



Sinful Obsession

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Some say I'm infatuated with the demon in my head. Consumed. Obsessed.

How could I not be when Asmodeus is in my dreams, touching and caressing me until I fall apart in his hands? The sweet musings whispered in my ears are like honey and molasses, stealing my heart one word at a time.

But when I try to tell people that he's real, that I've seen him in my bedroom, I'm the crazy one.

Which lands me in Briarwood Institute with some of the darkest, depraved individuals I've ever met. They're the really crazy ones. Dark souls that need to be locked away from the world for eternity.

Until I find the man I've been lusting after for the past several months.

And he's a whole lot more wicked than I could have imagined.

Asmodeus is more than just the demon in my head. He's Satan's son. And he's brought the four horsemen along, all five of them teasing me into the depths of their depravity.

And I'm loving every second of it.

Until I realize that I might be part of the problem.

That it's either the safety of the world or the love I've cultivated with pure evil.

Is it bad that my craving for their touch overrides my rational thought?

Because if it's my choice...

I'm choosing darkness.

Every. Damn. Time.

Sinful Obsession is an 18+ MMMMFEM Twisted Romance set in Briarwood Institute featuring the four horsemen, the end of the world, and an FMC who's not as pure as she seems. TW/CW in the Author's Note.

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

1 – Vienna

I poke at the chuck roast as the meat falls apart in little clumps, telling me that it is in fact not meat and is whatever kind of bean concoction that my mother claims is healthier than cow. She keeps trying to deceptively feed us items, saying that it's better for us and the future of this planet. I call bullshit, mostly because the dinners she makes now taste like ass. No, that's not correct.

Even ass tastes better.

A heavy, annoyed sigh falls from my lips as I glare at my mother asking about my grades for the umpteenth time. They haven't changed since two weeks ago, still Bs and Cs as I spend most of my time thinking about him . Asmodeus. My lover in the dark. My demon. My soul. His name lingers on my lips like a forbidden spell, a name that I whisper to myself to feel the safety of his gentle touch. Just thinking about him gives me a sense of calm as I stab my fork into the bean mush, ignoring any conversation at the table. In just a few more minutes, I can rush upstairs and say his name aloud to bring him to my side.

“Vienna Haddox! You're so disrespectful lately. Constantly ignoring your father and I as we try to get to know you. You'll be here the entire winter break and over the last week, you've said approximately three words during our family dinners.” My mother slaps the table to grab my attention, my shoulders falling in defeat.

I don't like being reminded that I'm stuck here for winter break while most of my friends are gallivanting across the country or spending weeks on a beach. Without the necessary funds to enjoy anything other than the local theater, I'm resigned to this

little white picket fence house with parents who are fed up with me and my interests—or lack thereof.

“Vienna, sweetie, are you still seeing that imaginary friend of yours? That demon?” She clutches the wooden cross necklace around her throat, her eyes suddenly wide with worry as she waits for my answer. She knows what I’m going to say and for her, it never gets any easier. I’ve been to every single fucking doctor in the city until one of them diagnosed me with schizophrenia and paranoia, writing a script that I absolutely don’t need.

Because Asmodeus isn’t a figment of my imagination.

I have the hickey to prove it.

Rolling my eyes, I shove a piece of bean roast into my mouth and immediately regret it. She won’t let up though, my father disinterested as he grumbles over his plate. He hates Mom’s food just as much as I do. “His name is Asmodeus, Mom,” I correct her, meeting her gaze. “And he’s not some figment of my imagination. He’s very real and he cares about me.” I won’t get into all the details of how thoroughly he fucks me after showing up nearly every night or the way he whispers sweet nothings in my ear until I fall asleep.

I’ve never had a man take care of me like Asmodeus does and I’m wondering if it’s a demon thing. Even just a kiss from him ignites my entire body in a way that my ex boyfriends could only dream of doing.

My mother leans back in her chair, grabbing her napkin to dab at her lips before speaking. “Vienna, you need to take your pills. You can’t get better if you insist on something that isn’t real. Besides, next year you’ll be picking up a real job and working with your father. You’re too old to be—”

“Too old to what, Mom?” I snap, unable to keep the edge out of my voice. “Asmodeus is everything to me. He’s perfect. You have no idea how he makes me feel or the future he’s promised me. He’s everything.” I clench my fork and knife in my hands, waiting for her to continue spewing shit that will only make me angrier.

Instead, it’s my father that speaks up. “Vienna, it’s not a he . It’s a demon. A demon that has somehow wormed his way into your thoughts and told you that he is the only way.” I should have known that my parents—devout churchgoers—wouldn’t understand nor would they believe me. Even if they did, they would think I’m possessed or have been led to the dark side. “This fixation is becoming annoying. I don’t know what your obsession with this demon is or why you’ve allowed him to take over your thoughts but it needs to stop. Darling,” he turns to my mother. “I think maybe we need to take her to the church.”

A tense laugh bursts from me as I stand up. Having me repent for my apparent sins that they think I’ve committed or hiring an exorcist—they haven’t but I’m sure they would—won’t get rid of Asmodeus. The only place I’ve ever seen him is in my room. “Neither of you know anything.” I grab my plate and toss it in the sink before taking the stairs by two. My parents are calling for me as I shut myself in my room and lock the door, hoping and praying that my demon will show up tonight.

I need him desperately.

The familiar tingle and soft hum of anticipation bleats around me, my room thick with the faintest, sweetest scent of smoke and sandalwood. His presence lingers in the darkness, not even a light shining through my blinds—just the way I like it best.

“Asmodeus?” My voice is soft, carrying on the tendrils of the void rippling through my room. The darkness feels alive but only silence meets my call. No deep, rich laughter, no whisper in my ear, no sudden warmth as he materializes behind me. I try to weather my disappointment, knowing that he has his own priorities, least of which

must be me.

After all, he's Satan's son and running a large part of hell.

He spent a few brief moments with me last night, murmuring something in my ear as I fell asleep, the momentary warmth wrapping me up in a perfect little cocoon. But tonight, I need him.

Trying not to read into it, I strip out of my clothes and slide under the covers before calling my best friend. I've known her since freshman year, someone I could always rely on even if she never understood my latest obsession. Ella picks up, her bubbly voice sounding through the earpiece. "I was wondering when you were going to call, bitch. You've always got some excuse not to come out with us!"

I snort. "Because your idea of a night out is \$100 and not remembering what we did. I'm saving up."

"No, you aren't. I'll bet you \$5 that you're in your room, waiting for your imaginary demon to show up and kiss you goodnight." Her laughter rings through the earpiece. I usually would laugh along with her but it feels patronizing. It feels like she's mocking me. "Vi, you know I love you, right?"

"Sure, I just don't like getting laughed at every time I try to talk to you. I know you don't understand all the stuff about Asmodeus but—"

Ella cuts me off. "No. I don't understand, especially since your mother took you to a fucking therapist. I'm worried about you. The obsession is unhealthy. All your friends are worried about you!"

None of them have ever told me that. They just look at me weird. No one texts me and asks me how I'm doing or wondering where I'll be. No one invites me out. I've

taken it to mean that I'm not worth their time and while that hurts, I have Asmodeus to fill in that free time. "Everyone's stopped talking to me, Ella. No one's worried. They just don't care. Besides, Asmodeus is important to me. I thought maybe one day you'd understand but—"

"Because I'm not delusional?" she snaps. "Because I live in the real world where people don't have demon boyfriends who come to visit them at night?"

I knew she wouldn't get it. I snuggle deeper beneath the blanket, clutching the phone to my ear a little tighter. "You don't know what it's like. I'm not like everyone else, Ella. I don't... I don't fit into your perfect little world."

"Oh, come on," she sighs, exasperated. "It's not about fitting in, Vienna. You've skipped out on everything—our senior year, every party, every get-together, everything. All because you're waiting for him. Do you even hear yourself?"

I do hear myself and if I was braver, I'd invite Ella over right now to meet Asmodeus and every night thereafter until he showed up so she could see. However, I'm also selfish and don't want to share our brief moments with someone who doesn't understand. My silence makes her frustrated, Ella adding onto her argument.

"Would you just read a fucking monster romance like the rest of us and get over it? I need you to stop living in that fantasy world of yours. It's a dangerous, slippery slope. Your mom told me that you haven't been taking your meds. She just wants to help. We all do."

"Dangerous?" I scoff, my anger sparking. "What's dangerous is you trying to tell me how to live my life. Just because I don't want the same things as you, doesn't mean I'm wrong."

There's a tense silence, and I hear her sigh again, but this time it's softer, sadder.

“Vi... I’m worried about you.”

“Well, don’t be,” I say coldly. “I don’t need you to worry. I need you to understand.” Before she can say anything else, I end the call, tossing my phone across the room before slipping back under the covers. Maybe I’m hallucinating but it’s such a perfect feeling. Maybe it’s all in my head but then I’d like to live there forever. Asmodeus makes me feel like I’m the only person in the world, the only one he sees, the only one important enough for him to break his routine.

My mind drifts back to the first time he visited me nearly six months ago. It was just past midnight, anxiety coursing through me as sleep evaded me. And that’s when I felt it, a presence—dark and seductive—filling the room. His voice was melodious as he spoke to me, like he’d known me for centuries, like he understood every corner of my soul, even the parts I tried to hide. I’d never felt so... seen.

The first few months, he was just an entity of darkness igniting a desire so fierce inside of me that I had to whip out my vibrator to soothe the need. Those dark eyes watched over me as I screamed through my orgasms, his soft words pushing me over the edge. And then he began to solidify, to become more of the darkness. His demonic form appeared for mere seconds before he shifted into a man, Asmodeus lying beside me as long as he could keep that form.

His hands and lips wandered, driving me up the wall as he whispered secrets into my ear about the history of the world—things that no one else could possibly know.

Asmodeus reminded me of a soldier, wide shoulders and thick muscles traveling down the length of his body. Long black hair crowded around his neck, his eyes the same color as the void I found so comfortable.

And then came the day last month when he gave me all of himself as I shattered on his cock, an experience I’ll never forget. Asmodeus always touches with such passion

and care but it was that night that I truly fell in love with a demon. I haven't been able to think of anyone other than him since. All that matters is him and his presence beside me.

I close my eyes, imagining Asmodeus gathering me up in his arms against his chest as he does most nights. "Where are you?" I whisper into the darkness again. A small whimper falls from my lips as nothing answers, the emptiness of the room weighing down on me. A flicker of fear at the idea that maybe he is just a figment of my imagination runs through me.

Still, I wait patiently for my lover, sleep trying to drag me under.

"Vienna," he murmurs, his voice wrapping around me like silk. "You're meant for so much more than this. Trust me."

"I do," I whisper back, reaching out to feel him and only being consumed by the darkness. Sometimes he only visits me like this, in his original form but I'm grateful for at least this.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

2 – Vienna

Fingers gliding softly over my cheek rouse me from sleep, a cool sensation that turns into molten heat, igniting my body with a warmth I've craved since I first met Asmodeus. His fingers continue down to my jaw and then lower, grazing my neck before rising again to run across my lips. I shoot up in bed and grab the hand, tugging it toward my chest. Asmodeus chuckles, a rich dark sound that carries through the room. He straightens slightly, bent over my bed, our faces inches from each other as I stare into his dark eyes.

“Love, I missed you,” he breathes before capturing my lips in a kiss. He moves to sit beside me on the mattress, wrapping his arms around my waist and dragging me into his lap. I straddle his thighs as I cling to him, savoring his mysterious taste and that wicked forked tongue as it slips into my mouth. He thrusts his hips upward, his cock brushing against my bare pussy, reminding me that I'm completely naked in front of my demon. “Did you dress for me?” Asmodeus jokes as he pulls away.

He reaches up to run a hand through my hair, locks I recently chopped off because I needed something different. While most of my classmates whined that my hair was gone, Asmodeus loves everything I change. He loves every part of me without fail. I don't answer him, watching as he greedily takes in his fill. I always sleep naked, always have but now it's in anticipation of Asmodeus appearing.

His hands glide down my shoulders and to my breasts lightly squeezing them before falling lower to the belly I can't seem to get rid of. No amount of exercise and diet pills have ever worked to make me smaller but Asmodeus doesn't mind. His fingers wrap around my hips, grabbing the extra skin and squeezing before he drags me

closer to him. Then he pulls me down so that I can feel the full length of his cock through the fabric of his pants.

“I was worried you wouldn’t come tonight. You didn’t last night.” A whimper follows my words as he begins to rock me over his cock, no doubt waiting for me to shatter. I’m already pent up on anger and disappointment, his movements making it easy to fall apart.

He hums as he moves forward to kiss me again, his lips trailing down to my jaw and then my neck, lightly sucking on the sensitive skin. “You know I’ll always come back to you, Vienna. You’re mine, remember?” I grip his shoulders as the heat grows in my lower belly, Asmodeus moving a hand between us to press against my clit. A gasp tears from my mouth as he massages the mound, alternating the pressure until I have to slap a hand over my lips to keep from crying out. “Give this to me, love. Fall apart on my fingers.”

He continues to direct the pace, making it impossible for me to pull away as my entire body shudders with the force of my orgasm. When he nibbles against my neck, I’m done for, coating his pants as he continues to massage my clit until I’m whimpering for relief.

“Always so beautiful for me, love.”

“It’s been so hard,” I push out when I can finally catch my breath, still straddling his thighs. Feeling the bulge still pressed up against me is distracting but I need Asmodeus to understand. “Not one person believes me. They think I’m crazy. They even gave me pills! Why can’t you just show yourself to them? Tell them that I’m not crazy?” I’m being selfish. Asmodeus has explained multiple times that he shouldn’t even be in this world, that his presence alone might disrupt the delicate balance of the universe. The frustration bubbles up even as I’m thinking about Asmodeus fucking me to sleep and curling up to his chest afterward.

Something is definitely wrong with me.

Asmodeus' gaze softens as he kisses me again, my anxiety falling away with his touch. "You don't need them to believe you but soon they'll have no choice." He brushes a few fingers across my neck, a shiver running down my spine. "Tonight, I'll mark you. They'll see who you belong to, love."

He's mentioned marking me a few times, a permanent mark that won't fade as my body heals. Still, I'm wary as to what that means. I search his expression, trying to understand what's going on in his head as he twists around and slowly lowers me back to the bed. He stands and strips off his clothes before moving between my thighs, hovering over me again.

He's perfection in human form, my tongue darting out to lick my lips. He dives in and sucks my tongue into his mouth before letting go, the movement catching me off guard. "I told you that you were mine, Vienna. Every part of you. From that deviant tongue of yours, to these beautiful curves," Asmodeus slides down my body, his breaths fanning across my pussy. "To this gorgeous cunt." He licks a stripe through my release, my back bowing off the bed, a little moan filtering through my lips. "To those beautiful sounds you make when I touch you. My mark will only show everyone what you already know."

"Really?"

"It's a reminder of who I am to you, of you to me. It will protect you in a way the world can recognize, in a way that even those in my world will understand."

Asmodeus has never truly explained his history the way he's explained Earth's history. I've always wanted to ask but he deflects, saying that I'm not ready to understand the fabric of balance and how it connects to my very human existence. So, I focus on the most important part as Asmodeus crawls back up the bed.

“Everyone will see it?”

“Yes, love.” He trails his fingers down my arm before pulling it to wrap around the back of his neck. A deviant grin spreads across his lips as he rocks himself against my core, my entire body tingling with anticipation. “Those that need to know you are claimed will see that you are loved, that you are mine .” The last word comes out in a growl as I shiver again.

His face turns up into this nightmarish, predatory smile as he surges forward, filling me with his cock in one thrust. My body lights up with pleasure as it vibrates inside of me, one of many quirks Asmodeus has shown me over the past weeks. He smashes his lips to mine as I come again, his cock thrumming inside of me, my pussy clenching around it. Tears glaze over my eyes as the vibration picks up speed, my demon grinning against my lips.

“Take your pleasure, love. Fall apart for me. Give in to me. ”

I’m pretty sure I sold my soul to him at some point as he pulls out, flips me over, and then plunges right back into my sex. My scream is muffled by the pillows as he grips my waist, his fingers digging into the extra skin there and pulls my ass up in the air. He’s relentless and rough, fucking into me like he owns my body. But he does. He’s told me time and time again that he does. My fingers curl into the bedding as his cock alternates between vibrating and having a mind of its own, something akin to a tongue licking up and down my channel.

It's a pleasurable torture that has me writhing beneath my demon as every thrust inside of me ramps me up to my third orgasm of the night. Just as I try to bury my face into the pillow, Asmodeus slips a hand into my hair and yanks my head back, my scream erupting into the darkness of the bedroom. Embarrassment heats my cheeks knowing that my parents are just down the hall but Asmodeus doesn't care.

He thrusts one last time before I feel his release filling me up and spilling between my thighs, Pain explodes through my shoulder as his lips encircle my skin before it's replaced by a sense of euphoria. I fall limply against the mattress as the sensations overwhelm me, a long unbidden groan tumbling from my lips. That dark chuckle is there again as Asmodeus rolls me onto my back, cradling my cheeks as he rouses me from whatever haze he put me under.

"Come back to me, love. There you go." He nuzzles his nose against mine as I drag in a breath, suddenly aware of my surroundings and the strange bite on my neck. It's not bleeding, nor is it sore but the skin feels... different. The physical presence of our bond fixes something in me as I sag against him, his heartbeat bringing me down from my high completely.

Asmodeus wraps his arms around me, tucking me tighter into his chest. We stay there for several moments, the darkness the only thing I find comfortable. His fingers start to wander, moving up my arm and then down my back, moving in little circles.

"Don't worry about them, love. I can see you worrying. They are small-minded, bound by rules and ideas they were given instead of those they chose for themselves. They fear what they don't understand." He pauses, his fingers lingering on the curve of my spine. "But you... you are different. You've always been different."

I look up at him, a soft smile spreading across my lips. "I am?"

"Yes," he murmurs, his hand drifting over the place he marked me, a faint impression just below my collarbone. "You're brave, Vienna. Curious. You're willing to see beyond the world they've built, beyond the walls they try to keep you inside of. That's what makes you special." His fingers press gently against the mark, and a strange comfort settles over me.

I press my thighs together, whining as the sensation strengthens, Asmodeus laughing

at my response. His touch is hypnotic, each stroke lulling me deeper into the safe world he's created. He's overwhelming and not enough at the same time as I reach forward to trace my own circles across his chest, studying the muscles that shiver beneath my touch.

"I love you," he whispers, his words gentle, his hand threading through my hair. "I've loved you since before the first time I saw you."

My breath catches because that's impossible. How could he love me before he saw me? It's as if fate pushed us together despite the universe trying to pull us apart. One wrong move and we could upset the balance of the world and yet, I can't find it in myself to care. In Asmodeus' arms, everything works. He's everything I've ever wanted, everything I've ever needed, wrapped up in a mystery I don't care to solve.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

3 – Asmodeus

Her sweet face stares back at me as she sleeps, soft puffs of air fanning my chest as I study her. My gaze lingers on her delicate features, the gentle curve of her cheek, the flutter of her lashes, and the faint worry lines in her forehead as she tries to battle her own thoughts even in her sleep. This beautiful creature has no idea how much she means to me or how much I've already claimed her in ways she can't imagine. My mark will show those that seek to take her away from me but it may be too little too late.

The delicate balance of Earth may start to unravel due to my claim but a world without Vienna isn't one worth living in.

For now, though, this is all I can give her. One day, I'll show her the truth of this world, of heaven and hell, and all the layers in between. There is so much more than darkness and light, right and wrong, good and evil. The teachings running through her ears from her parents are nothing more than lies built to paint hell as the evil that must be destroyed. If only Vienna could truly understand the world she's stepped into by loving me.

One day, I tell myself.

Today, though, I shall show her something else. Something that the people around her would never want her to know. My beautiful woman is always so desperate to make those around her believe and see the truth. That is far from the problem. It isn't that they don't believe or that they refuse to see Vienna's side. It's that they pretend to care and don't, wearing those false smiles and lying through their teeth to hurt my

woman.

They think they are saving her, saving her from me but all they are doing is pushing her away. In the end, the only person she will trust is the one person who may destroy the very world she lives in. I used to think the idea of friends and family would be something I would enjoy but seeing Vienna's, I want nothing to do with them.

I refocus on my woman, a heavy sigh falling from her plump lips as she curls tighter into my hold. My hand has a mind of its own as it traces little patterns along her arm and then up to her neck over the bond I've created. She stirs slightly, moving even closer, a smile playing on my lips. Even in sleep, she seeks me out, needing me, craving me. Vienna is so easy to love, so easy to be soft with, so easy to forget that I have a legacy to run the fiery pits of hell.

"You're mine," I whisper into her ear, reminding us both what a precious gift I have in my arms. Part of me wonders if I should have been rougher with her. After all, I'm not made to be gentle. I am a demon and the son of Satan but with Vienna, she brings out my need to protect and nurture, to truly see the force she will grow into.

Vienna stirs again, her eyes fluttering open, sleepy and unfocused before they brighten finding my gaze on her. A soft smile touches her lips as she angles her head up and I gladly give her the kiss she's looking for. "You've never stayed long, Asmodeus. I like waking up to you," she murmurs against my lips.

She isn't wrong. I don't usually stay after she falls asleep but this feels important, a part of our growing forbidden connection.

"I like holding you in my arms, love. I couldn't pass up the opportunity," I respond, caressing the side of her face and drawing her into another kiss. She tastes sweet and innocent, even though I know she's not but I could taste her lips all day if I didn't have responsibilities to attend to. "You shouldn't trust so easily," I say, instantly

regretting those words. Still, I'm waiting for the day when she finds that I'm not what she thinks I am.

Waiting for the day when she truly sees the darkness for what I am and decides that it's not worth the risk.

Vienna glares up at me before pushing herself into a sitting position. She folds her arms across her chest, her breasts hanging off her arms. I try to focus on her face, her nose scrunched up in anger but it's hard to when everything about her is so beautiful, so inviting. "You are the only one who hasn't made me feel insignificant. Sure, you might be a demon and hell, you might be a figment of my imagination but you make me feel safe and loved and cared for. Not one person has ever made me seen and for that? Yes, I trust you. I don't trust easily, Asmodeus. Not anymore."

I sit up as well, drawing her into my lap to soothe her worries. "I'm sorry, love. I shouldn't have assumed." She's still a bit tense despite my apology. There's more to tell her but the pain that flickered through her expression as she told me that I am the only one who has made her feel seen hurts. I gently pinch her chin, focusing on the flush in her cheeks and shifty eyes as I kiss her again, letting my hand roam down to her chest and squeeze one of her breasts.

If I do nothing else, I want to make sure that she feels beautiful in her own skin.

She gasps into my mouth as I break the kiss and replace my hand with my lips, sucking her breast into my mouth. My tongue circles around her nipple, tugging and nipping at it as my hand moves farther south and slips into her pussy. Vienna lets out the prettiest little sound, fingers sifting into my hair as I pleasure her. I switch my attention to the other breast, continuing to pump my fingers inside of her until her hips are meeting my shallow thrusts.

And when she comes for me, I memorize every one of those little sounds she makes

for me. Her body shakes in my arms as I remove my fingers and suck them into my mouth, her sweet nectar exploding on my tongue. A groan of appreciation tears from my throat, Vienna meeting my gaze with a much softer expression than before.

“Why do I feel like you’re distracting me from something with orgasms?” Vienna asks, those deep brown eyes seeing more than I want her to. She scrambles off my lap and sits on her knees, hands fisted on her thighs as she leans forward. “Asmodeus?”

I grab one of the sheets and wrap her in it, knowing that I won’t have the strength to restrain myself if she continues to sit like that. “There’s things you don’t know, Vienna. Something about the people in your life.” Her nose scrunches up again even as she’s still trying to catch her breath, her skin flushed. I hope she knows just how gorgeous she looks, wrapped up in that sheet, just the top half of her face visible.

Her head tilts to the side, confusion morphing into anger. “What do you mean?”

I hesitate, not wanting to ruin this moment and yet knowing that she needs to know. “Your parents,” I begin, my voice soft and steady. “They’re not the people you think they are. They keep things from you, things they think you don’t need to know.”

“What... what are you talking about?” Her voice wobbles, a hint of fear running through her words.

Keeping her calm is the most important but these truths won’t be easy to hear. “Your parents always told you to be pure, to stay true to the teachings of the church but they’re hypocrites in every sense of the word. Your father has been having an affair, something he’s hidden from everyone in his life. And your mother... she resents you, Vienna. She’s always resented you, always wished for something else, something different.”

I reach forward to touch her and she leans back, glaring at me. “That’s not true.”

“Vienna, I don’t want to hurt you but you need to know that the people in your life aren’t as pure as they’ve led you to believe. You’ve been held to a standard that they don’t even keep themselves.” A mixture of emotions moves through her face and I hate myself for revealing this part of her life to her. I thought it might help her understand but I’m seeing that it might only have hurt her instead.

Watching her fight her emotions is both fascinating and terrifying before she settles on just one—determination. “I don’t understand why they wouldn’t just say something. Dad’s always been so silent at dinners and Mom has never been quiet about how I’m not good enough. The question is why I have to be pure when they’re dragging themselves through the very dirt I’m supposed to avoid.”

“Because they don’t want you to know,” I say, my tone darkening slightly. “They want to keep you sheltered, to keep you in this perfect little bubble they’ve built around you. They think they’re protecting you, but all they’re doing is keeping you weak, dependent.”

She stares at me, her eyes glistening with unshed tears, and for a moment, I wonder if I’ve gone too far, if I’ve broken something inside her that can’t be fixed. But her expression is hard, her jaw setting in a way that tells me she’s already processing, already beginning to understand. “And my friends? Like Ella? What’s wrong with them?”

“They talk about you behind your back. They don’t trust you, Vienna. They think you’re... fragile, that you’re not capable of understanding the real world. They see you as something to be pitied, something to be managed.”

She unwraps herself from the sheets and crawls back into my arms. Unlike most humans, Vienna has never once been terrified of any of my forms. She craves my presence and she wholeheartedly trusts me when I give her the truths she so desperately seeks but can’t find. Some part of me is selfish in isolating her from the

world she's grown up in.

The other part of me knows that this is necessary for what is to come.

“Vienna, love, none of them see what I see. But I see you. I see how strong you are, what you will become, what you already are. It's not that they don't believe I exist but that keeping you in the little bubble they've curated is more important.” I press a soft kiss to her forehead, waiting for her to fall apart but she doesn't.

The anger coursing through her is beautiful. “I've always hated that no one ever believed me but they will tomorrow when they see the bond. They will know you are real, Asmodeus. And then I'll sit back and watch as they have to apologize to me for all those hateful words.”

She clings to me, her anger softening, her breathing slowing as I run my fingers through her hair, murmuring soft words of comfort until her eyelids begin to droop, her body relaxing against mine. She's exhausted, both physically and emotionally, and I know she needs to rest, to let these revelations settle.

“Sleep now,” I whisper. “Let yourself rest. You'll need your strength for tomorrow.”

I stay with her until her breathing is deep and steady, until I'm sure she's fully asleep. Then I slip away, making sure she's comfortable. One day, she'll have the entire picture but for now, this is enough. Moving silently through the shadows, I slip through the cracks of reality to return to Hell. The cracks are widening, the end just around the corner but there are many steps that must be completed before that comes to fruition.

If it ever does.

The familiar weight of darkness settles around me as I step into my realm, the air

thick with the scent of smoke and sulfur, the oppressive heat pressing down on me like a familiar embrace. As I move through the only home I've known, a presence waits for me just beyond the entrance to the forest I find solace in.

A shadowy figure slowly solidifies, a dusky red being stepping forward to reveal the true presence of Satan, himself. Also, my father. His gaze is sharp and disapproving, his forked tail swishing behind him in annoyance. That's one of the only things that the humans got right about hell, the presence of the devil himself.

"Father," I force out, my tone an expert blend of respect and defiance.

Satan's gaze narrows as I morph into the darkness I was born into, losing my physical form, a form created to walk the Earth. The change doesn't soften his expression. "Where have you been?" he demands, his voice a low rumble that echoes in the open space. No one is around us, this area of hell reserved for royalty.

"On Earth."

He scoffs, shaking his head as smoke billows from his nostrils. He's dangerously close to spreading his fire through my favorite forest which takes years to recreate to the specifications I need. "You were with that human, weren't you? You smell like her. Why do you insist on crawling onto that plane every evening?"

"She's important. Powerful, in her own way. And she trusts me. That trust could be... useful." I hate using Vienna but it's the only way my father won't try to pursue the true reason I am in her bed.

"Useful? You think her trust is worth something? You're wasting your time, Asmodeus. You should be focusing on your responsibilities, on upholding our cause. You know, the fight between us and the angels, the one where we destroy everything they've built?"

It's always been my father's goal after he was thrown out of heaven. He stripped off his own wings and vowed never to return. He also vowed to tear down the beauty of the world that the angels had helped create, brothers that discarded him the moment he was no longer useful.

I am part of that plan, given tasks to ensure the success of the world crumbling in our hands. "I am doing my part," I state, refusing to back down.

My father stares at me, observing the entity I am as I bleat around him. He created me, gave me a purpose, and is now calling on me to fulfill it. An agitated sigh falls from his lips as his skin darkens so that it almost matches mine in this form. "Your loyalty lies here, Asmodeus. Do not let a mortal distract you from what you were created to do."

I don't bother arguing, slipping off into my favorite forest. Satan doesn't understand, just as Vienna's family and friends don't. She's the key to something greater, something that neither Heaven nor Hell has yet to see.

I continue deeper into the depths of Hell, the familiar darkness swallowing me whole, my mind already drifting back to her, to the way she trusted me, the way she looked at me with such fierce loyalty, such unwavering belief.

This is only the beginning, love.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

4 – Vienna

A n irritated groan slips from my lips the next morning as I stomp down the stairs in search for food. My body aches in the best of ways but there's the pang of loneliness that always follows when Asmodeus leaves. My parents are seated in their usual spots, staring at me as I fiddle with the cabinets and then the fridge, looking for something that's more than the bagels laid out on the table.

They're sitting there as if nothing's wrong. As if everything isn't about to explode. As if all those things Asmodeus told me last night aren't true.

My mother clears her throat and gestures to my space across from my father, silently demanding for me to take a seat. I do, but not without an annoyed huff as I snatch a bagel and start dragging a thick wallop of cream cheese across it with the communal knife. The anger I went to bed with is still there, fighting to take over and say what I really want to say. All of the lies and the secrets and the betrayals... how could they?

It's always been about protecting me from evil, protecting me from the outside world that would cause me to sin when the biggest sinners are right here in this house. What even is the point? Are they purposely trying to keep me from Asmodeus? Is it really just about control? Whatever the reason, I'm over it.

I take a hefty bite of my bagel before dropping it to the table's surface, my mother scowling at the mess of crumbs that scatter across the wood. She locks eyes with me, taken aback at the fierceness in my gaze because unlike her, I'm done playing games. If they want to get on their knees and let the creator of the universe raw dog them with lies, that's on them. I'd rather have a certain vibrating cock if I'm being honest.

My gaze drifts to my father who looks disinterested as always, my expression hardening. “Why the fuck did neither of you tell me?” I don’t care how harsh the question sounds but it’s been 21-motherfucking-years and all I’ve had to deal with is ridicule and not being enough.

My mother stops with a glass of juice halfway to her lips, my father’s face suddenly pale at the accusation. He has to know what I’m talking about but the confusion on my mother’s face intrigues me. Could she possibly not know what’s going on?

“Vienna, we don’t need to have this conversation at the table,” my father pushes out. He picks up his napkin and dabs at his lips, about to repeat his words but I just hold up my hand and turn to my mother.

She’s looking between the both of us. “Vienna, what are you talking about?”

“The affair,” I blurt out, pointing to my father. “About all of it. About how you don’t even like me? About how hypocritical both of you are while demanding that I be perfect in the eyes of the lord and all that bullshit.”

My mother sets down the glass of juice, glaring at my father just as he shakes his head. A flash of panic crosses his face before he forces a calm, dismissive smile onto his face. “Vienna, I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says but the tightness in his jaw and the way his fingers curl around the edge of the table tells me otherwise. He’s lying. He’s still lying.

“Don’t. Don’t act like you don’t know. I know about everything you two have been keeping from me.” I think about adding the fact that Asmodeus let me in on these little tidbits but I don’t have to. If I think about it hard enough, it’s pretty easy to see the truth. All those late nights when Dad slipped out of the house, saying that there were a few things he needed to finish up at the church. All those moments when I brought home my perfect report card or a trophy and my mother told me that I needed

to do better.

All the times when I sat at this very table and felt like I was living a life I didn't understand.

“Mom, you didn't even know about the affair, did you? This is what I'm talking about! Dad's even keeping secrets from you!” There's a brief flash of guilt in my father's eyes before it disappears. I expect my mother to chew my father out, to tell him how immoral he's been and that he needs to repent—just the way she's done to me every time I talk about Asmodeus.

Instead, she just sits there in silence, mulling over her options, looking between the both of us. It takes her several minutes to speak again and I should have known that I would still be in the wrong. “Vienna, there is a lot going on here and I know that it's hard to understand but it's not healthy to dwell on it.” She blows out a breath, reaching for my father's hand and squeezing it. She fucking knew. “Is this about Asmodeus?”

The name drops from her lips like a curse as if he's in the wrong. Strangely enough, the demon is the only one who hasn't lied to me.

“He's the only one that gives me the truth, even if it hurts. You sit here and lie to my face even after I pointed things out! Do you have any idea how that makes me feel?” I clutch at my chest, trying not to play into the dramatics but their continued disbelief is making it hard to deal with any of the words coming out of their mouth. Deciding to take it one step further, I point to my neck, the iridescent bond mark Asmodeus left yesterday. It seems to change colors between a dark purple black and a midnight blue, a beautiful mix of beauty and darkness. Instead of belief, I'm just met with horror.

My mother's eyes widen, almost comically as she stares at it. “You let that demon mark you?!”

And there it is. She's known all along that the demon hasn't been in my head. "So, you know he's real?"

My mother pushes to her feet, her gaze narrowing as she jabs a finger into my shoulder. "I'm pointing out the fact that you went so far as to let this imaginary dark presence claim you. We all know that he isn't real but trying to prove he is by whatever is on your neck is disgusting."

"He's more real than any of this," I shout, my voice wobbling against my control. "He's the only one who understands me, the only one who's ever been there for me. And he knows what you've been hiding, all the secrets you keep so carefully tucked away. Like Dad's affair. He told me everything. That Dad's been cheating on you, that you've been lying to me, keeping me sheltered, making me out to be some broken thing just so you can control me."

"Stop this, Vienna," my mother says, her voice trembling with something between anger and fear. "Whatever this... this demon is telling you, it's not true. He's poisoning you, filling your head with lies."

"Poisoning me? For a brief moment, I thought that you didn't know, that you were kept in the dark about Dad but you knew. You stayed with him? Is the affair still going? Who is it anyway? Please tell me it's not the fucking greeter at church, the size 2 one that's a few years older than me?" My father averts his gaze and I burst out laughing. It isn't even a secretary or someone my father sees everyday. I wonder if she smiled at him a few times before he decided that he had to have her.

Once again, my mother has no reaction to any of this, just the fact that I'm supposedly acting at. She squeezes my shoulder and then moves to the kitchen counter before returning with a small orange bottle. "I spoke with your doctor and he thinks that maybe it's time to up the dosage a little bit. This isn't you. You're not thinking clearly."

I stare at the offending medication, suddenly realizing how much my mother has had her hands in my life. No doctor would ever prescribe my medication to my mother when I'm an adult by law. I've always had to set up the therapy appointments but she tagged along to make sure that I went. Even so, the doctor always handed me the script, not her. I read the label, not recognizing the names on there but it's obvious that it wasn't my doctor who prescribed these.

“Yeah, I'm not taking anything that I don't understand. I humored you the first few times but I'm not fucking crazy. You can choose not to believe me but that doesn't mean you get to shove medicine down my throat to keep me quiet. And before you go on another spiel about corruption or deceit or anything else that Asmodeus is doing, maybe ask yourselves why I chose to side with a demon rather than whatever the fuck you two call religion.” I push to my feet as my mother searches for some response but I'm not waiting around to hear it. My fists clench at my sides but Asmodeus' voice in the back of my head, a soft soothing presence keeps me from acting out. In the end, these two people are still my parents. That doesn't mean I have to stay here and be ridiculed.

So, I choose the next best thing and grab my keys from the counter. My father steps in my way—when or how he moved from the table so fast, I don't know—a pleading tone to his next words. “Keep this to yourself, Vienna. You don't understand everything that's going on and I would hate for you to make a rash decision while you're angry.”

I snort and walk around him. “Unbelievable,” slips from my mouth as I head outside and stuff myself into my car. My head is a mess, a whirlwind of anger and betrayal, the need to clear my thoughts the only thing on my mind. Well, that and exposing my father for the fraud that he is.

Pulling out of the driveway, I speed down the quiet road and stop just before the first light to make a post shattering the sweet life I've always lived.

Seems I live in a family of hypocrites. Who else knew that my dad was boning the cute little greeter?

Maybe I should have dealt with it in a healthier manner but I never claimed to be healthy or completely sane. I'm just not the kind of crazy my parents or friends think I am. And when the likes and comments start rolling in as I head for the highway, I hope that the bit of satisfaction will carry me through today.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

5 – Vienna

It doesn't.

Pulling into the driveway a few hours later, a town car sitting across from mine with dark-tinted windows terrifies me. I've only ever seen them in movies but they always signify the beginning of the end and usually involves doctors and orderlies. The sight of it in my driveway puts me on edge, a growing thrum of dread spreading across my chest.

Asmodeus' voice is brief and faint in the back of my head, almost as if signifying that this car will be taking me away from him. And yet, as always, his words are comforting, lulling me into a sense of peace.

You're strong, love. They fear what they don't understand. There's a hollow ache as his voice disappears as I decide whether to return or drive off into the sunset. I'm sure my aunt would take me in after hearing all this nonsense. We haven't spoken in a few years, seeing as she's the black sheep of the family but she'd rescue me in a heartbeat. I continue to sit in the driver's seat, pondering my options when I know there's only one.

There's a few bucks in my wallet and even less on my credit cards. Running away won't solve anything. I remind myself that as an adult, my parents could do a whole lot of nothing. They can't force me to take my pills, visit a doctor, or throw me into a mental institution. I take a deep breath and slowly let it out before slipping from my car to head into the house.

There's only lies to return to and possibly heartbreak if whoever owns that town car is here to take me away. Mom has threatened me before when I stopped taking the pills the first time. If she can get a doctor to prescribe her a random medication to keep me quiet, why couldn't she call for a house visit the same way?

The front door is unlocked as I step inside, confused by the dim light of the kitchen. Any excitement and happiness from breakfast is gone, dashed by my revelations. Soft voices drift in from the dining room, a room we almost never use unless there are special guests. I blow out a soft breath, trying to calm my nerves as I approach, the hushed whispers falling away once they realize I'm there.

An older man with silver hair and a clean-cut suit that screams authority sits across from my mother and father, two other women sitting on either side of the older man. The women are dressed in navy blue scrubs, their hands neatly folded in their laps, stoic expressions plastered on their petite faces. There is no emotion in their dull brown eyes as they stare forward, the older gentleman slowly turning to look at me.

"Vienna, I was wondering if you would be joining us," he says. My entire body rejects his voice and his presence, something about the three of them telling me they're bad news. Where Asmodeus always felt warm and exciting, these three feel like darkness and evil. His gaze makes my skin crawl as he takes me in before nodding. "Why don't you have a seat, sweet child?"

Sweet child? He speaks like he comes from the same church my parents attend, spewing words of purity when his aura screams something else entirely. "Nope, I'll stand. Who are you?" The scowl on my mother's face tells me that I should be polite but I'm done with the acting. If this is an intervention of sorts, I want to know upfront. When no one speaks, I throw my hands up in exasperation. "Look, can we just get to the part where you explain what's going on? I don't want to be placated or sweet talked or anything else."

My father is suspiciously not looking at me and I'm pretty sure it has to do with the post I put up a little while ago. Maybe if he kept his dick in his pants, we wouldn't be here.

I glare at the old man and then the table, soon realizing just how serious this meeting is. There's a slew of papers and pamphlets spread across the table, a thick folder sitting beside my mother. I recognize that folder. She stuffs what she calls 'evidence' of my sins in there, telling me that if I don't shape up that I would one day have to pay for each and every last one. According to their religion, I should be able to pray away the sin or whatever but she holds onto that shit like a grudge.

Why it's currently on the dining room table and in the vicinity of these three people, I have no fucking clue.

A closer look and I recognize one of the emblems on the pamphlet. Briarwood Institute. "No. Fucking. Way. Seriously? You don't want to believe me so you're trying to send me away to prison?" I point at the old crickety building spread across the front of the pamphlets, a building we grew up believing nightmares about.

The old man chuckles, a dark sound devoid of any warmth or emotion. "Vienna, dear, it's not a prison. It's a place to help those that are a little... confused. Your parents called to discuss the things you've been seeing or rather the things you believe you've been seeing."

I don't like his choice of words. He says believe like it's some kind of weakness, something to be corrected. The worst part is that it feels like I would be upsetting the balance of the universe if I acknowledge just who I've been seeing to these three. I don't even know how to explain it but something about them is making me feel sick to my stomach and it has nothing to do with Briarwood Institute.

"I don't know why she would have called a mental institution for help with her

perfectly sane daughter. Maybe it's a phase. Who knows?" I shrug, trying to play off the issue just as my mother slaps the folder and pushes it forward. I just wave it off. "Mom, sure, I'm a sinner and all that jazz but that doesn't make me crazy. Legally, you can't even make me go anywhere. Maybe we should be talking about how you found a doctor to prescribe me pills before ever even meeting me. I looked that shit up and apparently they're for paranoid schizophrenics. Like what the fuck?"

The older gentleman laughs again, leaning back in his chair. He swivels toward me, the woman beside him scooting back so that I have a full view of him. "There's a lot to unpack there, Vienna. First thing, we'll need to work on your language. There's no reason for all the curse words. Second, your mother explained to me what's going on and it sounds very serious. You not even remembering your doctor's name is a problem because memory loss isn't one of the issues." He waves me forward, not giving up until I step toward him. The woman stands and moves to the other side of the man so that I can sit. A small orange bottle is pushed toward me, my doctor's name clearly written along the bottom where it hadn't been this morning.

My nose scrunches up as I stare at it, wondering why I would have seen something else. I'm not ready to give into whatever is being pushed onto me in this moment so I don't react. I just sit there.

"Lastly, your parents filed for emergency custody, saying that you were a harm to yourself. In the last few days, she's been building her case and it's very concerning all the evidence that the judge brought to us. He granted her custody so that you can be properly taken care of. It's nice to have a mother that truly cares about you." The doctor reaches forward to take my hands in his but I'm not that forgiving.

Especially since he just mentioned that I am no longer considered an autonomous adult in the eyes of the law. There's no doubt in my mind that my mother reached out to Judge Jansen, one of the most influential men in our church. Makes me wonder if she's doing a little someone on the side like my father is because there's no other

reason for him to grant custody of my life to my mother. I'm not dangerous.

"That's all bullshit."

"Language," the doctor says.

I throw my hands, frustrated before glaring at my mother. "How is this even legal?" My mother looks fed up with me but I want her to feel uncomfortable, the same way I am currently feeling at finding out my rights have been taken away. "Please tell me you didn't sleep with Judge Jansen. Was that what you were doing a few nights ago when—"

She slaps a hand on the table, anger exploding through her expression. "I am doing what I think is right."

"Even if it means locking me away?"

The doctor sighs, trying to force a warm smile onto his face and failing. "Vienna, I mentioned before that this isn't a prison. You aren't locked away. It's a way for you to heal, to find help. Do you believe the devil is real, Vienna?" His voice is calm, almost clinical but the way he says it feels unnatural. Like the word in his mouth doesn't belong. "Or perhaps his son? Do you believe you're in touch with something... supernatural?"

I'm still pissed at this 'losing my rights' bullshit, something the doctor catches onto. He pulls one of the papers from the table and slides it toward me, an official statement signed by Judge Jansen himself. I have no idea what any of it is supposed to look like, just like I'm pretty sure the pills Michael showed me weren't mine but now say that they are. Aside from running outside and yelling that my parents are locking me away, I have no idea what my next step should be.

It doesn't help that Michael seems to know far more than I even told my parents. I never mentioned to them that Asmodeus was Satan's son, not that I can remember anyway. They knew he was a demon and my lover but nothing more. It just gives me another reason not to trust this old man. Asmodeus said that my parents and friends wanted me gone and this is just cinching the idea. My mother shifts in her seat, her gaze flickering to the man as if to gauge his reaction.

Maybe I should play dumb or pretend I don't know what this man is talking about but I'm tired of denying Asmodeus' presence. He said that our bond would protect me so I'm going to trust that he knows what he's talking about. "First, maybe you should have started with introducing yourself by name. Second, Asmodeus is real. I haven't been in touch with the supernatural. He's been on Earth, several times. He's more man that you will ever be!"

The fury on that man's face gives me a bit of happiness in this moment of despair. Just one more thing I shouldn't have said but I'll fantasize about that man's hands, lips, and cock all day long. I mirror him, leaning back in my chair and fold my arms across my chest.

A smirk of amusement appears on his face but my mother is horrified at our interaction. "Vienna, stop this! Just take your medication. It doesn't have to be this difficult."

" Mom , I would take that medication if I needed it but you have never tried to understand me. Case in point that you brought the folder of my 'sins' to the table and gave it to a fucking doctor. What the fuck is he going to do with my sins? All the times I skipped class, talked back to you, lied about where I was? None of that is an indication for a mental illness. I'm no harm to myself or anyone else even if these 'delusions' are real to me. Calling the strictest mental institution around to have a go at me is the real insanity here. No, no, fucking Judge Jansen to get him to sign over my rights to you is the kicker. You and Dad are fucking hypocrites." I push out my

chair, ready to take my ass upstairs when the old man speaks again.

He stands, much taller than I expected before he sticks his hand out. “You’re right, Vienna. We should have started differently. I’m Dr. Taeller but you can call me Michael. And we’ll get this language thing under control, I assure you.” I find his name ironic but don’t mention it, shaking his hand and then quickly dropping it. His flesh burns mine, as if there truly is evil running through him. My mother settles but only slightly as Michael speaks again. “Do you believe this... Asmodeus is someone you can see and touch? Or is he simply an idea? Something inside of you?”

Yet another reason I don’t like this fucking guy is the way he said my demon’s name. No one ever says it quite right, stumbling through the name as they try to put the vowels together. Michael said it perfectly. Why would he know something like that?

“This conversation is getting old. I know my mother told you all about everything. Me rehashing it won’t do any good. I get that you’re trying to “help” or whatever,” I say, putting air quotes up when I say ‘help’. “But I don’t need it.”

The two women exchange glances, their expressions calm, unruffled, as if they’ve seen this kind of thing before. One of them rises, her movements slow and careful, and approaches me with a soft, practiced smile. I instantly hate her too.

“Vienna, we’re here to help you,” she says. “The institute is a way for you to find yourself again, a place where you can finally find peace. We’re just here to help you find your way before we can bring you back to the life you enjoy so much.”

“And there it is,” I push out, a bitter laugh following it. “Locking me up isn’t going to do much good, especially if you think I’m seeing a motherfucking demon. What, do you guys perform exorcisms and shit there too?”

Michael shakes his head. “No. An exercised regimen of medication and rules

generally helps. Your parents are worried and rightly so. You're hostile and acting out in a way that they can no longer accept. I've seen this before and Briarwood Institute has helped many, many young adults like yourself."

I glare at the man trying to gaslight me into willingly giving in but it's not working. I've been fighting everyone in my life for the last six months since Asmodeus first arrived. Seeing their reactions to me and hearing what they think behind my backs is reason enough not to fall for Michael's tricks. I'm already playing with fire so I angle my neck to the side and point to the iridescent mark Asmodeus left last night. "And this? Because he left a beautiful mark on me, claiming me. He's mine and I'm his."

For a brief moment, fear flashes through Michael's expression before he fixes his face. "Vienna, I'm not entirely sure what that is but you need to understand that Asmodeus is no more real than unicorns or anything else. Your mind is creating this darkness to cope but that's what Briarwood Institute will help you find. We'll help you let go of these delusions so that you can return to your life before all of this began."

Delusions. The word hangs in the air like a poison, a surge of anger so strong it nearly blinds me rushing through me. Whatever story my mother has crafted is so strong that no matter what I say, Michael isn't deterred. In fact, the more information I've given him, the more desperate he seems to take me with him.

I reach around in my mind for Asmodeus, that comforting presence always there slipping away like sand through my fingers. A wave of desperation to keep him at my side grows and I sprint for the stairs, my feet pounding against the floor as I race toward my room. My mother's frantically calling after me, even Michael's steady voice saying my name in the mix but I don't stop. I can't.

"Asmodeus?" I yell into the darkness of my room. My door slams shut behind me as I approach my bed, wringing my hands together. "Please! Just this once. I know you're

busy and you're—oomph.”

A hard body wraps itself around me as I sink into the familiar embrace. He kisses the top of my head as he carries me to my bed, sitting down first and then pulling me over his lap so I'm straddling his thighs. I cling to him, refusing to look up and see his expression. “Love, I didn't know they would come. Do not trust them.”

“Why is she being such a bitch? I'm an adult and I should be making my own decisions but I can't get out of this. I don't even know how I would!”

He holds me tighter, rocking me side to side as he hums in my ear. “I will always be here. No matter what happens.”

“But I won't always be here.”

“Love, here is wherever you are. Not your room. It's just easier to show up in the darkness. Believe me when I say that wherever they're taking you, I'll be there too.”

“I felt you slipping away.”

“I'm right here, love. Always .”

I pull away just enough for a kiss, tears streaming down my cheeks at what's about to happen. I've never felt so helpless in my life as he fades away, my body dropping to the floor. A harsh knock sounds on my door and then it swings open, Michael and the women he came with standing at the entrance.

Michael peers inside as if trying to see something but Asmodeus is already gone. Some part of me wants Michael to see the truth. The other part is glad that Asmodeus is only mine. “Are you ready to go, Vienna? Your mother and I discussed that the winter program would be the best fit for you so that you can return to school when

the break is over.”

Fighting any longer will only delay the inevitable and unfortunately, I know more about this Briarwood Institute than I’d like. I’ve long studied the place as it sits just at the edge of our cozy little town, a place I was sure my mother would throw me into eventually. I think I was more scared about it months ago but when nothing happened, I felt safe in my own little bubble.

“You won’t need anything,” one of the women says. “Briarwood Institute has everything you’ll need. There’s a few things to get used to but I’m sure you’ll do just fine there.” She waves me over and I do well to stand and follow her, head tucked as if I’m finally submitting to them.

Michael’s smirk widens but I pretend not to notice. Something about my presence at this institute has him excited. All I know is that I fucking hate my parents for doing this to me. Especially my father. He’s just mad I outed him for his affair.

Silence wraps around me as I follow them out the door, refusing to even glance at my parents as I stuff myself in the backseat. The women sit on either side of me, casing me in so that I don’t find the courage to escape while we’re speeding down the road. I’m angry, not stupid. Even so, I curl into myself so that I’m not touching them, head still tucked to give the illusion of submission. As the car pulls out of the driveway, I make eye contact with Michael through the rearview mirror and throw him the middle finger. It does nothing to offset the emptiness I feel, surrounded by strangers and their fake ass smiles radiating an evil I can’t understand.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

6 - Vienna

Briarwood Institute is just as terrifying as I thought it would be, tall and uninviting. Its stone exterior is crumbling at the edges as if the years have worn it down to a skeletal frame. The sky overhead is gray, clouds hanging low like they're ready to collapse onto the world below. Everything about this place feels wrong, as if it exists in some reality separate from the rest of the world. Just before, there was sun and the brightness before snow overtakes our little town. Here, there's just an overwhelming sense of despair.

The women lead me up the front steps, the massive front doors made of thick, dark wood and reinforced iron. They creak as one of the women pushes them open, a groaning sound that echoes in the silence. The dreariness inside causes me to enjoy the outside one last time before we step fully inside and the doors shut behind me with a heavy, final thud.

Inside, the air is thick and stale, carrying a faint metallic scent that makes my nose wrinkle. Everything is dimly lit, the fluorescent lights casting a sickly yellow glow on the walls. The floors are cold tile, cracked in places, and there's a faint hum of machinery somewhere deep within the building, a low, unsettling noise that feels like it's vibrating beneath my skin.

The halls stretch out ahead of me in dark, winding paths, each one lined with heavy, locked doors. Some of them rattle faintly as we pass, as if something—someone—is inside, waiting to be let out. I feel a shiver crawl up my spine, and for a moment, I'm tempted to ask the women what's behind those doors, but something stops me. A feeling. A warning.

As we walk, I start to sense something... familiar. It's faint, just a whisper at the edge of my mind, but it's there, lingering, watching. It reminds me of him. Asmodeus . There's a strange energy here, one that feels similar to his presence, a dark, pulsing warmth in the middle of all this cold and gray. The feeling wraps around me, grounding me, and I cling to it, letting it keep me steady as we move through the maze of hallways.

The women say nothing, those blank faces staring ahead as they guide me deeper into the heart of the institute. At this point, I couldn't even return to the entrance, having lost count of how many hallways we've turned down. They stop in front of a door at the end of the hall as one of the women pulls a key from her pocket and unlocks it, pushing it open to reveal a small, stark room.

"This is yours," she says, her voice flat, as if she's reciting a line she's said a hundred times before. "You'll stay here while we assess your needs."

My needs? The warm smiles and inviting words from the house are gone. In their place is this small room, barely enough space for the narrow bed that sits against the wall. The drab gray sheets are better than the white ones I always see in the movies but just add to the dreary ambiance. There's a single window above the bed, but it's too far up for me to reach. It's covered with iron bars, faint shadows cast on the floor. The walls are painted a pale, washed-out gray and the only other piece of furniture is a small metal table bolted to the floor.

If this isn't a prison, I don't know what is. However, I don't react. I don't want to give them the satisfaction of winning or whatever they think they're doing to try and help me. So, I turn around and face them, giving them my best smile. In this place, I have nothing to my name except for the phone in my back pocket that I'm sure they'll take from me once it's discovered.

"Vienna, I'm sure you're scared but this is the best place for you right now. The

doctors are usually in lab coats of sorts but you can always find an orderly in dark blue.” She points to the bed. “There’s a blanket and a pillow, however, if you need anything else just ask. Your bathroom is off to the right and lunch will be served shortly. Since you’re new, you’ll be isolated today while we catalog your needs and observe your behavior. Try to rest.”

With that, they turn and leave, the door slamming shut behind them, the lock clicking into place. The sound echoes in this small area, leaving me to process everything that’s happening. I feel like a caged animal, trapped in this room with no way out, no way to explain to them that I don’t belong here.

Everything about this place screams illegal. I play with the light switch and huff when nothing happens. There’s still daylight sifting into my room but not enough to do anything with. It’s as if that’s the point.

I sink onto the bed, the thin mattress creaking under my weight and pull the blanket around me, curling up into a tight ball. The room is cold, the kind of cold that seeps into my bones and makes me feel like I’ll never be warm again. I shiver, clutching the blanket tighter, wishing with everything in me that I were anywhere but here.

The silence is oppressive, pressing in on me from all sides, amplifying the faint sounds that drift through the walls—the hum of the building, the occasional shuffle of footsteps, the distant murmur of voices. Panic bubbles up in my chest, a suffocating weight that threatens to swallow me whole.

And then, like a whisper in the darkness, I hear his voice.

“Be strong, love.”

My eyes snap open, my heart suddenly beating a little too fast as his voice fills my mind and his presence spreads through the darkness in my room. Asmodeus said that

he'd always be here, that here was wherever I was but I didn't think I'd find him in this dingy old mental institution. A sigh of relief falls from my lips as I relax.

"Is that really you?" My voice is barely above a whisper and I keep my head below the sheet not wanting to be disappointed.

"Yes, love. I'm here. I told you I'd always be with you, didn't I?"

It's like Christmas in the middle of July, his presence much stronger here than it was at home. I'm still pissed that my parents thought this was the next best step but having Asmodeus here will make the next few weeks easier. His energy is almost supercharged as if Briarwood is channeling or amplifying his presence.

"I fucking hate the staff here. They're like... what I thought darkness was supposed to be. What I initially thought you were but it isn't warm. Their eyes are dead and their touch is..."

Because they want to take you away from me. They know you are mine which means that you will see through their lies and fake promises.

I snort. "Yeah, Michael fucking flinched when he saw our bond."

Michael? The question comes out as a terrifying growl but my body doesn't get the memo, a tendril of pleasure making its way down between my thighs. Don't worry about them. You're here for a reason. This place is more than it seems and I'll be with you every step of the way.

For the first time in a while, I'm not sure if I believe Asmodeus' words. I'm sure I'll come out just fine on the other side, having to pretend that he doesn't exist and that I'm cured of all demonic activity. However, I don't believe there's a purpose here. Just another one of the million things my mother does to assert her control.

A faint knock on the door disturbs the darkness, Asmodeus' presence fading away. I sit up, one of the orderlies stepping inside with a tight-lipped smile, devoid of any emotion. I scoot as close to the corner of my bed as possible and pull my knees up to my chest. She probably sees a woman terrified of her new room. In reality, the closer that orderly steps, the more disgusted I become. Asmodeus said it's because they're trying to rip me from him but I think it's more than that.

I just don't know what.

"I'm Rosalie," she offers, her face brightening slightly. "Lunch is usually in the common area but since you're new, you'll be eating in here today. Just a precaution."

A precaution? I would understand if I was violent or if my supposed hallucinations were so erratic that I couldn't tell fact from fiction. "I don't need to be isolated and I don't need to be coddled. My mother threw me in here and I'm just looking forward to leaving."

Rosalie's smile doesn't budge but I can see in her eyes that my words affect her. "Vienna, there are protocols to follow to ensure that everyone gets the most out of Briarwood Institute. It has nothing to do with coddling and everything to do with making sure we are giving you what you need."

"Yeah, yeah," I mutter as she reaches just outside of the room and produces a small metal tray. It rests on a small cart as she pushes it toward the edge of the bed, the food bland and colorless. Hell, I might actually take my mother's bean roasts or whatever that is. Rosalie gives me a short nod before leaving and shutting the door behind her.

I'm pretty sure this isolation tactic is one of many ways they break patients before building them back up. The problem is that there's some connection to the church so there will be prayer and church services and moments where someone will try to

rebuke me. All things that happened growing up and never worked. Because I'm not someone that needs to be fixed and Asmodeus is very, very real.

Or at least his dick is because I don't have any toys the size of him or ones that can do what his does.

No, love. They don't make toys like mine.

"Asmodeus, did you just make a fucking joke?" He doesn't answer as I chuckle, crawling toward the food to inspect what's on there. The only safe thing is the juice box, everything else a mess of gray except for the corn that looks just as questionable. "Definitely not eating that."

You are stronger than your ability to withstand a few meals. If they think that's all it takes to break you, then they'll be in for a shock. They have no idea what you're capable of.

The familiar warmth wraps around me as always but now I'm curious what he means. What I'm capable of? He sounds like there's something more to my existence than just... Vienna Haddox. I almost ask Asmodeus if I'm meant for something greater but maybe I don't want to know.

Because for the second time in as many minutes, I wonder if there's some truth Asmodeus isn't telling me. Then I remember that I'm in love with Satan's son and have found myself locked up in a mental institution.

Okay, so maybe I don't make the best choices.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

7 – Ewan

The dimly lit lobby of Briarwood Institute tries to swallow me as I rest my elbows on my knees, fingers tracing idle patterns along the edge of the worn armrest. The silence in this place is heavy, almost as if it's trying to suffocate every sound but that's how it's always been here over the last several years since I was thrown into this prison. What should have been a month or maybe two turned into a few months and then years with no bright light at the end of the tunnel.

A heavy sigh falls from my lips as I stare out at nothing in particular. This lobby has seen countless people shuffled through its doors, individuals hopeful that they'll find the help they need. Orderlies and doctors push them inside, a sly smirk hiding beneath the gentle smiles as if this is all done for our own good. Those who have been here a while know better. This has nothing to do with healing and everything to do with control.

However, today's arrival is... different.

Kaua sits beside me, his stoic presence filling the large frame of the lounge beside me. His hands are folded across his stomach, his eyes half-closed as if he's drifting between awareness and his own thoughts. Despite the silence, there's an energy simmering just beneath the surface, ready to snap. I've learned to recognize it over the years, the way it pulses under his skin. He doesn't need to say much for me to understand him. War doesn't talk; War waits.

And then it strikes.

I, on the other hand, fuel my curiosity. It gnaws at me like an itch I can't scratch, something I just have to pick at until the seams unravel. For years now, the doctors have tried to destroy that itch, that restless need to understand how the world works. They want me to fit into the quiet, perfect mold of Ewan Thatcher, the accountant. A man with a family and happy memories to return to. They insist on things I can't remember and don't care about, visitors popping up from time to time begging for me to acknowledge them.

Maybe at some point, I was that person but they are desperately trying to pull me away from the truth.

They call me Ewan . But I know that I am Death .

An eerie shift in temperature follows the silent declaration, a cackle in the back of my mind as a passing orderly pales and then shifts through the lobby faster. They tell me I'm not Death and then treat me as a darkness to be avoided but they are right to be afraid. I don't remember Ewan Thatcher and the life he lived. I don't remember the simplicities of Earth or the taste of wealth that the Thatcher family boasts. However, I'm more than comfortable with the cold, creeping sensation that lies deep within me. The essence of death running through my veins.

Because I'm not just Death, but a Horseman—the true Death incarnate. I am merely biding my time in this prison until we are called upon to fulfill our purpose. I chance another glance at Kaua, the man's eyes now fully closed, his chest rising and falling with every full breath that passes through his lips. He's a work of art, one of many curiosities I have found myself bound to.

He wears his hair long around his shoulders, much longer than mine, a midnight brown with bits of sunkissed yellow mixed in. The color brings out the dark bronze of his skin, the very same color of his eyes that sparkle whenever he finds a new disastrous idea to attend to. My tongue darts out to lick my lips as I undress him with

my eyes, wondering when the next time I'll find myself under him and at his mercy. Only for Kaua and Conquest—Vito—do I give in.

Only them.

Only ever them.

Kaua clears his throat and I sigh, turning my attention back to the empty lobby, the memory of that small girl running through my head again. She's several inches shorter than us, no doubt, but the luscious curves on her body make me want to explore. Yet another curiosity, I suppose. What's different about this one is that she came in with her head high, a human with a resolve, a purpose, a determination.

I have yet to see a new patient that didn't look withered and beaten before they even stepped inside of here. She was more than just flesh and bone, a shell of herself. I think I'll enjoy playing with her.

"You're staring," Kaua murmurs, his deep voice barely above a whisper. He doesn't open his eyes but he doesn't need to. He can feel the energy radiating off me, knows when I'm restless. After all, he's been with me through every twisted, dull year of this place.

"You saw her too, didn't you?" I reply, my voice low, a hint of amusement lingering in my words. "The new girl."

Kaua chuckles, acknowledging that he's just as curious as I am. He'll never admit it but his silence isn't lack of interest. It's his way of watching, cataloging, and weighing every detail with the patience of a professional. Usually where I'm interested, he is as well.

"She's different," I say, a wild smile spreading across my lips. It's been entirely too

long since something fascinating walked through that door. “You saw the way they handled her. Like she was dangerous. Special, even.”

Kaua’s lips twitch, a faint smirk that quickly fades. “They say that about everyone who comes through here.”

“True,” I agree, but the feeling lingers. There’s something about her. Something that tells me she means more to this cause than just a human dragged here to heal. My gaze trails down the back hall where she disappeared. Will she be different when she realizes the truth about this place? That there’s no true escape? Or will that fierce look in her eyes remain regardless of her circumstances?

It’ll be at least a day until we see her. They always keep the new ones isolated to break them down and drug them up until they truly believe that this place will make them better. Somehow, I think it’ll be a little more difficult for them this time around. She’s got that look about her, the kind that says she’s not easily undone.

The silence is broken as an orderly walks by, a folder clutched to his chest. His gaze meets mine briefly before he shrieks and then slaps a hand over his face to keep the sound from echoing. I throw in a snarl, enjoying the way his face blanches and he stops just feet from us. It doesn’t help that Kaua chooses that moment to sit up, those large brown eyes piercing into the orderly’s soul.

“Who’s the new girl?” I ask, gesturing to the hallway. Patients shouldn’t be this close to the entrance but there’s very few orderlies who tell us what to do. In fact, most of our time is spent wandering this ghastly place with no way to get out. I mean, we’ve tried just waltzing out the door but the week in solitary with minimal food and less sunlight than we already get isn’t worth it.

The orderly swallows, glancing at Kaua as if he’s hoping for some kind of interference or a reason to scream. My beautiful monster isn’t stupid, though. He

won't incite something he can't finish and he'd find no enjoyment tearing this orderly limb from limb. When nothing happens, the orderly's shoulder falls. "Don't worry about it. You'll meet her at dinner."

"We all know that's bullshit," I smirk, raising an eyebrow in jest. The orderly shuffles back but doesn't leave. "They never show up on the first day. They'll keep her locked up, run their little tests, poke around until they've squeezed out whatever truth they're looking for." My first day was horrid. I kept yelling that I was telling the truth, that I was Death and needed to find my Horsemen, I was ignored, prodded, drugged, and left there in the darkness for days. I hope they won't be doing that to the new girl.

The orderly's face tightens, his jaw clenching as discomfort settles in his expression. They're always like this around me, even the doctors sometimes. They must know that I'm Death and that Kaua is War. It's the only expression for them to be terrified. They know what I am, or at least they sense it, like animals sensing a predator lurking in the dark.

Without another word, the orderly hurries off, his footsteps echoing down the hall as he disappears from sight. "I'm going to see her tonight," I murmur, more to myself than to Kaua, though I know he's listening. "Before the others get to her."

Kaua shifts beside me, drawing my attention. "You're taking a risk," he says. Strangely, he's been my voice of reason as if that makes any sense. War holding back Death? Who knew that would be a thing? And yet, I still see the understanding in his expression. He knows that I need to explore this curiosity until it no longer captures my attention. With nothing else to do in Briarwood, she's a shiny new toy for me to dissect.

"Maybe," I muse, tapping the armrest. "But I need to know."

Kaua just nods, leaning back in the chair again and closing his eyes. His steady breaths soothe the rampant urges but I won't be able to sit still for long. "Don't break the pretty thing, Ewan. Not yet. Not until we know why she's here."

"I don't break my toys, Kaua." This time, the cackle that follows echoes through the lobby.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

8 – Vienna

The set of white scrubs tossed on my bed are just as ugly as the blue ones that the orderlies were stuffed in. The only difference is that against the drab gray and stone of this building, every last piece of dirt can be seen on this scratchy fabric. I'm given a few minutes to change with no privacy—despite the attached bathroom, one of the orderlies swiping the phone from my back jean pocket. It's a wonder they didn't search me at the entrance but this is just as well.

They even provide the most god-awful undergarments, thin pieces of cloth that do absolutely nothing to protect my skin. The scrubs are cold, offering no comfort or warmth, topped off with a plastic pair of Crocs that upon testing squeak against the floor. I already feel like I've been stripped of my dignity, but this... these clothes are the final insult.

The last few hours have been filled with questions and constant prying, the orderlies in and out of my room trying to understand why I believe Asmodeus is real. I tried to explain at first but the look of disgust on her face caused me to clam up. It became a little too obvious that they weren't here to help me. All that bullshit in the pamphlets about healing can't possibly be true if this is what I'm having to deal with.

By the time the fifth orderly slips in, I can't help but laugh. The constant barrage of new faces and questions is supposed to break me, to confuse me, to overwhelm me. They've gone from questions to insisting that my delusions aren't real, that I'm compensating for something. I just nod and perch myself on the edge of my bed, waiting for the chaos to end.

Asmodeus is real, I remind myself. I feel closer to him here, more than I ever have outside these walls. There's a weight in the air, a strange energy that makes my skin prickle and my heart race. And in my head, I hear him, his voice sliding through my mind in a way that only he can, filling the empty spaces they're trying to create within me.

"Be strong, love. This place cannot touch you."

His words ground me in this cold, unfamiliar room as the murmur of orderlies stops, soft footsteps bringing me back to reality. The doctor from before—Michael—stands before me with a single metal tray, a small smile on his face as he places it beside the bed on the nightstand. "I understand that you might be confused and overwhelmed, Vienna but trust that this is the best place for you."

"Sure," I push out, glancing down at what is supposed to be dinner. I bite back the question I want to ask, 'why is everything gray again' and just continue staring at it. It smells like meatloaf but the only thing I can make out in the mess is the corn and I still have questions. Not wanting to be completely rude, I poke around the food with the provided fork, instantly hating the way everything squishes. If Michael forces me to eat that shit, I might puke.

A soft laugh comes from him, a sound that should be comforting but I find rather annoying. In fact, this close to him, my body starts to heat, my stomach rolling as I swallow the bile at the back of my throat. He crouches down in front of me, holding out a small cup of water and then two pills. "This should help with the hallucinations, Vienna. We can't help you if you don't help yourself first."

Feeding me random pills doesn't sound like help but no one asked me. There's no fucking way Michael or any of the orderlies have had enough time to diagnose me or even write up a fake profile with a diagnosis. Or maybe they have and I'm just too trusting that a few weeks from now, I'll be dropped off on my front steps so that I can

curse out my parents.

“What are you feeding me?”

“Something that will help you relax here. Everyone is a little out of sorts when they first arrive which is why we keep them isolated for a little bit. Vienna, stalling isn’t going to help you.”

“Why does that sound like a threat? I just asked what you want to put in my body. If it’s anything like the slop you offered, I can’t trust those pills.”

He rolls his eyes, a patronizing smirk tugging at the corners of his mouth. “Right. Of course. Well, you’re going to take them anyway.” He crosses his arms, that smug look plastered on his face, daring me to argue. I can keep asking but Michael won’t explain anything more than he has to. The worst part is that I already inspected the surrounding area and there’s no easy way out. All of the windows are barred and there’s several locks on every door.

Even if I made a run for it, I wouldn’t know which direction to head. Whoever built this fucking place essentially created a labyrinth and while I would usually be in awe, I’m currently pissed off that I’m stuck here.

Michael patiently waits as I take the pills and place them on my tongue before washing them back with water. I give him a wonderful view of my mouth, metal fillings and all, hoping that he’ll be satisfied with the way I expertly wiggle my tongue. He doesn’t seem amused but Asmodeus likes it.

“Very good, Vienna. I’ll leave you to your dinner. The medication works better on a full stomach.” He stands and moves to the door, patting the frame a few times before looking back. “Your obsession with your hallucination has been damaging to your relationships, to your life outside of here. Maybe it’s time to come back to reality,

don't you think?"

My first reaction is to once again state that Asmodeus is real but that line of thinking doesn't seem to be working. That and the fact that I don't trust Michael as far as I can throw him. "Sure," I push out, hoping the conversation is over.

Unfortunately, Michael seems to need the last word. "We'll see how long that confidence lasts, Vienna. Be careful that it doesn't bite you in the ass." He chuckles, shaking his head as I just glare at him. If he thinks I'm going to just give in, he has another thing coming because I don't belong here. "You'll be introduced to the rest of the staff and patients tomorrow morning at breakfast. There are very few rules here as we don't believe that heavy bouts of restrictions do any good. Show up to meals, be present for roll call in the mornings. And don't disrespect staff, aloud or otherwise." He pauses, watching me with those cold, assessing eyes, like he's daring me to protest. "Your parents are afraid for you, Vienna but they'd also rather you rot in here than deal with whatever darkness you think is real."

Of course, they do, I mutter to myself. My mother has supposedly never liked me. Of course she would dump me into someone else's pool the minute she could.

"Oh, and one more thing," he adds, his voice dropping to a mocking whisper. "There's no leaving here. No getting better, no magical healing process. This place is the end of the line. You're free to roam, of course. But there's nowhere to go."

"What the fuck?"

Why the fuck did he say the quiet part aloud? In all the movies I've watched, they like to keep that part on the down low and wait for me to despair before telling me that I have no escape. Without a phone and only equipped with these scratchy scrubs, Michael just fucking told me that this is my new reality. That the freedom I'm given in here is the only freedom I'll ever experience again.

Cold sweeps through me, shock running down my spine as I sit there, staring into the darkness. There's no fucking way my parents actually just threw me away, is there?

The door creaks on its hinges and I look up to see that Michael left it open.

My hands clench into fists, rage and frustration burning in my chest. So, this is what my mother thinks I deserve? To be locked away, discarded like some kind of broken toy, all because I dared to believe in something she couldn't understand?

If they think I'm just going to take this, they have another thing coming. Sure, my fight won't get me far and I'll end up drugged and out of my mind sooner rather than later but it won't happen without a struggle. I slide from the bed and stomp into the bathroom, laughing at the reflection I catch in the mirror. The Vienna I knew was gullible. She believed in her friends and family. She thought that despite her moments with Asmodeus, they would still love her.

They would still want her.

Well, fuck that version of me.

A deviant smile spreads across my lips as I open my mouth and spit out the two pills I stuffed in the back of my mouth. I always thought it was funny that there was a little cavity just beside my wisdom teeth on the right side, a pocket of space that makes my cheeks a little lopsided. I've never been more grateful for that party trick in my life.

I crush the pills into the sink before washing the powder down the drain. The bitter aftertaste clings to my mouth, but I ignore it, a small spark of triumph lighting up in my chest. Asmodeus is still with me, his presence stronger than ever, his voice a quiet whisper in the back of my mind.

"Good girl," he murmurs, his voice laced with approval, and a shiver of satisfaction

runs through me. “They can’t keep us apart, Vienna. They can’t touch what we have.”

My gaze shifts to the open door, the faint glow of the hallway lights casting eerie shadows across the floor. Stepping into that hallway, though, is a different matter. The idea makes my stomach churn, a strange, unsettling feeling spreading through me. There’s something about the orderlies, the staff here, that feels... off. It’s not the comforting darkness of Asmodeus; it’s something colder, something rigid, uninviting.

But that won’t stop me. I need to find out why Asmodeus’ presence is so strong here, why this place feels like it’s tethered to something darker, something otherworldly. I need to understand, to unravel the mystery that’s woven through these walls.

My initial question was why my parents would throw me away, however, if there’s more than just Asmodeus, if there’s more than just the darkness that he boasts, it begs a completely different question.

What are they trying to hide?

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

9 – Vienna

The corridors of Briarwood seem to stretch on forever as I trace a path across the stonewalls through the dimly lit hallways. The silence is thick, pressing down on me with each step, amplifying every small sound—the soft scrape of my Crocs against the floor, the quiet hum of electricity buzzing somewhere in the walls.

I have no idea where I'm headed. There's something pulling me closer, guiding me toward a familiar darkness that I can only hope is Asmodeus.

I keep one hand against the wall, letting it guide me as I walk. The walls feel ancient, rough beneath my fingertips, like they hold secrets in the stone, echoes of all the people who've passed through these halls, leaving parts of themselves behind.

Every so often, I pass a door, peering inside the small rooms, each as bleak and empty as my own. Some hold two or three beds, others are cluttered with shadows of personal effects—a single crumpled book on the floor, a broken mirror propped against the wall, a faded photograph tucked under a pillow. But none of it feels real. It's as if these rooms are waiting, biding their time, empty shells meant to hold memories that have long since faded.

The deeper I go, the stronger the pull becomes. It's like I can feel him, his presence pressing against me, filling the empty space in the air. I close my eyes for a moment, the warmth of his energy wrapping around me, filling my lungs until I feel like I'm drowning in it. My heart beats a little faster as I imagine him beside me, his lips brushing against my ear as he speaks, his hands running along my bare skin. I can almost feel his touch, the warmth of his body against mine, and the tickle that runs

through me as he whispers my name.

“Come closer, love,” his voice purrs in my mind, as if he’s right here, standing beside me, his breath hot against my ear. “You’re getting closer.”

A shiver tears down my spine as I rush forward, following that intoxicating pull. The air thickens with each step until it’s overwhelming, the urge to call him to appear beside me growing as I’m swallowed by the darkness.

The hallway seems to narrow, carrying a faint scent that reminds me of smoke and something sweet, like burning incense. A strange wind stirs around me, winding through the corridor and brushing against my skin, lifting my hair in a way that shouldn’t be possible. There are no windows here, no cracks in the walls, no doors to the outside that I’ve seen.

“Just a little further,” Asmodeus whispers. “You’re almost there.”

The inkling that this demon could be leading me to my death lingers in the back of my mind but it would be a sweet death and in a place like this, it could almost be merciful.

He continues to whisper to me as I press forward, heat growing in my lower belly until a whine pulls from my throat. The energy seems to rip away the old Vienna, the one that trusted so easily, replacing her with one that is resolved to unravel the mystery. I’m lost to this never ending maze of stone. And then I see it.

At the end of the hallway, a door stands before me, its dark wood carved with strange symbols that seem to shimmer in the dim light. There’s a warmth radiating from it, filling the air with a sense of something forbidden, something ancient and powerful. My breath catches in my throat and I reach out, my fingers trembling as they brush against the cool surface of the door.

“This is it,” Asmodeus whispers, his voice filled with anticipation. “The portal to Hell. This is why you feel me here, why you’re drawn to this place.”

“Hell?” I ask no one in particular. It never truly occurred to me that there would be an entrance or that being in Briarwood would lead me to Asmodeus’ door. But it’s right here, just beyond this wooden slab, the place where my demon came from, the place that binds us together. Unlike all of the other doors, there’s just one simple knob here as if no one would dare find themselves in this place.

After all, I have no idea how I would find it without Asmodeus’ help.

“Open it,” he whispers, his voice filled with dark promise. “Open it, and we can be together. Truly together, forever.”

I expect it to be locked, for this moment to fall away into nothingness but the faint click as I turn the knob ignites a new passion inside of me. And then suddenly, Asmodeus is there as the door swings open. He drags me against his chest, his breath hot against my ear as he whispers ‘I love you’. I can feel the grin on his lips against my skin as he drags me inside, the heat inside much hotter than the hallways I waded through. It’s just short of unbearable, my demon refusing to let me go as he points to the stone floor beneath us.

Fiery red light emboldens the stone, showing off the heat from below. Strangely enough, the stones aren’t hot.

“See what I mean?” he murmurs, his voice filled with amusement as he kisses the side of my neck, sending a shiver down my spine. “This is why you feel so close to me here. This place connects us, binds us together in ways you can’t even imagine.”

I tilt my head, leaning into his touch, my pulse racing as his lips move against my skin, his hands moving to sit on my hips. “I feel it,” I whisper, a faint tremor running

through me. “I feel you.” The darkness he always brought into my room is here, a hundredfold. And it feels more like home than anything else ever has.

Asmodeus tugs me closer, his lips crashing against mine in a kiss that’s both possessive and tender. It feels like we haven’t seen each other in ages when it’s only been hours. Still, I sink my fingers into his hair, grasping at the need coursing through me. “I need you,” I breathe against his lips, surprising myself at the whine that follows.

He does this to me. He brings out my craving for his darkness. Only him.

“Love, as much as I want to take you, doing so here would be different. I’m more demon than I’ve ever been with you and I don’t want to hurt you.” He kisses me again before stepping back, revealing what he means.

The Asmodeus in my room is almost human, a warrior of a man. Here, his tarred, shadowy skin gleams like polished obsidian, veins of molten fire pulsing beneath its surface. His tail, thick and sinuous, flicks behind him, its forked end curling as if alive. His eyes glow a deep, molten red, their intensity holding me captive. His forked tongue flicks over his lips as he watches me, his expression unreadable but laced with something raw and vulnerable. He’s no less beautiful than the man in my room, maybe even more blindingly so as I stare at my demon. This isn’t his true form but the energy seeping from this portal is making it hard to assume the form I always see.

I take a step closer. “You won’t hurt me,” I whisper, my voice steady despite the ache building in my chest. “You can’t hurt me, not when you love me.”

A low growl rumbles in his chest, his hands clenching at his sides. “You don’t know what you’re saying, Vienna. My love doesn’t make me less of a demon.”

“No,” I reply, lifting my chin. “But it makes you mine.”

Before he can protest again, I push up onto my tiptoes, cupping his face with my hands. His skin is warm beneath my palms, the faint hum of his power beneath the surface. I press my lips to his, soft at first, testing, but his growl deepens and then the kiss ignites like wildfire.

His arms wrap around me, pulling me flush against him as he slowly lowers me to the floor. The world fades around me, the reason why I'm here and everything else disappearing into the background as Asmodeus devours me. Before I know it, I'm naked against the heated stone beneath, Asmodeus leaning back on his knees as he surveys me. That forked tongue makes another experience before he leans back down, licking up and down my neck before paying attention to my chest.

A cry tears from my throat as he sucks one of my breasts into his mouth, his hand attending the other one. Those elegant fingers seem to elongate and stretch, nails scraping against my skin until I'm writhing for a release. I sink my hands into his hair, feeling him change even as he gives me pleasure.

And then I feel it.

Something like a mixture between silicone and leather, pressing inside of me. My breath catches in my throat as I tug on his hair, whining for an explanation. "Just my tail, love. I couldn't wait to touch you, to hear those sounds, Vienna." He stares up at me, a deviant smile forming on his lips as his tail continues. I gasp, my back bowing as the appendage thrusts inside of me. Then it vibrates, just like his cock and I shatter, screaming into the darkness of the room.

Asmodeus chuckles as he moves back up to my lips, murmuring that he has more in store for me, that we'll spend tonight together. His eyes soften, the molten red flickering like dying embers. He lowers me gently to the floor, his movements careful, reverent. His claws, sharper now than ever, trace along the arms, my body bare beneath his smoldering gaze.

He only gives me a few moments before surging forward, filling me like only he can. His tail whips around us before wrapping around the back of my thigh and slipping between my ass cheeks. A gasp tears from my throat as that muscle presses against my puckered hole, Asmodeus thrusting into my pussy at the same time. He uses my first release to ease the slide as he presses me open, swallowing my cries with another kiss.

I cling to his shoulders as he holds me, fucks me, loves me . He consumes me in ways I can't explain until I'm shattering all over again, Asmodeus curling me tighter into his arms.

"Claiming you sometimes is never enough," he whispers into my ear. He nibbles on the lobe, presses soft kisses along my jaw before moving farther down to suck on the mark he gave me. His hips are still moving, still trying to drag out another orgasm. A dry laugh falls from my lips as I squirm beneath him, Asmodeus gently grabbing my waist with those claws of his. "You're really not scared of me, love?"

"How could I be? You've never pretended to be anyone else than the darkness in my room, a darkness that has wholly loved me for me. Why would I be scared of you when you show me your real form?"

God, he's still moving. If he keeps rocking against me, I'm going to come again. The worst part is that I think he knows as I try to bite back a moan.

"Love, this isn't my true form."

"Then show me."

"Someday. Right now, I'm going to enjoy every last bit of you. I'm going to make love to you. I'm going to make you fall apart until you're pleading for me to stop. And then I'm going to hold you until I have to leave."

I have no problems with that.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

10 – Ewan

My mind is a mass of chaos as I head for our room just after dinner, Kaua a few steps behind me. The faint hum of the crackling fluorescent lights above us flicker incessantly, an annoying hum accompanied by the sudden bouts of darkness. Briarwood has always felt lifeless. I've seen the strongest minds break and crack beneath the gaslighting that the doctors subject us to everyday. They go from believing in who they are, to following whatever the orderlies require them to do. But that's what they want.

To break us.

For me, Death is all I have.

And then there's her.

I can't stop thinking about her.

Most new patients crumble by the time they're brought to their rooms. The doctors make sure of it. Orderlies bombard them with an onslaught of confusion—papers to sign, questions to answer, rules to think about. Then new orderlies take over, enforcing their brand of cruelty, until the patient is too exhausted or scared to resist. By the time the doctor delivers the final blow—the news that there's no way out, that someone out there wanted them gone for good—it's usually too late for them to fight back.

Not to mention the pills they offer during dinner. Patients, at that point, willingly take

them, no longer wanting to push against the inevitable.

Maybe the girl is different. Maybe she hasn't broken yet. Maybe she's curled up in bed right now, staring at the ceiling and trying to figure out her next move.

Or maybe I'm giving her too much credit.

Kaua steps into the room behind me, shutting the door with a quiet click. The air between us feels heavy, like it always does when I can't focus, when my thoughts are spinning too fast for me to catch hold of them. I toss my jacket onto the edge of the bed and start poking around, searching for something to ground me.

"Ewan."

Kaua's voice is low and steady, a sound that rumbles through me and brings me back to reality. I glance over my shoulder to see him standing there, his broad frame silhouetted against the dim light. His arms are crossed, but his expression is soft, concerned, worried. I hate that look on him.

"It's not usually this bad. What's going on?"

"Nothing," I lie, turning back to the bed. The downside of being Death is the curiosities. The need to understand how things work. How they are put together. Why they act like they do. My ultimate goal is to take that bit of life but in order to do so, I have to know how the wheels and cogs work in tandem. And when I can't tinker or figure it out, the chaos becomes just a little too loud.

It'll be a long night if I don't get to see the new girl.

The floor creaks as Kaua steps closer, his presence suddenly behind me. I stand up straight, one of his thick arms wrapping around my stomach and pulling me back into

his chest. “You’re a terrible liar, Death .” His chuckle rumbles through his chest and down my spine, making a beeline for my cock. He slowly walks me toward the wall before turning me around and casing me in. Kaua is one of the only people who can do this to me—disarm me, strip me of my defenses with nothing more than a touch.

He reaches up to caress my cheek, his thumb running across my lips as he waits for me to speak. “I can’t focus,” I finally admit.

“Because of the new girl?”

I don’t respond right away, but that’s answer enough. Kaua sighs, his hands falling to my waist with a firm grip. “You can’t figure out everyone, Ewan.”

“I’m not,” my words are far from convincing as I sag back against the wall. “Fuck, I’m just curious. I need to understand her and nothing makes sense. She came in here with a smile. Determination. Who does that? Finding out where she was going and then the ride over couldn’t have been pleasant but she... there...”

Kaua presses his forehead against mine, quieting my anxieties. “You don’t have to understand everything in the world, regardless if she becomes your next project.” He waits for me to give in, his fingers digging into my waist until my lips part in silent agony.

I relish in the pain he offers, Kaua grinning just before he kisses me. It brings me back to the present, away from the chaos in my head even if I won’t let this curiosity rest. “Kaua—”

“Shh,” he murmurs, his lips ghosting over my jawline. “Stop thinking for once.”

Easier said than done. My thoughts are a storm, a chaotic mess of curiosity, frustration, and something I don’t want to name. But Kaua doesn’t give me the

chance to overthink. His hands are firm as they grip my waist tighter, the man pressing against me until I feel the outline of his cock against my upper thigh.

The contrast of the cold against my skin and the heat of Kaua's body is dizzying. His lips capture mine again, his kisses a strange mix of tenderness and hunger, like he's trying to remind me that I'm not alone while also claiming me as his.

"You're always in your head," Kaua mutters against my lips, his voice low and teasing. "Always thinking, always analyzing."

He continues to taste me, both of us content in this embrace as we wait for the rest of our quad to show. My mind is still on that girl but I can breathe again for the first time in a few hours, heavy footsteps causing me to glance at the entrance to our room.

A wild smile is plastered on Vito's face, his blonde hair mussed and hanging over his eyes as Nevan dangles from his shoulder. I laugh at their boyish antics, both of them sharing a love far different than mine and Kaua's. Nevan's a brat through and through, Vito enjoying the chase. After all, he is conquest. Nevan—famine—enjoys egging people until they crack and fall apart, his constant games pushing Vito over the edge. It isn't uncommon to find them lip locked in the hallways, Vito enjoying the spoils of his win.

Nevan easily slides to the ground, patting Vito's chest before turning to us and wiggling his eyebrows at me in jest. "Got lost in your head again, didn't you? What's the new curiosity? The girl still?"

I nod, Kaua stepping away from me to sit on the edge of the bed. He pulls me down to sit beside him, placing a firm hand on my back to ground me. Vito takes up the bed across from us, Nevan staying perched by the door, a smirk tugging at his lips, drinking in the tension like it's some kind of delicacy.

“It’s not just us, right?” Vito mutters, glaring at me. “You all feel it too. I mean, you don’t get distracted by new patients unless something’s off. Unless something is different.”

I nod, rubbing the back of my neck as the unease settles deeper into my bones. “They’re setting her up today so no one’s seen her just yet.”

Nevan chuckles, a low, unsettling sound that reminds me just how strange his gift is. “Maybe the new girl is the source of it. A little disruption in the precious order of Briarwood would be nice..”

Vito, however, isn’t as sure. “Ewan mentioned she was just a mere human. She can’t do anything to disrupt the balance but I’m nearly as curious as Death here to find out what it is.”

“They wouldn’t have brought her here if it wasn’t something important,” I say. “Human or not, she believes in something or believes she is someone that the doctors want to keep locked up. Whatever that belief is has caused everything to shift. Everyone’s been on edge all day.”

A dark smile spreads across Nevan’s face as he leans back against the edge of the bed. “It smells like fear.”

Intrigued by that, I push myself to my feet, needing to explore. Staying any longer in our room will only agitate me further until Kaua or Vito fucks me to sleep. Hell, at this point, I would be open to fucking Nevan until I can’t move any longer. Unfortunately, even if I wear out my body, the chaos in my mind will continue to churn. The other three don’t even question me as we step out into the hallway, each of us instinctively taking our roles in the silent formation.

I lead, with Kaua flanking me, his imposing presence like a shield, while Vito prowls

beside him, and Nevan takes up the rear, his gaze shifting from shadow to shadow, watching for any sign of movement.

The dimly lit corridors and the heavy silence that follows our footsteps is only broken by the quiet hum hidden deep within the walls. Each step deeper into the darkness brings us closer to a foreign sensation, the air thick and charged as if the darkness is more of a thing and less of an idea. And then I hear it. At first, it's soft, almost nonexistent and then it happens again.

An almost playful giggle that sends a shiver down my spine.

Vito's eyes gleam with a dangerous excitement. "That's her, isn't it?" he says, his voice barely a whisper. "The new girl."

I nod, feeling the strange energy intensify with each step.

The sound of her laughter grows louder as I push through the darkness, heading toward a corridor that has been off limits since I first stepped inside Briarwood. It isn't like I haven't tried to venture down here but there's always someone guarding the door at the end, a door I soon found out guards an entrance to hell.

The walls here seem to press in around us, as if they're alive, breathing, pulsing with an energy that feels both ancient and malevolent. And then I see it—the door at the end of the hall, the heavy wood almost vibrating from the darkness within.

A door that shouldn't be open.

Each of us stand inches from it, caught in a mixture of awe and confusion. We've heard the stories over the years, whispered tales from other patients about how the door has never been opened. How the portal has been locked away with several fail safes that everyone has been caught at least once trying to undo.

Every attempt has ended the same way—solitary confinement, locked away for days, maybe weeks, as a reminder of our limits. Patients, including ourselves, stopped trying after a while, content to let the door remain a mystery.

But now, here it is, cracked open, a faint heat radiating from the darkness beyond.

And that adorable giggle coming from inside.

“Impossible,” Vito breathes, his eyes wide with something between fear and excitement. “None of us could open that door. Not even all four of us together.”

“Then how did she do it?” Kaua mutters, his jaw pulled tight as his gaze fixes on the door handle. “She’s just a human.”

“Maybe she’s more than that,” Nevan sing songs. “Or maybe whoever she believes is real is behind this.”

Carefully, I pull the handle, the door moving freely with the motion. The creak echoes in the darkness, inviting us to see truly what lies inside. I don’t expect to see the heated stones, almost alive as they shift and breathe with the energy of hell itself. And there she is, the new girl.

She’s lying on the floor just inside the doorway, her body relaxed, her eyes closed as if in sleep. Her clothes are strewn around her, leaving her bare and vulnerable, her skin bathed in the faint glow of the heat emanating from the open doorway.

For a moment, I can’t move, caught in the strange beauty of the sight before me.

Her skin is flushed, a faint sheen of sweat glistening in the dim light, and there’s a strange serenity on her face, a peaceful smile curving her lips as if she’s found something that none of us could ever understand. Her short hair fans out around her,

framing her face, and her lashes rest against her cheeks, giving her an almost ethereal quality, like she's something out of a dream.

A mere human shouldn't be able to open that door. She shouldn't even be able to get this close to the portal without burning up, without her very soul being torn apart. And yet here she is, untouched, unscathed, lying across the portal as if she belongs there, as if she's part of it.

It feels wrong to watch her like this and yet I can't seem to look away. Her eyes open slowly, wide brown eyes locking on mine as she slowly sits up. A faint smile plays on her lips as she reaches for her white scrubs, not at all ashamed of being naked in front of us.

"Hi," she mumbles, stuffing herself into her pants and then the shirt.

There's a strange pull toward her, something I can't explain and I'm not sure I want to. This curiosity is one I don't think I'll be able to fully dissect but she's about to become my new obsession. I stare down at her, caught in the intensity of her gaze, something so different than the other patients dropped off here. There's no flicker of fear, no terror wafting off of her, just a resilience that makes no sense in the current circumstances.

Vito steps forward, his eyes narrowed as he studies her, his expression a mixture of suspicion and intrigue. "Who are you?" he demands. "How did you open that door?"

Her smile doesn't shift as she addresses him with the same resolve she did me. Most people are terrified of Vito and Kaua's size but nothing in her gaze reflects that. "I just... turned the knob? Was I not supposed to?"

Nevan's grin widens, his eyes gleaming with something dark and twisted. "I like her."

Kaua watches her in silence, as if he's weighing her every word, every movement, trying to make sense of what she is, of why she's here.

I step forward, my hand hovering just above her shoulder, unsure whether I should touch her, whether I even have the right to. "What are you?"

"I think I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be."

The others shift behind me, a mixture of confusion and unease filling the air and I know they're just as captivated and drawn to her as I am. She's something different, something... dangerous . And I can't shake the feeling that whatever she is, whatever power brought her here, it's only just beginning.

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

11 – Vienna

I 'm right where I'm supposed to be.

A few hours ago, I was cursing my parents and Michael and every other person that had a hand in sticking me in this place. They're all on my shit list, although my mother is at the top with her dick sucking skills and Judge Jansen for agreeing to hand over my rights without so much as an investigation into why I was a danger to myself.

None of that matters now as I stare at the four men crowding around the door. They're beautiful, each in their own dark, twisted way, with silver eyes that seem to see right through me. Their presence is like an electric charge in the air, familiar somehow, like the comforting, intoxicating darkness that comes with Asmodeus' presence. They give off the same demonic air, a feeling of warmth and danger intertwined.

None of them speak but I can't tell if it's because they're still assessing me or weirded out that they found me naked across the portal to hell. Either way, I'm now fully embarrassed and with Asmodeus gone from my side, I want to return to the cold room I was so graciously gifted with.

"Vienna," I finally say, my voice wobbling, a strange thrill rushing through me as their eyes flick to my extended hand, each one tilting their head in slight surprise, curiosity glinting in their silver eyes.

"Rude," I bite out when they don't shake my hand as I cataloge each of them for

myself. My gaze drifts over each of them, memorizing their features, their sharp, ethereal beauty. One of them—the thickest of the four—steps forward, his hand closing around my arm. His touch is firm but oddly gentle, and without a word, he pulls me out of the room, his grip guiding me down the hallway.

The others follow silently as I'm led back through the winding corridors I would never be able to find my way through. Asmodeus' presence is stronger than ever, still wrapped around me like a war hug, his voice brushing past my ear as he fills me with reassurance.

“Don't be afraid of them, love,” he murmurs. “They can help you. They're more like me than they are like anyone else in this place.”

Which explains why I feel comfortable in their presence. The large hand around my arm becomes comfortable the longer it's there until I'm pushed into a room filled with four beds, each one carefully made, the blankets tucked with an almost military precision.

He guides me to sit on the bed toward the far corner as they all surround me, obviously still wondering who I am, why I was in that room, and why I'm here in the first place. It's a long story, I joke with myself but quickly clear my throat when none of them start smiling.

“Who are you?” one of them finally asks. This one is lean and sharp-featured, his gaze almost predatory as he studies me, as if trying to decide if I'm prey or something else entirely. He's the one that first opened the door, long black hair framing his angular face. To anyone else, I'm sure they would be terrified but his gaze is just as captivating as it is intense.

A frown takes over my face as I replay Asmodeus' words in my head and then make a connection that I'm sure wasn't supposed to be this easy. The Four Horsemen? First

my demon shows up in my room and now I've met the four men created to start the apocalypse? This feels like an impossible timeline and yet, here I am, staring at Death, himself.

Or at least who I think is Death.

"I'm just me, Vienna but I told my parents that a demon had been meeting me—Asmodeus and they all freaked out. My mother sucked dick to get a judge to sign off on reverting my adult rights to her and then one of the doctors—Michael—dragged me in here and told me that I'd never be leaving. But Asmodeus explained everything tonight, well a lot of things." I suck my lips into my mouth, waiting for someone to break the silence that's slowly growing awkward. My face flames at the memory of them finding me naked on the floor.

No doubt they all heard me giggling as Asmodeus slowly left my side, leaving little kisses in his wake.

The shortest one but still taller than me by a good few inches steps up. He's nearly six feet tall, hair a bit shorter than Death's, a cruel glint in his eyes as he crouches in front of me so that our faces are level. I swallow nervously and stuff my hands between my thighs to stave off the initial heated attraction I have to these men.

"Oh, did he now?" he asks, his tone mocking but laced with curiosity. "And just how much did this demon of yours tell you, little girl?"

There has to be something wrong with me that I find these men intriguing and alluring rather than evil. They should be the stuff of nightmares and yet I'm trying not to think about who's hands I want on me first. It doesn't help that it feels like Asmodeus is touching me, caressing me in front of them, putting on a live show that they don't even know they're watching.

They are my companions, not that they know yet, love. Conquest, War, Famine, Death.

As Asmodeus says their names, it's almost as if I can tell who each of them are and so I repeat his words, the men crowding around me genuinely surprised.

At the mention of their names, their expressions shift, a mixture of pride and something more dangerous, more primal. They share a look, a silent exchange before the one who approached me first—the one Asmodeus called Death—reaches out, his hand brushing against my cheek. Famine, the one crouched in front of me, moves to the side, allowing for Death to come closer.

“How does a mere human girl know the name of Satan’s son?” His voice is soft but the hunger in his expression has me clamping my thighs tighter together. There’s a melodic edge to his words, dark and intriguing the way I would expect Death’s voice to be. “How did you even manage to open that door?”

“I just opened it,” I admit. “Asmodeus is always with me but his presence became stronger when I got here. I followed whatever that feeling was until I found the door and then him. He’s realer here than everywhere else. It just opened.” I stare down at my palms situated in my lap, wondering if there’s power in my touch that I don’t know.

Their silence speaks volumes. They don’t believe me but it’s not the same feeling as with my parents or when I spoke with Michael. They aren’t trying to gaslight me into believing Asmodeus isn’t real. It’s something else entirely. Conquest, the one who seems more confident than the others as he rests against the other bed, his arms folded across his chest, speaks next.

“That door has been sealed since we got here,” he states, irritation lacing his words. “We’ve tried everything to open it, every trick, every bit of power we have, and it’s

never budged. But you..." He trails off, his gaze darkening as he stares at me, as if trying to solve a puzzle that doesn't make sense.

"If you're thinking that I'm more than human, I don't know what that would be. Asmodeus has never said anything and I feel human." I raise my hands up, flipping them over as if that will tell us anything. Death smirks as he takes one of them in his hands, his touch just as electric as their stares.

He leans in closer, his other hand brushing against my cheek, his touch cold but strangely comforting. For a moment, there's this strange bond as if he's peeling back the layers of my soul, seeing me in a way that no one else ever has. There's a dark, twisted excitement that comes with it, and then, suddenly, his lips are on mine, cold and soft, a kiss that feels like falling into the abyss.

Like Asmodeus... but different.

I lose myself in the sensation, in the strange, intoxicating darkness that seems to radiate from him. But just as quickly as it began, he pulls back, his eyes wide, his expression a mixture of shock and something I can't quite place.

"You..." he whispers, his gaze filled with a mixture of awe and confusion. "You feel like a drug. Like... darkness itself. How can a human girl feel like that?"

I resist the urge to drag Death back into another kiss. "If I knew what I was, it might explain why they dragged me in here. I understand why you four are here but just because I see Asmodeus doesn't make sense. Also, I need names because I'm 100% sure you don't go by Death."

Death snorts and stands up, shaking his head. "It's Ewan. And then you have Nevan, Kaua, and Vito." He points at each of them in turn, Famine, War, and Conquest each offering me a nod as they're acknowledged. "As for why they brought you here, I

would say it has something to do with your ability to open that door. I haven't even seen one of the orderlies or the doctors open it."

"All I know is that I have to set him free," I say, the words spilling out before I can stop them, the urgency in my voice undeniable. "He's the only one who's ever truly loved me, who's ever seen me for who I am. And I need him. I need to be with him."

The four of them exchange another look, a silent conversation passing between them, and then Vito raises an eyebrow, his expression laced with amusement. "So, you're saying you want to start the apocalypse? Because that's what opening that portal means, sweetheart. If Asmodeus crosses over, everything changes. Our powers return. The world as you know it... ends."

I shrug, the thought filling me with a strange, twisted excitement rather than fear. "I don't care about the world. I only care about him. Everyone in my life has left me behind because I can't stop talking about my "hallucinations". Even with his fucking bond on in my neck, my mother sucked a judge's dick to get me in here. Excuse me if I don't really care about the state of the world right now."

Nevan steps forward, trying to hide his amusement as he glares down at me again. "Your mother sounds like a bitch, Vienna. However, Asmodeus isn't as pure as you think. He's made you feel like he's the only one you can trust. He's isolated you, made you dependent on him, twisted your mind until he's all you can think about."

I frown, his words cutting deeper than I expect. They aren't true but they don't hurt any less. "You don't understand. He loves me."

"Does he?" Nevan murmurs, his tone filled with a quiet, unsettling understanding. "Or has he just made you believe that?"

There's a flicker of uncertainty that runs through me, a moment where I'm not sure

my actions are entirely my own. And yet, I don't feel like Asmodeus has done anything I haven't wanted him to. My parents being hypocrites and my friends talking behind my back wasn't his doing. No, my feelings are real and as stupid as they might be, I'm still opening that goddamn portal. "I'm still doing it. As the four horsemen, it's weird that you would try to talk me out of it."

The four of them exchange a look, a mixture of resignation and curiosity in their expressions, and then Ewan sighs, moving to sit beside me. "If that's what you want, we won't stop you. But you need to understand something, Vienna. If you go down this path, if you set him free... there's no going back. The world will burn, and we will be the ones to bring that destruction."

I meet his gaze, my resolve unwavering. "Then let it burn," I say, my voice steady, filled with a dark, twisted determination. "It might look like Asmodeus isolated me from the life I was living but before him I wasn't really living. They weren't really my friends and I couldn't trust my own parents. Before Asmodeus, I just was and now, I feel more whole than I've ever been."

Vito leans forward from his perch on the bed, a faint smirk on his lips as he extends a hand. The room is small enough that I don't even have to stand, his fingers brushing the edge of my knee. "If you're sure about this, we'll keep you out of trouble. Make sure the doctors and orderlies don't interfere."

"Why would you do that?" I ask, tilting my head to the side. My gaze darts to Kaua—War—who has been silent this entire time. He's like an immovable force, a heavy presence that is both comforting and terrifying. With his silver eyes trained on me, I know he's just observing and cataloging information until he's ready to speak. "Why would you protect some random human?"

"Because," Ewan begins, "At some point, you may revert to the humanity you're so desperate to leave behind and we'll be there to give you what little there is left."

I nod and then take Vito's hand, giving it a firm shake. A dark thrill races through me as he holds onto my hand a little longer than necessary. He pulls me to my feet, a silent promise now formed between the four of us, a dark alliance forged in shadows and secrets.

Vito leads me back to my room, my hand still comfortably in his. Maybe it's wrong to think that I've finally found a purpose or a reason to exist in this small little world.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

12 – Vienna

Vito steps into my room, his presence filling the small space. He's holding an extra blanket and a pillow, his face shadowed, unreadable as he watches me from across the room. When he grabbed that before stepping over here, I have no idea but if it means a little extra warmth at night, I'm all for it.

I'm standing by the edge of my bed, my pulse thrumming as I take him in, the hard lines of his jaw, the sharp edge of his cheekbones, and the way his blonde hair is mussed over his silver eyes. There's a hint of amusement beneath the darkness that draws me closer in a way that doesn't make sense.

He holds out the blanket and pillow, his voice low and gruff as he says, "Figured it'd be colder in here than what they give you." His words are clipped, almost reluctant, as if he's fighting his own emotions the same way I am. Death himself already kissed me and now I'm fantasizing about Vito's large hands around my neck as he fucks into me so hard I scream.

Asmodeus is going to be disappointed in me.

I take the blanket, my fingers brushing against his. "Thanks," I say softly, draping the blanket over my bed. "I expected Death—I mean Ewan to care and maybe Nevan but not you."

He chuckles, leaning against the edge of the doorframe and crossing his arms over his chest. "I don't," he says, his voice edged with irritation. "But it wouldn't do for you to freeze to death before you get a chance to open that damn portal."

A smirk tugs at my lips. “Is that it? Or are you trying to be nice?”

He scoffs, rolling his eyes. “Nice doesn’t suit me.”

There’s so much I don’t know about him, so many questions swirling in my mind. Maybe I should have listened in Sunday school but nowhere in there did it explain that Conquest was an over six foot beautiful beast. “Vito,” I say, testing his name on my lips, watching the way his gaze sharpens as I say it. “What... who were you before you became Conquest?”

His eyes narrow as if I’ve crossed some invisible line. “Why does that matter?” he snaps, dismissing my question. “You’re just a human taking up a death wish for love. What do you care who I was?”

I swallow, twisted sense of defiance bubble up within me. “Because I’m not scared of you,” I say, my voice steady. “I’m not scared of any of you. Maybe I should be, but I’m not. You’re all terrifying, but... there’s something familiar in it. Like you’re exactly where you’re supposed to be. Like I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be.”

He huffs, his jaw clenching as he steps closer, his gaze searing into mine. “Not scared, huh?” His voice rumbles through the low light of my room, wrapping around me like a warm hug. “You realize you’re standing in the presence of the end, don’t you? That if you do manage to set Asmodeus free, you’re not just releasing him—you’re unleashing us. The world will burn, Vienna. You’ll be the one to start it. You will hear their cries, their agony. You see the world you know become nothing.”

“I know. But no one else ever cared about me, Vito. Not until Asmodeus. He sees me in a way that no one else does. I don’t care about the world. I only care about him.”

He shakes his head, a flash of frustration and something darker, more painful, crossing his face. “Of course he sees you. He’s Asmodeus. He knows things about

humans, things you could never understand. He... manipulates, Vienna. That's what he does."

"You don't know him like I do. You can't understand." I huff, realizing how I sound. I sound like those girls who obsess over darkness that doesn't exist or darkness that will ultimately destroy them. However, this feels different. It feels like I'm supposed to be at his side as if some part of me has always been searching for my other half before he showed up. After all, the first time we ever met, he whispered 'I found you'.

"Fine," he mutters. "Believe whatever you want." He leans back against the wall, his gaze shifting away as if he's done with the conversation, but he doesn't leave.

Silence stretches between us, until finally, he speaks again, much softer, pain flickering through his expression. "I'm Conquest," he pushes out. "I can influence people. Their desires, their motivations. I can make them want something so desperately, they'd destroy everything in their path to get it. I can make them fight, make them crave chaos. That's who I am. Conquest isn't about peace or harmony. It's about control. And I've always enjoyed the chaos more."

I take it back. I'm glad I didn't listen in Sunday school because this version is much more captivating. "So, you can make people... want things? Make them crave destruction?"

He nods, a dangerous smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "That's what Conquest does. But don't worry, I'm not using my powers on you."

I tilt my head, curiosity flickering in my gaze. "Why not?"

Vito shrugs but I can see the turmoil in his expression. "Because I don't want to. The others here are weak, easy to control, easy to push. But you're different. There's a

pureness to your soul despite the darkness.”

When I catch the rawness in his eyes, it makes me hurt for him. It can't be easy waking up one day to fulfill a purpose and not knowing what came before. “What did they do to you, Vito?” I step up to him and place a hand on his crossed arms. My curiosity belies my sanity, my questions no doubt going to ruin whatever partnership we've just created. “Who were you before all of this?”

“None of us remember much,” he admits. “Just... fragments. I woke up one day and I knew I was Conquest. Knew it as surely as I knew my own name. But the doctors, the orderlies, they all tried to convince me I was someone else. That I was... crazy.” He lets out a bitter laugh, his gaze flickering with anger. “They said I was an ordinary man, but I knew they were wrong. I can feel the power inside me, the need to control, to conquer. I tried showing a few friends the truth but they called the police, saying I was a danger to myself and them. The court committed me to Briarwood Institute for a 72-hour hold. It's been just over five years.”

I can't imagine the confusion Vito felt at that time, trying to come to terms with who he was and at the same time realizing the support system around him had fallen away. Like me.

Without thinking, I lean up and press a soft kiss to his jaw, my lips lingering there for a moment, feeling the warmth of his skin, the steady beat of his pulse beneath my touch. He tenses, his breath hitching, but he doesn't pull away. Instead, he stays still, watching me, waiting for my next move.

“What are you doing to me, Vienna?”

I pull back, meeting his gaze, a faint smile tugging at my lips. “I was about to ask you the same thing. Are you sure you're not using your powers on me?”

He shakes his head, his eyes dark and intense as they lock onto mine. “No. I’m not. I don’t want to influence you, not like that. Not like the others.”

I hear Asmodeus’s voice in my head, his tone soft, reassuring, as if he’s right here beside me. “It’s alright, love. You can trust him. You are mine but that doesn’t mean I can’t share. Besides, I’ve always been a fan of watching.”

My cheeks heat as I realize he’s probably seen every last moment in my bedroom as I pleased myself while calling out his name. That’s not what I expected Asmodeus to say. I didn’t expect for him to be okay with this or how fast my heart is opening to four men I just met. However, his approval is all I need. After all, we’ll be destroying the world together. I clear my throat and meet Vito’s eyes with a renewed confidence. “Then kiss me.”

He stares at me for a long moment, his gaze searching, as if he’s trying to see into the depths of my soul, to understand something that even I can’t fully grasp. And then, slowly, he leans down, his hand coming up to cup my face and his lips meet mine in a kiss that’s both gentle and possessive, filled with a dark intensity that leaves me breathless. There’s a tenderness in his touch, a softness that belies Vito’s rough exterior. He kisses me like he’s trying to hold onto something fragile, something precious, and I feel myself melting into him, losing myself in the warmth of his embrace.

The world fades away as it does when I’m with Asmodeus, nothing but just the two of us here in this beautiful moment.

When we finally pull apart, his gaze is softer, the hardness in his expression melting away, replaced by something vulnerable, something real. He brushes a strand of hair away from my face, his fingers lingering against my cheek as he murmurs, “You’re playing a dangerous game, Vienna.”

“So are you,” I reply, my voice barely above a whisper. “But isn’t that what Conquest is all about?”

He chuckles, a dark sound that sends a shiver down my spine, and for a moment, I see a glint of the man he was, the man he could have been, before all of this. And in that moment, I know that I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be.

“So long as your demon won’t kill me for touching you, I’m all in.”

I grin up at him as I place my hands against his chest. I know I’m playing with fire and for some reason, it just doesn’t phase me the way it should. “It’s a good thing he says he likes to watch.”

Page 13

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

13 – Vito

The air in Vienna's room feels heavier as I stare at the beautiful woman standing before me, taunting me. Ewan mentioned that Vienna is like a drug, something we just can't get enough of. It's one reason why I don't think she's human because there's no reason for the four horsemen to be thrown off by one woman. It doesn't make any sense.

But Ewan is right. Vienna is a drug, and I'm already addicted.

She's looking up at me, those big, hopeful brown eyes locking me in place. There's a softness in her gaze that is rarely directed at me. Most people here are terrified of us, including the orderlies. They steer clear as often as they can. Even the other horsemen, as much as we love each other, there's no gentle touches between us. Not like this, not the way her hand is currently pressed against my chest, waiting for me to make a move.

My mind screams to step back, but my body—the body that's always been disciplined, restrained—is drawn forward, pulled into her orbit. I cup her face, my thumb brushing her cheek as her lips part with the smallest, sweetest gasp. She doesn't pull away, doesn't even flinch, and that vulnerability undoes me completely.

"Vienna," I murmur. "We shouldn't..."

But she tilts her head, leaning into my touch. "Vito," she whispers, my name on her lips is my undoing.

I close the distance, kissing her like a man starved. Her lips are soft, warm, and they part for me with an eagerness that steals the breath from my lungs. A sweet sound escapes her, my fingers threading through her hair, angling her closer as I deepen the kiss, tasting her, needing more.

She presses against me, her body melting against my chest, and I lose the battle with myself. I lift her effortlessly and carry her to the bed. I lay her down gently, hovering over her, trying to give her space to stop this, to stop me. But she doesn't. Her hands slide to my shoulders, tugging me closer, her breath warm against my cheek. "Please," she whispers, and it's the sweetest sound I've ever heard.

I kiss her again, but it's different this time—slower, more deliberate. My hands explore the curve of her waist, the dip of her hips, memorizing every inch of her. She trembles beneath me, Vienna so much more responsive than anyone else I've touched. It's intoxicating. Every soft moan, every shiver, draws me deeper into her spell.

I'm careful as I undress her, not wanting to hurt her and wanting to devour her all the same. "I'm not fragile, Vito." A tendril of uncertainty runs through her expression before it's replaced with need. I couldn't imagine the body she was hiding beneath those frumpy scrubs, full curves that fit into the palms of my hands as I slide down to grip her waist.

I see now what Asmodeus sees, the irresistible pull of her light, her purity. She's not just a human; she's something more, something rare and precious. And for the first time, I'm terrified—not of her, but of what losing her would mean. It doesn't matter if it's been hours since I met her, I'm obsessed.

"Vienna," I say again, my voice barely more than a rasp. She looks at me, chewing her bottom lip, my chest tightening as that bit of uncertainty runs through her expression again. "Tell me to stop, Vienna. Tell me we shouldn't be doing this."

She shakes her head, her fingers brushing along the edge of my jaw. “Don’t stop,” she murmurs.

So I don’t.

I shed my clothes and crawl back onto the bed, situating myself between her thighs before thrusting forward. She wraps her legs around my waist, pulling me deeper inside of her as her pussy strangles my cock. Her fingers dig into my shoulders as I rock against her, waiting for her to beg me to keep going. “Vienna,” I breathe against her lips. “You feel like you were made for me, for us,” I say, quickly correcting myself. She’s more than just mine.

Her moans sound like the very darkness and chaos I enjoy, a melody that speaks to what’s left of my soul. When she finally nods, I pick up a slow, torturous rhythm so that I can worship every inch of her body. She responds so beautifully, a melody of soft moans and whispered words as I fuck her and kiss her, claiming her in a way I haven’t even done with Nevan.

Maybe she’s a trap.

A lure to drag me away from my purpose.

In this moment, I don’t really fucking care.

Especially when my name on her lips becomes one of the sweetest things I’ve heard, her gasps lengthening as I thrust one last time and explode inside of her. I nearly collapse onto her, pulling her with me onto our sides so that we’re still connected, my body already begging for another round.

I stroke her hair, my thoughts a tangled mess. She’s not just a pawn in some cosmic game, not just a human who’s been manipulated by Asmodeus to release Satan’s son.

She's something else entirely, something I can't put my finger on, but it's there—a spark, a pull that sets her apart from anyone I've ever met.

I press a kiss to her temple, holding her tighter. "I'll protect you," I whisper into her hair. "No matter what, Vienna, I'll keep you safe."

She hums softly, already drifting to sleep, her trust wrapping around me like a chain. I know I'm playing with fire. But as I watch her sleep, curled up in my arms like the most precious thing in the world, I realize I don't care. If she's the fire, I'll gladly burn.

Page 14

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

14 – Kaua

I stand at the edge of Vienna's doorway the next morning, the shadows around me stretching into the dim light of her room. The door is cracked, just enough for me to see her tangled in the mess of extra sheets left behind after Vito's visit last night. The faint scent of him—of conquest—still lingers in the air, and it prickles at something instinctive in me. Vito's influence is subtle, a smoldering ember that feeds on the will of others, but Vienna... she's something else entirely.

She stirs, her bare shoulders glinting in the soft glow from the hallway, her face peaceful despite the storm that rages around us all.

I shouldn't be here, not like this, but she's a puzzle I can't ignore. Ewan's curiosity is rubbing off on me, I guess. She's dangerous, I know that much. The fact that she's in love with Asmodeus is proof enough.

And yet... I can't look away.

As if my presence calls to her, Vienna's eyes flutter open. She blinks a few times before her gaze finds me, and instead of the wariness I expect, she smiles—a warm, disarming expression that cuts through the tension like a blade.

“Kaua,” she says softly, sitting up and wrapping one of the sheets around herself. “I didn't think I'd find you lurking outside my door.” An unashamed giggle follows her words, the comfort she finds in us is intriguing.

I step inside without a word, my footsteps heavy on the tiled floor. “I'm not lurking. I

was making sure you were... settled.”

Vienna tilts her head, her smile widening as she rises from the bed, letting the sheet fall to reveal the undergarments the institute provides. She slips her scrubs back on and then makes her way over to me. “If you were coming to see that Conquest didn’t break me, I’m still in one piece and as for your question, I’m settled now,” she says, her tone teasing. She steps closer, the soft patter of her bare feet against the floor echoing in the quiet room. “Is this where you lecture me about staying out of trouble?”

The amusement in her tone makes it harder to resist as I reach out and pull her close. I didn’t understand the attraction Ewan and Vito both felt but I do now. The restless energy that usually courses through me, the constant itch for conflict and chaos, ebbs away. In its place is a quiet, unfamiliar peace, as if her presence alone has the power to calm the storm. It doesn’t make any sense but I’m thankful for a moment of silence.

“You shouldn’t be here,” I murmur, though the words feel hollow even as I say them. I can’t bring myself to let her go.

She looks up at me, her dark eyes searching mine. “And yet, here we are.” She seems resigned to her fate, something most patients don’t figure out until they’ve been here a year or two. Vienna found out that her mother threw her away and this morning, her eyes are bright and the determination in her expression shows just how strong she is.

I release her, stepping back before I lose myself entirely. She’s probably already sore after spending the night with Vito and I’m larger than he is. “I’ll walk you to breakfast. Don’t want you getting lost.”

Vienna laughs softly, grabbing her shoes and then following me as I lead her out of the room. “How chivalrous of you.” She eagerly reaches for my hand, the small

gesture making me smile. She seems to enjoy touch or leaning into the caress of our darkness. Not even Ewan leans on me like that. It's a welcome change.

Vienna is a distraction we can't afford but she's also a danger I can't ignore. And yet, if she's truly the missing piece in all of these, we can't afford to lose her either. Vito told us all that Asmodeus let her know we were safe and to trust us. Vito mentioned that for some reason our purpose includes Vienna.

When we reach the cafeteria, the hum of voices and clatter of trays greets us, and I immediately scan the room, my instincts on high alert. Vienna stays close, her hand still entangled in mine as if she finds comfort in the largest man in the room. As we approach the line for food, someone steps in front of her, their expression smug, disregarding who she has beside her.

"Well, look who it is," the man sneers, his tone dripping with malice. I recognize him as one of the "lesser", his words not mine. A type of demon who is released on Earth during the apocalypse. Their only job is to wreck havoc and cause chaos. I have no idea what his name is but he reminds of a mangey little dog, always trying to start a fight. "Little miss special treatment. What's it like, being the head doctor's favorite?"

Vienna stiffens at my side as I drag her partly behind me. Michael rarely does any of the heavy lifting around here. He watches from the shadows, gathering information much like I do until it becomes the perfect time to strike. The problem is that he does it under the guise of offering healing and I do it for the fun of it. The fact that Michael is interested in Vienna is unheard of but also a problem.

He knows something.

When the lesser steps forward again, a growl tears from my throat, my restraint barely controlled. "Get out of the way."

The man hesitates, glancing between me and Vienna, before his gaze lands back on me. “And who are you supposed to be?”

Apparently, this lesser is newer if he hasn’t heard the rumors. “She’s mine,” I state, my tone leaving no room for argument. One of the orderlies at the end of the line glares at us, wondering what’s holding up the progress. I sincerely hope the lesser backs off before this becomes a problem. When he doesn’t budge, I allow my gift to surface, the need to release a little chaos growing.

The lesser’s eyes widen as he disappears into the crowd, muttering something under his breath that I can’t quite catch. I don’t take my eyes off him until he’s out of sight.

Vienna exhales slowly, her shoulders relaxing as she looks up at me. “Thanks,” she says quietly, her voice steady despite the tension. “But I only belong to Asmodeus.”

The mention of his name sends a ripple of something dark through me, but I push it down, nodding once. “Let’s get your food.”

We move through the line, and I notice how close she stays, as if my presence offers her some semblance of safety. It stirs something primal in me, a protective instinct I didn’t expect but can’t deny. Despite how strong she is, she isn’t prepared for the chaos that runs these halls. The orderlies and doctors aren’t the only ones to watch out for unfortunately.

As we settle at the table toward the back corner where we always sit, I keep a watchful eye on the room, sneering at anyone who dares to let their gaze linger on Vienna for too long. She notices, of course, her laughter breaking the tension as she pats my hand.

“You don’t have to babysit me, Kaua,” she teases. “I can take care of myself.”

“Maybe,” I mutter, my hand closing over hers instinctively. “But that doesn’t mean I’ll let you.” Knowing that Michael has an interest in her makes it even harder to pretend that her presence isn’t doing something to me. He’s a devious force, maybe even more twisted than the stories I hear or have read about Asmodeus.

Vienna just shrugs as she stares down at the food gathered on her plate. She pokes at it with a fork but doesn’t eat it. Everyone hates the food when they first arrive but hunger usually overrides their pride when there’s nothing else to nibble on. Just as I’m about to tell her that she should eat something, the others step into the cafeteria, their presence commanding the room’s attention without effort.

Page 15

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

15 – Vienna

The cafeteria feels like a void, the gray walls and sterile air pressing in as I sit at the table with the four horsemen. They're larger than life, a strange mix of commanding presence and quiet discomfort, with a handful of lust sprinkled in. It's like I'm sitting among predators who aren't sure whether I'm a threat, prey, or something else entirely.

At this point, I'm not even sure what I am—if I'm even 100% human.

Ewan leans forward, his pale eyes glinting with a mix of mischief and something darker. "So, did you have fun spending the night with Vito?"

Heat floods my cheeks and I grab my fork, shoveling a mouthful of food into my mouth to avoid answering. Unfortunately, the consistency is revolting—somewhere between paste and glue—and my body rejects it immediately. I open my mouth and let the mess fall back onto my tray, my cheeks flaming as the four of them erupt into laughter.

"That bad, huh?" Kaua rumbles beside me.

"You get used to it," Nevan says with a smirk, though there's no real humor behind it. "Eventually."

I frown, pushing the tray away. "I'll starve for a few weeks. It's fine."

The table goes quiet, and I realize too late that I've said the wrong thing. Their gazes

sharpen, their unease palpable. Nevan leans forward, his expression uncharacteristically serious. “Starving won’t get you out of here,” he says softly. “Nothing will.”

“I know. Michael explained that but it doesn’t mean that—” I ask, my voice wobbling.

Nevan gestures subtly to the room, his eyes scanning the other patients. “Briarwood isn’t a place you leave, Vienna. It’s not about proving you’re sane. It’s not about getting better. Once you’re here, you stay here. For most of us, there’s no way out. The way out for us is starting the apocalypse and before you arrived, we had no fucking clue how to open that door.”

“So, you would have just rotted in here forever?”

“Possibly,” he replies, his tone almost casual now, as if he’s grown numb to the reality. “Look around. Do you see anyone who doesn’t belong here?”

I do as he says, my gaze drifting across the room. The patients don’t look like the stereotypical image of people in a mental facility. They’re calm, quiet, composed. They could be sitting in a college cafeteria, except for the white scrubs and the lack of color in the room itself.

“Most of them don’t even claim to be human,” Nevan continues, his voice low but clear. “They’ll tell you they’re demons, mythical creatures, shifters, gods. The staff doesn’t care. They just keep them here, feed them, and let them exist.”

“And me?” I ask, my voice barely above a whisper. “What do they think I am?”

Vito chuckles, leaning back in his chair. “You’re the anomaly. You don’t profess to be anything. You’re just a woman who sees a demon.”

This is the first time I'm seeing everyone and it's appalling to see how young most of the patients are—in their 20s and low 30s at best. One of them looks barely old enough to be 18. But none of them are yelling about their existence, trying to push back against any of the orderlies. They're just here, existing.

It's terrifying.

Ewan reaches forward and taps the table to grab my attention. "They're all medicated, led to believe that what they think are lies. Most of them live in that safe haze, the one that tells them this place is here to make it better and then there's the rest of us who knew the truth and refuse to play it safe."

I'm about to ask about the medication when the temperature in the room shifts, dropping several degrees. The low hum of conversation dies down, Michael stepping into the cafeteria. He strides into the room in a black suit, his hands clasped behind his back, flanked by the two women who were with him yesterday. His presence feels like a storm, dark and suffocating, and I can't stop the way my body reacts.

My breath catches and I start to tremble, my hands curling into fists as every instinct screams at me to run. I hate him—hate him more than I can explain in this moment—and it's as if my entire body is trying to reject his very existence.

Michael's gaze sweeps the room before landing on me. He makes his way to our table, the crowd parting for him like the sea. By the time he reaches us, I'm shaking so badly I can barely sit still. Not even Kaua's gentle touch on my back is helping me stay calm.

"Good morning, Vienna," he says, his voice smooth but there's nothing sincere about his greeting. His eyes flick to the four men around me. "And good morning to you all."

None of the horsemen respond, Michael doesn't seem to care. He focuses on me again, a faint smile playing on his lips.

"I trust you slept well and I see you've made some... interesting friends. But I would caution you against getting too comfortable with them." He glances at the others, his smile turning deviant. "They're a lot of trouble, you know."

Kaua tenses beside me, his jaw clenched, but he doesn't say anything. The others remain still, their expressions unreadable, but I can feel the tension radiating from them like a coiled spring.

"If you want to get out of here, Vienna," Michael says. "You'll need to prove that you can handle the outside world. And that starts with choosing better company."

With that, he straightens, nodding to the others before turning on his heel and walking away. The room slowly comes back to life, but I'm frozen, my chest tight, my breaths shallow and rapid.

"Vienna?" Kaua's voice cuts through the haze, low and concerned.

I shake my head, trying to pull myself together, but the panic is overwhelming. Before I can stop myself, I'm gasping, my hands shaking uncontrollably. Kaua doesn't hesitate. He pulls me into his lap, his arms wrapping around me like a shield, grounding me as I struggle to breathe. I curl into his chest the same way that I would with Asmodeus at times when the world was too loud.

"You're okay," he murmurs, his lips brushing against the top of my head. "He's gone. You're safe."

The others watch in silence, until Ewan speaks. "We've all noticed how... off the doctors and orderlies are here," he says slowly. "But scared? That's not a word I'd

use for them.”

“I’m not scared,” I manage, my voice trembling. “I just... I don’t like them. Their presence makes me want to vomit.” It was even more pronounced a few seconds ago than it was at my house or even last night when Michael told me that I wouldn’t be leaving.

Kaua’s grip tightens slightly, his warmth anchoring me as I slowly start to calm down. Nevan snorts, breaking the tension with a soft laugh. “Careful, Vienna,” he says, his tone teasing. “Kaua has a weakness for small, cute things.”

I laugh despite myself, the sound shaky but real. “Maybe I like big things,” I shoot back as I make eye contact with Vito, earning a chuckle from all of them.

The tension eases, as I settle into Kaua’s arms, the weight of Michael’s presence lifting bit by bit. For the first time since I arrived at Briarwood, I feel a sliver of comfort in the daylight. Asmodeus’ presence is still there but these four add to it and their physical presence gives me something my demon couldn’t.

Ewan, Vito, and Nevan disappear to grab food, the moment easing into a comfortable silence. I stay where I am, leaning against Kaua, letting myself breathe as the strange, twisted dynamic between us settles into something almost... normal. For now, it’s enough.

I just hope that Asmodeus meant it when he said he liked to watch or our next meeting is going to be awkward as fuck.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

16 – Ewan

The day stretches on uneventfully. I keep my eyes on Vienna, watching her as she moves through the bleak monotony of Briarwood like a flicker of light in an abyss. She doesn't belong here, that much is obvious. She's too bright, too untainted compared to the shadows that cling to the rest of us. And yet, she's here, clinging to the idea of Asmodeus like it's her lifeline.

It's maddening.

The way she speaks of him, her tone filled with reverence and longing, makes me want to shake her. She doesn't see the danger, the manipulation, the strings he's no doubt pulling. She's precious, pure, and she's infatuated with the darkest thing she could've found.

It doesn't help that the four of us have become just as obsessed in the brief moments we've spent with her, needing to touch her, kiss her, and wrap ourselves around her. I can understand because of my curiosities but even Kaua and Vito can't seem to part with her.

We return to the rooms as the day comes to end, Vienna staying close to Kaua or Vito, her small frame practically disappearing in their arms whenever she feels Michael's presence. It's almost comical, seeing her cling to them for safety when they're easily two of the deadliest beings here. Aside from me, of course.

The difference is, I've learned restraint. I haven't truly unleashed what I am in years. Mostly because I have absolutely no idea how my gift works. With the others, they

push and pull the fabric of life and play with the delicate balance. I destroy it. There is no immediate balance with death. Everyone thinks my balance is life but it isn't. I have no idea what it is and it's one of many reasons I haven't tried to push forward and discover my limits.

I do know that I can coax a soul from its vessel like a lover's whisper. They'll thank me for taking their essence as they breathe their last. Their face always lights up as I replace their soul with a sense of peace. They believe I've given them a gift and instead, I've just claimed their existence. It's the main reason I'm in here.

We manifested as one of the horsemen but I found my gift before I stepped into Briarwood. It's a sweet calling, a craving that grows every time I do it which is why I keep from practicing it. There's a limit to the souls in Briarwood Institute and it would be very obvious after a while who was taking them.

Vienna doesn't shy away from us—from me—the way most do. It's fascinating, almost unsettling. I could reach out and take her soul with a thought, yet she looks at me like I'm... human. The others, too. There hasn't been one moment that I've been Death that someone has looked at me as if I'm just a man

She catches me staring as we settle in our room, her brows furrowing. "What?" she asks, curious.

I smirk, leaning back against the wall. "Nothing. Just trying to figure out how someone like you ended up in a place like this."

Her eyes narrow, and she crosses her arms. "We already went over how I got here."

"No, princess, I know that. I also know that you're not as pure or untouched as we previously thought. I know that there's a reason for you to be here but on the outside, you just look sweet."

Her face scrunches up in anger but the only thing I can think to describe her is adorable. “That doesn’t really feel like a compliment, Death .”

My true name on her lips sends a shiver down my spine as I venture closer, needing to be beside her as the others currently are. Kaua selfishly drags her into his lap and sits back against the wall. I sit beside him, ignoring the other two’s grunts of disapproval. “I told you before that no one here professes to be human. Not one person. Everyone here in some part has a part in the apocalypse, aside from the orderlies and the doctors. Except for you.”

She’s even angrier now but doesn’t move from Kaua’s lap, chewing on her bottom lip as she finds the words she wants to throw at me. “Right, because I’m just a human and just seeing a demon.”

Nevan scoots closer, stealing her attention. “That would be it if you hadn’t opened the door. That’s the one step between us and fulfilling our purpose. Sure, there’s other parts that are needed to open the portal but without access, we couldn’t do anything.”

Her emotions soften as she looks between Nevan and then me before settling back into Kaua’s chest. She looks perfect there, her unconscious movements as she accepts our touches more telling than she knows. “Does everyone else know that they’re part of it?”

“Probably not,” Kaua forces out. “The man in line at breakfast, he was a lesser or claims to be. One of the demons that are let out during the apocalypse to spread the mayhem we start. Not all of the players are here but most of them. It’s like we’re being rounded up and locked away and it might have worked if you didn’t show up.”

I scootch a little closer, trying to intimidate her, trying to make her actually see what she’s getting herself into. “And you’re doing all of this for a fucking demon. A demon!” My snarl reverberates through the room, Vienna scrambling from Kaua’s

lap. She stands her ground as she points at me, about to speak when one of my many gifts pushes forth.

Unable to understand this woman, I stalk toward her. Smoke begins to seep from my skin, dark and suffocating, and my form shifts. My cloak materializes, the scythe appearing in my hand, its blade gleaming in the dim light. It's one of the few things that the humans got right. I tower over her, the embodiment of death itself, but she doesn't even flinch.

Instead, she reaches up, grabs the edge of my hood, and rips it off. "Stop that," she says firmly, her voice cutting through the silence like a blade. "You're not allowed to shift when we're talking."

I stare at her, stunned. "You're not scared of me?"

She laughs as I just stand there, unable to make sense of Vienna even more than a second ago. "When I first met Asmodeus, he wasn't even one form. He was just... darkness. An entity, I guess? And I still wanted to sleep with him."

For a moment, I'm at a loss for words. Then, slowly, I shift back to my original form, the smoke dissipating. "You're something else."

She smirks, her confidence returning. "I've been told that before."

Without thinking, I lean down to kiss her, amazed at the way she so easily melts into my chest. In the day that she's been here, she's become something to all of us. I want to know what Asmodeus' plan for us but now I'm even more intrigued by the anomaly that is Vienna.

Page 17

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

17 – Vienna

I 'm still reeling from the kiss when Ewan offers to walk me back to my room. The silence is just short of uncomfortable as I hold my hands in front of me, sifting through the chaotic thoughts from a full day's worth of nothing. Finding out that all the players of the apocalypse or at least most of them are here, in this building is strange. The fact that the doctors have had their hand in rounding them up is even more strange. Are they fanatics or something else?

It makes more sense now why Michael would think my folder of 'sins' was important. Unfortunately, I'm still lost on what I'm truly supposed to be doing here. All I ever wanted was for Asmodeus and I to be together, as impossible of a dream as that was. Now, it feels like I'm part of something bigger, like this is my calling. I just don't know where I fit in.

Because in all the stories that I've ever read, there isn't a human that starts the apocalypse. There's been a demon, Cyclops, even a fucking unicorn shifter but never a human. Never a woman. Never someone like me.

We reach my room before I even realize, Ewan chuckling as I trip over the small lip of the threshold. "Stay here, princess, " he says, using the pet name mockingly. "There's a lot of dark forces in this place and few of them are friendly."

He's going to give me whiplash with the way he's soft one minute and hard the next. Shifting in front of me like that was absolutely terrifying but breaking at that moment would have ruined everything I wanted to do. Ripping his cloak from his head might not have been the smartest move, though.

“You’re friendly. Enough, I guess.”

“That depends on who you ask, princess.”

My nose scrunches up at the name but I don’t hate it, not the way it flows from his lips in this silky smooth tone daring me to come closer. And then his next question ruins the moment. “What happens if you find out you’re just a pawn in his plan?” Ewan asks, one of his brows raising as he leans against the doorway. “What if all of this is just part of his scheme to get what he wants?”

I’m not sure why Ewan has asked more questions than even the doctors or my parents. No one has really probed or tried to understand why I’ll follow Asmodeus so blindly. I pull down the collar of my scrubs, showing off Asmodeus’ bond mark. “If that were the case, he wouldn’t have marked me. And yes, it still very well could be a trap but there have been times where he has showed up in my room asking for me in a way that doesn’t make sense. He’s told me that he loved me before he even met me. Those aren’t words said lightly and if they are, I’m going to continue living in my fantasy world.”

He's fighting some invisible force, some emotion but I can't figure it out.

“Why fight me so hard when this would fulfill your purpose? Why do you keep questioning me?”

“Because we’re cursed with a bit of humanity,” Ewan replies. “We may be the embodiment of the horsemen, but that doesn’t mean it’s easy. That doesn’t mean it doesn’t hurt.”

He steps closer again, his hand brushing against my cheek, his touch unexpectedly gentle. “Are you sure this is what you want?” he asks, his voice barely above a whisper. “I’ll only ask this one last time. Are you absolutely sure?”

My heart races, my mind spinning with uncertainty. But I force myself to nod, even as the weight of my decision presses down on me. “Yes,” I say firmly, though my voice wobbles. “I want this.”

Ewan watches me for a moment longer, then leans down and presses a kiss to my forehead. It’s soft, almost tender, a shiver running down my spine. “Then I hope you’re ready for what comes next,” he murmurs, stepping back. “Because there’s no going back.”

He leaves, the darkness swallowing him whole before I close the door and turn around to see Asmodeus standing there. He’s more human than he was at the portal and I almost miss feeling that form against my skin. I feel like I’ve been caught doing something I shouldn’t even though he encouraged this madness with four other men. His dark eyes flash red as he looks at me, his mouth curving into a familiar, knowing smile. “You’re making friends,” he says, amused.

“Is that what we’re calling them? Friends?” My cheeks heat as I walk into his open arms, burying my face into his chest so he can’t see how embarrassed I am. Was he watching when Vito fucked me last night? Or when the others kissed me? When Death himself tried to terrify me and then made sure I was safe?

“Yes, I was there, watching you, love. I saw everything, heard every little cry, moan, and whine for more. You’re so beautiful when I take you apart but I think I enjoy watching just as much.” He wraps a firm hand around the back of my neck and tugs so that he can lean down to kiss me. “You don’t have to be ashamed of what you want—”

I cut him off, pushing away from him. “That’s just it. It feels more like a craving, a need. Like I went from not even knowing they exist to wanting to stay in that room with them. It feels like...”

“Me,” Asmodeus finishes. A warm smile plays on his lips as his shoulders fall. “It should feel that way, love. They are born of the same darkness that I am, the darkness that calls to you. I may have found you first but that never meant I would be the last to have you. I will always love you, Vienna. Always. That will never change.”

His words feel different than usual. The comfort I depend on isn't there. It's something else. “What aren't you telling me? There's something you're keeping from me, aren't you?”

Asmodeus holds out his hand and then guides me to the mattress to sit beside him. “There are many things I can tell you, love. About the world, about how it came to be. I can tell you histories that you would never find in a book but I can't tell you the answers for questions you currently have. The delicate balance of the world depends on you choosing this path on your own.”

Every time Ewan yelled at me, demanding to know that I loved Asmodeus because of my own choice makes sense now. “You can't just tell me?”

His gaze softens, and I see something in his expression that I've never seen before: vulnerability. “Because some things can't be told,” he says quietly. “Some things have to unfold on their own. If I tell you now, it won't happen. Or worse, it'll go wrong.”

I stare at him, the weight of his words settling over me. He's not holding back because he doesn't want to. He's holding back because he has to. Because the delicate balance of the world depends on it.

Before I can say anything else, he drags me onto his lap, smothering my lips with his. He consumes me entirely, growling into my mouth as he pulls me down to grind against his cock. It's so easy to lose myself in him, to give myself over to this demon in a way I never had with anyone else.

When he finally pulls away, his forehead rests against mine, his breath mingling with mine. “Trust me,” he whispers. “Please.”

The world may be falling apart around me, but in his arms, I feel whole. Even if it’s only for a little while.

18 – Nevan

The allure of Vienna is something I can't understand. The others—Kaua, Vito, Ewan—they're entranced by her. Even Ewan, who wears his disdain for most things like a second skin, can't seem to stay indifferent. Sure, she's intriguing, but she's also terrifying. Last night proved that.

Watching her stare Ewan in the eyes as he shifted into his true form, the embodiment of death itself, and then yanking his hood off like it was nothing... That isn't normal. That isn't human. She didn't even flinch. She just laughed, like she was chatting with an old friend. It makes me wonder if she even knows what fear is—or if Asmodeus has twisted her mind so completely that she's forgotten how to feel it.

She doesn't know I was there. After everything settled down, after Ewan's temper simmered and everyone retreated to their rooms, I crept over to hers. Call it curiosity, call it suspicion, I couldn't help myself. What I found only deepened the mystery.

The door was cracked just enough for me to see inside, and there he was. Asmodeus. Not the terrifying, otherworldly entity Vienna described, but a man—a devilishly handsome one, sure—but still just a man in that moment. The way he touched her, the way her body responded to him, it was enough to make my stomach churn. Not out of disgust, but something else. Something darker.

Her little cries echoed down the hallway, muffled but clear enough to make me wince. It's a good thing the doctors and orderlies keep to themselves at night, or they would've heard everything. I watched longer than I should have. Not because I enjoyed it, but because I couldn't look away. There was something raw, something

twisted in the way he consumed her, and in the way she gave herself to him completely.

When I finally pulled myself away, retreating down the hall, I felt restless. The chaos that follows us in Briarwood is usually enough to keep me entertained, but lately, it's grown tiresome. I'm sick of this place. Sick of the monotony, the creeping insanity, the way the walls feel like they're closing in. I want to fulfill my purpose, to be famine, to tip the scales and watch the world burn. But here, I'm just another freak, locked away with the rest of them.

As I wander the halls, my thoughts swirling, I notice a faint glow emanating from a nearby room. It's not the sickly yellow of the overhead lights or the dim gray of the walls. This is something else. Something bright. I move closer, careful not to make a sound, and peer inside.

Michael is sitting at a table, flanked by two other doctors I recognize immediately: Raphael and Gabriel. Their names alone have always felt... off, but now it makes sense. The ethereal light surrounding them is unmistakable, and the faint beat of light in the shape of wings behind them confirms what I already suspect.

Angels.

They're drinking wine, their voices low but clear as they laugh and joke about the patients. The casual cruelty in their words sends a shiver down my spine.

"We're doing our job," Michael says. "Keeping the darkness locked away, keeping evil contained. It's what we're meant to do."

Raphael chuckles, taking a sip of his wine. "Most of them are harmless. They can claim to be demons or gods all they want, but they're just delusional."

Gabriel smirks, leaning back in his chair. “And the new one? Vienna? What’s her story?”

Michael waves a hand dismissively. “She’s different. Her lies about meeting Asmodeus seem a little too real, but I’m not worried about her involvement. She’s human, after all. What can she really do?”

“She’s sitting with the four horsemen,” Raphael points out. “That’s bound to stir up some trouble.”

Michael’s smile deepens. “Let her. She might get herself into trouble, but it’s nothing we can’t handle.”

My breath catches and I pull back before I can be seen. My mind races as I retreat down the hall, piecing together everything I’ve just heard. It all makes sense now—the way Vienna reacts to them, the way they carry themselves, the control they have over this place. They’re not just doctors. They’re angels, and this isn’t just a mental institution.

I burst into our room, my chest heaving as I try to catch my breath. The others look up, startled, but their expressions quickly harden as they see the look on my face.

“What is it?” Ewan asks, sitting up. He rubs at his eyes, Kaua groaning from behind him. The big guy glares at me and if this wasn’t important, I know I’d be on his shit list. I still might be.

“They’re angels,” I say, the words spilling out before I can stop myself. “Michael, Raphael, Gabriel. They’re angels, and they’re running this place.”

Ewan stares at me, disbelief flickering in his eyes. “Angels? Are you serious?”

I nod, my hands shaking. “I saw them. They’re not human. This whole place... fuck, how did we not know? We suspected that someone was rounding up the players of the apocalypse. It’s a cage, yes, but it’s their cage. They’re keeping the darkness contained. And Vienna...”

“What about her?” Vito asks, stalking over to me. He cradles my cheeks in his hands, searching my expression for answers.

“They’re watching her,” I say, my voice trembling. “They don’t believe her story about Asmodeus, but they know she’s different. They know she’s with us and that makes her a target.”

The room goes silent, the weight of my words sinking in. Finally, Kaua speaks, his voice steady but grim. “We can’t leave her alone. If they’re watching her, she’s in more danger than we thought.”

“I’ll tell her,” I say quickly, already heading for the door. “She needs to know before her meeting with them tomorrow.”

“Go,” Ewan says, his tone commanding. “Before sunrise. She needs to be ready.”

I nod, hurrying down the hallway, my mind racing. The air feels heavier now, the walls pressing in as I approach Vienna’s door. I don’t bother knocking. I push the door open and step inside, my chest heaving as I drop to my knees beside her bed.

She stirs, her eyes fluttering open as she looks at me in confusion. “Nevan?” she murmurs, her voice thick with sleep.

I reach for her hand, my grip firm but gentle. “Vienna, I have something to tell you,” I say, my voice soft but urgent. “And it’s more important than life and death.”

Page 19

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 2:59 am

19 – Vienna

Nevan calling my name and something about life or death wakes me. Well, that and the sensation of lead pressing against my limbs. My body feels heavy, weighed down, and my head throbs as though I've been drugged—which I likely have. After a night with Asmodeus, where his touch unraveled and stitched me back together over and over, I feel hollow. Drained. Which doesn't make any sense.

"Vienna," he whispers. "Can you hear me?" His expression is dark, his jaw pulled tight as he jostles my shoulder.

I try to answer, but my voice comes out garbled. Frustration wells up inside me as I fight to move, to speak, but the weight of my body is suffocating. Nevan moves quickly, sitting on the edge of the bed and cupping my cheek with his hand. His touch is cool and grounding, his thumb brushing against my skin as he leans closer.

"It's okay," he says softly, his lips brushing mine in a kiss that's unexpectedly tender. The connection jolts something awake in me, my mind snapping into focus even as my body struggles to catch up.

I blink rapidly, my surroundings becoming clear. The dim, oppressive light of my room, the faint hum of activity in the hall. Nevan's concerned face inches from mine. "What... what happened?" I manage, my voice weak but coherent.

Nevan exhales, his hand still steady against my cheek. "The medication," he explains. "I forgot that they administer it at night, when no one notices. It's subtle at first, but after two nights, it starts to kick in. You've been here long enough that it's in your

system now. It doesn't work on the four of us but it makes it easier for the staff to make sure we don't slip out at night. Not that we'd get far. It went over my head, I'm sorry."

The absolute despair in his expression would be comical if I wasn't still drained from whatever they gave me. "What's in it?"

"A mixture of things, I'm sure. How are you feeling?" I let out a little groan, Nevan running his thumb across my lips. "I'm taking it away, Vienna. I can give and restrict in doses which is one reason why we never feel the after effects. I've muted the effects so you can think clearly, at least for now."

I stare at him, processing his words, before nodding slowly. "Why are you doing this?"

"Because you need to understand what's going on," he says, his tone growing urgent. "Vienna, I found out something. Something that explains everything." He pauses, as though weighing his next words carefully. When he finally speaks, his voice is low, barely above a whisper as if someone is watching us. "The doctors here—they're angels."

I blink, the weight of his statement hitting me like a physical blow. "Angels," I repeat, disbelief dripping from the word.

"I know it sounds insane," he continues, his silver eyes locked on mine. "But it's true. Michael, Raphael, Gabriel—they're not human. I saw them. Their light, their wings. They're the ones running this place, keeping us locked up."

I lean back against the pillows, my mind racing. "I thought it was weird that the first doctor's name was Michael," I mutter, half to myself.

Nevan's lips twitch in a grim smile. "It's not just weird—it's intentional. They're here to keep us contained, to rid the world of evil. That's why you can't trust them. Don't tell them anything more than you have to. If you say the wrong thing, they'll lock you away forever."

There's a fierce concern in his voice that I've never heard before. "Okay," I whisper. "I'll be careful."

A knock at the door sends a jolt through me and Nevan's hand slips away as the door creaks open. Michael steps inside, his presence as unsettling as ever. The air around him seems heavier, colder, and I can't stop the way my body tenses.

Michael's smile is polite but hollow as he closes the door behind him, his eyes flicking briefly to Nevan. "I thought you'd be in your own room by now," he states, no room for argument.

Nevan stands, his expression unreadable. "Just making sure she's settled." He glances at me, his eyes softening for a moment as he squeezes my shoulder and then excuses himself to leave.

Michael steps closer, his gaze lingering on me as he takes a seat beside the bed. "I would have called you to my office, but you seem comfortable here." What he means to say is that he wanted to catch me unaware, away from everyone else. However, since Nevan saw him, I know that the four horsemen will be impatiently waiting for Michael to leave so that they can return.

Especially after I just found out that Michael is a motherfucking angel.

I don't respond, my stomach twisting as his unsettling presence fills the room. He leans forward slightly, his eyes narrowing just enough to make my skin crawl. "How are you fitting in, Vienna? How are things with the others?"

“Okay,” I reply shortly, forcing my voice to stay steady.

Michael’s smile tightens. “If you don’t truly answer the questions, I can’t help you get better. And you do want to get better, don’t you?”

The way he says it sends a chill down my spine, like he already knows the answer. Like he already knows everything. His gaslighting skills are impeccable but just not good enough.

“You’re treading down a dark path,” he continues. “I’ve seen it before. People like you, drawn to the wrong things, the wrong people. It never ends well.”

The way his words linger feels deliberate, as if he’s referencing more than just my time here. It’s almost as though he knows about Asmodeus, about the portal, about the horsemen. The realization makes my heart race, but I keep my expression neutral. I fully sit up, glad that I pulled my scrubs back on after spending the night with Asmodeus.

Michael reaches into his pocket and offers me a small packet of sweets—something so out of place in this sterile, suffocating room. “Here,” he says. “A little treat. Maybe it’ll help you open up about your first two days here.”

I shake my head and then regret it, my body still lagging from the effects of the medication they slipped me. “I’ve just wandered a bit.”

“I see. Well, I think it’s time we give you some structure. Starting tomorrow, you’ll attend some of the classes we offer. Group therapy, activities. It’ll help you keep a schedule, keep your mind focused.”

My throat tightens, but I force myself to nod. “Okay.”

“Good.” Michael’s smile returns, cold and empty. He sets two pills and a glass of water on the bedside table, his gaze locking onto mine. “Take these. They’ll help you sleep.”

I hesitate, but the weight of his stare is suffocating. Slowly, I take the pills, washing them down with the water as he watches. Satisfied, he stands, his movements unnervingly smooth. “Rest well, Vienna. Tomorrow’s a new day.”

He leaves without another word, and the moment the door closes behind him, I collapse back against the bed, my limbs heavy and unresponsive again. Panic sets in as the medication takes hold, and I can feel myself sinking, slipping into a numb haze.

But then, strong arms lift me, cradling me against a solid chest. Nevan’s voice cuts through the fog. “I’ve got you,” he murmurs. “You’re safe.”

The effects of the medication begin to fade, the heaviness lifting as he carries me down the hall. By the time we reach the others’ room, my mind is clear again, and I cling to him, my breath shaky but even.

As he sets me down, I look up at him, my voice barely above a whisper. “Thank you.”

Nevan brushes a strand of hair from my face, his expression soft but serious. “We’ll protect you, Vienna. All of us.”

I close my eyes, exhaustion tugging at me, and reach out in my mind for Asmodeus. His voice is immediate, smooth and reassuring. Trust them, he says, his words settling over me like a warm blanket.

So, I do, curling up tighter against Nevan’s chest.

20 – Vienna

The room is quiet when I wake. I'm curled up on one of the beds in the four horsemen's shared space, my body aching and heavy from the medication still clinging to me despite Nevan's intervention. It's as though the drugs left a shadow over me, dulling everything to a muted hum.

Ewan is sitting beside me, his long fingers gently combing through my hair. His touch is surprisingly tender for someone who radiates power and death. His gaze meets mine as I stir, a faint smirk pulling at his lips. "Finally awake," he says, his voice low and smooth. "You've been out for most of the day."

I try to sit up, my body protesting every movement and glance toward the single window in the room. The glass is filthy, the faint outline of the outside world barely visible through the grime. Darkness presses against it, reminding me of how much time I wasted.

"How long?" I ask, my voice hoarse.

"Almost an entire day," Ewan replies, reaching to a small tray on the table beside him. "We brought you some food. Figured you'd want something that isn't gray and flavorless."

He hands me an orange, its vibrant color a shock against the drab backdrop of the room. I take it gratefully, peeling it with trembling fingers. The scent is sharp and sweet, and when I pop a slice into my mouth, the taste floods my senses, waking me up more than anything else.

Ewan watches me with a smirk, his pale eyes flickering with the need to protect me. “We need to keep you away from the doctors,” he says, “No more wandering alone. One of us stays with you at all times.”

I nod, swallowing the last piece of the orange. There’s no hesitation in my response. After what Michael did last night, the thought of being alone with any of them again sends a shiver down my spine.

The door creaks open and Nevan steps inside, his sharp gaze immediately finding mine. He crosses the room in a few strides, kneeling beside me and brushing his hand against my cheek. His touch is cool and I let out a soft sigh as the lingering weight of the medication finally disappears.

“How are you feeling?” he asks, his voice softer than usual.

“Better,” I admit. “Still tired, though.”

The room fills with quiet laughter from the others, their amusement a strange balm to the tension that’s lingered since Michael’s visit. Ewan leans back against the wall. “Stick with Nevan for a while. He has something to show you anyway and being with him will alleviate any other symptoms of the medication.”

Kaua steps forward, his large frame filling the room as he crosses his arms. “I’ll come, too. We can’t afford to split up too much.”

I find myself nodding again, unable to argue with the logic. As much as I’d like to think I can take care of myself, this place has proven the opposite. I might be able to open that door but so far, that’s the only thing I’m good at. I reach for Asmodeus but that feat seems too much in my current state.

Nevan helps me to my feet and then guides me into the hallway, the faint hum of the

building buzzing beneath my feet as we walk in silence. Kaua's presence is a steady weight beside me, his arm brushing mine occasionally as if to remind me he's there. Nevan leads the way, neither of them hurried to get to whatever destination they're headed for.

We stop at the end of the hall in front of a door I hadn't noticed before. Nevan pushes it open, revealing a dimly lit library that feels impossibly large for this decrepit building. Shelves stretch high, packed with old books, their spines worn and faded. The scent of aged paper and ink fills the air, mingling with the ever-present chill of Briarwood.

"What is this place?" I ask, stepping inside.

"A library of sorts," Nevan replies, his voice echoing slightly in the quiet space. "There's a lot about Briarwood that doesn't make sense. This is one of those things. No one comes in here, really. No one's ever stopped us from coming in here either. The only forbidden places are the offices and that corridor that leads to the portal."

I wander over to a shelf, running my fingers along the spines. One catches my eye, its cover embossed with strange symbols I can't quite place. I pull it down and open it, flipping through pages filled with intricate illustrations and texts that make my head spin. They're stories, histories—things Asmodeus has whispered to me in the dark over the past months.

"It's all real," I murmur, more to myself than to them.

Nevan steps closer, glancing at the book in my hands. "Asmodeus told you about the stories of old, did he? I've worked through some of these books but there's too much to read and not all of it is English." He points to some of the symbols on the page, his other hand grazing my arm. The sleepiness still edging at my consciousness falls away until I feel almost 100%.

As I process his words, Kaua steps up behind me, wrapping an arm around my waist and pulling me into his chest. The warmth of his body against mine is startling, but not unwelcome. I grumble softly, shooting him a glare.

“You’re clingy,” I mutter.

“You’re fragile,” he counters, smirking. “I’m keeping you upright.”

Nevan takes the book from my hands, his fingers brushing mine briefly before he slides it back onto the shelf. “There are forces here we don’t understand,” he says, his tone serious. “They’ll affect you differently than they do us. You’re human, Vienna. That makes you vulnerable.”

He steps closer, his hand brushing my cheek as he leans in. His lips meet mine and for a moment, the world narrows to just us three. When he pulls back, his eyes meet mine, and there’s something raw in his gaze. “I see what Asmodeus sees,” he murmurs.

I’m about to respond when a slow, deliberate clap echoes through the library. My head snaps toward the sound, my breath catching as I see him.

Asmodeus stands in the shadows, his dark eyes glinting with amusement. He steps forward, his movements smooth and predatory, and I feel my cheeks heat as I realize I’m still in Kaua’s arms, with Nevan standing so close.

“You look beautiful in the arms of other men,” Asmodeus says, his voice dripping with approval. “I should leave you like this more often.”

His words make my stomach twist in a mix of embarrassment and desire. He steps closer, his gaze locking onto mine as he leans in and kisses me. It’s different from Nevan’s kiss—deeper, more consuming, like he’s claiming me all over again.

When he pulls back, he turns his attention to the two men beside me. “You two are meant for great things,” he says. “Don’t forget that.”

Nevan and Kaua exchange a glance, their eyes briefly flashing—a deep crimson red—before returning to their normal hues. The sight leaves me breathless, a strange sense of awe settling over me. Asmodeus’s gaze locks with mine, while Nevan and Kaua hover on either side of me, their hands settling on my waist as they turn me to fully face my demon.

“Vienna,” Asmodeus purrs. It sends a shiver down my spine, a thread of anticipation winding tight in my chest. His fingers brush my cheek, a gasp tearing from my throat as those fingers trail down my jaw and begin their descent.

“Do you want this, Vienna?” Nevan whispers beside me, his breath warm against my ear. “Do you want Asmodeus to show us how he takes care of you?”

Kaua steps closer, his fingertips trailing down my arm, barely grazing my skin, yet it feels like fire, like a thousand tiny sparks lighting beneath my skin.

I can’t speak. I don’t know how to ask them what’s happening—what this is. All I can do is stand here, suspended between confusion and longing as their attention wraps around me like a vice. Nevan pinches my chin and then kisses me, devouring my mouth as Kaua’s lips attach to my neck. My body shudders as my shirt is lifted, Asmodeus’ placing light kisses down my belly as his fingers graze the waistband of my pants.

My breath catches in my throat as I try to pull away, none of them letting me squirm from their hold. Not that I want to leave but the sensations are already bordering on too much, especially when Asmodeus hooks two fingers into my pants and drags them down my legs. The cool air of the library brushes against the exposed skin, Nevan chuckling into the kiss before he thrusts his tongue inside my mouth.

Kaua begins sucking on Asmodeus' bond mark, my entire body trembling with need as I cling to them. And when War himself moves one of those large hands to squeeze my breast, I buckle in their arms. Asmodeus laughs, the sound echoing before he spreads my legs just wide enough to hook my panties to the side.

"Already wet for me, for us, love? You are absolutely perfect, Vienna." And then he stuffs his face between my legs, Nevan swallowing the moans on the edge of my tongue. I don't even know what to do, unable to hold myself up as they deal out pleasure until I'm completely consumed by their darkness. I shiver and writhe, clinging to their scrubs until my body starts to shake.

Asmodeus tastes me like he's never tasted me before, his tongue curling and thrusting inside of me as the muscle vibrates. He was right that there's no toy that compares to him, especially when he's shifted with that gorgeous tail of his.

"Come for us, Vienna," Kaua mumbles against my neck, twisting my nipple until my back arches and I shatter. They're there to catch me, Asmodeus licking up my release until he's satisfied. It feels like forever before he resituates my pants and stands back up, stealing me from Nevan to give me a kiss of his own.

I taste myself on his lips, savoring it until he pulls away. "I love you, Vienna." Kaua and Nevan repeat the same thing, the evidence in their expression. It has to be the supernatural pull because there's no other fucking reason for this.

"How can you love me?" I ask, twisting to look at the two Horsemen. "You don't even know me. It's been what, two days?" I try to catch my breath, still coming down from my orgasm.

Asmodeus smiles, a smile that makes me feel like I'm standing on the edge of a cliff. "You're waking up," he says, his hand cupping my cheek. "You'll understand soon enough."

I want to argue, to push back against the certainty in his voice, but the truth is, I can feel it too—something stirring deep inside me, something I don't understand. It terrifies me, but I can't deny it. Not when they're looking at me like this, not when every touch feels like a tether to something bigger, something I'm not ready to name.

Asmodeus leans in again, his lips brushing mine in a kiss that feels like a promise and I let myself fall.

21 – Asmodeus

Vienna fell asleep a few moments ago, a mixture of the lingering medication effects and the beginning of the end weighing down on her human soul. I carry her through the hallways of Briarwood, one of the only moments I've been able to spend with her so freely. She stirs faintly, her breathing shallow. My arms tighten around her protectively, though the irony isn't lost on me. Me, a demon, protecting a human girl from forces supposedly meant to safeguard her kind.

Behind me, Nevan and Kaua walk in silence, their footsteps barely audible against the cold stone floor. I can feel their eyes on me, the tension radiating from them palpable. They're wary of me, as they should be. But there's also a flicker of something else—respect, curiosity, maybe even awe. It's been a long time since anyone looked at me like that. It's also been a long time since I have shared someone and watching her fall apart at the Horsemen's hands is everything.

When we reach the room, I push the door open with my shoulder, stepping inside to find Ewan and Vito waiting. The two of them rise from where they're seated, their gazes sharp as they take me in. For a moment, the room is silent, charged with the weight of unspoken words.

I deposit Vienna onto the bed, my movements careful as I cradle her head until it rests against the pillow. She stirs slightly, her eyelids fluttering, but she doesn't wake. Straightening, I turn to face the four of them, my horsemen of the apocalypse.

"Be careful with her," I say, my voice low but firm. "She's precious. More precious than you know. It's only a matter of time until things start happening. When they do,

you'll understand."

They exchange glances, each of them skeptical yet still curious about their purpose

"You're the four horsemen," I continue, my tone softening slightly. "Death, Conquest, War, and Famine. In another life, we were friends. Maybe one day that will come to pass again."

Nevan's brow furrows, his fingers twitching at his sides. "Friends?" he echoes, his voice tinged with disbelief. "I don't remember that."

"You wouldn't," I say simply. "Not yet."

Vito steps forward, the muscles in his neck and shoulders pulled tight. "I understand our purpose but why is the portal so important? Why does it have to be opened?"

I turn to him, my gaze locking onto his. "It's the balance of life," I explain. "It has to happen. It always happens."

"And if it doesn't?" Ewan asks, his voice cutting through the tension like a blade.

"If it doesn't," I say carefully, "it could be worse than the apocalypse."

The room falls silent again, the weight of my words settling over them. I can feel their unease, their uncertainty, but I don't offer them anything more. Some truths aren't meant to be spoken—not yet. The delicate balance of their existence—of everything rests on just that—balance. The apocalypse is only part of that, part of the circle of life.

Stepping back, I nod to them once more. "Take care of her," I repeat, my voice soft but commanding. "She's the key to all of this."

Without waiting for a response, I turn and head for the door. Once I'm in the hallway, my form begins to shift, the edges of my body dissolving into shadow. I let the darkness consume me, my shape slipping away until I'm nothing more than an entity, a swirling mass of black smoke and energy.

I glide through the corridors, unseen, until I reach the heart of Briarwood. The portal is beneath the stone floor, its presence pulsing like a heartbeat. I hover above it, my essence coiling and shifting as I stare down at the spot where it lies hidden.

A grin spreads through me, though it has no form. The first crack appears, a thin, jagged line splitting the stone and revealing a faint, fiery glow beneath. The pits of hell are stirring, and soon, the balance will tip.

Soon, everything will change.

22 – Vienna

The past few days I've done everything I can to just survive under the radar. I've learned to move through the motions, to adapt to the suffocating routine of Briarwood. But every moment feels like a battle, each interaction a test of my will to stay sane. The worst are the mornings—when the medication still lingers in my system, turning my body into a leaden weight.

Nevan has taken to sleeping by my side, and it's the only reason I can pull myself out of the haze most mornings. His touch eases the remnants of the drugs, peeling back the veil just enough for me to function. It's not comfort in the traditional sense; it's survival. I'd never admit it, but I've come to depend on him.

I spend most of my time in their room when I'm not forced into the charade of group therapy. Their room has become my sanctuary. They're steady, constant, and I've found myself leaning into that stability more than I ever thought I would. Even their sharp edges feel safer than the carefully crafted facades of the doctors and orderlies—the angels.

And then there's Asmodeus—or rather, his absence. He hasn't spoken to me or shown himself in days, but I can feel him, always there, a shadow lingering just out of reach. His presence is a hum beneath my skin, a reminder that I'm not alone even when I am.

It's the others who unsettle me the most. The doctors. The orderlies. The way they move, their grace unnatural, almost inhuman. Their very existence feels off, their presence turning my stomach in ways I can't explain. Michael and Raphael are the

worst of them, their probing questions and too-perfect smiles setting my nerves on edge. Every meeting with them leaves me raw, trembling, my panic barely contained until Kaua pulls me back together.

This morning is no different. I barely manage to stomach the orange Nevan hands me at breakfast, my appetite strangled by the tension of the room. The group therapy looms ahead and I feel like I'm walking toward my execution as I shuffle into the circle.

The others are already seated, their eyes dull with a mix of resignation and exhaustion. I recognize some of them now, their stories swirling in my head. Demons. Chaos. The embodiment of sin. They don't understand why they're here, but I do. Or at least, I think I do.

This place isn't just a mental hospital. It's a cage. A holding pen for the parts of the apocalypse, gathered here like pieces of a puzzle waiting to be assembled. The portal, the door at the end of the hallway—it's the lock. And for some reason, I'm the key.

"Vienna," the orderly's voice snaps me out of my thoughts. She's looking at me expectantly, her sharp gaze pinning me in place. "It's your turn."

I've avoided speaking for two days now, dodging every attempt to draw me into the group. But today, there's no escape. The circle of eyes is on me, waiting, judging.

I take a deep breath, my hands twisting in my lap. "I don't see why I need to—"

"You can't get better unless you talk about the truth," the orderly interrupts.

The truth. The word feels like a mockery. I glance around the circle, my gaze catching on each of them in turn. We're all gathered here, right next to the portal, under the watchful eyes of angels who seem determined to keep the apocalypse at

bay.

I swallow hard, my throat suddenly dry. “I believe Satan’s son meets me in my dreams. And sometimes in my room.”

The words hang in the air, the silence that follows almost deafening. I don’t elaborate, skimming over the details of Asmodeus’ visits, leaving the others to fill in the blanks.

The orderly doesn’t look satisfied, but she lets it go. The session drags on, each story more absurd and horrifying than the last, until finally, the group is dismissed. I rise from my chair, relief flooding through me, but it’s short-lived.

“Vienna. A word.”

I freeze, turning slowly to face her. She gestures for me to come closer, her expression unreadable. “You’re going to have to start participating,” she says, her voice low but firm. “If these groups don’t help, we’ll have to move you to private sessions.”

My stomach drops. Private sessions. Isolation. The thought alone is enough to send a spike of fear through me. “I’ll participate,” I say quickly, my voice trembling. “Tomorrow. I promise.”

The orderly eyes me for a moment before nodding. “Good.”

As I turn to leave, I feel their eyes on me—Michael’s eyes, Raphael’s, all of them. Their presence presses against my back like a physical weight and I quicken my pace, nearly running into Kaua as he waits for me by the door.

He doesn’t say anything, just falls into step beside me as we head down the hallway.

The weight of the orderlies' gazes doesn't lift until we're halfway back to their room and by the time we reach it, I'm practically sprinting.

Inside, the others are waiting. Nevan sits perched on the arm of a chair, his gaze flicking to me as I burst through the door. "What happened?"

I pace the room, my breaths shallow and uneven. "They know something," I say finally, the words tumbling out in a rush. "The angels. The doctors. They know about the portal, about Asmodeus. About me. I can feel it."

The room goes quiet, their expressions darkening. I don't stop moving, the panic bubbling up inside me until it feels like it might consume me.

"I need the night alone," I say suddenly, my voice shaky. "I need to call him. I need to talk to Asmodeus."

Kaua steps forward, his broad frame filling my vision. "We'll let you call him," he says, his voice low but steady. "But don't think for a second that we won't be watching."

I don't argue. I can't. Their presence is the only thing keeping me tethered, the only thing keeping the darkness from swallowing me whole.

23 – Vienna

I sit on the edge of Ewan's bed, my fingers twisting nervously in my lap. The four horsemen are scattered around the room, as Ewan leans against the wall, his long legs stretched out in front of him, his pale eyes sharp and unreadable as he watches me. Kaua lounges in a chair near the corner, Nevan and Vito on the opposite bed, murmuring quietly to each other, their handsome features shadowed in the dim light.

I feel out of place, like an intruder in their world despite how much time I've spent with them. And tonight, something feels different . The air is thick, heavy with a tension I can't explain. It clings to my skin, seeps into my lungs, until I'm sure they can feel it too.

But I know the source. I can feel him—Asmodeus.

His energy is stronger than usual, a pulsing, oppressive presence that seems to fill every corner of the room. It's like a storm gathering just beyond the horizon, its power crackling in the air, waiting to be unleashed. My body reacts to it instinctively, heat spreading through me in waves that I can't suppress. My cheeks burn, and I keep my head down, unable to meet the horsemen's eyes.

I try to focus on anything else, but the visions start creeping in, unbidden and vivid. Flames lick at the edges of my mind, casting shadows that twist and writhe. I see a sprawling, endless landscape bathed in fire and darkness, the contours of hell itself. It's not chaotic like I imagined—it's structured, intricate, a world of terrifying beauty. His world.

I can feel Asmodeus' touch even though he isn't physically here. It's like he's wrapping himself around me, his energy seeping into my skin, pulling me under. My breath hitches, and I press my thighs together, trying to fight the sensations coursing through me. It's intimate, invasive, and I feel completely exposed. I glance around the room, panic rising as I realize they're all here, watching, unaware of the battle raging inside me.

His voice slithers into my mind, dripping with promises that make my head spin.

“Look, love. This is where you will reign. Where you will be worshipped, adored, and feared.”

The images shift, and I see myself standing on a throne of black obsidian, the heat of hellfire illuminating the space around me. Creatures bow at my feet, their faces twisted in awe and terror. The power is intoxicating, a promise of something I never knew I wanted but now can't resist.

“You will never be alone again. Eternal love, power, and union that transcends anything mortal.” His words wrap around me like a seductive spell, each one sinking deeper into my mind.

My breath comes faster, my skin flushed and damp. I can't tell where the visions end and reality begin. It's like he's touching me, his hands roaming over me in ways that leave me trembling. I bite my lip hard enough to draw blood, trying to stifle the soft sound that escapes me.

“You okay?” Nevan's voice breaks through the haze, concerned. He's watching me now, his brow furrowed as he leans forward.

I nod quickly, ducking my head. “Yeah. Just... tired.”

“They’re watching,” I whisper in my mind, trying to push Asmodeus away, though my body betrays me, aching for his touch.

And then he appears.

The shadows in the corners deepen, pooling together, coalescing into a figure. My heart skips a beat, my mouth going dry as Asmodeus steps forward, his form slowly taking shape.

“Hello, boys,” he says, his voice a deep rumble that reverberates through the room.

I can’t breathe.

This isn’t the Asmodeus I’ve grown accustomed to, the charming, beautiful man who appears in my dreams. This is him in his true form, unfiltered, raw, and utterly demonic. Horns curve elegantly from his head, as dark as onyx. His skin is dark and marbled with faint cracks of molten red, glowing faintly like embers beneath a dying fire. His wings are massive, stretching wide before folding neatly behind him, their edges sharp as blades.

He grins, revealing too many teeth, his crimson eyes glowing. There’s something monstrous about him, something that should terrify me, but instead, I feel drawn to him, mesmerized.

The horsemen are silent, their shock palpable. Even Ewan, who rarely betrays emotion, looks visibly shaken. Kaua straightens in his chair, his body tense, ready for a fight that will never come.

“Asmodeus,” Ewan finally asks, his voice tight. “What are you doing here?”

Asmodeus doesn’t answer immediately. His gaze flicks to me, lingering for a moment

before he turns to the others. “I thought it was time to introduce myself properly. After all, we’re all part of the same game, aren’t we?”

Vito narrows his gaze at my demon. “Game? Is that what this is to you?”

“Not at all,” Asmodeus replies smoothly, his grin widening. “This is destiny. Each of us has a role to play. You, the horsemen, and Vienna—my beloved queen.”

The words make my stomach flip, a mix of fear and longing that I can’t untangle. I glance at the horsemen, their expressions a mixture of anger and unease.

Asmodeus tilts his head, his grin softening into something almost tender as he looks at me. “I want her to be mine. To take her rightful place at my side. To see her ascend to the power she was born for.”

“She’s human,” Nevan snaps. “You’re asking her to throw away everything for—what? Your vision of eternity?”

Asmodeus’ gaze sharpens, his eyes locking onto Nevan. “You think she’s human?” he asks softly. “You think someone as radiant, as powerful as her is just a mortal girl?”

The words send a chill through me. I want to deny them, to cling to the fragile reality I’ve been holding onto, but deep down, I know he’s right. There’s something inside me, something that’s been awakening since I came to Briarwood.

Asmodeus steps closer, before leaning down, his hand brushing my cheek as he whispers, “You feel it, don’t you? The truth. You were made for this.”

I can’t speak. My throat is dry, my mind spinning, but I don’t pull away. The horsemen remain silent as Asmodeus straightens, his gaze sweeping over them with

something almost like approval.

“You’re meant for great things,” he says, his voice low and commanding. “When the time comes, you’ll see where you truly belong.”

The portal.

The second crack is there, a jagged line that promises the beginning of the end.

24 – Vito

There's an edge to the morning, a tension that sits heavy in the air. I can feel it pressing down on me as I move through the hallways, my steps silent against the tiled floors. This place is a cage, a maze of despair and control, but today, I'm not here to be contained. I'm here to loosen the bars, even just a little.

Manipulation has always been my strength. It's in my blood, my nature as Conquest. People think conquest is about brute force, about domination through strength alone. They're wrong. It's subtle. It's the art of making someone believe my truth is their truth, planting seeds of doubt and trust in equal measure until they move the way I want them to.

The orderlies are no exception. They patrol these hallways from the shadows, watching, waiting. They're not human, not fully, though they wear the shape of it well. It's the way they move—too fluid, too graceful—that gives them away. Angels in disguise, keeping us in line, keeping her in line. I'm not sure how? I didn't pick it up sooner.

I catch sight of two of them lingering at the end of the hallway. They're murmuring to each other in low tones, their voices too soft for human ears to pick up. I don't need to hear them to know what they're saying.

I approach slowly, my posture relaxed, non-threatening. They glance at me as I draw near, their expressions unreadable, but I meet their gazes with a smile meant to disarm.

“Morning,” I say casually, keeping my tone as friendly as possible.

They tense but quickly relax, trying not to show their fear. Typical. I lean against the wall, crossing my arms over my chest as I let the silence continue, giving them time to feel the weight of my presence.

“I wanted to mention something. About this hallway. It’s been quiet, hasn’t it? No issues, no disturbances.”

One of them, the man with sharp features and eyes too bright to be natural, tilts his head slightly. “And?”

I shrug. “Just thinking you could probably skip it for a few days. Focus on the other wings. This section doesn’t need constant monitoring. We’re not exactly the rowdy type.”

The other orderly, a woman with the same unnatural eyes, frowns. “You’re suggesting we abandon protocol?”

“Not abandon,” I correct, my smile widening. “Just... reprioritize. You’re stretched thin as it is, right? Wouldn’t hurt to ease the workload.”

They hesitate, exchanging another glance. The doubt so easily creeps in, the flicker of consideration. It’s enough. I nod to myself and push off the wall, leaving them with a parting grin.

“Think about it,” I say as I walk away, keeping my pace slow and unhurried.

I don’t look back, but I can feel their eyes on me. The seed is planted. It won’t take root immediately, but it doesn’t have to. All I need is a few cracks in their vigilance, just enough to give us a chance to get to the door again.

By the time I return to the room, the sunlight is creeping through the one grimy window. The others are stirring, the air heavy with their shared presence. Asmodeus is already gone, his absence a gaping void that somehow feels just as suffocating as his presence.

Nevan is curled around Vienna on the bed, his long frame tangled with hers as he works to counteract the effects of the medication they dose her with every night. She looks pale, almost fragile, but her breathing is steady, and there's a flicker of determination in her half-lidded eyes as she wakes up.

"We need to move," I say, my voice cutting through the stillness. "We need to get to the door before breakfast."

Vienna sits up slowly, rubbing at her eyes. Her movements are sluggish, but she doesn't argue. She gets to her feet, swaying slightly before Nevan steadies her with a hand on her arm. The others grumble as they pull themselves together, half-dressed in their white scrubs, but they follow without question.

The hallway leading to the forbidden door is silent, the orderlies absent. Just as I hoped. When we reach the door, my stomach drops. It's already open.

The crack of light spilling through the doorway feels wrong, unnatural even. It's not the same darkness that Asmodeus exudes, a mixture of red and white hues that don't make sense. Vienna leans against my side, her confusion growing as is the rest of ours.

Before any of us can move, voices drift through the doorway. Familiar voices.

"... becoming too dangerous," Raphael says, his words clipped by annoyance. "There are already two cracks and they're widening."

Michael's voice follows. "We've known this was a risk. The portal was never meant to hold indefinitely."

They're close, just on the other side of the door. We freeze, pressing ourselves against the wall to stay out of sight.

"And the patients?" Raphael asks.

Michael sighs. "They're free roaming for now, but we'll have to reevaluate. If the portal opens fully, they'll gain their powers back. That's not a risk we can afford."

Raphael scoffs. "You think any of them could manage that?"

"Vienna," Michael says flatly. "She has access to Asmodeus. That alone makes her a threat."

"You said before that she's human," Raphael counters, though there's doubt in his tone. "How could she possibly—"

"I foolishly believed that a human couldn't open the portal but her connection to the four horsemen is suspicious. They're too close, too fast." Michael interrupts. "Asmodeus is planning something. We need to separate them. Soon."

We've been careful, but it's not enough. They're onto us, onto her.

I glance at the others, their faces mirroring my own alarm. Ewan's jaw is tight, his pale eyes narrowed. Kaua looks ready to charge through the door, his hands flexing as if itching for a fight. Nevan is unreadable, his gaze fixed on Vienna, who stands frozen, confusion and determination warring in her expression.

I gesture for us to leave and we slip back down the hallway as quietly as we came.

The tension is thick, a silent understanding passing between us. I don't speak again until we get back to the room.

"They know. They're planning to separate us."

Vienna's hands tremble, but she clenches them into fists, her eyes darting to the others. "What do we do?"

Nevan steps forward, his expression calm despite the storm brewing behind his eyes. "We go to the library. If we can't get to the portal, we need information. Now."

There's no argument. The plan is set. As we move, Vienna stays close to me, her body tense but her steps steady. My need to protect her grows with every step as I throw an arm around her shoulder and pull her close. I know it won't be enough. The delicate balance rests on evening the scales and we've been roaming free without any hinderance for just a little too long.

25 – Vienna

I 'm not sure why I think a sudden bout of information will help us thwart the angels but I'll do just about anything at this point. Knowing that they're bracing for us, preparing to block us from our purpose is reason enough for to be here right now, running my fingers along the binds of the books like I did before. I'll be punished for skipping group therapy but this is more important.

The four horsemen fan out around me. Ewan and Kaua take the far shelves, their tall forms moving like shadows in the dim light. Vito and Nevan stick closer, their presence grounding even as the tension in the air crackles between us. It's comforting and unnerving all at once. The library is vast and the silence only adds to the eerie atmosphere.

The worst part is that I have absolutely no idea what I'm even looking for.

My fingers trail along the spines of the books as I walk, my mind swimming with questions. Why did no one stop us? Why didn't anyone check in our rooms to make sure we were ushered to breakfast?

As if reading my thoughts, Vito catches my eye, leaning casually against a shelf. "I handled the surveillance," he says, his tone low and laced with amusement. "No one's watching us here."

I pause, blinking at him. "You did what?"

He shrugs, a smirk tugging at his lips. "Convinced them this wing wasn't worth their

time. You're welcome."

"Thank you," I murmur, my voice softer than I intend.

As I move past him, I catch Ewan and Kaua out of the corner of my eye. They're standing close, too close, their heads bent together as though sharing some secret. And then it happens—Ewan's hand grips the back of Kaua's neck, pulling him into a kiss that's anything but subtle. It's raw, intense, and startlingly intimate.

My face burns, and I whirl around, intending to escape before I see more, but a strong hand wraps around my wrist. I'm pulled back between them, my breath hitching as their heat surrounds me.

"Where do you think you're going?" Kaua's voice rumbles, low and teasing.

Before I can answer, Ewan tilts my chin up, his pale eyes gleaming with something dark and playful. "You're not getting away that easily," he murmurs.

And then they're kissing me, first Ewan and then Kaua, his warmth a stark contrast that leaves me reeling. It's overwhelming, and yet I don't pull away. Their touches are fleeting, teasing, before they let me go, grinning like they've won some unspoken game.

Flustered, I stumble back, my heart racing as I try to catch my breath. "You're both impossible," I joke, brushing past them as I head deeper into the library.

The shelves grow taller, the air thicker with dust and age. I cough again, waving a hand in front of my face as I navigate the narrow aisles. My fingers skim the books almost absently until one catches my attention. It's old, its leather cover cracked and faded, and yet it seems to call to me. I'm much deeper between the shelves than I was last time but the darkness doesn't phase me.

The moment I open it, a strange warmth washes over me, pulling me in. The words on the pages blur and shift, symbols and text I don't understand. My head swims, and I feel a strange pull, as though the book itself is alive, reaching for me.

A sharp jolt zaps through my fingers, and I cry out, dropping the book as a searing pain spreads across my chest. Tears spring to my eyes as I clutch at my shirt, the burning sensation spreading like fire beneath my skin.

The others are on me in an instant. Nevan reaches for the book, while Kaua grabs my shoulders, steadying me as I gasp for air.

“What happened?” Ewan demands as he scans me for injuries.

“I—” I start, but the words die in my throat as the library door slams open.

Michael strides in, his heavy footsteps ringing through the library. His gaze locks onto me as he turns down the row we're in, his expression twisting into something that makes my stomach churn.

“What are you doing here?” he snaps, his voice laced with authority. “And why did you miss breakfast?”

Before I can answer, he's on me, his hand closing around my arm like a vice. I try to pull away, but his grip is persistent as he drags me toward the door.

“She's with us,” Ewan says, stepping forward.

Michael doesn't even look at him. “She was told to participate. There are consequences for disobedience.” His gaze flickers to me, cold and calculating. “And she's about to find out what they are.”

I struggle, squirming against his hold, but it's like fighting a steel trap. He drags me down the hallway, my protests falling on deaf ears, until he shoves me into my room and slams the door behind us. The sound reverberates through the small space as I stagger back.

Michael stands between me and the door, his eyes narrowing as he takes a step closer. "What were you looking for in the library?" he demands.

"Nothing," I say quickly, my voice wobbling. "I was just—"

"Don't lie to me. There's a dark presence around you, Vienna. Wherever you go, it follows. Why?"

I freeze, his words sinking in. I can't let him know that I know.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I say, forcing my voice to stay steady. "I don't feel anything."

His expression darkens and he steps closer, his presence suffocating and not in a good way. "You're lying and lies have consequences."

Before I can react, he pulls a small bottle of pills from his pocket, shaking two into his hand. "Since the medication isn't working, we'll have to adjust the dosage."

"No," I whisper, backing away. "Please—"

"Take them," he orders.

With shaking hands, I take the pills, the weight of his gaze pressing down on me as I swallow them. The effects are immediate, a numbing haze creeping over me, stealing the strength from my limbs. My knees buckle, and I collapse against the bed, my

body limp and unresponsive all over again.

Michael leans over me, his breath hot against my ear. “You’ll stay here. Isolated. Until you decide to cooperate.”

I can’t respond, my tongue heavy and useless in my mouth. He straightens, his cruel laughter ringing in my ears as he heads for the door.

“You’re not as clever as you think, Vienna,” he says as he steps out, the door clanking shut behind him.

The sound of the lock turning echoes in my mind as the darkness pulls me under.

26 – Vienna

The room is eerily silent, the kind of silence that presses against your chest and makes you feel like the world has stopped breathing. My limbs are heavy, weighted by the drug Michael forced on me. I should be out for hours, lost in the haze they've been feeding me since I arrived. But instead, there's that familiar voice I love so much.

"Get up, love."

His voice is a whisper and a command. My eyes snap open, and for a moment, I'm still disoriented. The weight in my body is gone, the drug's effects burned away as if they were never there. I sit up, my breath shallow, confusion and unease coiling in my stomach. Without Nevan at my side, I don't understand. "What's happening?"

The sharp, searing pain in my chest from earlier strikes like a bolt of lightning, tearing a gasp from my lips. My hands fly to the source, scratching at my skin as though I can claw the fire out. Tears blur my vision as I stumble from the bed, desperate for relief. I race to the bathroom and turn to face the mirror.

That's when I see it.

The pale skin of my chest is marked with a glowing symbol, lines of fire etched into my flesh, pulsing faintly like a second heartbeat. The design is intricate, otherworldly, almost demonic. It doesn't belong to this world—or to me. Yet it feels... familiar.

"What is this?" My voice trembles, barely audible over my erratic heartbeat. I press

my fingers to the symbol, the heat of it making me wince, and as I stare, the world tilts.

A wave crashes over me, pulling me under an ocean of memories I didn't know existed. Faces and places flash before my eyes—too fast to make sense of, yet intense enough to leave an impression. I see myself, though not as Vienna. As someone else, someone older, someone stronger. A name whispers in the corners of my mind, echoing louder with every passing second.

“Lilith,” I whisper, my voice breaking as I meet my own reflection. The name feels right, powerful, as though it's always been mine.

The memories come sharper now, their edges slicing through the haze of my mind. I see him—Asmodeus—in every life, waiting for me, calling me back. I see the portal, its fiery depths churning as I stand before it, my hands outstretched to let the darkness pour through. This is my role. My purpose. A cycle that repeats again and again, each time ending and beginning with him.

It's almost beautiful, this twisted game we play. A dance between worlds, between chaos and creation. And I understand now why he's so careful, why he only comes to me in the dark. The shadows are his refuge, a veil that keeps the balance intact. If he steps into the light, the angels—the very doctors who locked me in here—would know. They've spent lifetimes trying to stop us, trying to keep the portal sealed. But they can't. They've failed before, and they'll fail again.

My lips curl into a small, bitter smile as I turn away from the mirror. “They don't know who they're dealing with.”

The power surges through me suddenly, like a dam breaking. My knees buckle, and I grip the sink, my fingers trembling as the energy courses through my veins. It's overwhelming and for a moment, I'm certain I'll burn alive from the inside out. But

then it settles, pooling in the middle of the symbol.

And then I feel it—another crack.

The portal is weakening, its fragile prison giving way to the power behind it. I can feel the connection, the tether that binds me to it. And with every breath, it grows stronger.

“You’re close,” I murmur to myself, my voice steady despite the storm raging inside me. “We’re so close.”

The warmth behind me is instant. I don’t need to turn around to know he’s there.

“Hello, love,” Asmodeus murmurs against the back of my neck. “I’ve been waiting for you.”

I stand to meet his gaze in the mirror, his crimson eyes glowing with a mix of pride and hunger. He looks at me like I’m the center of the universe, and for the first time, I feel like I might actually be. We stay like that for several minutes before his presence disappears, leaving me with the realization of who I am.

Lilith.

27 – Asmodeus

I return to hell, resting against the very throne set aside from my woman. She's finally assumed who she is, an event that would always come to pass no matter how hard the angels try to postpone it.

Across from me, Satan, lounges on his throne. He's laughing, the faint fire dancing around him

"You've done it again," he booms, slapping a hand against the armrest of his throne. The sound rings out in the darkness, metal against the leather form he now holds. "You've found her, my clever son. Against all odds, you've found Lilith yet again."

I lean back, a smirk playing at the corner of my lips. "Was there ever any doubt, Father?"

Satan shakes his head, his laughter tapering off into a low chuckle. "Oh, the angels tried. They always do, don't they? Hiding her, scattering her essence across the mortal plane, wrapping her up in new names, new lives. But they always fail."

"She has to exist," I reply, very proud of my efforts. "They know that as well as we do. Balance requires her. Without Lilith, their precious light would collapse under the weight of itself. They need our destruction to rebuild."

"And yet," Satan says, his grin widening, "they never stop trying to keep her from you. I wonder why they bother. They must know by now that it's futile."

I shrug. “They don’t understand her like I do. Lilith is chaos and creation wrapped in mortal flesh. She belongs to the darkness, no matter how hard they try to mold her into something else. I’d recognize her in any form, in any life.”

Satan leans forward, his crimson gaze locking onto mine. “How is it that you always find her? Tell me, my son. What is it about her that calls to you?” It’s such a contrast between now and a few days ago when he was berating me for being distracted by a human. Then again, he’s always been like that where I am concerned. How he hasn’t come to trust that I know what I’m doing is beyond me.

I pause, considering his question. How do I explain something so instinctual, so intrinsic to my very being? “It’s everything,” I finally push out. “The way she moves, the way she looks at the world. Her defiance, her hunger for something more. Lilith is my goddess of darkness. She’s written into the marrow of my existence. I don’t need to look for her—I feel her. I always will.”

Satan laughs again, the sound rolling through the space like thunder. “You’re a sentimental fool,” he says, though his tone carries no malice. “But a clever one. This game you play with the angels, with the mortal world—it’s entertaining, I’ll give you that.”

I allow myself a small smile, basking in his praise. He played a game with the angels, with the supposed god himself and while everyone believes he lost, Satan now has a kingdom to himself. “It’s not just a game to me. It’s a reunion. Every time I find her, every time I wake her, it’s a reminder of what they can’t take from us. The angels can try to hide her, bury her under their rules and sanctity, but they’ll never erase what we are.”

“And what are you, my son?” Satan asks, leaning back with an expression of amusement.

“We’re an inevitability, a promise, something that can’t be broken,” I say simply.

“Well said. You’ve done well, Asmodeus. Bringing her back, finding her in that pathetic shell of a place the angels call an institution. It’s no small feat.”

I don’t bother hiding my pride. I’ve earned it. Every crack in the portal is a testament to my success, to the inevitability of Lilith’s return and the chaos she will bring.

“I love this part,” I admit, my voice softer now. “The rediscovery. The chase. The way she’ll look at me when she remembers who she is, who we are. There’s nothing like it.”

“And the angels?” Satan asks, a wicked grin spreading across his face. “Don’t tell me you don’t enjoy sticking it to them every time you bring her back.”

“Of course I do,” I chuckle. “Their desperation is almost as satisfying as the reunion itself.”

Satan leans back, his laughter echoing again. “You’re my son, through and through. But tell me, Asmodeus, how do you plan to give her what she deserves this time? You’ve always been good at bringing her back, but you’ve never been able to keep her. The game always resets, doesn’t it?”

I stiffen, the weight of his words settling over me. He’s right. Every cycle ends the same way—with Lilith torn from me, the portal sealed, and the angels celebrating their hollow victory. And then it begins again, the search, the awakening, the fight to bring her back to me.

“She always finds it endearing,” I say quietly, more to myself than to him. “The way we start over. The way I never stop looking for her.”

Satan hums. “Perhaps. But what if this time is different? What if this time, she decides she’s tired of the game?”

The thought sends a chill through me, one that even the fires of Hell can’t banish. Lilith—my Vienna—she’s not like the others. She never has been. She’s always had a mind of her own, a will as strong as the darkness itself.

“And what if she doesn’t?” I ask, my voice quiet but resolute. “What if she chooses me again?”

Satan’s grin widens. “Then you’ve won. But remember, Asmodeus, the choice is always hers. You may find her, wake her, but you cannot force her hand. That’s what makes this game so deliciously unpredictable.”

I rise from my throne—Lilith’s throne, the weight of his words pressing against my chest. The energy in this place pulsates, flowing more freely as I feel the portal from Briarwood shake, another crack splitting across those stones.

As I step into the shadows, letting the darkness wrap around me like a second skin, I allow myself a moment of hope. Hope that Vienna—my Lilith—will see this cycle for what it is. A reunion, a rebirth, a chance to reclaim the world that was always meant to be ours.

28 – Michael

I pace behind my desk, my hands clasped tightly behind my back as Gabriel and Raphael sit opposite, their forms rigid and tense. Their usual ethereal calm is gone, replaced by a rare, simmering anxiety.

“It’s happening,” I growl. “The balance is tipping.”

Gabriel tilts his head slightly, his golden eyes narrowing. “Are you certain?”

I slam my hands down on the desk, the sound reverberating through the room. “Of course I’m certain! Do you think I wouldn’t feel it? The portal is cracking— again . And this time, it’s different.”

Raphael leans forward, his expression dark. “We’ve been watching every patient closely. None of them fit the characteristics. The horsemen are contained. They’ve shown no signs of regaining their full power. You even drugged that poor human last night.”

I stop pacing and turn to face them, my jaw pulled tight. “It’s not the horsemen.”

Silence falls, tension so thick that it’s nearly suffocating. Gabriel exchanges a glance with Raphael, his brow furrowing. “It can’t be.”

I take a deep breath, my chest tightening with frustration. “It is. It’s Vienna.”

“Vienna?” Raphael scoffs, his wings shifting slightly, a faint rustle of feathers. “She’s

human! She doesn't have—”

“She's not human,” I snap, cutting him off. “Not entirely. Not anymore. Can't you feel it? The shift in energy, the way her presence warps the balance around her?”

Gabriel's eyes darken, his voice dropping to a cautious tone. “You're saying she's Lilith?”

“She is Lilith,” I reply, my voice cold and steady. “Or rather, she has become her. For centuries, we've waited, watching, ensuring that when Lilith resurfaced, we'd be ready to contain her. We have been so careful, retrieving her presence and hiding it back in the mortal realm so that Asmodeus wouldn't get to her. And yet, here we are. The one thing we didn't account for—a human body strong enough to house her essence. And now, Asmodeus has found her.”

Raphael slams a fist on the armrest of his chair, his composure breaking. “How is that possible? Lilith has never been human! Her essence should have burned through any mortal form.”

“Apparently, this one was strong enough. Or Asmodeus prepared her in ways we couldn't foresee. Regardless, she is here, and she's stronger than we anticipated.”

Gabriel leans back, his golden eyes narrowing further. “What about the horsemen? Their connection to her is amplifying the cracks in the portal, isn't it?”

“Of course it is,” I hiss, resuming my pacing. “But separating them at this stage will be nearly impossible. They're drawn to her, and she to them. It's part of the design—an inevitability we've been fighting since the beginning.”

Raphael speaks, his voice heavy with conviction. “Then we kill her. Or at least one of the horsemen. It will break the cycle.”

I stop dead in my tracks, glaring at him. “Do you have any idea what that would do to the balance of this world? Killing Lilith—or even one of the horsemen—would tear the fabric of reality apart. It would be far more catastrophic than the apocalypse we’re trying to prevent.”

“Then what do you suggest, Michael?” Gabriel asks. “She’s here. Asmodeus has awakened her. The portal is cracking. The world is already tipping.”

I rake a hand through my hair, my frustration mounting. “We keep her contained. We reinforce the barriers. We isolate her from the horsemen and from Asmodeus until we find a way to close the portal.”

Raphael snorts. “Containment? We all felt that shift in power. Medication won’t work anymore. Restraints won’t hold her if she decides to unleash herself.”

“Then we’ll make sure she doesn’t decide to,” I snap. “We’ll control her environment completely. No contact with anyone. No stimuli. If we can keep her weakened, keep her second-guessing herself, we might be able to stall her long enough to reinforce the seals.”

Gabriel folds his arms, his gaze unyielding. “And if we can’t?”

I meet his eyes, the weight of the question settling heavily on my shoulders. “Then we lose. And the apocalypse begins.”

The room falls silent, the gravity of the situation pressing down on all of us. For centuries, we’ve fought this battle, maneuvering in the shadows, pulling strings to maintain the fragile balance of the world. And now, it’s slipping through our fingers. I know that we will rebuild but I hate the destruction that always has to come first.

“Raphael, monitor the horsemen. Any sign of them attempting to reach her, and you

report it immediately.”

He nods, though his expression is grim. “And Vienna?”

“She is not to see anyone, until we figure out how to contain this, she is to remain locked in her room. No exceptions.”

I turn to leave, my wings shifting against my back as I stride toward Vienna’s quarters. My frustration boils over as I approach the door, its edges glowing faintly with the energy radiating from within. She’s more powerful than I ever imagined and the thought of what she could unleash if left unchecked sends a shiver down my spine.

I reinforce the locks with a sharp gesture, the sigils flaring bright before settling into the metal. The door won’t open—not for her, not for the horsemen, not even for Asmodeus. Not until we’re ready.

29 – Vienna

I wake with a start, my heart pounding in my chest as I slowly sit up. My head throbs with the new power surging through me, the name Lilith ringing in the back of my head. It feels so surreal, like it happened days or weeks ago and not a few hours ago in my bathroom. I call out to Asmodeus and find no answer, confusion settling in my expression as I head for the door. The little bit of sunlight spilling into my room means that it's still morning or at the latest the afternoon.

Inches from the door, I stop, staring at the faintly glowing edges. I can't read the symbols etched into the door but I quickly connect them to some angelic language, which means they're from Michael himself. I press my hand against the cold but the second I make contact, a sharp jolt shoots through me. I yelp, stumbling back as pain radiates up my arm.

"Stupid door," I mutter, glaring at it like it's an enemy.

The anger rises, hot and fierce, and before I can stop myself, I press my palms against the surface again. This time, something changes. The air around me hums with power, my vision sharpening as my frustration boils over into something darker. I feel it building in my chest, twisting and writhing like a living thing.

"Open," I whisper, my voice low but commanding.

The door cracks.

It's not much—just a thin line that spiders across the metal like a fissure in

stone—but it's enough to make me freeze. My breath catches as I stare at it, disbelief mixing with a flicker of excitement.

“What the hell?” I murmur, stepping back.

I turn and scan the room, desperate for something—anything—to help me figure out what just happened. I wish I had a phone, or a way to contact someone, but then I think of Kaua. The thought of his strength and steady presence makes my chest ache.

And then he's here.

One second the room is empty, and the next, Kaua is standing before me, his nostrils flaring as he takes in his surroundings. His eyes lock onto mine, wide with confusion, and I stumble back further, my heartbeat hammering in my ears.

“Vienna?” he asks. “What the hell just happened?”

“I—I don't know,” I stammer, my hands trembling at my sides. “You just... appeared.”

His gaze sweeps over the room, his confusion giving way to realization. “You summoned me.”

“I what ?”

Before I can process his words, the air shifts again, and suddenly, the room is filled with the other horsemen. Nevan, Vito, and Ewan stand before me, their expressions ranging from bewildered to alarmed.

“What's going on?” Vito asks, his sharp eyes scanning the room. “Why are we all here?”

“I don’t know!” I cry, clutching my head as the throbbing intensifies. The power swirling inside me grows too strong, too chaotic, and I feel another crack—this time not in the door, but in the portal. The energy pulses through me until my knees buckle.

Before I can hit the ground, strong arms catch me. I look up to find myself wrapped in a tangle of limbs, the four horsemen surrounding me, their presence grounding even as my body shakes.

“Lilith,” Ewan whispers, the name a reverent murmur that cuts through the chaos in my mind.

I perk up at the sound, blinking at him as the weight of it settles over me. “You know?” I ask, my voice soft, almost afraid.

Ewan nods, his pale eyes steady. “We suspected, but now... it’s undeniable.”

Taking a shaky breath, I straighten, their arms loosening but not letting me go entirely. “After the library,” I begin, “something happened. I found this book, and it—” I pause, pulling at the hem of my shirt. “It marked me.”

I pull the shirt over my head, exposing the glowing symbol etched into my chest. Their reactions are immediate—sharp intakes of breath, their gazes locking onto the mark with a mixture of awe and unease.

“Eyes up here,” I snap, pulling their attention back to my face. “It’s not just the mark. I remembered everything. All my past lives, all the times Asmodeus found me. It’s overwhelming.”

They exchange glances, silence following my words until Ewan speaks. “What does it mean? For us, for you?”

“It means this is just the beginning,” I say, my voice trembling. “It’s a game we’ve played for centuries, a cycle of finding and losing each other. But this time, I’m scared. I know how it ends and it never lasts.”

Kaua’s hand comes to rest on my shoulder. “Maybe it doesn’t have to end the same way this time.”

Ewan shakes his head, his jaw tight. “The lore surrounding Lilith and Asmodeus is complicated. You’ve always been powerful, but your abilities don’t follow any rules. That’s what makes you so dangerous.” I flinch at the word, but he continues, his tone softening. “And that’s why the angels fear you. They can’t predict you.”

Before I can respond, I close my eyes and call out for him in my mind, focusing in a way I didn’t do before. Asmodeus.

His presence is immediate, a comforting warmth that wraps around me like a protective cloak even if he isn’t currently here. “Soon, love,” his voice purrs, rich and soothing. “We’ll be together soon. But I can’t come to you now—it will alert the angels.”

“Then what am I supposed to do?” I ask aloud, drawing confused looks from the others. “What’s the next step?”

“You must help the horsemen,” Asmodeus says, his voice reverberating through my mind. “Their powers are dormant, but you can amplify them. Together, you’ll crack open the portal.”

When his voice fades, I open my eyes to find the others watching me expectantly. “We have to awaken your powers. It’s the only way.”

“All right,” Ewan says. “Let’s figure this out.”

As we begin to brainstorm, I can't help but feel the weight of what's coming. The portal is calling, the cracks growing larger with each passing moment. And I'm at the center of it all, the key to a game that has only just begun.

30 – Vito

I walk beside her, my steps slow and measured. Vienna—or Lilith, as she now fully embodies—is a force of nature. She carries herself with an edge that wasn't there before, a sharpness in her eyes that cuts through the gloom of this place. Even the other patients notice; their stares ranging from awe to fear as we pass through the hallways toward the room where her group therapy takes places.

I smirk to myself. They should fear her. She's magnificent.

As we approach the room, two orderlies block the doorway. They're always here, always watching, but today I'm not in the mood for their interference. Vienna pauses beside me, her eyes narrowing slightly as she tilts her head. There's something almost predatory about her now, the way she assesses them like they're obstacles to be removed rather than people.

"Wait here," I say softly, stepping forward. She raises an eyebrow but doesn't argue, leaning casually against the wall.

The orderlies glance at each other as I approach, their gazes sharpening with suspicion. "Patients are required to attend therapy," one of them says, his tone flat. "No exceptions."

I let my smile widen, just enough to disarm them. "Of course," I say smoothly. "But I think we can make an exception today."

The taller of the two snorts, folding his arms. "Rules are rules."

Rules. How cute.

I take a step closer, lowering my voice. “You’re overworked, aren’t you? Constantly monitoring patients, enforcing rules that don’t make sense. It’s exhausting.”

The orderly blinks, his posture stiffening. “What are you—”

“You don’t need to monitor her anymore,” I continue, my voice just above a whisper as I push a bit of honey into my tone. “She’s fine. No trouble at all. Let her be.”

The other orderly frowns, shaking his head. “We can’t just—”

I shift my tone, letting a thread of power weave through my words. “Of course you can. It’s easier for everyone, isn’t it?”

For a moment, they hesitate, their eyes flickering with uncertainty. But then the taller one’s gaze locks onto mine and something shifts. His eyes flash red—just for a second—and when they return to their usual color, his expression is blank, compliant.

“You’re right,” he says slowly. “No need to enforce attendance.”

The second orderly looks at him in surprise, then at me. “But—”

“You agree,” I say, turning my attention to him. “Don’t you?”

His lips part as if to argue, but then his eyes flicker red as well. When he speaks, his voice is softer, almost dazed. “Yes. No need to enforce attendance.”

Vienna watches the exchange with a faint smile, her arms crossed. She steps forward as the orderlies move aside, their postures slack and docile. “Good boys,” she says, her tone laced with amusement.

We pass through the now-open doorway, but I don't miss the way the other patients in the room stare at her. Their whispers follow us, hushed but urgent, and I catch fragments of their words: Lilith, demon, terrifying.

She's still human—technically—but her presence has shifted. The way she walks, the way she commands attention without saying a word... it's intoxicating. She doesn't belong in this broken place; she belongs to the dark, untouchable and eternal.

The therapy session is a joke, her mere presence making the others too uneasy to speak. By the time we leave, she's practically buzzing with energy, her eyes alight with something fierce and untamed.

In the hallway, I pull her aside, pressing her against the wall. She doesn't flinch, doesn't shy away. Instead, she looks up at me with that knowing smirk, her confidence electric.

"You're enjoying this," she purrs.

I grin, leaning closer until my lips brush against hers. "And you aren't?"

She tilts her head, her eyes gleaming. "Oh, I am."

Before she can say more, I capture her lips with mine. The kiss is fierce, hungry, and unlike anything I've felt before. This isn't the Vienna I met days ago. This is Lilith—bold, commanding, and absolutely addictive.

When I pull back, she's smiling, her cheeks flushed. "You might want to be careful," she says, her tone teasing. "I'm not the submissive type."

"Good," I reply, my voice rough with desire. "I wouldn't want you any other way."

We return to the room, the air still charged between us. The other horsemen are there, their postures relaxed but their gazes sharpen as we enter.

“There’s another crack in the portal,” Vienna announces. She doesn’t wait for their reaction, moving to the center of the room as if she owns it.

I feel it too—the faint hum of energy in the air, the undeniable pull of something ancient and powerful. Testing my own powers, I let a thread of persuasion drift toward Ewan and Kaua, pushing them together just for the fun of it. They resist for a moment, their expressions annoyed, but then their resolve crumbles.

“Are you serious?” Ewan mutters before grabbing Kaua by the collar and kissing him deeply.

I laugh, leaning against the wall as they get lost in each other. “Works like a charm.”

“Not fair!” Nevan whines, crossing his arms like a child. “I want kisses too!”

Vienna laughs, the sound rich and full as she turns to him. “Well, come here then,” she muses, crooking a finger toward him.

Nevan’s face lights up, and he rushes to her side. She takes his face in her hands, pulling him into a kiss that leaves him grinning like an idiot.

The room is alive with laughter and energy, the weight of our situation momentarily forgotten. But as I watch Vienna—Lilith—standing at the center of it all, I realize that we’ve finally reached the beginning of the end.

31 - Nevan

Calling for every last patient to attend therapy is suspicious in and of itself. Using the cafeteria for it has me on edge. Every patient is here, each one wearing their discomfort like a second skin. I spot a few familiar faces, the ones who've been here for years like I have, their expressions worn and resigned. Others are newer, their anxiety worn on their sleeve.

Vienna walks ahead of me. There's a confidence in her now that wasn't there before, something darker and more commanding. The patients avoid her gaze, whispering among themselves like schoolchildren afraid of the teacher.

The angels—Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael—stand at the front of the room, their presence oppressive in the way only theirs can be. They're dressed impeccably, as always, their suits tailored to perfection, their expressions projecting softness we all know is a lie. But there's something off about them today. The usual radiance they carry seems dimmer, their movements less fluid. I don't know if it's because of Vienna or the cracks in the portal, but whatever it is, it makes me grin.

"Everyone, take a seat," Michael bellows, his voice carrying through the cafeteria. The patients obey, shuffling into chairs without a word of protest.

I settle into my spot beside Vito, who slouches in his chair with an air of boredom. Vienna sits to my left, her head held high, her lips twitching like she's suppressing a laugh. Ewan and Kaua flank her, their postures protective but relaxed. In the last few minutes, we've somehow meshed as one unit, feeding off of each other.

Michael steps forward, clasping his hands in front of him. “Today, we’re going to focus on participation. True participation. If you want to heal, you must engage with the process.”

Raphael and Gabriel nod in agreement, their eyes scanning the room. I have to swallow a laugh. Healing? Half the people in this room have been here for years. I’ve been here for years. What a joke.

Vito leans closer. “What’s the point of this, anyway?”

I shrug, my gaze fixed on the angels. “Control. They’re losing it, and they know it.”

As Michael continues his speech, I feel a strange pull in the back of my mind. It’s faint, like a thread brushing against my consciousness, but it’s persistent. I close my eyes, focusing on the sensation, and suddenly, I see it.

Emotions.

They’re not visible in the traditional sense, but they’re there—strings of light and color stretching from every person in the room. The patients’ emotions are bright, vivid, and chaotic, a tangled web of despair, fear, and faint hope. The angels’ emotions, however, are different. Their strings are dull, muted, as though their radiance has been drained.

I reach out mentally, tentatively brushing against one of the brighter strings. A wave of warmth floods me, and I realize I’m amplifying it, pulling it forward like a thread on a loom. The patient it belongs to straightens in their chair, their shoulders relaxing as a small smile tugs at their lips.

Interesting.

I glance at Vito, whose grin widens as he watches me. “What are you doing?”

“Testing something,” I reply, focusing on the angels now. Their strings are harder to grasp, slippery and resistant, but I persist. When I finally manage to latch onto one, I yank, hard .

Michael’s voice falters mid-sentence. His shoulders sag slightly, and for a moment, his expression flickers—hope draining from his features. I do it again, this time to Gabriel and Raphael, pulling at their strings until their carefully crafted masks crumble.

“What the hell are you doing?” Vito asks again, his grin turning feral.

I meet his gaze, my own smile dark. “I can manipulate emotions. Like you can persuade, I can take everything they feel and twist it. I just stole every last shred of hope and happiness they had.”

Vito’s laugh is sharp, drawing the attention of a few nearby patients. He waves them off, leaning closer. “That’s beautiful.”

The angels’ voices are monotone now, their words flat and devoid of the usual commanding presence.

Vienna giggles beside me, the sound soft but dripping with amusement. “I can see it,” she whispers, her voice tinged with awe. “Their auras—they’re so dim. Almost... evil.”

Ewan chuckles, shaking his head. “Technically, aren’t we on the evil side?”

Vienna turns to him, her eyes glinting. “How can it be evil if it’s for love?”

I snort. “That’s bullshit, and you know it.”

Another crack ripples through the portal, the energy faint but unmistakable. I feel it settle into my chest, amplifying the power coursing through me. I reach out again, pulling at the strings, weaving the emotions in the room into something entirely new.

The patients relax, their despair giving way to hope. The angels, however, stand stiffly, their monotone speech continuing as though on autopilot.

“It’s working,” I murmur, more to myself than anyone else.

Vienna tilts her head, watching me with a curious smile. “You’re good at this.”

“I know,” I joke.

The session drags on, the angels’ words losing all meaning as the room falls into a strange sense of peace. By the time it ends, Vienna looks more alive than I’ve ever seen her, her laughter ringing through the hallway as we leave.

She’s losing herself, and part of me wonders if that’s the point.

32 – Ewan

I lead Vienna back from the meeting, her presence beside me radiating a strange mix of confidence and anxiety. The weight of what's to come presses down on me, a steady reminder that my role in this is inevitable. It's not something I want to do, but it's something I have to do. Death always is.

The hallway stretches ahead, empty and quiet now that the orderlies have been neutralized by Nevan and Vito. Their absence makes the building feel eerily hollow. Vienna glances at me, her lips pressed together in thought, but she doesn't speak until we reach the door to our room.

"Do you regret it?" she asks softly, her voice cutting through the stillness.

I pause, my hand on the doorknob. "Regret what?"

"Being who you are. Death."

I open the door without answering, motioning for her to step inside. The others aren't here yet; they're giving us space, whether out of respect or necessity, I don't know.

"Regret doesn't matter," I say finally, crossing the room to lean against the wall. "It doesn't change what I am."

"But you didn't choose it," she presses, her arms folding across her chest. "None of you did."

“No,” I admit, my voice quieter now. “But that doesn’t make it any less real.”

She steps closer. “And now you have to use it.”

I nod, the weight of her words sinking into my chest. “In order to open the portal, I have to take a soul. Not just kill someone— take them. Hold them in my hands, strip them from their body, and claim them as mine.”

Vienna’s breath hitches, but she doesn’t look away. “What happens to you when you do?”

I let out a humorless laugh, running a hand through my hair. “It changes you. Death always does. The first time is... permanent. Once I do this, there’s no going back. Whatever scraps of humanity I still have will be gone.”

“Do you want that?”

“It doesn’t matter what I want,” I say, my tone sharper than I intend. “It’s what has to happen. I don’t have a choice.”

She bites her lip, her gaze dropping to the floor. “What about my soul?”

I stiffen, my body going cold. “What are you talking about?”

“Take mine.”

“No. Absolutely not.”

“Why not?” she demands, stepping closer so that there’s mere inches between us. “I’m not just Vienna anymore. I’m Lilith. And when this is over, Vienna will be gone. She’s already fading. Why shouldn’t you take her soul? It’s not like I’ll need

it.”

“You don’t understand,” I snap, my fists clenching at my sides. “If I take your soul, you’ll—”

“I’ll what?” she interrupts, her voice rising. “Die? Be destroyed? I’m already being destroyed, Ewan. Every minute that passes, I lose more of myself to her. And maybe that’s how it’s supposed to be. But if giving you my soul helps us open the portal, then it’s worth it.”

I stare at her, my chest tightening. She’s serious. Deadly serious. And the worst part is, she’s right. Vienna is already fading, her humanity eroding under the weight of Lilith’s presence. But taking her soul? It feels like crossing a line I can’t uncross.

“I don’t want you to think of me any differently,” I say finally, my voice barely above a whisper. “After I take a soul—your soul—I won’t be the same.”

Her expression softens, and she steps closer, her hands brushing against mine. “You’ll still be you, Ewan. No matter what happens.”

“You don’t know that,” I mumble, my gaze dropping to the floor. “Death changes you. It consumes you. And once I do this...”

“It’s okay,” she says. “If it’s me, it’s okay.”

I close my eyes, my mind racing with everything that’s brought us to this moment. The portal, the angels, the inevitability of what we are. And her—Vienna, Lilith, the woman who has somehow become the center of it all.

“How do you want me to do it?” I ask finally, my voice trembling despite myself.

She smiles faintly, her hands tightening around mine. “Through a kiss.”

I blink, startled at her request. “A kiss?”

“If I’m going to lose my soul, I want it to feel like love.”

The words hit me like a punch to the gut, and I can’t bring myself to argue. Instead, I close the distance between us, my hands trembling as I cup her face.

“Are you sure?” I whisper, my voice breaking.

“Yes,” she says, her eyes locking onto mine. “I trust you.”

I don’t know if I deserve that trust, but I lean in anyway, pressing my lips to hers. The kiss is soft at first, hesitant, but it deepens quickly, a current of desperation and longing pulling us together.

And then I feel it—the shift, the pull. Her soul brushes against mine, warm and vibrant, and I reach out, wrapping it in my grasp. It’s not like taking something by force; it’s like she’s giving it to me willingly, a piece of herself offered without hesitation.

The room shudders around us, the air crackling with energy. A sharp, splitting sound echoes through the walls, and I know without looking that the portal has cracked further.

When I pull back, Vienna sags against me, her breath shallow. Her eyes meet mine, and for a moment, I see her—truly her—before the flicker of Lilith takes over.

“It’s done,” I whisper, my voice hollow.

She nods, a faint smile on her lips. “You did good, Ewan.”

I hold her close, my chest aching with a mixture of pride and sorrow. The portal is closer to opening, but at what cost? And as I feel the darkness settle deeper into my bones, I can’t help but wonder if I’ll ever feel human again.

Or if I’ll ever want to.

33 – Lilith

Death's kiss was sweet. It always is. Every lifetime, I coax Death himself into taking my soul so that he doesn't have to use his gift on someone innocent while he still has his humanity. The human part of me fades away every time anyway. Ewan stirs at my side as I slip from the bed and make my way down the hall, heading for the door to survey the damage down to the portal.

It's not enough but we're getting closer to the final stages, regardless of how hard the angels try to keep us at bay.

I can feel Vienna—the human part of me—fraying at the edges, unraveling with every breath I take. By the time I reach the final hallway, she's all but gone, a whisper of my humanity clinging to the darkness I've always found comfort in.

And then he appears.

Michael steps out of the shadows, his pristine suit immaculate, his golden eyes glowing faintly in the dim light. He's radiant, but there's something darker in his expression as his presence stops me in my tracks.

"Lilith," he says, his voice echoing through the hallway. "You won't make it to the door."

I straighten, squaring my shoulders as I meet his gaze. "You know? It's about time. You also can't stop me."

Michael tilts his head, a faint smile tugging at his lips. “Can’t I? You’re powerful, yes, but unrefined. You don’t even know how to use your gifts yet.”

“I’ll figure it out.” This is the hardest part about becoming myself. While I remember my other lives and all the times I fell in love with Asmodeus again, figuring out my gifts never comes back to me. There’s a lot of trial and error and lots of frustration as the end draws near.

Michael takes a step closer, grinning down at me. “Today won’t be the end,” he says softly, almost like a promise. “You’re not ready, and neither is the portal. But don’t worry. We’ll stop you before it’s too late.”

The condescension in his tone lights a fire in me, and before I can think, I lash out. The air around me crackles as I summon every ounce of power I can feel, throwing it toward him in a desperate burst. It’s uncoordinated and chaotic, but it’s enough to make the walls tremble.

Michael doesn’t flinch. He raises a hand, deflecting the attack with ease. The energy dissipates, the angel watching me for several seconds before stepping forward and placing a hand on my shoulder.

“You’ll understand soon enough,” he says calmly. “But for now, you need to rest.”

I try to fight as his grip tightens, but it’s like my body is no longer mine to control. A wave of cold washes over me and darkness creeps in at the edges of my vision. The last thing I see is Michael’s face, serene and impassive, as the world fades away.

I wake up to a small room bare of any color, just like my own room but this place seems even less lively if that were possible. Solitary confinement. Of course. The air is stifling, heavy with the weight of silence, and my head throbs with the aftereffects of whatever Michael did.

I sit up slowly, my hands trembling as I press them against the cold floor. The mark on my chest burns faintly, a reminder of who I am—of who I’ve become. For a moment, I feel lost, trapped between Vienna and Lilith, between humanity and something far darker.

And then he’s there.

“Asmodeus,” I whisper, my voice cracking.

He steps out of the shadows, his form solidifying into the man I know so well. His golden eyes are warm, glowing softly as he crosses the room. He kneels before me, his hands gentle as they cup my face.

“My love,” he purrs, the warmth wrapping around me. “They can never keep me from you.” His arms wrap around me, strong and unyielding, and for a moment, the world feels less heavy.

“She’s disappearing,” I whisper, my voice trembling. “Vienna is slipping away.”

He pulls back just enough to meet my gaze, his expression soft but resolute. “Ah, you must have helped Death with his gift. You were always selfless, love. However, you’ve always been Lilith, my queen, my chaos. Vienna was just a mask, just like all the others.”

“Asmodeus, we’re running out of time and I have absolutely no idea how to use my powers. It ebbs and flows with emotion but it’s not enough. I don’t know how to be Lilith but—”

“You don’t have to,” he says, his thumb brushing a stray lock of hair behind my ear. “You already are.”

I close my eyes, his words sinking in. More memories come, filling my head and calming me further. Lifetimes of love and destruction, of finding and losing him over and over again. Each memory is a shard of glass, cutting deep but fitting into a mosaic I didn't know existed.

I pull back, my hands gripping his shoulders as I meet his gaze. "How long do we have?" For the first time, I see something in his eyes that I never expected: tears. They glisten against the crimson glow, threatening to fall, and it breaks something in me.

"As long as the end takes," he says softly, his voice thick with emotion. "We have until it all burns."

The truth of his words are devastating, but I nod anyway, resolved to spend every last moment that I can by his side. "Then let's make it count."

A sweet smile spreads across his lips before he pulls me into a kiss. It's not frantic or desperate—it's slow and deliberate, a promise made in silence. His love wraps around me, grounding me even as the darkness inside me blooms, unfurling like a flower in the night.

By the time we pull apart, I feel different. Stronger. More certain.

"I'm ready," I say, my voice steady.

He nods, his hand brushing against the mark on my chest. "Then let's begin." The general hum of his energy flows through me, empowering me, taking Vienna away and placing her to rest. It isn't perfect but she didn't suffer. She'll be reborn into a peaceful life as I take her body and give my existence to the man I've loved across lifetimes.

He guides me to the floor and pulls me into his lap, both of us content to sit in this embrace as he feeds me his power. This time when I close my eyes, I feel loved and protected and I know that we're moments away from fulfilling the purpose we were created for.

34 – Ewan

Waking up to an empty bed didn't terrify me at first until I realized that Vienna—Lilith—wasn't with the others either. We hurried to the cafeteria, hoping that she had found her way there before us but her absence feels like a kick to the gut.

Even as we assume our table toward the back, each of us ignoring the lifeless, gray food on our trays, we can't help but wonder where she disappeared to her. The new signature of power from her is thick and strong but distant. It's pulsing through me, powering the portal. I can only imagine that she probably followed the energy and one of the angels stopped her.

"She's somewhere in the building," I say under my breath, my voice just loud enough for the others to hear. My hands are clenched into fists beneath the table, my plate untouched. "We just have to figure out where."

"She's locked up tight," Vito whispers. "And Michael's not stupid. He'll have her somewhere close, where he can keep an eye on her."

Nevan shifts in his seat, his sharp eyes scanning the room. "What do we do if they're right?" he asks, his voice low but tinged with unease. "If Vienna's body can't handle it? She's human."

"She's not just human anymore," Kaua growls, his voice a quiet rumble. "She's Lilith. Death officially took her soul. We would have felt an energy shift if her physical body couldn't contain that kind of darkness."

“Means jack if we can’t get to her,” Vito mutters, leaning back and running a hand through his hair. “But I’ll find out where she is. That’s step one.”

Before I can respond, a ripple of energy crawls through the air. We all stiffen as the three angels walk into the cafeteria. Michael leads the way, his presence suffocating as always, with Raphael and Gabriel flanking him like guard dogs. The room falls silent as their cold gazes sweep over us. When he heads toward us, I brace myself for the worst news.

“It’s over,” Michael says. “You’re wasting your time. Vienna’s body is human, and she won’t last. She can’t handle what’s inside her. With her physical body protected, there will be no damage to the rest of Briarwood when things inevitably go south.”

There’s never been a human version of Lilith but that doesn’t mean it can’t happen.

“She’s stronger than you think,” Kaua growls, his voice low enough that only we can hear.

Michael doesn’t respond, but the faint smirk on his face is enough to make my blood boil. The angels leave in unison, a practiced routine that’s both haunting and agitating. Vito leans forward, addressing the three of us. “We don’t have time to sit around. They think they’ve already won. We have to prove them wrong.”

As if summoned by our desperation, Asmodeus’ voice echoes in my mind, dark and rich like the shadows he commands. “The cracks in the portal are giving you what you need,” he says. “You’re growing stronger. Use it.”

I glance at the others, and by their expressions, I know they’ve heard him too. I can’t imagine living with a voice like that in my head but all the more power to Vienna for staying sane until Lilith appeared.

“I’ll get the information,” Vito smirks, leaning back as he surveys the cafeteria. “Watch me.” It sounds like a challenge, a game that only he’s playing and I’m all for it.

Moments later, Vito is up, casually approaching one of the orderlies standing by the wall. His voice drops to a whisper, a conversation between only the two of them. I don’t need to hear the words to know Vito’s weaving his magic, planting the suggestion, bending the man’s will like a branch in the wind.

Nevan chuckles from his seat across from me. “If Vito gets the location, I’ll handle the orderlies. Starve them of their emotions. Make them hollow.”

“And I’ll handle the crowd,” Kaua says, a dark grin tugging at his lips. “All it takes is a spark.”

I nod, my chest tightening. “I’ll slip away once it starts. I just need enough time to get to her.”

The plan forms quickly, our whispers blending with the drone of the cafeteria. Vito returns to the table, his grin triumphant.

“She’s in a room beside Michael’s office,” he offers. “Close enough to keep an eye on her, but not where they think anyone would look.”

This plan is stupid, dangerously so but with the portal so close to bursting up, we have to try everything we can to retrieve her. Even if that means attempting this god-awful plan.

“Let’s move,” Kaua says, cracking his knuckles.

The next few minutes pass in a blur. Kaua’s distraction begins as a subtle shift in the

air, a ripple of tension that spreads like wildfire. Voices rise, sharp and angry, the cafeteria soon erupting into chaos. Patients are shouting, fists flying, chairs scraping against the floor. The orderlies rush to contain the brawl, their focus entirely on the riot.

Nevan steps forward, easily, draining the orderlies of their emotions. He reaches forward, pulling on imaginary strings as if orchestrating a chorus of darkness. Their movements slow, their expressions blank, and the chaos spirals out of control as the orderlies lose their grip on the situation.

And now, it's my turn.

I slip through the commotion, keeping my head down as I move through the chaos. My heart pounds in my chest, every step taking me closer to Vienna. Her energy thickens as I head down the hallways, memorized pathways leading me to the offices we've done our best to avoid over the years.

Asmodeus' voice echoes faintly in my mind, urging me forward, directing me.

When I reach the corridor near Michael's office, I slow down, facing the long hallway of solitary rooms. I've spent my share of time behind each one of those doors, the doctors and orderlies trying to beat the idea of Death out of me. It makes sense now that they were never actually trying to make me believe I wasn't Death, but rather to ruin my resolve to the point that I was nothing more than a shell of the horseman I'm supposed to be.

"Is she here?" I whisper, hoping that Lilith's demon will respond.

There's no answer but I didn't expect there to be. In the delicate balance of life, there are things we all have to experience so that the apocalypse truly happens. I don't remember my past lives like Lilith and Asmodeus does so I don't understand this

experience.

Or the test either one of them has put before me.

So, I move forward, testing the first door. It opens, a squeal piercing the silence as it swings open. This close to Michael's office, I'm bound to get caught but there's no other way. Yelling into the hallway will alert them of my position but I'm sure someone is already headed this way. Death isn't exactly a subtle presence.

35 – Kaua

The cafeteria erupts in chaos around me, and it's glorious. The air is thick with tension, shouts blending into an animalistic chorus as patients shove, scream, and lash out at each other. The tables are overturned, trays clattering to the floor, food smeared across every surface like a battlefield smeared in blood.

I stand still for a moment, letting it wash over me, drinking in the destruction like the purest drug. The energy is intoxicating and it feels like home. The first punch lands somewhere to my right, and I turn my head just in time to see a scrawny kid come barreling toward me, fists flying. His movements are uncoordinated, desperate, but his intent is clear.

I grin. "Oh, you want to play?"

The kid's fist connects with my shoulder, but it feels like nothing more than a tap. Before he can land another hit, I grab him by the collar and slam him into the nearest table with enough force to send trays skittering across the floor. The sound is beautiful and I let out a roar that echoes through the chaos.

Others are watching now, their faces flickering with a mix of fear and exhilaration. Some of them back away, but others are drawn in, their own aggression stoked by the fire I've unleashed. Their anger feeds my own, building into something monstrous.

Someone else lunges at me—a bigger guy this time, his face twisted in fury. I sidestep his swing and drive my elbow into his ribs, the satisfying crunch of bone beneath my weight ringing in my ears. He stumbles, gasping for breath before I shove

him aside, my eyes scanning the room for the next target.

It's not enough. The energy inside me is growing, clawing at my insides, demanding more. I need to keep moving, to keep fighting, to let it all out before it consumes me.

An orderly steps into my path, his face a mask of authority and anger. He holds up his hands, trying to calm the chaos with words that are drowned out by the noise. I don't wait for him to finish. With a feral growl, I charge at him, my shoulder slamming into his chest like a battering ram. He goes down hard, his head hitting the floor with a sickening thud.

The sight of blood sends a fresh wave of energy through me. My vision sharpens, the world narrowing to a red haze as I lose myself in the violence. My fists connect with flesh, my shoes crunch against ribs, and every impact feels like a release, like I'm feeding the beast inside me.

This is War.

I don't know how long it lasts. Time becomes meaningless, the chaos around me blending into a single, animalistic blur. But then, suddenly, there's a hand on my shoulder, and I whip around, ready to strike again.

It's Nevan.

He doesn't flinch at the sight of me as his hands come up, cupping my face, and before I can process what's happening, his lips are on mine. The kiss is sudden, hitting me like a bucket of ice water.

For a moment, the world stops spinning. The haze lifts and the fire inside me dims just enough for me to breathe again. When Nevan pulls back, his eyes search mine, a faint smirk tugging at his lips. "Welcome back, War."

I blink, my breath coming in short pants as I take in the scene around me. The cafeteria is a mess of overturned tables, shattered plates, and writhing bodies. Blood stains the floor and my hands are slick with it, the copper scent filling my nose.

“Fuck...” I trail off, my voice rough.

Nevan interrupts my train of thought, his smirk widening. “It was spectacular.”

Vito appears beside us, his arms crossed and his expression somewhere between amused and exasperated. “You always take it too far,” he says, shaking his head. “But damn if it’s not effective.”

I should feel something—guilt, maybe, or regret—but there’s nothing. Only a strange, hollow satisfaction. “Did Ewan get her?” I ask, my voice quieter now.

Nevan nods. “He’s on his way. Let’s get you cleaned up.”

They lead me out of the cafeteria, the chaos still raging behind us. The other patients barely notice us leave, too caught up in their own frenzy to care. Back in the room, Nevan pushes me toward the sink, his hands already reaching for a towel. “You’re a mess,” he mumbles, though there’s no real judgment in his tone.

Vito leans against the wall, watching with an amused glint in his eyes. “When the world ends, you won’t need anyone to bring you back to reality. You’ll incite war until the entire planet tears itself apart.”

I snort, running a hand through my hair as Nevan dabs at the blood on my knuckles on my other. “Not the worst way to go out.”

Nevan shakes his head, but there’s a faint smile on his lips. “Just try not to kill everyone before we get there, yeah? Gotta leave some fun for the rest of us.”

The three of us share a rare moment of laughter, the tension easing slightly. But in the back of my mind, the chaos still lingers, a reminder of what I am—and what we're heading toward. Vienna, Lilith, whatever name she goes by now... she's the reason for all of this. She's the center of our destruction, and somehow, she's become the one thing we all want to protect.

I just hope Ewan makes it to her in time.

36 – Lilith

The first thing I feel is heat. It isn't uncomfortable, not the kind that burns or scalds—it's power, raw and consuming, thrumming through every fiber of my being. My skin feels alive, electric, and my chest pulses with a steady rhythm that isn't entirely my own. The mark etched there glows faintly, radiating with an energy that feels all too familiar.

My eyes flutter open, and the room comes into focus. It's the same gray, lifeless solitary confinement cell they shoved me into, but it no longer feels oppressive. These walls incapable of holding me now that Asmodeus has lent me his power. I sit up slowly, a smile creeping onto my lips. It's not Vienna's smile—it's mine. Lilith's.

His voice whispers in my mind now, low and soothing, a constant companion in the storm.

"It's time, my love," he says. "You're ready."

I stand, the restraints of the room laughable now. My fingers trail along the edge of the door, feeling the angelic sigils carved into the metal. Once, they would have stopped me. Once, I might have feared their power.

Not anymore.

With a flick of my wrist, the sigils flare and then dissolve, their light snuffed out like a dying star. The door trembles before bursting open, the force of it shaking the walls. The sound echoes down the hallway, a warning to anyone foolish enough to stand in

my way.

I step out, barefoot and unbothered by the cold floor beneath me. I can feel Ewan's presence, faint but steady, like a beacon calling me forward. My Death, always so stubborn, always so loyal. Ewan meets my gaze, the horsemen laughing as he shakes his head and then approaches. "I would have beat down every fucking door until it killed me, Lilith. How are you here? They would have locked the door."

"They can't kill Death," I joke before stepping into his chest and wrapping my arms around his waist. "And they did lock that door. Vienna would have never been able to open it. I, however, can't be contained by such inferior gifts."

He laughs, a beautiful sound in the darkness. I catalog his angled features and mussed hair, the twinge of fear in his eyes as he stares down at me. "We thought we lost you for a little bit." And then he kisses me, devouring my lips despite the fact that we might be caught at any moment.

I separate us and start moving back down the hallway, away from Michael's office. "You still have a piece of your humanity, Ewan. Death would not have come for me because Death cannot love."

"Please, for the love of the apocalypse, tell me that you did not get yourself captured to show me that my humanity still exists." When I don't answer, he tugs on my hand and drags me into his chest. He presses me against the wall, those silver eyes glowing as he searches my expression. "Lilith, tell me that you didn't do all that to prove this to me."

"I didn't. Michael genuinely surprised me but it's a lesson learned all the same. My Death always retains a little bit of his humanity. Always."

That feels impossible but he doesn't question it. "One day," he says, his voice softer

now, “I’d like to hear the stories of our past lives. All of them.”

I smile, the weight of his words settling over me. “One day, I’ll tell you. All of them.”

The hallways are quiet as we move through them, the air heavy with the weight of what’s to come. As we round a corner, the others come into view. Nevan leans casually against the wall, his arms crossed, but his gaze flicks to us immediately. Kaua and Vito stand a few steps away, their postures tense but ready. They straighten as we approach, their eyes locking onto me. There’s a moment of silence, heavy with unspoken understanding, before I step forward.

I step closer to them, my gaze softening as I take them in. The weight of our shared purpose binds us, but it’s more than that now. It’s something deeper, something eternal. My hands reach for Nevan first, cupping his face as I press my lips to his. He responds eagerly, his hands gripping my waist as if to anchor himself to me.

When we pull apart, his eyes are alight with mischief. “I’ve waited centuries for that.”

I smile, turning to Kaua next. He doesn’t wait for me to reach him, pulling me into a crushing embrace before his lips crash against mine. His kiss is rough, possessive, and I meet it with equal fervor. When we part, his wolfish grin matches the growl in his voice. “You’re even better than I imagined.”

Vito is next, his cocky smirk softening as I step toward him. I take his face in my hands, my fingers brushing against his jaw as I kiss him. His lips are warm and demanding, his arms wrapping around me as if he’ll never let go.

When I finally turn to Ewan, his expression is unreadable, his gaze locked onto mine

with an intensity that makes my chest ache. I step closer, my hand resting on his cheek as I kiss him. It's slow, deliberate, filled with everything we've endured and everything we will face.

When I pull back, I glance at all of them, my voice steady as I say, "There will be time for each of you later. But now, we have a portal to open."

There's no more time. The angels already know we're coming.

We head for that forbidden hallway, a single guard standing before the door to the portal. He's tall and broad, his presence imposing, but it's laughable. He's nothing more than a minor obstacle, a flicker of resistance in the face of inevitability.

"Really?" Vito asks, a chuckle following his question. "This is what they send to stop us?"

The guard shifts, his expression hardening, but he doesn't stand a chance. Vito steps forward, his movements fluid and precise, and before the guard can react, Vito's hand shoots out, gripping his throat. The guard's eyes widen as Vito leans in, his voice deadly.

"You don't belong here," Vito says, and with a twist of his wrist, the guard crumples to the ground, lifeless.

The door looms before us now, the energy behind it pulsing, almost alive, the portal's cracks widening with every passing moment.

Just as we step forward, Michael's presence appears, moving into our path. He's not truly here, just a piece of his essence as he no doubt races down the hallways to stop us. This version of him flickers in the darkness, an almost laughable sight. His wings are out, glowing with a brilliance that feels almost overwhelming, his expression is

tight with anger and desperation.

“Vienna,” he says, his voice sharp but imploring. “This isn’t you. Your humanity is still there. You don’t have to do this.”

I tilt my head, a knowing smile tugging at my lips. “My humanity?” I repeat, my voice laced with amusement. “I gave that to Death.”

Michael’s expression falters, a flicker of uncertainty crossing his face. “You don’t have to become her,” he says, his tone softening. “You can fight this. You can—”

“I am her,” I interrupt, stepping closer. “I am Lilith and I would appreciate it if you addressed me as such.”

He opens his mouth to argue, but I cut him off. “I have a destiny to fulfill, Michael. I have a portal to open and a lover to return to. You cannot stop me. None of you can.”

The others move to my sides, their presence a wall of power and resolve. Michael glances at them, his expression hardening, but even he can’t hide the fear in his eyes. He knows he’s outmatched.

“You think this will end the way you want it to?” he says, his voice rising. “You’re playing with forces you don’t understand.”

I smile, my hand brushing against the door as the sigils flicker and dim, symbols that I couldn’t see as Vienna but are clear to me now as Lilith. “I understand more than you ever will, Michael. And you? You’re already too late.”

The sigils fade completely, the door trembling as the portal’s energy surges forward. The others step back, their gazes locked on me as I pull the door open, the weight of eternity resting on my shoulders. Michael disappears in the surge of energy, only

darkness remaining, threatening to consume us in the best of ways.

I glance back at my horsemen, my smile widening as I say, “Ready for the beginning of the end?”

37 – Lilith

The air around us is thick with the hum of power, the pulse of the portal before us vibrating in the very air. It's alive, breathing in time with my own heartbeat, and I feel its call deep in my bones. The energy here, in this place, is intoxicating, overwhelming. And it's mine. All mine.

I stand in the center of it, my horsemen by my side, each of them waiting for the signal, the moment where the battle begins. This is what I've waited for. This is the moment where everything changes. The angels—those pretentious, sanctimonious creatures—are coming for us. They think they can stop us. They think they can end this.

But they cannot.

I smile, watching as the first few of them descend from the ceiling, their white wings spread wide, their swords gleaming like fallen stars. Their ethereal light shines through the darkness of the room, casting long shadows against the stone walls. They don't even understand what they're walking into. They think their divine powers can stop us, but they have no idea how far gone we are. How far I have gone.

The portal at my back shudders, its cracks widening, sending out tendrils of dark energy that seem to reach for the angels, eager to pull them into the depths. I know what this place is. I know what it holds. And they're about to learn that too.

The first angel—a tall, imposing figure with dark brown hair and a cold, beautiful face—advances, his sword drawn, the blade shining with an unholy light. His eyes

narrow as he takes in the scene before him, his lips curling with disdain.

“You are still human, Vienna,” he says, his voice full of righteousness. “You cannot give yourself over to this darkness. You were meant for something greater.”

I laugh, the sound harsh and full of malice. “I gave that up,” I say. “I gave up Vienna long ago. I am Lilith now. And I will destroy this world. We will.”

The angels seem to pause for just a moment. Their wings flutter as if the air itself is thickening around them. And in that moment, Vito moves.

Without a sound, Vito steps forward, his hand raised, and I can feel his power ripple out, a wave of influence washing over the angels in front of us. He doesn't even have to say a word. With just a flick of his wrist, he takes hold of their minds, twisting them, turning them against one another. I watch with a smirk as one of the angels suddenly stumbles back, his sword swinging wildly to his side, his expression confused.

“Traitor,” Vito mutters under his breath, and another angel turns his sword on the one who faltered. Chaos erupts among them, and I hear the first screams of confusion as they begin to fight amongst themselves. Their divine power is nothing against Vito's mind control. They are not prepared for him.

At the same moment, Kaua's voice rips through the chaos, a roar of pure feral rage, echoing off the walls. The angel before him doesn't have a chance to react before Kaua charges, his fists raised, his muscles coiled with raw, unrelenting strength. He slams into the first angel he finds, sending him crashing into the wall with a sickening crunch. The sound of bones breaking fills the air, but Kaua doesn't stop. He doesn't even pause to breathe.

Kaua is War incarnate. I watch as he tears through their ranks, an unstoppable force,

his fists and feet landing with crushing force. Each hit reverberates through the air, and I can feel the anger, the rage, the desire for destruction emanating from him. He is untamable.

Nevan moves next. His presence is quieter, more subtle. He doesn't charge into battle like Kaua does. Instead, Nevan steps into the fray with a calm, calculating expression, his eyes flicking over the chaos. His aura spreads out in waves, waves of famine that seem to drain the energy from the angels around him. I see their faces shift from determination to weariness, their eyes clouding with fatigue as he saps their strength. One by one, they begin to falter, their blows growing weaker, slower. Their wings flap sluggishly, and their movements are more and more sluggish, as if the very life is being drained from them.

They can't fight famine. They can't fight him .

Ewan steps forward last, his hand outstretched, his fingers curling like talons as he moves through the disarray. His presence is like a cold wind, one that freezes the very air around him. The angels don't even see him coming before their bodies begin to decay. One by one, they begin to rot where they stand, their flesh withering as Ewan's power takes hold. I watch, mesmerized, as he turns each angel to dust with a simple touch. His gift is death, and he is merciless. The very air seems to grow colder as his power spreads, the temperature dropping with each angel he touches.

I stand at the center of it all, the eye of the storm. The portal hums behind me, its cracks widening with every passing moment. The energy in the room is a heady mix of darkness and chaos, and I can feel it seeping into me. I can feel it amplifying the power inside me, growing with every second. The portal calls to me, urging me to give it more. To tear the world apart. To open the gates.

I glance over at the others, and we exchange knowing looks. The angels are being destroyed, their numbers dwindling, but we still have a long way to go. I can hear the

screeching of their swords as they clash with ours, their righteous fury turning against them. And then, just as I'm about to turn back to the portal, a voice cuts through the chaos.

“Enough.”

The voice is soft, but it cuts through the noise like a knife. My heart skips a beat as I feel the presence behind me, a shadow moving in the corner of my mind, familiar and soothing.

I turn, and there he is.

Asmodeus.

His form is dark, his silhouette almost blending into the shadows as he steps into the room. The air seems to grow darker around him, the light in the room dimming as his presence fills the space. His eyes gleam like blackened stars, his smile twisted and full of satisfaction as he looks at me. He is everything I've ever wanted and more. He is mine .

“We're almost there,” he says, his voice low, dripping with satisfaction.

I smile back at him, my heart pounding in my chest. “Yes. But not quite yet.”

He steps forward, his presence commanding. His eyes meet mine, and there's a moment of pure connection, a moment where time seems to stop. In that instant, I know that nothing can stop us. Not the angels. Not the world. Nothing.

Asmodeus extends his hand toward me, and I take it, feeling the surge of his power flow through me. Together, we are unstoppable. Together, we will open the portal. Together, we will end the world.

The chaos around us intensifies as the last of the angels fall. Their numbers are depleted, their bodies littering the floor, but still, we wait. I can feel the weight of the moment pressing down on us, and I know it's time.

Asmodeus stands beside me, his presence an anchor as we move toward the portal. The others gather behind us, waiting, watching, ready. I take a deep breath and step forward, my power resonating through the air. I can feel the world trembling beneath me as the portal cracks open wider, ready to spill forth the darkness.

And then, we step into it. Together.

And the world begins to burn.

38 – Nevan

The air is thick with the sound of battle, the sharp clash of steel against steel, the guttural screams of angels who thought they were prepared for this. They weren't. None of them were. This moment, this battle, has been written in the stars for centuries, for millennia. And now, as the war rages around me, I feel the pull of it, like a hunger deep in my chest. The kind of hunger that has gnawed at my soul since the day I first tasted it. Power. Death. Destruction. It's what I've craved, what I was always meant for.

And here, standing by her side— Lilith —it feels like I've finally come home.

I can feel the tug of the portal behind us, the dark energy calling to us like a lover's whisper, a promise of all that awaits on the other side. I glance at her, my queen, my goddess, my reason for everything that has led me here. Her power thrums in the air like a low hum, a pulse that reverberates through my very bones. She is more than I ever imagined she would be. More than I could ever want. And yet, I'm still drawn to her like a moth to a flame, consumed by this need to protect her, to shield her from everything that stands between us and the end of the world.

I know that I am not the one who holds the key to this— Asmodeus does. But in this moment, I am something else. I am Famine. I am hunger. And I will keep her safe.

The angels are swarming now, their wings unfurling like some sick parody of grace, their swords gleaming as they descend upon us. They think they can win. They think they can stop us. They think they can keep us from claiming what's ours.

The first of them comes at me, his sword raised, but he doesn't have the strength to wield it. Not anymore. I don't even have to move. I just stretch out my hands, and I feel it—the hunger that flows through me, like a river ready to burst its banks. I reach for him, feel the lifeblood drain from him as my power takes hold, pulling his essence from him in a slow, deliberate feast. His skin grows pale, his eyes dull, and the strength in his limbs falters. I hear the air leave his lungs in a rasping sigh, and I feel his energy siphoning into me, fueling my resolve.

I don't even care about his death. I don't care about the bodies falling all around us. All I care about is her . Lilith.

I glance at her, just for a moment, and I see the dark fire in her eyes. She is the embodiment of all that is wrong with this world, but I would follow her anywhere, anywhere she commands. I would die for her.

A sword swings at my head, and I barely flinch. I don't need to move to avoid it. I can feel the sword's energy long before it touches me. Another angel, more desperate this time, their wings beating frantically. But I feel the weight of their hunger, their fear, their desperation. Their strength wanes the longer they fight us, the longer they stand against us. It's as if their very will is being drained by my power.

I can taste their pain on my tongue, feel it seeping into me like the sweetest nectar. The hunger within me grows stronger with every soul I take. And still, I stand between them and her.

I hear her voice—low, soothing, a dark command, “Nevan.” Her eyes meet mine, and there's a flicker of something in them. Something that isn't just a promise of power, but of something more . I don't know what it is, but in this moment, I don't need to know.

I move to her side, my gaze fixed on the battlefield around us. My mind is a fog of

hunger, of need, but it's focused. It's purposeful . My eyes scan the angels, the ones who still stand tall. And I see their weaknesses. I feel their energy, their emotions, their doubt. I reach out, pulling at their essence with every breath I take. They falter, they crumble.

And they die.

But the fight isn't over. The others are still coming. Still descending from above. And I can hear the clang of swords, the cries of battle, as the heavens themselves fall apart at the seams. But I won't let them get to her. I won't let them touch her.

The next wave of angels approaches, this time with more force, more fury. But I'm ready. I'm always ready. I reach out again, spreading my arms wide as if embracing the inevitable. The hunger takes over, and I feel their souls leaving their bodies, leaving them hollow and broken.

And I see her watching me. Her eyes are dark, filled with that same hunger. The same fire that burns in me. I feel the heat of it crawling under my skin as I drain them, weaken them, tear them apart. Her gaze is locked on me, her lips curling into a smile.

"Good," she whispers. "You were always meant to be mine."

I don't respond. There's nothing to say. Nothing that could be said. We both understand what this is. What we are.

I hear the sound of something sharp cutting through the air—a blade, this time aimed directly at Lilith. My heart skips a beat, but before I can act, I feel a surge of energy coming from her. She's done this before. She's done this so many times. She is a goddess, a queen, a force of nature.

Her hand reaches out to me, and I stop. Everything stops. The battle pauses, the

sounds fading into the background as her fingers brush my face. Her touch is soft, almost tender, but I can feel the darkness beneath it.

“You’re mine,” she says, her voice a dark promise. “And I’ll never let them take you from me.”

I close my eyes, savoring the feel of her fingers against my skin. It’s a promise. A vow.

I lean into her touch, pressing my cheek into her hand, my breath shallow. “I’ll guard you until my last breath. Until the world burns to the ground, I’ll stand by your side.”

She smiles. It’s a dark, twisted smile, the kind that sends shivers down my spine. “And when that happens, you’ll be the one to carry me through it.”

I nod, knowing that the world will fall to pieces around us. The heavens will burn. The earth will crumble. And when the last angel falls, when the last breath is drawn, I will be there beside her, my soul entwined with hers.

I glance back at the battlefield, feeling the emptiness in my chest grow even darker. The portal is closer now. I can feel it pulsing in the air, a sickeningly sweet rhythm that matches my heartbeat. The others are still fighting, still tearing the angels apart, but I know it’s only a matter of time before they all fall.

I stand tall, resolute and unwavering, my life force draining, but my hunger for power and purpose growing stronger with every passing second. I can feel it deep within me. The hunger for more. For her.

And she’s right. This is just the beginning. The world will end, yes. But together, we will remake it.

And I will stand beside her until there is nothing left.

The world is ours now.

39 - Ewan

The portal looms before us, a fractured, pulsing mass of darkness that hums with a power so ancient it feels alive. It draws us closer, an irresistible force pulling at the very core of who we are. Each crack in its surface bleeds energy into the room, heavy and suffocating, filling the space with a soundless rhythm that matches my heartbeat. The end is close now, so close I can taste it in the air, bitter and electric.

I step forward, my boots heavy against the stone floor, my breath shallow. My body feels lighter than it should, as if the pull of the portal is trying to unravel me, to take me apart piece by piece. I glance at the others—Kaua, Vito, Nevan—and then at her. Lilith. The queen of everything, our dark sun.

She's glowing, not in the radiant, ethereal way of the angels but in a way that feels raw and visceral, like she's a storm barely held together. Her mark burns brightly on her chest, and her eyes are locked on the swirling black mass of the portal as if it's the only thing in existence. She's more than Vienna now. She's something other, something more. And yet, there's still something human in the way she carries herself, in the way she clings to Asmodeus' name like it's her anchor.

I know what's coming. I've always known. This is who we are—what we are. But as I take another step closer, the weight of it all settles over me like a shroud.

I am Death.

I always have been, and I always will be.

And that's why it's me who has to speak.

"Lilith," I say, my voice cutting through the oppressive silence. She doesn't turn at first, her focus unwavering, but then she shifts slightly, her gaze flicking to mine.

Her expression is unreadable, but there's a fire in her eyes, a determination that burns brighter than anything I've ever seen. She's made her choice. I can see it in the way she holds herself, in the way she breathes. But she hasn't thought this through. Not all the way. Not to the end.

"You know what happens when we do this," I say, my voice low but steady. "This isn't just about opening the portal. It's about what comes after. About what this will do to you."

She tilts her head slightly, her lips curving into a faint smile. "You think I don't know what I'm doing?"

"I think you don't know what this will cost," I reply. "You've embraced your role, your power. But the portal... It doesn't just give. It takes. Even from you."

She steps closer, her movements deliberate, her gaze locked on mine. "And what do you think it will take from me, Ewan? My humanity? That's already gone. My soul? That belongs to Asmodeus."

I shake my head, my jaw tightening. "It's not that simple. The portal doesn't care about love or devotion. It doesn't care about power. It's chaos, Lilith. It's destruction. And once it's open, you might not be able to control it. You might not be able to control yourself."

Her smile falters for just a moment, a flicker of something—doubt, maybe, or hesitation—but then it's gone, replaced by the same fierce determination that brought

us here. “I don’t need control,” she says. “I need freedom. For me. For him. For all of us.”

“And when that freedom comes at the cost of everything else?” I press, my voice sharper now. “When it consumes the world, the people, the very balance that keeps us tethered? What then?”

She doesn’t answer immediately, her gaze drifting back to the portal. The silence stretches between us, heavy and suffocating, until she finally speaks.

“Then it burns,” she says, her voice a quiet, resolute whisper. “And I’ll burn with it if I have to.”

Her words hit me like a physical blow, and for a moment, I can’t breathe. I want to argue, to fight, to make her see reason, but I know it’s pointless. She’s already made her choice. She’s chosen Asmodeus. She’s chosen this.

And I’ve chosen her.

I nod slowly, my chest tightening as I take another step closer. “If this is what you want,” I say, my voice barely above a whisper, “then I’ll follow you. Into the fire, into the darkness—wherever this leads, I’ll be there. But know this, Lilith. There’s no coming back. Not for any of us.”

She turns to face me fully now, her gaze steady, her expression softening just enough to remind me of the woman she used to be. “I know,” she says. “And I wouldn’t ask you to. I need you, Ewan. All of you. Until the end.”

Her hand reaches out, brushing against my cheek, and I close my eyes at the warmth of her touch. It’s brief, fleeting, but it’s enough. Enough to remind me why I’m here, why I’ve always been here. I am Death. She is destruction. And together, we are

unstoppable.

The others move closer now, their presence grounding me as Lilith steps back toward the portal. Kaua's fists are clenched, his feral energy barely contained. Nevan's gaze is sharp, calculating, as if he's already two steps ahead. Vito's smirk is gone, replaced by something colder, darker. They're all ready. They've all made their choice.

And as Lilith raises her hands, the portal responds, its energy flaring wildly, filling the room with a deafening roar. The ground trembles beneath us, cracks spidering out from the base of the portal, and the air grows thick with heat and darkness.

This is it. This is the end.

And as the first tendrils of the portal's energy reach out toward us, wrapping around Lilith like an embrace, I take a deep breath and step forward, ready to meet the darkness head-on.

Whatever happens next, I will stand by her side.

Until the end.

40 - Lilith

The air around me vibrates with energy, heavy and suffocating, like the world is holding its breath. The portal looms before us, its fractured surface bleeding shadows and light in chaotic bursts. I feel it calling to me, pulling at the edges of who I am—or who I was. Vienna is still here, clinging to the edges of my consciousness like a ghost, fragile and trembling. But she won't be here for long.

This is the moment I've been waiting for. The moment everything changes.

The horsemen stand at my side, their presence grounding me, yet their power hums like a storm ready to break. Ewan is to my left, quiet and resolute, his gaze fixed on the portal. Kaua is restless, his muscles coiled like a predator waiting to strike. Nevan watches me with sharp, calculating eyes, and Vito's smirk is gone, replaced by something far darker, far more reverent.

And Asmodeus—my Asmodeus—is here too. He lingers in the shadows, his form shifting between solid and smoke, his presence an anchor and a promise. His voice murmurs softly in the back of my mind, a low hum of encouragement and devotion.

"It's time, my love. Say the words."

The words. The ones only I know. The incantation etched into my very soul, the key to opening the portal and unleashing everything it holds. I feel them burning in my throat, ancient and powerful, waiting for release. But once I speak them, there will be no going back. Vienna will be gone. I will be gone. Only Lilith will remain.

I close my eyes, taking a deep, shuddering breath. In the darkness behind my eyelids, I see her—Vienna. She stands there, fragile and afraid, the girl who fought so hard to survive, who clung to hope even when there was none. She looks at me with wide, terrified eyes, and for a moment, I falter.

“You don’t have to do this,” she whispers, her voice trembling. “You can still turn back.”

I smile softly, sadly, as I step closer to her, my hand reaching out to cup her face. “I have to,” I say, my voice steady despite the ache in my chest. “This is who we are. Who we’ve always been.”

Her lips tremble, her hands clutching at mine. “But what happens to me?”

“You rest,” I say gently, leaning in to press a kiss to her forehead. “You’ve done enough. Let me take it from here.”

She nods, tears streaming down her face, and then she fades, her form dissolving into nothingness. For the first time, I feel the weight of her lift from my shoulders. Vienna is gone. And in her place stands Lilith.

I open my eyes, the portal blazing before me, and I feel the change begin. It starts as a warmth in my chest, spreading out in fiery tendrils that crawl under my skin, searing and unrelenting. The pain is indescribable, an all-consuming inferno that burns away everything I was. My humanity crumbles beneath it, each piece of Vienna turning to ash as the fire spreads.

I cry out, the sound raw and guttural, but I don’t stop. I can’t stop. The words bubble up from deep within me, ancient and primal, spilling from my lips in a voice that isn’t entirely mine.

“Ignis tenebris, ostende mihi regnum tuum. Aperi portas inferni.”

The incantation echoes through the room, reverberating off the walls and blending with the roar of the portal. The pain intensifies, blinding and consuming, and I fall to my knees, my hands clawing at the stone floor as I scream.

I feel everything I was—the fear, the hope, the love—burning away, leaving only raw, unrestrained power in its place. My mortality is ripped from me, torn apart piece by piece, until there’s nothing left but Lilith. Pure, unbridled, and eternal.

When the pain finally subsides, I collapse forward, my breath coming in ragged gasps. The room is silent except for the hum of the portal, and as I push myself to my feet, I feel... different. Lighter. Stronger.

Power thrums through me, coursing through my veins like liquid fire. My skin feels electric, my senses sharper than ever. I look down at my hands, flexing my fingers, and they glow faintly with the remnants of the portal’s energy. My reflection catches my eye in the fractured surface of the portal, and I hardly recognize myself.

My eyes are darker, almost black, with a faint red glow at the edges. My features are sharper, more striking, and my smile... it’s no longer Vienna’s smile. It’s mine. Lilith’s.

I turn to the others, and their expressions say everything. Awe. Fear. Devotion. Even Asmodeus, who has known me across lifetimes, looks at me like he’s seeing me for the first time.

“Lilith,” Ewan says, his voice low and reverent.

I nod, stepping toward him, my movements fluid and deliberate. “She’s gone,” I say, my voice steady. “Vienna is gone. And now... I am who I was always meant to be.”

He watches me, his expression unreadable, and for a moment, I wonder if he'll say something more. But then he nods, his gaze softening. "I'll follow you," he says. "Wherever this leads."

I smile, my hand reaching out to cup his face. "I know you will."

I move to the others, my presence commanding as I take each of them in turn. Kaua's feral grin widens as I touch his shoulder, and Nevan bows his head slightly, his sharp eyes never leaving mine. Vito's smirk returns, but there's a new glint in his eyes, one of pure devotion. And Asmodeus... he steps closer, his form solidifying as his hand brushes against mine.

"You're perfect," he murmurs, his voice full of pride. "Just as you were always meant to be."

I nod, turning back to the portal. It shudders violently now, the cracks spreading and glowing with an otherworldly light. The words I spoke still linger in the air, and I can feel the final barrier breaking.

This is it. This is the moment.

The portal bursts open, its energy flooding the room in a blinding flash of light and shadow. The ground shakes beneath us, and I feel the weight of eternity settle over me.

I am Lilith. And the world will never be the same.

41 - Lilith

The words spill from my lips like venom, laced with ancient power and a weight that makes the air around me tremble. The final syllable reverberates through the room, and for a moment, the world holds its breath. Then it happens.

The portal shudders, and a crack of fiery energy slices through its center. It splits wide, spilling Hell's essence into Briarwood in violent, pulsating waves. Shadows leap and twist, stretching unnaturally along the walls, their jagged shapes distorting as if alive. The once-sterile white halls are devoured by creeping darkness, the pale fluorescence replaced with a dim, blood-red glow.

It is beautiful.

The energy is intoxicating, a heady rush that makes my pulse race and my skin tingle. I can feel it—the power of Hell, the very essence of destruction and chaos, seeping into every corner of the building. The walls groan under its weight, cracks spidering across their surfaces as if the structure itself is trying to recoil from the darkness.

Behind me, the horsemen stir, their reactions primal and raw. The portal's energy pulses through them, awakening something deep within—something ancient, something terrible.

Vito is the first to change. His form straightens, his eyes blazing with a golden light that burns with the hunger of conquest. He clenches his fists, and I swear I can feel the ripple of his will bending the very air around him. The smirk on his lips is dangerous, full of promise and inevitability.

“This,” he murmurs, his voice dripping with satisfaction, “is what we were made for.”

Beside him, Kaua’s transformation is even more visceral. His body tenses, his muscles coiling like a predator about to strike. His hands flex, and the energy rolling off him is violent, barely contained. His eyes are alight with the primal urge for battle, his teeth bared in a grin that is more feral than human.

He looks at me, and I see the fire in his gaze, the promise of destruction. “This world is going to burn,” he growls.

Nevan’s change is subtler, but no less chilling. His touch leaves a trail of decay, the very floor beneath his feet withering to ash. The light around him dims, as if his presence alone is enough to snuff out vitality. His expression is calm, almost serene, but there is a quiet hunger in his eyes—a hunger that cannot be sated.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” he says softly, his voice carrying a note of reverence.

And then there’s Ewan.

He stands at the edge of the portal, his figure cloaked in shadows that seem to ripple and shift with a life of their own. His eyes are dark, endless voids that draw in the light around him, and his very presence chills the air. Death radiates from him, a cold, inevitable force that cannot be denied.

“We’re complete now,” he says, his voice a low rumble that sends a shiver down my spine.

I step forward, feeling the power of the portal wash over me in waves. It wraps around me like a lover, familiar and all-consuming. The final transformation has begun. The last vestiges of Vienna, the fragile mortal I once was, burn away, replaced

entirely by Lilith—the queen of Hell, the mother of chaos, the harbinger of ruin.

I lift my hand, feeling the energy coil around my fingers like smoke. The horsemen watch me, their gazes filled with awe and devotion. They are no longer just men; they are avatars of destruction, embodiments of the apocalypse.

“Are you ready?” I ask, my voice laced with power.

Vito steps forward, his smirk widening. “I’ve been ready for centuries.”

Kaua cracks his knuckles, his grin feral. “Let’s give them something to remember.”

Nevan inclines his head, his calm demeanor betraying the storm that brews beneath. “Lead us, my queen.”

And Ewan, my constant, my Death, steps to my side. “Always.”

Together, we march forward, the portal’s energy surging around us. The walls of Briarwood buckle and crack, the building itself warping under the strain of the darkness that now consumes it. The sound of distant screams echoes through the halls, the remaining staff and patients caught in the storm of chaos.

As we move, the horsemen unleash their powers, each step a declaration of their dominion.

Vito’s influence is palpable. The few orderlies who dare to stand in our way turn on each other, their minds twisted by his will. They claw and fight, driven to madness by the force of his presence.

Kaua charges ahead, his movements a blur of violence. His fists connect with the walls, with doors, with anyone foolish enough to stand in his path. Each impact sends

shockwaves rippling through the air, the very foundation of Briarwood trembling beneath his strength.

Nevan follows behind, his mere presence draining the life from everything around him. Plants wither, the air grows stale, and even the light seems to dim as he passes. The energy he exudes is suffocating, a quiet, relentless force that leaves only desolation in its wake.

And Ewan...

Ewan moves like a shadow, silent and deadly. His touch brings death, instant and absolute. The guards who try to stop us collapse without a sound, their bodies crumpling to the floor as the life drains from their eyes.

I watch them with pride, my heart swelling as I see the destruction we unleash together. This is what we were meant for. This is our destiny.

We reach the heart of Briarwood, the portal's energy pulsing like a heartbeat. The air is thick with power, the scent of sulfur and ash filling my lungs.

Asmodeus steps through the portal, his form more terrifying and magnificent than ever. His eyes lock on mine, and for a moment, the chaos around us fades.

"You've done well, my queen," he says, his voice a low growl that sends shivers through me.

I smile, the power of Hell coursing through me. "It's just the beginning."

And together, we prepare to bring the world to its knees.

42 – Lilith

The air around us vibrates with the force of the portal's power, its energy crashing against the walls like a relentless tide. Shadows twist and writhe in every corner, taking on forms both monstrous and beautiful, dancing in reverence for what is to come. The ground trembles beneath our feet, fissures spreading outward like veins of molten energy. I can feel the weight of eternity pressing down on me, heavy and intoxicating.

And then, through the portal, he steps into the mortal world.

Asmodeus.

His form is impossibly large, yet he seems to fill the room without crowding it, his presence all-consuming. He is cloaked in darkness, the edges of his form melting into the shadows like he is one with them. His features are both grotesque and beautiful, as if the very essence of his being refuses to settle on a single form. His skin gleams faintly with an otherworldly sheen, his eyes burning with an eternal, flickering fire. Horns curve elegantly from his head, and his wings—vast and leathery—spread out behind him, casting the room in shadow.

He is magnificent. Terrifying. Perfect.

I cannot move. My chest tightens as I take him in, the air stolen from my lungs by his sheer presence. This is the true form of the being I've loved across lifetimes, the demon I've fought and bled for. And as his gaze falls on me, all-consuming and filled with something dark and pure, I feel my knees weaken.

The horsemen fall silent, their power subdued in the presence of their king. Kaua's ever-present feral grin softens, his hands lowering as if to offer respect. Vito tilts his head, his smirk gone, replaced by a look of reverence. Nevan watches with a keen, calculating intensity, and even Ewan—my Death, so unyielding—lowers his gaze slightly, his respect evident.

But Asmodeus isn't looking at them. He is looking at me .

"Lilith," he says, his voice a deep, resonant rumble that fills the space and seeps into my bones. It is a voice that commands, that consumes, but when he speaks my name, it softens, becoming something almost gentle.

I cannot speak. My throat feels tight, my words caught somewhere between fear and awe. But I do not need to. Asmodeus moves toward me, his steps slow and deliberate, the ground shaking faintly with each one. The shadows seem to part for him, bowing in his wake, and the heat of his presence envelops me like a storm.

When he reaches me, he stops, towering over me yet making me feel as though I am the only thing that matters in this shattered world. His hand reaches out, clawed yet elegant, and he takes mine, his touch both cold and burning.

"You have freed me," he says, his eyes locking onto mine. "You, my queen. My goddess. You defied Heaven and Hell to bring me here, to stand by my side once more."

His words wrap around me like a caress, and I can feel the truth in them. The love. The devotion. It is overwhelming, consuming, but I do not flinch. I do not look away.

"I would do it again," I whisper, my voice trembling but resolute. "A thousand times, in a thousand lifetimes."

His lips curve into a smile, dark and dangerous, yet filled with something so profound it makes my heart ache. “And I would wait for you, through every one.”

He pulls me closer, his hands resting on my waist as he lowers his face to mine. His breath is warm against my skin, and the fire in his eyes burns brighter. “You are mine, Lilith. And I am yours. Now, always, and forever.”

I nod, my hands trembling as they reach up to touch his face. His skin is smooth and warm beneath my fingers, his power radiating through every inch of him. “Always,” I echo, my voice steady now.

And then he kisses me.

It is not a soft kiss. It is not gentle or tender. It is fierce and consuming, a clash of fire and shadow, of darkness and desire. His lips claim mine with an urgency that borders on desperation, his hands pulling me closer until there is no space left between us. I can feel his power seeping into me, mingling with my own, creating something stronger, darker, unstoppable.

The world around us seems to fall away. The tremors of the portal, the distant sounds of battle, even the presence of the horsemen—it all fades into nothingness. There is only him, only us, locked together in this moment of absolute, unbreakable unity.

When we finally pull apart, his forehead rests against mine, his breath mingling with mine as the fire in his eyes softens. “You have no idea how long I’ve waited for this,” he murmurs, his voice barely above a whisper.

I smile, my fingers tracing the sharp line of his jaw. “I think I do.”

The moment lingers, charged with a quiet intensity, before the world crashes back into focus. The portal behind us roars with power, its energy spilling into the room

and rippling outward. The air grows heavier, hotter, as the true apocalypse begins.

The horsemen step forward now, their power building as they take their place beside us. Kaua's eyes gleam with an unrestrained hunger for battle, his fists clenched and ready. Vito's smirk returns, his confidence radiating as he surveys the chaos. Nevan's presence grows darker, his aura of famine spreading like a shadow across the ground. And Ewan... Ewan stands tall and unyielding, his touch of death lingering in the air like a promise.

This is it. This is the moment we were made for. The end of the world. The beginning of ours.

Asmodeus pulls me closer, his arms wrapping around me as his wings spread wide, casting us in shadow. "Let it burn," he says, his voice a low growl. "Let it all burn."

And as the first flames lick at the edges of the portal, I smile.

We will burn it all. Together.

43 - Asmodeus

The portal's energy courses through me like a dark, relentless tide, filling every inch of my being with power that has been denied for too long. It is a reunion with my true self, the culmination of eons of waiting and watching, and it surges through the air around us, shaping the chaos I've longed to unleash.

The horsemen, my allies and instruments of destruction, now radiate with the force of their true selves. Each of them is an embodiment of apocalypse, and I, Asmodeus, stand at the center of this storm, my Lilith by my side.

I can feel her exhilaration, her newfound strength and confidence, as her laughter echoes softly behind me. She is a goddess of destruction, a queen at my side, and the sight of her—eyes glowing with power, lips curled into a dark smile—only fuels the darkness within me.

I turn my gaze to Vito first, the embodiment of Conquest. He strides through the halls of Briarwood with a smug confidence, his every step radiating influence. The guards and staff, once regimented and loyal to their angelic overlords, are now consumed by his power. I watch as their expressions twist, jealousy and rage overtaking reason.

One guard turns on another, screaming accusations of betrayal, and they begin to claw at each other, their fists colliding in blind fury. A nurse nearby, trembling with envy over something as insignificant as a stolen glance, picks up a metal tray and bashes it against her colleague's head with a scream. Vito's laughter fills the air, his smirk growing wider as the chaos he sows takes root.

“Beautiful,” I murmur, my voice low and full of approval. “Let them tear each other apart.”

Vito turns to me briefly, his eyes gleaming with dark satisfaction. “It’s almost too easy,” he says, his voice dripping with venom. “Humans are always on the brink of destruction. All they need is a push.”

As if to punctuate his point, another wave of discord ripples through the institution. The once-sterile halls are now stained with blood and screams, the pristine white walls splattered with the results of Vito’s influence.

Further down the corridor, Kaua barrels forward like an unstoppable force of nature. War incarnate. His fists collide with walls, desks, and bodies alike, each blow leaving destruction in its wake. The fire in his eyes burns brighter with every step, his grin feral as he revels in the chaos. His movements are raw and unrestrained, each swing of his fists carrying the weight of a thousand battles.

I watch as he grabs an orderly by the throat, lifting him off the ground with ease before slamming him into the floor. The crack of bones reverberates through the air, and Kaua’s laugh follows close behind.

“This place was far too orderly,” he growls, his voice like the rumble of thunder. “Now it feels alive.”

“Alive?” I say, smirking as I approach him. “Or closer to death?”

He meets my gaze, his grin widening, and nods. “Both.”

Nevan’s power, though quieter, is no less devastating. His presence alone is enough to rot everything around him, a creeping hunger that devours life itself. The air grows colder as he passes, and I watch as the food trays left abandoned in the chaos crumble

to dust, the flowers in the decorative vases wilting and falling apart. Even the guards who manage to stand against Vito's influence falter as Nevan approaches, their vitality draining from their bodies.

I catch a glimpse of his expression, a mixture of grim satisfaction and predatory hunger, as he reaches out to touch the corner of a desk. It collapses instantly, the wood turning brittle and disintegrating under his fingers. A guard stumbles toward him, weapon raised, but before the man can get close, he drops to his knees, his face pale and gaunt.

"Starved of life," Nevan murmurs, his voice a low, haunting whisper. "Everything must wither eventually."

And then there is Ewan, my Death. He moves with a quiet, deliberate purpose, his touch the final note in this symphony of destruction. Each person he brushes against falls silent, their bodies collapsing with no time for screams or struggle. His steps are unhurried, his expression unreadable, but the aura of death around him is unmistakable.

I watch as he walks through a cluster of guards, his hand outstretched. One by one, they fall, their eyes wide with the realization of their mortality. Their bodies crumble, the life drained from them in an instant, and Ewan steps over them without a glance back.

"You've always been efficient," I say as I catch up to him, my tone laced with admiration.

He doesn't look at me, his gaze fixed ahead. "It's not about efficiency," he says. "It's about inevitability."

Lilith watches it all with a dark, radiant joy. Her power hums in the air, blending with

the chaos, amplifying it. She is more alive now than I have ever seen her, her confidence unshakable as she surveys the destruction we have wrought.

“This is what freedom feels like,” she says, her voice tinged with exhilaration. “No chains. No gods. Just power.”

I step closer to her, my hand brushing against hers. “This is what you were meant for,” I say. “To stand by my side and burn the world to ash.”

Her smile deepens, and she turns to face me fully, her eyes blazing. “And I will. But first, Briarwood must fall.”

With her words, the energy in the air intensifies. The walls of the institution groan under the weight of the portal’s power, cracks spreading like veins through the building. The chaos within mirrors the destruction outside, the screams of the guards and staff blending into a symphony of annihilation.

This is what I have waited for. What we have all waited for. The end of order. The beginning of chaos. And as I stand here, surrounded by the horsemen and my queen, I feel a satisfaction so profound it borders on ecstasy.

The apocalypse has begun, and there is no turning back.

44 - Lilith

The air is a cacophony of screams and battle cries, the portal's dark energy pulsing like a living thing. It feeds me, wrapping around my body, surging through my veins until I am drunk on its power. Briarwood is unrecognizable now—a fractured husk of what it once was, overrun by chaos and destruction. I stand at the heart of it, the portal at my back, Asmodeus at my side, and my horsemen wreaking havoc around us.

The sound of wings slicing through the air draws my attention, a sharp, almost melodic hum that pierces the chaotic symphony. The angels descend, their radiant forms a stark contrast to the darkness we have unleashed. Their weapons gleam with celestial light, and their faces are set with grim determination.

I smile. Let them come.

They aim for the portal first, their movements swift and calculated. I see Michael among them, his eyes blazing with righteous fury as he raises a blade of pure light. His voice cuts through the din like a sharp wind. "Seal it! Do not let them escape!"

Seal it? As if they could.

I step forward, my hand outstretched, and the portal pulses in response, its energy flaring outward like a protective shield. The angels falter, their forms dimming slightly as the portal's darkness pushes back against their light.

"Not today," I murmur, my voice low and dangerous.

Asmodeus moves beside me, his towering form casting a shadow over the angels. His laughter is a deep, resonant growl, filled with amusement and menace. “They always think they can win,” he says, his eyes locked on Michael. “And they are always wrong.”

The angels charge, their light searing against the darkness, and the battle erupts.

Vito is the first to move, stepping into the fray with a smirk that borders on cruel. He raises a hand, his power rippling outward in invisible waves. The angels hesitate, their movements faltering as their wills bend under his influence. I watch as one angel turns on another, his celestial blade slicing through his comrade with precision. The betrayed angel lets out a scream that is both human and inhuman, a sound that echoes in the air like shattered glass.

“Divide and conquer,” Vito says, his tone mocking as he steps closer to his next victim. “It’s almost too easy.”

Kaua is a force of nature, a storm of rage and destruction that cannot be contained. He charges into the angels with a roar, his fists colliding with their radiant forms. Each punch lands with a sound like thunder, their light dimming under the sheer force of his blows. He grabs one angel by the wings, tearing them apart with a sickening crack before slamming the body into the ground.

“Fight me!” he roars, his voice echoing through the battlefield. “Come at me with everything you’ve got, or don’t bother coming at all!”

Nevan is quieter, his presence less overt but no less deadly. He moves through the fray like a shadow, his aura of famine spreading outward. The angels weaken as they approach him, their strength draining from their bodies, their movements slowing. One angel raises her blade to strike him, but her arms falter, her weapon falling from her grasp as she collapses to the ground, her once-radiant form now dull and lifeless.

“You can’t fight hunger,” Nevan murmurs, his voice a soft, haunting whisper. “It consumes everything.”

And then there’s Ewan. My Death. He moves with a grace that is almost beautiful, his steps deliberate, his touch lethal. Each angel he encounters falls with a single, silent touch, their bodies crumbling into ash before they even have a chance to scream. He is unyielding, unrelenting, a force that cannot be stopped.

The angels begin to falter, their ranks thinning, but they are stubborn. They keep coming, their light burning brighter as if to compensate for their dwindling numbers. Michael leads them, his blade slicing through the air as he charges toward me.

I brace myself, but before he can reach me, Asmodeus intercepts him. Their clash is a sight to behold—light against shadow, celestial against infernal. Asmodeus moves with a predatory grace, his claws deflecting Michael’s blade as they circle each other.

“You’re a fool to think you can stop us,” Asmodeus says, his voice a low growl. “This is her destiny, Michael. And you will not take it from her.”

Michael’s eyes blaze with defiance. “I will not let you destroy this world.”

“Destroy it?” Asmodeus laughs, his claws slashing through the air. “We’re going to remake it.”

I can’t help but smile as I watch him fight, his power and presence a perfect match for mine. He is chaos incarnate, and together, we are unstoppable.

But Michael isn’t the only threat. More angels surge toward the portal, their desperation growing. I raise my hands, summoning the portal’s energy, and unleash it in a wave of darkness that sends them reeling. They scream as the shadows consume them, their light snuffed out like candles in a storm.

Behind me, the horsemen continue their assault, their powers tearing through the angels with ease. The once-pristine halls of Briarwood are now a battlefield, littered with bodies and drenched in chaos.

And I? I revel in it.

This is what I was made for. To stand at the center of destruction, to command my forces, to be a queen in the chaos. I turn my gaze to Asmodeus, who meets my eyes as he drives Michael back, his movements fluid and precise.

“Lilith,” he says, his voice a dark caress even in the midst of battle. “This is your moment.”

I nod, stepping forward, the portal’s energy wrapping around me like a cloak. The angels falter as I approach, their light dimming under the weight of my presence. I am no longer Vienna. I am no longer mortal. I am Lilith, queen of the damned, and this world will bow to me.

And as the last of the angels fall, their light extinguished, I turn to Asmodeus, my smile dark and triumphant. “It begins,” I say, my voice steady and commanding.

“Yes,” he replies, his eyes burning with pride and love. “And together, we will end it.”

The battlefield falls silent, the portal roaring behind us, and I know that this is only the beginning. Together, we will tear this world apart. Together, we will reign.

45 - Lilith

The battlefield falls silent. The air hums with the residual power of the portal, the stench of blood and decay thick in my lungs. The angels lie broken at our feet, their celestial light snuffed out, their attempts to stop us futile. I stand in the center of it all, the portal's energy curling around me like a cloak, its dark tendrils embracing me as if welcoming me home.

I look at my horsemen. My warriors. My devoted apostles of chaos. Each of them is marked by their purpose, their powers heightened, their auras crackling with the raw energy of the portal. Kaua, bruised and bloodstained, his fists still clenched with the fury of war. Vito, his smirk sharp and satisfied, the remnants of his manipulations lingering in the air. Nevan, quiet and haunting, his presence still draining the life from everything around him. And Ewan, my Death, his expression calm and resolute, his touch having ended countless lives today.

And Asmodeus. My lover. My king. He stands at my side, his towering form exuding a power that rivals the portal itself. His eyes burn with pride, with adoration, and I feel his hand brush mine, grounding me, claiming me.

I am not Vienna anymore. I haven't been for some time. That fragile, mortal girl is gone, burned away by the fires of the portal. I am Lilith now, fully and completely, and I am free .

The portal pulses behind me, its energy fueling me, giving me the strength to do what must be done. I step forward, my movements deliberate, commanding. My horsemen turn their attention to me, their eyes filled with unwavering loyalty. They are mine.

Every part of them belongs to me, and I to them. Together, we will bring this world to its knees.

“You’ve done well,” I say, my voice ringing out, cold and sharp. “The angels are no more, their light extinguished. But our work is far from finished.”

Kaua grins, his knuckles cracking as he flexes his hands. “Say the word, my queen, and I’ll bring the rest of the world to ruin.”

“All in time,” I reply, my gaze sweeping over them. “The portal’s power is ours now. It feeds us, strengthens us. With it, we can unleash chaos upon the world, tear down its foundations, and rebuild it in our image.”

Vito’s smirk widens, his eyes glinting with anticipation. “Finally. A world worth ruling.”

“But first,” I say, my tone darkening, “there is a personal matter I wish to address.”

The air grows heavier, the energy around us shifting as my voice sharpens, laced with a cruelty I didn’t know I was capable of. My empathy is gone, stripped away by the portal’s power, leaving only this: a righteous, burning desire for vengeance.

“Vienna’s parents,” I say, my voice steady and ice-cold. “They made their daughter suffer. They cast her aside, ignored her pleas, left her to rot in the darkness they created. I want them to pay for what they’ve done.”

Nevan tilts his head, his gaze thoughtful. “And how would you like them to suffer, my queen?”

I step closer to them, my hands clenched at my sides. “I want them to feel the weight of their sins. I want them to know what it means to beg for mercy and to have their

pleas fall on deaf ears. I want their screams to echo through the halls of Hell, unanswered and unrelenting.”

The horsemen exchange glances, their expressions darkening with understanding. Kaua grins, his teeth gleaming. “I can make that happen.”

“They will know pain,” Vito says, his tone light but edged with malice. “They’ll destroy themselves before we even have to lift a finger.”

“I’ll drain them of everything they hold dear,” Nevan adds, his voice soft and chilling. “Their life, their hope, their will.”

Ewan steps forward, his gaze meeting mine. “And when they’ve suffered enough, I’ll bring them to you. Their deaths will be yours to command.”

My heart swells with a dark pride as I look at them, my horsemen, my loyal harbingers of destruction. They would raze the earth for me, and I would let them.

“Do it,” I say, my voice unwavering. “Make them suffer. Make them beg. And when they do, make sure I can hear it.”

They nod as one, their loyalty absolute. Each of them turns toward the portal, drawing upon its energy, their powers growing even stronger as they prepare to ride forth and unleash their wrath upon humanity.

Kaua steps forward first, his fists glowing with a fiery energy that crackles and burns. “War will come to them,” he says, his voice a growl. “And it won’t end until there’s nothing left.”

Vito follows, his smirk widening as he raises his hand, his power shimmering in the air. “They’ll turn on each other,” he says. “Their minds will be mine to twist and

break.”

Nevan moves next, his presence growing colder, his aura of famine spreading outward. “They’ll starve,” he says, his voice barely above a whisper. “Of everything.”

Ewan steps last, his touch bringing a chill to the air as he brushes past me. “And in the end,” he says, his voice steady and final, “there will be only death.”

As they prepare to leave, Asmodeus moves beside me, his hand resting on my shoulder. “You’ve embraced your destiny, my love,” he says, his voice low and filled with pride. “You are everything I knew you would be.”

I turn to him, my eyes burning with determination. “This is only the beginning.”

He smiles, his fangs glinting in the dim light. “Then let us make it a beginning worth remembering.”

As I watch the horsemen step through the portal, their forms disappearing into the swirling darkness, I feel no remorse. No hesitation. Only purpose. Only power.

This is what I was meant to do. To rule. To destroy. To create. The world will burn, and from its ashes, we will rise.

And I will stand at the center of it all, a queen in the chaos, my lover and my horsemen by my side.

Forever.

46 - Lilith

I stand at the threshold of the world, my gaze fixed on the horizon, where the land stretches out before me like a canvas. The four of them are with me, my horsemen, each one embodying the very essence of destruction that now courses through the Earth. The world is about to change, and we are the catalysts of that change.

With the portal's energy coursing through us, we have become something far greater than what we were. Each of them is more powerful than ever, their true forms revealed, their abilities honed to perfection. I can feel the power in the air, crackling with anticipation. The time has come to set the world ablaze, and it will burn until there is nothing left but ash.

Asmodeus stands at my side, his arm around my waist, his presence grounding me. He is my king, my lover, my equal. Together, we are unstoppable. I look up at him, and he meets my gaze with a smile that makes my heart quicken. This is what we were born for—this destruction, this reign of darkness. And it will be glorious.

Vito steps forward, his movements smooth and controlled, his eyes glinting with the thrill of what's to come. He doesn't speak, but his very presence shifts the air, filling it with an oppressive weight. He is Conquest, the harbinger of corruption, the one who will tear the fabric of the world apart.

Kaua moves next, his broad shoulders rippling with power, his fists clenched at his sides. His rage is a force of nature, and when he moves, the Earth trembles beneath him. He is War, and when he takes action, nothing is left standing in his wake.

Nevan steps behind him, his movements quiet, almost ethereal. He is the embodiment of Famine, and wherever he goes, hunger follows. The world will starve under his influence, crops will wither, and the weak will perish. His hunger is insatiable, and it will be the Earth that feeds him.

Ewan, my Death, stands at the rear. His presence is a void, a coldness that freezes the very air around him. He is the end of all things, the one who will take life from the world with a single touch. He is the silent force that will claim the souls of the living, leaving nothing but emptiness in his wake.

Together, we are unstoppable. And we are going to make this world burn.

I turn to face the sky, the winds beginning to howl as if in response to the energy building around us. The time has come to unleash hell.

“Go,” I say softly, my voice carrying the weight of command.

Vito doesn’t hesitate. He steps forward, his eyes narrowing as he surveys the world before him. His power surges, and I can feel it. The leaders of nations will bow to him, or they will burn. It doesn’t matter to him. His mind twists and manipulates, and soon, the world will be embroiled in war.

His powers are subtle, insidious, infiltrating the minds of rulers and kings, turning them against each other with whispers of corruption, with promises of power. Nations will fall into disarray as alliances crumble, and violence will tear through the land. It has begun. I can feel the tremors of it, the first cracks forming beneath the surface.

Kaua follows, his presence a hurricane of violence. His power surges outward, and I can feel it in my bones—the violence, the fury, the battles that will rage across the world. Wars will break out in every corner of the Earth, civil unrest rising like a tidal wave. His influence is a fire, spreading faster than anyone can comprehend. And

when Kaua fights, it is a war unlike any other. There is no mercy, no pause. Only chaos.

His roar echoes through the air as he charges forward, and I smile, a cold, cruel smile.

Nevan is next. His steps are slow, deliberate, as if he's savoring the moment. The hunger within him stirs, and I can feel it—feel the world begin to wither in response to his power. Crops will die, the Earth will grow barren, and people will starve. It's already beginning. I can feel the land grow cold, the crops shriveling in the fields, the air thick with an unnatural hunger.

He is famine incarnate, and soon, there will be no food left to sustain the human race. They will be hollowed out, driven by desperation and hunger, and those who survive will be nothing more than shells of their former selves.

Ewan stands silent, his eyes scanning the horizon. His power is different—more subtle, but no less deadly. His presence brings a chill to the air, and I can feel the life around us begin to fade. He is Death, and with each step he takes, more and more lives are claimed. The people who wander through this world unaware of what is coming will not live to see another day. They will fall before him, their lives extinguished in an instant, their bodies empty of breath.

Ewan moves forward, and I can feel the dread that follows him, the silent wave of mortality that rolls over the Earth. As he walks, the world grows quieter, as if the very life within it is being siphoned away. And with each life he takes, I feel stronger, more powerful.

I stand at the center of it all, watching as my horsemen take the world to the brink of ruin. The sky darkens, swirling with the energy of the portal, crackling with power. The winds howl, and the fires that begin to rage in the distance fill the air with an acrid smoke. Cities will crumble, governments will fall, and humanity will be left in

ruins.

And we will be the ones to watch it all burn.

I feel Asmodeus' presence behind me, his arms encircling me as he pulls me close. "We've done it, my queen," he whispers in my ear, his voice low and reverent. "The world is ours."

I turn to him, my eyes burning with the same dark intensity that fuels me. "It is only just beginning," I reply, my voice filled with dark satisfaction.

The world will burn. And when it does, we will rise from its ashes, rulers of the new world.

The chaos, the destruction, the violence—it all feeds me. It strengthens me. And there is no turning back now. I am Lilith, and this is my destiny.

I reach out, feeling the heat of the fires, the tremors beneath my feet. The Earth is alive with the power we've unleashed, and I revel in it. This is what I was born to do—this is why I was created. To destroy, to rule, to make the world burn.

And I will stand at the center of it all, my horsemen at my side, my lover by my side, and together, we will watch the world fall to its knees.

The apocalypse has arrived, and it is ours to command.

47 - Lilith

The world burns around us, a symphony of chaos and despair. The fires stretch into the sky, black clouds of smoke billowing above cities that once stood proud, now reduced to smoldering ruins. The screams of the broken and dying fill the air, a melody that is sweet and haunting. I stand at the center of it all, my eyes wide with the thrill of it. My heart beats to the rhythm of destruction. Asmodeus stands beside me, his presence a steadying force in the midst of the madness.

He looks at me, his dark eyes full of understanding, full of something more. His hand rests gently on the curve of my waist, and for a moment, I feel the weight of everything that has led us here. This is what we've always been destined for. The end. And then the beginning again.

"We have done it, my queen," Asmodeus says, his voice low, a growl in the back of his throat. His words are both a celebration and a warning. He speaks not just of the devastation around us, but of something far older, something we both understand deep in our bones. The weight of eternity.

"I know," I reply, my voice thick with satisfaction. I look around at the devastation, feeling the power surge in my veins, the feeling of the world unraveling beneath my feet. I am the queen of this chaos, the one who set it all into motion. I will watch it burn until nothing is left.

But Asmodeus' gaze is fixed on something else. His eyes narrow as he watches the distant sky, the horizon where the celestial bodies still hang, taunting us with their glimmers of light. "It will not last forever, you know. Even as we destroy, the angels

will rebuild. They always do.”

I turn to him, intrigued by the bitterness in his voice. "Rebuild? Do you think they will rise again, just like before?"

He gives a quiet, dark chuckle, the sound low and dangerous. “Of course they will. The cycle never ends. Heaven and Hell, creation and destruction. It’s the dance of eternity, Lilith. One cannot exist without the other. For every moment of ruin, there will be another moment of rebirth.”

I study him, intrigued by his words. He says them with such finality, as though he understands the depths of the universe’s design in ways I have yet to comprehend. His words speak of an inevitability, of a constant back-and-forth that will never end. His hand tightens slightly on my waist, the touch possessive, grounding me in the chaos that surrounds us.

“And you are content with that?” I ask, my voice laced with something darker now. “Content with this endless cycle of destruction?”

He smiles, but it’s not the gentle smile I’m used to. It’s something far colder. “Content? I don’t need contentment, Lilith. I am eternal. I exist beyond the need for peace, for rest, for joy. I am the embodiment of chaos, of corruption. The angels, the gods—they cannot destroy us. Not really. We will always return, always spread our darkness across the world. And when we do, it will be more glorious than before. We are the inevitable consequence of existence.”

I feel something stir inside me at his words. I am like him now—immortal, bound by nothing but the will to destroy. I do not need to be content. I don’t need anything but this power, this reign over the world that I have now. The pride I feel swells in my chest, and I turn back to the destruction, watching the fires rage as if it’s a beautiful thing.

“And when the world falls apart again?” I ask softly. “When the angels rebuild, what then? Will we have to do it all over again?”

Asmodeus steps forward, his form towering and dark against the glowing fires. His eyes gleam with a ferocity that matches my own. “Always,” he says, voice low, like a promise. “We will always return. We are the darkness that gives shape to the light. The end and the beginning. And together, we will never stop.”

His words echo in my mind, and something inside me responds. I have never been more alive than I am now, standing here with him, watching the world fall apart. It doesn’t matter that the angels will rebuild. It doesn’t matter that there will be other cycles of destruction. I have tasted power, tasted darkness, and now I am bound to it. There is no going back.

“I want them to suffer,” I say, my voice icy with finality. “Vienna’s parents. I want them to feel everything they made her feel. The agony, the helplessness. Let them scream for mercy, but never receive it.”

Asmodeus looks at me, his eyes dark with approval. “Done,” he says. “Their suffering will be as endless as the cycle itself. We will make them feel the weight of eternity, of every moment they took from you. They will beg. They will plead. And they will never escape.”

A dark smile twists my lips. This is what I was born for. This is my purpose—my destiny. I am Lilith, the queen of Hell, the one who was cast aside, only to rise again and bring ruin to all. And with Asmodeus by my side, we will bring about the end of everything.

“The cycle never ends, does it?” I murmur, more to myself than to him.

“No,” Asmodeus replies, his voice soft now, almost tender. “It never does. But with

you, my love, we will make it ours. We will shape it to our will.”

I feel the weight of his words settle on me like a cloak, wrapping me in something dark and eternal. I am his, and he is mine. And together, we will create and destroy, over and over again.

The world around us continues to burn, but it’s not just destruction I feel now. It’s creation, too. Every moment of violence, every scream, every death—they are all part of a new beginning. I see it now, as if the cycle of creation and destruction is a dance, a never-ending waltz that we are destined to lead. We are the darkness that makes the light shine brighter, the end that brings about the new beginning.

And I embrace it.

I turn my gaze back to the sky, watching as the heavens themselves begin to crack, the stars dimming beneath the weight of our power. The angels will come again, I know. They will rebuild, they will fight, and they will be driven by a need to stop us. But they will fail. They always do.

With a smile, I close my eyes and let myself feel it—the power, the destruction, the eternal cycle that we are bound to. I feel no fear, no doubt, only a sense of purpose. This is what we were born to do. This is why we exist.

Asmodeus’ hand tightens around mine, and I feel the heat of his touch, the warmth of his love. His presence fills me with a sense of fulfillment, a sense of completion. We are one, bound by our love, our power, and our destruction.

“We will never stop,” I whisper. “Together, we will never stop.”

And as we stand there, watching the world burn and knowing that it will rise again only to fall once more, I know one thing for sure: The cycle will continue. But it will

always be in our hands.

The end is just the beginning, and we are the ones who will shape it.

48 - Asmodeus

The Earth trembles beneath our feet, a world undone by chaos and destruction. Fires rage in the distance, their smoke curling into the heavens like black tendrils of defiance. The screams of humanity, once so sweet to my ears, now feel muted, their echoes fading beneath the light—the angels' counterstrike.

I can feel it, the sickening, familiar pull of their power. Waves of light ripple through the land, spreading like an infection, undoing everything we've wrought. The Earth, scarred and broken by our hands, begins to heal. Cities rise where ruins once stood. The charred remains of forests sprout new growth. The cries of the dying soften, replaced by a growing calm.

The angels are rebuilding. They always do.

"Do you feel it?" Lilith asks beside me, her voice steady but sharp with tension. She stands tall, her silhouette outlined by the fiery glow of the destruction we've caused. Her dark hair whips around her face, her eyes glowing with power—a queen in the midst of ruin.

"Yes," I reply, my gaze fixed on the horizon where the angels' light creeps closer. "They're undoing our work. Faster than before."

"They're stronger," she mutters, a bitter edge to her tone. "Stronger than the last time."

I glance at her, my chest tightening. She is radiant, a goddess of darkness, her

presence commanding, unstoppable. But beneath her confidence, I see the truth—the same fear that festers within me. The angels are growing stronger, their strategies more cunning, their resolve unyielding. Every time they rebuild, they learn. Every time they hide her from me, they make it harder to find her.

And one day, I might not.

That thought festers in the pit of my stomach like poison. I've searched for her through countless lifetimes, across the stretches of eternity. I've always found her, always brought her back. But the angels are clever, their light insidious. They know what she means to me. They know how to keep her from me. And if they succeed...

"I'll find you," I say, my voice low, fierce, as I turn to face her. "No matter how long it takes, no matter what they do, I'll find you."

Lilith meets my gaze, her expression softening. For a moment, the weight of her power slips, and I see her—the woman she was before the portal, before the chaos, before the destruction. The woman who loves me, who fights for me, who would burn the world for me just as I would for her.

"You always do," she whispers, her hand brushing against mine. "But Asmodeus... what if next time... what if next time is different?"

"It won't be," I say firmly, though the doubt gnaws at the edges of my mind. "It can't be."

She doesn't answer, her gaze drifting to the angels' light as it draws closer. The pull of the portal tugs at us, subtle but unrelenting. We don't have much time left. Soon, we'll be forced back into Hell, the cycle beginning anew. The angels will rebuild, the balance of the universe will be restored, and Lilith will be hidden away once more.

And I'll have to find her all over again.

The thought is unbearable. The centuries we've spent apart, the lifetimes I've endured searching for her, clawing through the darkness just to catch a glimpse of her light—it's a torment I wouldn't wish on anyone, mortal or divine. And yet, it's my reality. My curse. My purpose.

"Let's go," I say, taking her hand in mine. Her fingers are cold, but her grip is steady, strong. She doesn't hesitate, following me as we turn away from the destruction we've wrought.

We return to the portal, its swirling darkness beckoning us home. The horsemen are waiting—Kaua, Vito, Nevan, and Ewan. They stand together, their forms still radiating the power they've unleashed upon the Earth. Each of them looks to us, their loyalty unwavering, their roles fulfilled.

"It's time," I say, my voice steady despite the weight in my chest. They nod, their expressions solemn. They know the cycle as well as we do. They are bound to it, just as we are.

We step through the portal, the familiar darkness swallowing us whole. It's cold, suffocating, yet comforting in its familiarity. Hell awaits on the other side, a world of fire and shadows, a kingdom that is ours to rule but never truly satisfy.

When we emerge, Satan is there, his massive form towering above us, his eyes gleaming with approval. He steps forward, his presence commanding, his power palpable.

"You've done well," he says, his voice a rumble that shakes the ground beneath us. His gaze shifts to Lilith, and he bows his head slightly—a rare gesture of respect. "You've fulfilled your purpose, my queen."

Lilith inclines her head, her expression calm but distant. “For now,” she replies, her voice steady. “The cycle isn’t over.”

Satan chuckles, a deep, throaty sound that echoes through the chamber. “It never is,” he says. “But you’ve earned your rest. All of you have.”

With that, he turns and disappears into the shadows, leaving us alone.

The horsemen retreat to their quarters, their presence lingering but distant. It’s just the two of us now, standing in the quiet, oppressive heat of our realm. Lilith turns to me, her eyes softening, and for the first time in what feels like an eternity, I feel at peace.

“Thank you,” she says softly, her voice barely above a whisper. “For finding me. For always finding me.”

I step closer, my hand brushing against her cheek, my thumb tracing the curve of her jaw. “I always will,” I say, my voice low, filled with a love that words can’t capture. “No matter how many lifetimes, no matter how many cycles. I will always come for you.”

Her lips curve into a small, bittersweet smile, and she leans into my touch. “And I will always wait for you,” she murmurs. “No matter where they hide me, no matter how long it takes. I’ll always be waiting.”

We stand there, the weight of eternity pressing down on us, but for now, it doesn’t matter. For now, we have each other. For now, we are together.

And as we retreat into the shadows, into the fleeting solace of our love, I know that this moment won’t last. The angels will rebuild. The cycle will begin again. But until then, I will cherish this. I will cherish her.

Because she is mine, and I am hers.

Forever.

A smodeus

I wake in the dark, alone, a haunting absence where once there was warmth. The silence is suffocating, but it's not the silence that bothers me—it's the emptiness. I can still feel her, though, the echo of her presence deep in my bones, in the very marrow of my soul. Lilith. My queen. My love.

I close my eyes, the memory of her face, her voice, so vivid that it burns, like fire coursing through my veins. She promised me then, just before the nothingness took her, before the realm of shadows ripped her from my arms once more— "You'll see me again in your dreams."

Her words carry weight, a promise I've held onto for centuries, for eons. Each cycle, each rebirth, she slips through my fingers just when I think I've found her again. She's always there, always just out of reach, like a flame flickering in the distance, dancing and teasing me with its warmth, but never enough to touch.

I had to let her go. I had no choice. The angels pulled her from me, sealed her away in their light, and I was left in the shadows, waiting. Always waiting.

But I will find her. I always do.

I shift, the dark fog of the void still clinging to my form as I rise from the ashes of what's left of our last world. Our last fight. Another victory, another fall. Time has never been kind to us, but it has always been on our side, hasn't it? Always.

I inhale deeply, my senses awakening to the scent of the world. The world has moved

on, as it always does, untouched by the chaos that rages just beneath its surface. The mortal realm keeps turning, unaware of the forces at play behind the veil. But I feel it in the air. The cycle is starting again. I know it. I feel her. She's close.

The first time I find her, I'll make sure she never slips through my fingers again. I swear it.

Weeks Later

The night feels different tonight. There's a twinge in the air, a sense of something that I cannot quite place, something that pulls at me, drawing me in. I'm not sure if I should trust it or if it's another false alarm, another false hope. I've been wrong before.

But tonight... I don't think so.

I stand in the dark alley, my eyes drawn to the dim light of a bar, the flickering neon sign buzzing lazily overhead. The place looks like nothing special—a rundown building, a relic of some long-forgotten time—but I know better. I've been tracking her for centuries, watching, waiting. Her essence, her presence, is unmistakable. Even in this life, she calls to me.

I don't enter immediately. There's a tug at the back of my mind, a hesitation in the pit of my stomach. She's here. I know she is.

But who is she this time?

I enter the bar, and the scent of stale beer, cigarette smoke, and something deeper—older—hits me like a physical blow. The place is nearly empty, save for a few patrons scattered at the bar. The air is thick with the hum of low conversation and the clinking of glasses. It's all noise, but none of it matters.

I scan the room, but it's her I'm looking for.

And then I see her.

She's behind the bar, her long, dark hair pulled into a tight ponytail, her back turned as she reaches for a bottle. There's something about her—something familiar, something I can't quite place. My heart twists. She's there, the same dark eyes, the same fire. But different, too. More human, less divine. She hasn't awakened yet, not completely. I know that. But she will. I've seen it before. I will make her see it.

I step closer, and my gaze fixes on her with an intensity that makes my skin burn, makes my heart pound against my ribs. She senses me, even before she turns. I know she does.

And then her eyes meet mine, brown, warm, but with a flicker of something ancient, something far older than any human being should ever possess. I freeze. For a moment, I think I've made a mistake. This is not her. It can't be.

But then she smiles.

It's subtle, almost imperceptible, but I feel it in my soul. That smile is not just a greeting. It's recognition. She knows me. She remembers me.

Her voice is soft, teasing, and full of a knowing that makes my heart skip a beat. "Been waiting for you," she says, her words like honey, thick with the promise of something darker. She pulls a bottle of whiskey from the shelf, uncorks it with a practiced hand, and pours a drink without breaking eye contact.

I don't move at first. My feet feel as though they're rooted to the floor, my gaze locked onto hers, and I realize then that I've waited for this moment for centuries, for this perfect, cruel reunion. Every second of agony, of torment, of endless waiting was for this.

My queen. My Lilith.

“You’ve been waiting for me?” I ask, my voice low, the rasp of centuries of longing and rage clear in every word. My hand twitches at my side, ready to reach for her, to pull her into my arms, but I force myself to wait. She’s not ready. She doesn’t remember yet. But she will.

She tilts her head, eyes narrowing as she studies me, like she’s searching through the fog of a distant dream, trying to place where she’s seen me before, trying to unlock the memory buried deep inside her soul.

“I have,” she murmurs softly. “I’ve known you’d come.”

I step closer, slowly, letting the tension build between us, feeling the air shift. This is her. She may not remember yet, but she feels it. I know she does. The pull between us is undeniable, the bond that time cannot sever, the bond that will always bring us back together.

But this time... this time , I won’t lose her.

The last of the patrons trickle out of the bar, leaving us alone in the dim light. I can feel the others—the horsemen—close behind me, waiting for the signal. This is not just a reunion. This is the start of something greater, something unavoidable .

She’s still holding the bottle of whiskey, her fingers delicate around the neck, but there’s a strength in her presence that calls to me, like a fire just waiting to consume the world.

“What’s your name?” I ask, though I already know the answer. It’s a formality. She’s Lilith. Always has been. Always will be.

She smirks, a knowing glint in her eyes. “Does it matter?”

I take another step, my hand finally reaching for her, my fingers brushing against hers. “It matters,” I say, voice dark with meaning, “because I’ve waited too long for this.”

She pulls her hand away from mine, placing the bottle of whiskey on the counter with deliberate slowness, her eyes never leaving mine. “I don’t know if you understand yet,” she says softly, her voice low, almost seductive. “But I’ve been waiting for a long time, too. And I’m not sure how long I can hold on this time...”

There’s a moment of silence, and in that silence, I know what she means. She’s already slipping. She feels it too. The call. The pull. The darkness. It’s all coming back. The earth will crumble beneath our feet. Humanity will fall again. And the cycle... the cycle will begin anew.

I reach for her again, but this time, she doesn’t pull away. Instead, she leans into me, her lips brushing against my ear as she whispers, “Are you ready to see this world burn again, my love? Because I am.”

And with that, I know that nothing will stop us. Not this time.

The others are waiting. I can feel them, close, ready. The horsemen, the storm, the chaos, all of it. The end of everything. We will bring the world to its knees again, and this time, I will never let her slip through my fingers.

“Let’s start the fire,” I say, and the world burns.