



# Tall, Dark & Horny

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**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** Adan Deville had ruled The Abyss for centuries. The powerful demon enforced his laws with an iron fist, and no one dared test him...until a delicate human wandered into his domain.

Calliope Ash didn't plan to stumble across a supernatural hotel in the middle of a storm. All she wanted was to salvage a ruined travel itinerary. Then she locked eyes with a man who made her heart forget how to beat—and discovered there was more to this world than she ever knew. Including herself.=

**Total Pages (Source):** 18

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 3:55 am*

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ADAN

The Abyss never slept. My hotel practically breathed with the night, inhaling every secret and whisper that drifted through its ancient stone walls. Ten stories tall, carved from stone and shadow, it stood as a fortress for the supernatural. A place where creatures of all kinds could come to lay their weary heads. A haven with rules as strict as the iron fist I ruled it with.

But tonight, the building and land surrounding it pulsed with something different. Almost unsettled.

Staring out the window, I scanned the darkened woods for any sign of the source of my uneasiness. When I didn't find one, I allowed my demon side to push forward just enough for my powers to sweep the area. Still nothing.

I stepped onto the stone balcony outside my top-floor chambers, dragging the chill of the night air deep into my lungs. I didn't catch anything unfamiliar in the scent of the wind, but my disquiet didn't ease.

The land I had claimed stretched below me like a sleeping beast. Its wards pulsed steady, strong, and familiar. As they should be since they were mine.

The building and the land surrounding it for as far as my supernatural eyes could see were mine to protect. And so was every soul in my domain.

If an unknown danger lurked on my land, I needed to uncover it...and eradicate the threat.

I called my demon half forward, letting it take over my body. Flames flooded my vision, turning my eyes to swirling black pits lit with fire. My skin thickened, toughened, as bones cracked and reshaped beneath the surface. I relished the bite of pain as my wings tore free, leathery and massive, their deep magenta color fading toward the bottom. Then my horns pushed through with a satisfying ache, ribbed and black, curving slightly. And finally, my segmented tail unfurled behind me, black with the exception of the deadly magenta tip.

I rolled my shoulders, the weight of my iron guards grounding me. With a low growl, I leaped into the sky. Wind rushed over my chest and thighs, the night air wrapping around me as I soared above my land, every inch of the soil steeped in power that answered only to me.

From up here, I could feel the heartbeat of The Abyss below—slow, watchful, alive. I circled the perimeter twice, wings slicing through the clouds like blades, but whatever had stirred my wards left no trail I could follow. There was no sign of an intruder. No flare of power other than my own. Just the quiet hum of magic that had long been mine.

Dissatisfied, I banked low and landed near the side entrance of the stone building, the sidewalk cracking beneath my iron boots as I touched down. Heat shimmered across my skin as I shifted, my larger demon form folding inward to my human one. My horns retracted, my tail drew inward, and my wings vanished in a gust of smoke and embers. Then my shoes hit the ground. My black dress slacks from earlier were untouched, and the black shirt I'd worn was still clinging to my back.

I didn't need glamours or illusions to keep my clothes in place. My body adapted to my form, and the corresponding wardrobe came with me. The perks of being forged

in hellfire with a father who was often referred to as “Destroyer” by supernatural beings with plenty of their own power yet still feared him.

I had built this place with blood, stone, and resolve. My own domain, where I didn't have to share power with anyone else. Not even my father.

I always felt a deep sense of satisfaction walking through the doors of The Abyss. The building and surrounding acreage were more than just symbols of my status in the demon world. They were my sanctuary. My throne. But also my burden in some ways.

My boots echoed against the stone as I headed into the heart of The Abyss. At the reception desk, Lyra looked up from her tablet. Silver streaked her black hair, and her fitted blazer over bloodred silk marked her as one of my staff.

“Problem in the eastern wing.” She tapped the screen. “Our newest guest did not react well to the subtle changes in their room.”

My hotel was alive in its own quiet way. The rooms morphed deliberately to meet the needs of my guests. A shifter might step into silence so thick it dulled every sound, their mattress firmed to cradle muscle and bone shaped by instinct. A vampire's suite was darkened during the day, allowing them to rest without fear of the sun's rays. Or a fae guest could wake to find vines curling delicately around the light fixtures.

But the changes were meant to be subtle, not disorienting.

My nostrils flared. I must have been more distracted than I realized since I rarely made mistakes like this. “The harpy eagle?”

She nodded. “He neglected to let us know he had recently been named alpha of his convocation.”

The changes made to the room when his species stayed with us were particularly unobtrusive because of their exceptional spatial awareness. But as a new alpha, his territorial instincts would be at an all-time high, making him hyper-attuned to even the smallest shift. Even a chair less than an inch off its usual angle would feel like a challenge to his authority. “It’s been handled?”

“Of course.”

She turned and gestured toward the wall behind her. A crystal glyph embedded in the stone pulsed faintly red before fading to blue. It was barely perceptible. A signal keyed to my blood. One only a handful of people in this building knew about and even fewer could see.

Some of the tension eased from my muscles. “Remind me to give you a bonus.”

“Already added it to my check.”

My lips twitched in the barest semblance of a smile.

“That’s why you hired me.”

I left her and moved to the second floor to look at the lobby from the railing, one of my favorite spots in the building. I could see everything from this vantage point.

A mahogany bar stretched along the left wall, bottles lining the shelves behind it in organized chaos. Thomas, my bartender, flipped one behind his back with casual flair, catching it one-handed before pouring a shot for the customer seated in front of him.

A flicker of motion at the far end caught my attention. Two warlocks, both young. Then again, most beings were when you’d lived as long as I had. Brash and full of

magic they barely understood, convinced they were untouchable. I used to be like that once. Before the blood, the wars, the gate. Before I earned the scars that didn't show, earned in the name of my father.

The taller one reached out with a hand that glowed faint gold, and my demon side stirred with interest, whispering darkly in the back of my mind since my guests were forbidden to use magic in The Abyss.

Let me out. He broke your law. Let him burn for it.

I moved.

One breath, I stood at the railing. The next, I was between them.

I only had three rules: no killing, no magic, and every woman beneath my roof had my protection. Demons weren't fond of rules, which was exactly why I kept them simple—and brutally enforced. Not many assholes tried to test me.

Except for the dumb ones, like this kid.

In the early days, a week didn't pass without me having to demonstrate exactly why I was the one in charge. A demon running a hotel for supernatural beings was bound to be challenged. Now? Most knew better. My name carried weight. And my punishments lingered in the air like smoke and sulfur.

The warlocks startled.

“No magic,” I said quietly, voice low and unhurried. “No exceptions.”

The taller one sneered. “I was just playing. Didn't mean anything by it.”

I tilted my head. “Is that what you’d say if someone violated your mind for fun?”

His friend proved he was wiser by scooting his stool back to get out of the line of fire. Literally.

But the one who’d broken my rules didn’t follow suit. Instead, he argued, “I didn’t even use my magic. Not really.”

“You didn’t get the chance. And now you never will.” My eyes burned black, hellfire rippling just beneath the surface. The flames weren’t visible yet—but they would be. “You used your power without consent. In my domain.”

The glyphs in the walls flared red again.

The taller one dropped to his knees, clutching his chest. His friend lifted his hands in a gesture of surrender. Smart. Possibly salvageable.

I grabbed my prey by the collar, lifting him easily. Fire crackled at my fingertips, not quite touching skin. Yet.

“The Abyss has many floors,” I murmured. “But only one direction for people like you.”

I dragged him toward the back hallway, nodding once at Lyra as I passed. She pressed a rune beneath the desk. Stone slid open beside her—revealing a staircase descending into darkness.

“Want help escorting him?” she asked, flashing me a hopeful look.

“I think I can handle this one on my own.”

Her shoulders slumped at my wry response.

As we plunged into the darkness, the air changed. Grew colder. Wetter.

The walls here were older than the ones my guests saw above. The stone pulsed with ancient magic, shaped into corridors by something darker than hands.

I'd chosen this place for a reason. The Abyss was built atop a ley line junction, one of the most potent in the world. A hidden gate to the underworld sat below us, sealed by wards older than names.

The demon in me stirred with anticipation.

Burn him. Mark him. Let them all see what happens when they defy you.

I shoved the warlock into the far cell. Flames licked his coat sleeve, singeing the threads.

"You'll stay here until sunrise. Then you'll leave, never to return."

He didn't argue, which was good because I wasn't in the mood to repeat myself.

The cell door slammed shut, runes flaring to life. The magic inside was sealed. And if he was stupid enough to test it, he'd bleed and burn for the effort.

I turned and walked back up, the walls murmuring as I passed. They weren't truly alive. But they remembered. And so did I.

Back on the main floor, everything had returned to normal. Low conversation. Glass clinking. Music playing softly from nowhere.



Thomas slid a shot of barrel-aged demon fire whiskey across the bar. The smoky, dark amber liquid that smelled of charred oak and heat was made in-house at The Abyss. Infused with a drop of hellfire essence, it was something only a high-ranking demon could handle...and my favorite drink.

“On the house tonight,” he said.

I quirked a brow and muttered, “I own the place.”

“Exactly.”

Shaking my head, I lifted the glass. “Salute.”

The shot went down smoothly. But it didn’t touch the heat already burning inside me.

Nothing ever did.

### CALLIOPE

As a travel influencer, I planned my trips meticulously from my route to the places I wanted to eat and where I stayed. I didn't leave anything to chance. It had worked well for me over the past two years and was a big part of how I had managed to quickly grow my following to the point where I got free stays and was earning money from my posts.

To say that today was an aberration was putting it mildly. Everything that could go wrong had. The second leg of my flight had been canceled, leaving me stranded more than a thousand miles from my destination. Since it was due to a systemwide issue for the airline, a ton of people were impacted by cancellations. The earliest flight I could get out of town was three days later, which would've left me checking into the hotel less than twenty-four hours before I was due to check out.

I hadn't wanted to let this delay ruin my entire trip, so I headed to the car rental counters. Snagging one before they were all gone felt like a small victory. Unfortunately, my problems didn't end at the airport.

An unexpected storm popped up out of nowhere when I was only a few hundred miles into my drive. My mom had hated anything more than a light drizzle, but storms didn't bother me. I'd always had an odd affinity to storms, almost as though they energized me.

It must have taken out some cell towers because I lost my signal on my phone...and

access to my maps app. My dashboard GPS didn't even try to help. It spun in place for a few minutes like it was taunting me before declaring it couldn't find my location. Without them, I had no clue where I was going.

Still, I pressed on, doing my best to remember the route. The most I could recall was that I was supposed to stay on the highway for about another hundred miles.

But then the highway signs disappeared. Eventually, the sky got darker. And the road narrowed. Finally, I realized with a twist of dread that I had no idea where I was.

I spotted a small roadside diner through the downpour and turned off the road, pulling into a mostly empty lot. The neon sign flickered over the windows—fitting, considering everything else that had gone wrong.

Inside, the diner smelled like burnt coffee and something vaguely fried. A single server leaned on the counter, staring at her phone with a bored expression. A wall-mounted TV murmured in the background, the volume too low to follow.

“Evening,” she said without looking up.

“Hi.” I offered a hopeful smile. “Sorry to bother you, but the GPS in my rental car isn't working, and my cell lost its signal. I've been driving for a while, and I'm pretty sure I took a wrong turn somewhere. Any chance I could borrow your Wi-Fi?”

She snorted. “I wish we had Wi-Fi for you to borrow, then I wouldn't have to download stuff to read or watch before I come into work. It's the freaking worst when I forget and am stuck here twiddling my thumbs for my entire shift. And GPS won't help much out this way anyway. You're in a bit of a dead zone.”

I'd been to several places off the beaten path, but at least they'd all had Wi-Fi or a cell signal. “Maybe you can give me directions?”

“I could try, but you’d probably end up lost.” She finally set her phone down and glanced up at me. “I don’t drive, so I don’t pay much attention to where I’m going when my dad drops me off places.”

“Crap.” I pressed my lips together in a flat line as I considered my limited options. “Is there a town nearby?”

“That depends on your definition of near. And what you think is a town.” She picked up her phone again. “Closest stop with anything worth much is about an hour past my house.”

“Which way is that?”

She jerked her thumb to the right. “Make a left at the tree that’s split down the middle because it was struck by lightning, then keep going straight through the woods.”

Woods. At night. In the rain.

I resisted the urge to groan. “I don’t suppose the road is marked? Or well lit?”

“Not really.” She went back to whatever was on her phone without another word.

Unless I wanted to sit around here for who knew how long, I didn’t have much choice. With the clock ticking down on my hotel reservation, I decided to head out in the direction she’d pointed out and hope for the best. It was a decision I deeply regretted an hour and a half later.

I’d been pretty certain that I turned at the tree the girl had described, but it took much longer than expected to see anything remotely like a town. Trees crowded the road like they were trying to swallow the asphalt. Just as I debated the odds of being able to safely make a U-turn, the rain eased into mist, heavy and low to the ground. Then

the road curved, and a building rose out of the mist like something from a horror movie.

Ten stories tall and built from stone, its windows flickered with soft golden light. Gargoyle-like statues flanked the entrance, and the driveway circled a massive fountain, glistening in the rain.

As I pulled around and parked as far off to the side as I could get, my heart thudded against my ribs. Something about the place pulled at me, but I also felt the sudden urge to flee. Unfortunately, I couldn't turn around now. I was about ten hours past my tolerance for mishaps, I had nowhere else to go, and my gas tank wouldn't get me far even if I did.

After taking a deep breath and slowly exhaling, I turned off the engine and exited the car. I thought about grabbing my luggage from the trunk but ultimately decided that was beyond presumptuous. So I headed inside with only my purse.

The moment I stepped through the doors, warmth enveloped me. The lobby was grand but not ostentatious. Dark wood floors. A chandelier of iron and glass was suspended high above. A massive bar took up the left wall, and a wide staircase curved upward to the next level.

The woman behind the reception desk greeted me. "Good evening, welcome to The Abyss. I'm Lyra, how can I help you?"

I hesitated. "Hi. I, uh...I don't have a reservation."

"No problem." Her gaze darted over my shoulder briefly before returning to me, but her smile didn't falter. "We always keep a few rooms available. Would you like to check in?"

I nodded. “Yes, please. Just for tonight.”

She slid a leather-bound book toward me, along with an old-fashioned pen. “Name?”

“Calliope Ash.”

As I signed, I glanced toward the bar to see what had momentarily captured her attention. When I spotted the man standing at the end of the bar, I understood her distraction. With his Grecian nose, chiseled cheekbones, strong jawline, and a dimple in his chin, I assumed that most women noticed him. Especially since his dark hair only made his blue eyes seem brighter. His black dress shirt stretched across his broad shoulders, with the sleeves rolled to his elbows, revealing strong forearms. His matching slacks did nothing to hide how thick his thighs were. He was tall, dark, and gorgeous personified.

Our eyes met, and something jolted through me. It almost felt as though someone had reached into my chest and pressed directly against my heart. I looked away, cheeks burning.

Lyra carried on as though nothing unusual had happened. “Would you like a drink before heading up to your room?”

“Actually...yes.”

My reply surprised me since that hadn’t been what I’d planned to say. The last thing I needed right now was a drink. Not when I was exhausted enough from my day to not be acting like myself. But I felt a magnetic pull toward the bar. And him.

She handed over a brass skeleton key on a midnight-blue velvet ribbon. It was beautiful and old-fashioned, entirely out of sync with the rest of the ultramodern technology on the desk. “Your room is on the tenth floor. The elevator will open for

you when you wave the key against the symbol beside it.”

I was too tired to question how much the room would cost. Whatever the price, it was worth being dry and warm for the night. “Thank you.”

“Do you have any luggage you’d like brought up?” Lyra continued. “I can have one of our staff retrieve your bags from your vehicle and valet park it.”

“Oh.” I blinked at the offer. “That would be great. Um...there’s just one suitcase and my matching carry-on in the trunk. My car’s the little rental parked on the circle out front.”

She inclined her head and stretched her hand out to take the key from me. “I’ll make sure it’s taken care of.”

I nodded, feeling a little dazed. “Thanks. This place is not what I expected when I first stumbled across it.”

Lyra smiled, amusement gleaming from her eyes. “The Abyss rarely is.”

The hotel's name wasn't exactly welcoming, but I was in no position to judge.

After flashing her a grateful smile, I made my way to the bar. The man I noticed earlier was now seated on one of the leather stools, nursing a drink. Something amber and smoky swirled in his glass.

“First time here?” the bartender asked me, already setting down a napkin.

I nodded. “It wasn’t exactly planned.”

“Sounds like you could definitely use a drink then. We just added a smooth, honey-

infused whiskey to the menu a few days ago.”

My nose wrinkled. “I haven’t ever tried whiskey before.”

“How about a small taste to see if you like it?”

He didn’t wait for me to reply before he poured. With the bartender distracted, I stole another glance at the man beside me. He wasn’t looking my way anymore, but the strange awareness didn’t fade. If anything, it had sharpened.

“Here you go,” the bartender said, pushing a glass toward me with about an inch of golden-amber hue liquid in the bottom.

I shook my head with a soft laugh. “If that’s a sample, don’t worry about bringing me a real drink if I like it.”

“Lightweight?”

“Yup.” I nodded. “This will be plenty.”

As I took a careful sip, he mixed another drink in a tall glass and set it down in front of me. “A sparkling lavender-lemon spritz with edible petals that will help chase down the whiskey if it’s too strong for you.”

The liquor he’d given me was sweet with just enough bite that I felt it in the back of my throat. “Thanks, the whiskey is good, but I’ll probably need this. Although, it’s almost too pretty to drink.”

“Seemed fitting to serve to a woman as gorgeous as yourself.”

The man beside me finally spoke. “You drove in during the storm.”



I looked over, surprised he'd noticed. "Yeah. My flight was canceled, and everything else just sort of spiraled from there."

"Not many people find this place by accident."

I swallowed. "Believe me, it wasn't on the itinerary."

He studied me for a beat, as though he could see more than I was saying. "Sometimes detours take you exactly where you need to be."

My pulse stuttered. "Let's hope so since the vacation I had planned isn't going to happen anytime soon."

He offered a hand. "Adan."

"Calliope."

The moment our palms touched, warmth surged up my arm. Not from the drink—this was something else. Something deep and elemental.

I pulled my hand back, trying to hide the slight tremble of my fingers.

"Your luggage has been delivered to your room, Miss Ash," the woman at the front desk called.

After gulping down the remainder of my whiskey, I stood. I was still a little unsteady as I dug through my purse for some cash. Forcing my attention toward the bartender, I asked, "How much do I owe you?"

His gaze darted toward Adan before he flashed me a quick smile that didn't hold his earlier warmth. "It's on the house, Miss Ash."

“Thank you.” I dropped a few bills for a tip on the bar top before grabbing the spritz.  
“I guess I’ll take this up to my room.”

“Enjoy.”

As I turned away, I caught one last glimpse of Adan over my shoulder. He hadn’t taken his eyes off me.

## Page 3

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ADAN

Calliope Ash was an unexpected twist. One in a petite, radiant, strawberry-blond package that I couldn't tear my gaze away from.

My demon rumbled, pressing up against my skin with a hungry sort of curiosity that I had never experienced before. Even just thinking her name seemed to have the power to rile him up. Follow her.

He'd have to settle for watching those delicate curves of hers as she walked away from the bar. Unfortunately, I needed to go slowly with the sweet beauty that fate had paired me with.

There had only been the slightest flare of recognition in her pretty green eyes when her gaze locked with mine. And her shoulders were still tight with tension despite the finger of honey-infused whiskey she had gulped down.

I didn't need time to understand what Calliope was to me. When demon mates met, it was a deep and elemental instinct. Something ancient that predated language or logic. A pull forged in hellfire itself.

And she had no idea.

Calliope looked human, but there was something just beneath her surface. An otherworldly flicker that didn't belong to mortals.

I didn't think she was aware of it, though. Not with how her eyes widened as she took in all that was The Abyss. I'd bet the fortune I had accumulated over my long life on the fact that my hotel was her first encounter with the supernatural world.

Which made her appearance at my doorstep all the more intriguing. Humans did not stumble across The Abyss. My land was too skilled at keeping them away.

After Calliope was safely out of earshot, I turned toward Thomas. He was busy wiping down the polished bar with more care than usual, avoiding eye contact. I let him stew in the tension of not knowing how close he'd come to losing his job—and possibly his life—for calling my mate gorgeous in front of me.

It didn't matter that he didn't know that she was fated to belong to me. All that counted was that he'd dared to flirt with her.

"She's not to be touched." My voice was calm, cold, and final. There was no mistaking the weight behind my words. "By anyone."

Thomas nodded. "Understood."

I studied him for a beat longer. He was a good bartender and was great at reading a room filled with supernatural beings. That was why I had employed him at The Abyss for so long. But right now, he was walking a razor's edge, and I was holding the blade.

"Go check the stockroom," I muttered.

Thomas didn't argue. He just nodded once and disappeared into the back, proving he was smart enough to live another day.

Satisfied he wouldn't make the mistake of flirting with my fated mate again, my gaze

drifted back to Calliope, who stood at the elevator now, lifting her drink to her lips with both hands. She tilted her head slightly to examine the symbols beside the door. The key Lyra had given her glinted in the light as she waved it across the etched brass panel.

Normally, the elevator opened instantly. But tonight, The Abyss responded to my deep-seated need and delayed it. Just for a few more seconds, giving me that extra time with Calliope, even if it was from across the lobby.

She tapped her foot, unaware that she was under observation. Her shoulders rose and fell with a quiet sigh before she glanced back over her shoulder. Toward me.

Our eyes met again—and just like before, something pulled taut between us. Invisible, but undeniable.

The elevator dinged at last, and she stepped inside. But she didn't look away. Not until the doors had almost fully closed.

I waited a beat longer before I tore my gaze away, my inner demon roaring inside my head over losing sight of Calliope. He didn't understand the need to wait. As far as he was concerned, claiming her was inevitable. Fate had given us a beautiful mate, and his instincts pushed hard to mark her so that every supernatural being at The Abyss knew who she belonged to.

I understood his frustration. Putting her on a floor that could only be accessed by those I trusted was the only thing stopping me from heading straight to her room. She was safe for now with The Abyss watching over her.

And I had no doubt that Thomas would quickly spread the word that Calliope was under my protection, even if he didn't fully understand why I'd given the order. Only someone willing to risk certain death would dare to touch her now.

With that settled, I stood and walked across the lobby toward the front desk. Lyra straightened the moment she saw me coming.

She tilted her head to the side, lips pressed together. “You put her in your guest suite.”

I’d given the telepathic instruction while Calliope had been checking in, but I understood why Lyra was confused. That didn’t mean I owed her an explanation, though. “Yes.”

“On the tenth floor.”

The clarification wasn’t needed since I was aware that I had installed my fated mate in a suite next door to my private domain. Crossing my arms over my chest, I didn’t bother to reply and just waited for her to fill the silence.

“In all the years since you gave me that key, you’ve never let a guest use it.”

Cocking my head to the side, I murmured, “You know better than most that I don’t have family that I’d invite to The Abyss.”

My lineage was a topic I avoided like the plague, so her wince at my reply wasn’t surprising. Her tone was careful as she explained, “It’s just that...she’s human. They don’t usually make it past the threshold of The Abyss, let alone get a room, and you had me put her in a guest suite that you never let anyone stay in. I get that I might be overstepping here, but I’m hoping you’ll understand that I’m only asking because I care.”

I quirked a brow, irritated that she dared to question the order I’d given her, even if it was coming from a place of concern. But I wasn’t ready to explain to anyone who Calliope was to me except for the woman herself. “Don’t worry about who or what

she is except for a VIP guest.”

She gave me a sharp nod. “Got it. I’ll make sure she receives our highest level of service.”

“Start by sending up a dinner cart. Include a bottle of the new honey-infused whiskey from the bar. She seemed to enjoy the sample Thomas gave her. And a few different meal choices since I don’t know her preferences.”

“I’ll make sure the kitchen makes it their top priority.” She tapped on her tablet before adding, “Looks as though they should be able to have a cart up to her suite within the half hour.”

The part of me that had been forged in fire and fed on war snarled inside my head like a caged beast. “Have them send it in the elevator. I’ll bring it to Calliope myself.”

Questions swirled in her eyes, but Lyra kept them to herself. “I’ll let them know.”

“Thank you.”

I walked away, forcing myself not to head straight to the elevator. Instead, I prowled outside and walked the perimeter of the stone building, laying down several new wards. The magical security surrounding The Abyss was extensive, but I wouldn’t take any risks where my fated mate’s safety was concerned.

Once I was satisfied that nobody would encroach while I was with Calliope, I stalked inside the back entrance and took my express elevator to the tenth floor. It had been my private space since the day I’d built this place. A sanctuary within a sanctuary.

Then I strode down the hallway that traversed the width of the entire building, arriving just in time to retrieve the rolling cart sent by the kitchen.

Lifting the lids covering each dish, my demon half pressed forward to scent the food for anything that might harm Calliope. He was a paranoid bastard, even more so now that we'd found her. Nobody on my staff had any reason to tamper with food sent to my floor, but I still checked the entire cart for anything amiss.

Once I confirmed all was in order, I rolled it toward the guest suite. I pressed my palm against the door. The wood was warm. Breathing, almost. The power in the walls hummed like a sleeping creature, soothed by her presence.

I closed my eyes and whispered an extra ward over her room. Silent. Invisible. Nothing would touch her here. Not unless they went through me first.

As I lifted my fist to knock on the hard surface, I reminded myself to be patient. Calliope had no idea what was coming next. But I did.

Because nothing in this realm—or the next—was ever going to take her from me.



### CALLIOPE

A loud knock startled me so badly I nearly fell off the couch. I'd only meant to rest there for a minute before grabbing my toiletries and getting ready for bed. Apparently, I'd nodded off.

Twisting around, I wondered if I had imagined the sound. The hallway outside my room had been quiet since I stepped off the elevator, and I hadn't ordered anything. Honestly, I wasn't even sure room service was a thing at The Abyss.

Then another knock came, deep and deliberate. I padded to the door and cracked it open, immediately forgetting how to breathe.

Adan stood in the hallway. The man from the bar with the piercing blue eyes and dark, intense stare who'd starred in my dream just moments ago.

He stood behind a sleek black rolling cart covered in silver-domed dishes.

I blinked a few times, but he didn't disappear. "Um...am I still asleep?"

His mouth curved slightly. "Not unless you dream about late-night meal deliveries."

"You brought me food?" I squeaked, my cheeks heating as soon as the words left my mouth because he obviously had.

“Since you got waylaid by the storm, I thought you might be hungry.”

My stomach betrayed me with a loud growl. I wrapped an arm around my middle and tried not to look as flustered as I felt. “I mean, I am, but I could’ve called down myself.”

“Now you don’t need to.”

I opened the door the rest of the way to let him in, my heart thudding as he pushed the cart into the room. Nothing about my reaction to him was normal. But I didn’t want him to leave.

He stopped near the table in the corner of the sitting room and lifted one of the domes, revealing a steaming plate of pasta with roasted vegetables and herbs. “This one’s vegetarian, just in case.”

I shook my head with a soft laugh. “You definitely don’t know me.”

A glimmer sparked in his eyes. “Not yet.”

My breath caught in my chest at the weight in those two little words. I crossed the room, hoping movement would hide my reaction.

“Maybe the steak with truffle potatoes and asparagus will be more to your liking.” He lifted two of the lids in unison. “Or chicken Kiev with wild rice and peas.”

“Yum.” I licked my lips and stared. “They all look delicious, even the vegetarian pasta, but that’s way more than I could eat for two big meals, let alone a late-night snack.”

“I wanted to be sure there was something you’d like, but you don’t need to finish it

all.” He pulled out one of the four chairs and gestured for me to sit down.

After he pushed my chair in, I twisted around to flash him a grateful smile. “Would you like to join me?”

It must have been a trick of light because I could’ve sworn his pupils expanded to fill his entire eye for a moment. But when I blinked, they were back to the same gorgeous shade of blue as before. “Absolutely.”

He asked what I wanted before setting a plate in front of each of us—chicken for me and steak for him—before sitting across from me. Then he bent low to grab an ice bucket, two glasses, and a familiar bottle from the bottom of the cart.

“It’s a good thing you brought so much. Another drink of that whiskey would put me straight on my butt without getting plenty of food in my belly.”

“Then we can save this to enjoy with dessert.”

Sweets were my biggest weakness. My gaze flicked toward the last dome on the cart—the only one he hadn’t lifted yet. “There’s dessert?”

“Of course.” He lifted the final cover, revealing a chocolate tart with berries and fresh whipped cream.

My eyes widened. “This is way more than a late-night snack. It’s a feast.”

“Hardly,” he disagreed as we dug into our meals. “But I can make sure breakfast fits that description, if you’d like.”

After swallowing a delicious bite of chicken Kiev, I pointed my fork at him. “What are you...some kind of room service ninja?”

His lips curved. “That’s one way of putting it.”

“Well, I hope whoever runs this place knows their staff goes above and beyond.” I gave him a teasing smile. “Even for their unexpected guests.”

“I’m sure he’d appreciate the feedback.”

I tilted my head as a new thought occurred to me. “Wait...do you actually work here?”

“I suppose you could put it that way.”

My eyes narrowed at the slight glint of humor in his blue orbs. “What exactly is your job?”

He hesitated a beat. “I’m the owner.”

My jaw went slack. “The owner?”

“Yes.”

I wasn’t quite sure how to respond to that. “And you brought me dinner.”

“You looked like you needed it.”

“That was very kind of you.” I cut into my chicken to mask the trembling of my fingers. “And unexpected.”

“You’ll find The Abyss is full of surprises.”

“That’s certainly been my experience during the short time I’ve been here.”

We ate in companionable silence for a few minutes. The food was divine, and I was far too hungry to pretend otherwise. But as I chewed another bite of peas, I couldn't shake the feeling that Adan was studying me with more intensity than he let on.

When we were ready to move onto dessert, he filled my glass with a splash of the honey-infused whiskey. I took a small sip, enjoying the warmth that rushed to my belly. The liquor was the perfect accompaniment to the rich chocolate tart, but I couldn't gulp it down. My tolerance was low on the best of nights, and this one had been anything but normal.

Drinking at all under these circumstances—in a strange place with a man I'd just met—wasn't something I would usually do. But something about being here with Adan made me feel safe. Not just the physical comfort of being in a luxurious hotel far from the storm, but a strange sense of protection that I didn't quite know how to explain. It hummed beneath the surface of my skin like a low vibration, steady and sure.

"You okay?" Adan asked.

I nodded quickly. "Yeah. Sorry, just thinking."

"About?"

I hesitated. "Honestly? One of the things I'm wondering about is how much this room is going to cost me."

His brow arched slightly. "Worried it'll blow your budget?"

"You're assuming there was a budget in the first place." I flashed him a sheepish smile and swept my hand in a half circle to gesture toward the high-end furnishings of the massive suite. "And considering how fancy everything is, I expect to get a bill

that makes my credit card weep.”

Adan chuckled, the deep sound curling low in my stomach. “You don’t need to worry about that happening.”

I squinted at him. “That’s a comforting answer with exactly zero details.”

“I guess you’ll have to trust me.”

“I’m not usually great at relying on strangers,” I admitted with a soft laugh. “Especially mysterious ones who show up at my hotel room with dinner after dark.”

He tilted his head. “Yet here you are, enjoying dessert with me after our shared meal and drinking whiskey that could drop a lesser mortal.”

“Touché.” I laughed and took another sip. “Do you always treat lost guests like royalty?”

His gaze never wavered. “Only the special ones.”

My throat went dry. “That’s a very smooth answer.”

“I never gave it to anyone before. Just you because I don’t say things I don’t mean.”

My cheeks heated again, but not from embarrassment this time. I shifted in my chair, caught between flustered and fascinated.

Before I could think of something clever to say, a low chime sounded from the hallway. It was barely audible but still clear. Adan frowned and tilted his head, as though he was listening to something I couldn’t hear.

“What was that?” I asked, glancing toward the door.

He blinked and offered a neutral smile. “Just part of the building’s internal alert system. Nothing to worry about.”

That sounded a little more intense than your typical fire alarm. But I let it go. For now, at least.

“You said The Abyss is full of surprises,” I said, trying to lighten the mood again. “Anything else I should know during my short time here?”

Adan leaned back slightly in his chair, his expression unreadable. Although I had the odd sense that he wasn’t happy with my mention of not being here for long. “That depends on how open you are to having your view of the world turned upside down.”

My heart gave a funny little skip. “I’ve traveled all over. Nothing really shocks me anymore.”

His smile was slow and wicked. “Then you haven’t traveled far enough yet.”

Something electric sizzled in the air between us. And at that moment, I had the sense that I hadn’t stumbled into this place by accident at all.

His gaze held mine as the air between us shifted—as though something unseen had stirred in response to his words. The chandelier above us shimmered, its glow pulsing ever so slightly, as though the building itself had drawn a breath.

“What was that?” I whispered.

Adan didn’t look away. “The Abyss has its own kind of awareness. It senses things most places never will.”

“That shouldn’t be possible.” A shiver chased down my spine, but it wasn’t fear. Or not completely. More of a dizzy, weightless feeling that came right before your world tilted off its axis.

“You’ll find that the inconceivable is the norm here.”



5

ADAN

Her whisper echoed in my mind.

That shouldn't be possible.

Her choice of words was interesting. Shouldn't be. As though some part of her—buried so deep in her consciousness that she wasn't even aware of it—already sensed the truth.

My demon stirred with a low hum of satisfaction, as if he'd been waiting for the smallest confirmation that she wasn't fully human. An excuse to claim her immediately instead of waiting. One I ignored because it didn't matter that I sensed something shimmering under her skin that didn't belong in a human. Not when Calliope didn't even seem aware there was likely some supernatural blood flowing through her veins.

And she wasn't running. Not yet.

There was a flare of curiosity in her pretty green eyes.

The chandelier overhead still pulsed faintly, the afterglow of The Abyss responding to her presence. I let her take it in.

Once I gave her a more thorough explanation, there was no going back for either of

us.

Calliope blinked slowly, as though she was trying to reconcile what she'd seen with what she knew. She tugged on a lock of strawberry-blond hair, her brows drawing together in thought.

Her eyes were cloudy when her gaze met mine again, and I knew it was time to explain.

“You’re not imagining things.”

Her head tilted to the side, and she twisted her hands together.

“You’ve stepped into a world most people don’t even know exists.” I leaned forward slightly, elbows resting on the table. “One we go to great lengths to keep hidden.”

Her lips parted, but no words came. An understandable response from someone who had never encountered anything outside the human realm before.

“There is a supernatural world, Calliope. And you’re in the very heart of it. The Abyss is more than just a building. Its stone is steeped in magic.”

Her fingers tightened around her fork, but she didn’t take another bite of the chocolate tart. I could see the questions forming in her expression. Too many for her to even know which one to start with. So I gave her the truth she didn’t yet know how to ask for.

“There’s an entire world hidden alongside what you know. One built on power, ancient bloodlines, and rules older than your maps. It’s carefully kept from human sight. Veiled in illusion and guarded by magic. Most people go their whole lives without ever glimpsing it.”

Her breath caught, and that same shiver from earlier danced across her skin. “I don’t understand. You’re making it sound like you’re not human.”

“Because I’m not.”

She dropped her fork onto the plate with a clatter, and her hand went to her throat as she gasped.

I never expected to be in the position of explaining the supernatural world to my fated mate, and I was in the unusual position of second-guessing myself. Her shock was palpable, a heavy weight in the air surrounding us, but I needed to push forward because there was no going back.

When a demon found their one, it wasn’t a question. It was a reckoning.

Mine had arrived in the form of a soaked and exhausted woman with freckles and a wary smile—utterly unaware that the moment she stepped through my doors, the world as she knew it had ended.

I stood and circled the table, pulling her chair so she faced me. Then I crouched in front of Calliope, taking her trembling hands in mine.

The moment our skin met, the faintest flicker of power pulsed through the floor. The Abyss continued to respond as though it recognized her, which made sense considering how deeply embedded my magic was in this land.

“There are shifters who share their body with a beast. Witches who draw power from the elements. Beings made of shadow...or born in flame.”

“Like in fairy tales?” she asked, skepticism clear in her expression.

My lips curved into a slight smirk. “Sometimes, it’s true that where there’s smoke, there’s fire.”

Her eyes narrowed. “If you’re telling me the truth, which of those things are you?”

“A demon.”

Her incredulity turned to astonishment as I let my other half push to the surface, my eyes bleeding to black.

“Whoa,” she breathed, her fingers clenching around mine. “Either the whiskey went to my head more than I realized, or you’re not lying.”

I pushed my demon down and tightened my grip on her hands. “You can count on me to always be honest with you, Calliope. Even when I’d prefer not to.”

“I appreciate that,” she whispered.

“Supernatural beings don’t let humans see their true faces unless there’s no other choice. And demons are the most private of all.”

She shifted nervously in her chair. “Why?”

“Because we have more to lose.”

Her brows drew together again. “You’re not all in it together to keep the secret from us?”

“To a certain extent, yes,” I conceded with a shrug. “Except demons have more enemies to make if we’re careless. It’s not only the humans we have to worry about but also others who view some of our kind as abominations because they were born

in hell and didn't stay there."

Including me, but I wasn't sure if she was quite ready to learn that bit of information yet when what I'd explained so far was already a lot to take in.

Her gaze searched mine. "Why are you telling me any of this?"

I leaned back slightly, the shadows of the room curling around my shoulders. "Because hiding it from you would be impossible while you're here."

She was understandably quiet for a long moment after my confession, processing the information I'd shared with her. Then she gave a short, breathy laugh that was forced around the edges. "It's not as though I'll have much of a chance to see anything else. I've already eaten dinner here with you, I'll probably pass out pretty soon, and I'm leaving in the morning."

My demon surged in protest, the word no echoing like a drumbeat behind my ribs. It took every ounce of my control to keep my expression calm while tension curled low in my gut, wrapping around my spine like smoke.

She thought she was leaving.

But I wouldn't—couldn't—let that happen.

I stared at her for a long moment, letting the silence stretch just enough to make her shift in her seat. "You're not going anywhere in the morning."

Her voice was thin as she whispered, "What?"

My eyes locked on hers, quiet and steady as I repeated, "You're not going anywhere, Calliope."

Her face paled, but she didn't move. I watched her pulse flutter at her throat, delicate and unguarded. There was a freckle at the edge of her jaw, barely visible, and it took everything I had not to press my mouth there. Especially with my demon pushing hard to claim her.

I leaned in slightly and lowered my voice to a mere rasp. "Not until you understand who you are to me."

Her pulse sped up as she whispered, "What do you mean?"

I straightened slowly, giving her space even as my demon clawed beneath my skin, furious at the distance. I had to tread carefully now. The truth couldn't be softened—but it could be delivered with care.

"You need to understand something about demons. We don't form attachments easily. Many of us never do. And we don't bite like shifters. What binds us with the other half of our soul is forged in hellfire itself, so our marking is more of a brand. When we meet the one who's meant for us—our fated mate—it's final. Immediate. Irrevocable."

Her brows furrowed, lips parting just slightly as she struggled to keep up. "How do you know you've found the right person?"

"A tether snaps into place the moment we meet the person we're meant to claim. One that I finally felt tonight."

She sucked in a shaky breath, and I saw her throat bob as she swallowed. "Are you saying...you think I'm your mate?"

"No." I met her gaze without hesitation. "I'm saying I know you are."

She froze, barely blinking. “That’s not possible. I’m human.”

I didn’t correct her—not yet. First, she needed time to accept that the world was more than she’d ever imagined. And for me to figure out what, exactly, Calliope might be.

“I don’t see how I could be your...your anything. I don’t know anything about demons, or magic, or mating, or...” The panic rose in her eyes.

Barely resisting the urge to crowd her, I took a slow step back, loosening the leash on my control just enough to soothe the flare of power in the room. “I understand this might be too much to wrap your head around in one night. Maybe it would help if I showed you a little more of the world you’ve stepped into.”

Her chest rose and fell quickly, but she didn’t run. Or demand that I leave. She was handling the situation well for a woman who had just met her first supernatural being—and learned she was his fated mate.

The same couldn’t be said for my demon half. He didn’t like the space I’d created between us and snarled in my head, furious that I hadn’t sealed the bond the moment I recognized her. But I held him back because Calliope didn’t need pressure.

She needed time.

And I was determined to give her what little I could.

“Like what?”

I gestured toward the door. “Let me show you The Abyss. Some of it, anyway.”

“I’m not sure.” Calliope’s gaze darted between me and the exit, hesitation written across every inch of her. Her shoulders were still tight, the fight-or-flight instinct

clearly warring inside her.

“No pressure,” I assured her. “But you’ll understand more when you see it.”

For a long moment, she didn’t move. Then she finally nodded and stood, wiping her hands on her thighs. “Okay.”

I opened the door and held it for her, and the moment she stepped into the hallway, The Abyss responded. The lighting shifted, the sconces along the walls glowing warmer. Not brighter exactly, just more...alive. The faint hum of warded magic pulsed beneath the surface of the stone floor like a heartbeat, quiet and steady. My magic. And now hers, in a way.

She paused to look around, pretty green eyes wide with wonder. The awe on her face only made her more beautiful.

As we reached the main elevator, I pressed the button and watched as the doors slid open, the interior washed in a soft golden glow. “That was just the beginning.”



### CALLIOPE

As I stepped into the elevator with Adan, I knew nothing would ever be the same. What he'd told me should be impossible, but there was no denying something was otherworldly in the way his eyes bled completely to black.

The hotel, too. Now that I was paying attention, the entire building felt quietly alive in a way I couldn't explain.

My pulse picked up as the doors slid closed behind us. Hoping to soothe my nerves, I joked, "Next you'll tell me you have a dragon chained up in the basement."

Adan's deep chuckle filled the lift. "Wouldn't be the strangest thing under this roof."

"You're serious, aren't you?" I peered up at him, searching for any sign that he was teasing me but finding none. "Dragons are real?"

He nodded. "I don't have one in the basement, but dragon shifters do exist and stay at The Abyss from time to time."

I gawked at him, wondering if any of the guests I'd seen in the bar shared their body with a freaking dragon. "Like now?"

"Sorry, but no." He shook his head with a laugh. "I can put in a call to an acquaintance of mine to see if he can swing by, but he likes to stick closer to home

now that his son is in that curious stage where he likes to explore and get into all sorts of trouble. Safer to do on his own territory.”

He was talking about calling a man who could turn into a dragon as if it were the world's most normal thing. And maybe to him, it was. For me, it was mind-blowing, which was a good way to describe my night at The Abyss overall. Starting with the man at my side.

Adan's steps were unhurried, matching mine with quiet ease. Even with my mind still whirling, I didn't miss how his black dress shirt clung to his shoulders and arms as though it had been tailored to worship his powerful body. Or that his thighs had no business looking that good in those pants.

I'd just found out he was a demon, but instead of being panicked, all I felt was a humming sort of awareness that I didn't want to define just yet. Luckily, I was saved from considering the reason for that by the elevator door sliding open.

I'd always loved discovering new places, wandering into hidden gems and sharing them with the world. But The Abyss wasn't just a place I hadn't visited before. It was somewhere I hadn't even known was possible.

“Is it always this quiet?” I asked, my voice soft in the hush of the empty hallway.

Adan glanced back at me with a faint smile. “The entirety of the hotel, no. But this particular area doesn't get much more foot traffic than the tenth floor since only a handful of employees are allowed to be here.”

There was a good chance he'd say I was an exception because I was his fated mate, but that was a topic I wasn't ready to touch. So I just nodded and let him guide me farther down the hallway.

My sandals barely made a sound against the stone floor as I followed Adan down the corridor. The air was cool but not unwelcoming.

The farther we went, the more I noticed details I hadn't caught before. The wall sconces shifted ever so subtly as we passed, the golden light softening when it fell on me, almost as though it was being filtered through warmth. I glanced over my shoulder, but the shadows behind us seemed unchanged. The floor gleamed without showing our reflections, and the walls bore faint carvings unlike anything I had ever seen. The closest I'd come in my travels was some old Viking runes in Scandinavia...but the ones here pulsed with energy, alive in a way no carving should be.

"What are these symbols?" I brushed my fingers lightly over the nearest one and felt a slight buzz against my fingertips.

"Wards," Adan answered, moving closer with a satisfied gleam in his eyes that I didn't understand. "This is one of my protective glyphs. Some guard against intrusion, others keep the building hidden from human eyes. Most respond only to me."

"But I can see them." I looked up at him.

He offered a faint smile. "I know."

I didn't know how to respond to that, so I stayed quiet, taking in the subtle, impossible changes around me.

A doorway on our left blinked—actually blinked—before dissolving into the wall. I stumbled to a halt. "Did that just..."

"It did," he confirmed with a nod. "The Abyss adapts to its guests. Some rooms shift

location based on energy or need.”

“And some freaking blink like an eye?”

My dismay made him chuckle as he pressed his palm against my lower back to lead me farther down the hallway.

We turned another corner, and a massive window came into view. This one revealed a night sky awash in stars. There were too many for me to count. They glittered in a deep violet sky, and the constellations were unfamiliar, as though they belonged to a different world altogether. It wasn’t even the oddest thing I had encountered tonight, but the sight made me stumble to a stop.

“Where is that?”

“A place the window remembers,” he murmured. “Sometimes, The Abyss shows you what you need to see.”

As I stared out at the stars, a tall woman in a long gray cloak passed us. Her silver hair tumbled in waves down her back, and her eyes glowed faintly gold when she looked at me. They weren’t hostile, just curious.

“Good evening, Lord Deville,” she said in a twinkling voice.

He inclined his head with a kind of reverence I’d seen the hotel staff give him. “Good evening, Mistress Elari.”

When she walked out of view, I gave him a sidelong glance. “Lord Deville, huh? You didn’t mention that title earlier.”

He smirked. “Would you have taken me seriously if I’d led with that?”

“Probably not,” I admitted. “But it explains the whole ‘demon royalty’ vibe you’ve got going on.”

“Keep complimenting me, and I might think you’re warming up to the idea of staying longer,” he warned.

Considering everything he’d told me and the strange things I’d seen with my own eyes, I should’ve been running for the door. But as odd as this place was, I felt welcomed. At home, even. And I couldn’t deny the magnetic pull I felt toward Adan.

“You’re not exactly making it easy to walk away.”

“Good.” He settled his hand at my lower back again, and the heat of his touch seeped into my bones. “Then I’d better keep it up.”

We passed a hallway lined with mirrors that had ornate black frames. Except when I turned to look, my reflection was only a faint outline. Adan’s was completely there, standing beside me.

“Okay, what in the heck is up with that?” I whispered.

“Not all mirrors show the surface. Some reflect presence. Magic. What’s hidden inside.”

Before I could ask why I appeared at all on the reflective surface when I was just a human, the atmosphere changed. The only part of this hallway I hadn’t seen yet was a single black door ahead of us.

It was unlike any that we’d passed during the tour. Taller, narrower, and smooth as obsidian. It didn’t have any symbols etched into the hard surface. There wasn’t even a doorknob. Just a faint shimmer, like the surface itself resisted being touched.

Adan's gait slowed. His shoulders stiffened, and the air around him pulled tighter, like a current going still before a storm. His presence didn't dim, exactly. But it shifted. As though it was being shielded by something I couldn't see.

I stopped walking. "What's behind there?"

He paused before answering, "That door isn't part of the tour."

I blinked. "You've told me more about demons, supernatural wards, and shape-shifting dragons than I imagined possible. And a random door is where you draw the line?"

"There's nothing arbitrary in my reasons for skipping this particular one." He turned to face me, but the smile he flashed at me didn't quite reach his eyes. "Some things aren't ready to be seen. Not yet."

My stomach flipped, more from curiosity than fear. "You're being cagey."

"Only a little." He shrugged. "I can't give away all my secrets right off the bat."

Whatever was behind that door, my gut told me it was important to Adan. I studied him for a moment, my curiosity sharpening, but I ultimately decided to save my questions for later. "I suppose that would ruin your air of mystery."

"And it would be a damn shame to lose your interest."

I snorted and muttered, "As if that's going to happen."

He was smug as he guided me to a set of stone stairs that led to the public sections of the hotel. By the time we looped back toward the elevator, the energy between us had shifted. Not drastically—or even all at once. But I felt it in the brush of his hand

against my back. Also in the way his gaze lingered when I glanced at him. And how neither of us spoke, as though words might shatter whatever fragile thread was drawing us closer.

My breath caught as we reached the corridor near my suite. The hush pressed in closer now, thick with anticipation. The walls still hummed with subtle magic, but it felt different now. Somehow, it seemed less like the building reacting to me and more like it was holding its breath for us. Waiting for our return.

I stopped outside the door to my room and turned to him, needing to break the spell of silence. “I feel like there’s a lot you haven’t told me yet.”

He arched a dark brow, amusement shining from his gorgeous blue eyes. “It would take far longer than one evening to fill you in on all the secrets of The Abyss.”

“What about yours?”

His lips curved. “Considering I’ve been alive for hundreds of years, that would take a while, too.”

“Hundreds...as in plural?” I whispered, trying to wrap my head around this man being more than five times my age.

“Very much plural,” he confirmed with a nod, pressing his finger beneath my chin to close my gaping mouth.

“I...I don’t even know how to respond to that.”

His eyes darkened, the blue deepening to a stormy hue that made my heart stutter. “How about you promise to stick around so I can tell you more tomorrow?”

“I guess I could do that.” I licked my lips, which suddenly felt dry. “I missed check-in for my other hotel reservation, so I’m sure they canceled it on me.”

“Good.”

Then he kissed me. The press of his lips against mine wasn’t rushed or tentative. It was a deliberately slow claiming. His hand curved around the back of my neck, thumb brushing just beneath my ear. The heat of his mouth slid over mine like a promise, and everything else faded into the background. Including the part of me that still tried to deny that any of this was real.

The only thing I was aware of was Adan. The feel of his lips. The quiet strength in his touch. And the sudden, breathless awareness that something in me was changing—responding to him in a way that defied logic.

I swayed toward him, wanting more, but then he stilled. His hand tensed slightly at my nape, and he pulled back, just enough to rest his forehead against mine. His breathing turned ragged, his voice rough with restraint. “Something’s wrong.”

A knot formed low in my stomach. “What do you mean?”

“A ripple in the wards.” He pulled away, his hand lingering on my neck for a heartbeat longer. “I have to check on something.”

Disappointment and confusion churned in my chest, but I nodded. “Okay.”

His gaze swept over me as though he didn’t want to forget a single detail. “I’ll see you soon, Calliope.”

He turned and walked away, his powerful stride already shifting into something more purposeful...and dangerous.



I entered my suite, and the door closed behind me with a soft click. But I didn't move right away. My fingers brushed my lips as my heart thundered in my chest.

The kiss had shaken me for all the right reasons. But it was the look in his eyes as he walked away that really made my knees go weak.

ADAN

I stalked down the hallway the moment I was out of Calliope's sight. The pull to return to her coiled like a chain around my ribs, but the disturbance in the wards throbbed hard enough to demand my attention.

The echo of her kiss still lingered on my lips. After pulling it deep into my lungs, her scent remained. Subtle but heady. A potent blend of wild honey and distant thunderstorms.

My demon snarled inside me, furious at the interruption. He was pissed as fuck at being forced to leave her side.

I should have been back in my mate's suite, tasting more of that sweet skin. And finding out exactly how far she was willing to let me go. Instead, I was heading toward a problem. One that would regret existing the moment I laid eyes on it.

I took the side stairs down two levels and emerged into the east wing, where the pulse had originated.

Kastiel was already waiting for me.

The head of security stood with his arms crossed and his obsidian eyes tracking my approach. Built like a fortress, he gave a curt nod in greeting. "Adan."

“Talk fast.”

“A shifter guest lost his temper in the games room. Loud. Threatening. Nothing that broke your laws, but enough to trip the aggression ward.”

My jaw flexed.

“The staff handled it. He was drunk. Minor property damage.”

“What kind of shifter?”

“Mountain lion. Loner pack.” Kastiel tilted his head. “Young and stupid.”

I exhaled slowly. Not worth branding or tossing out, but close. “Warn him. If he so much as raises his voice again, I’ll handle it personally.”

“Understood.”

I looked around the corridor, feeling the faint hum of wards restoring themselves. The glyphs overhead had already begun to cool.

“Anything else?” I asked.

“No. But your power spiked hard enough that I thought you might start tearing stone.”

I shot him a warning look. “Get back to work, Kastiel.”

He’d known me long enough to understand how bad of an idea pushing me would be. He just smirked and vanished into the shadows.

With the crisis handled, I stood still for a long moment, torn. I'd barely left Calliope's side. I could feel her presence, like a sunbeam on the edge of my awareness. Soft. Warm. Still awake.

But going to her tonight carried its own risks. So I turned and walked away, feeling as though my insides were being ripped to shreds with each step I took. The only thing that kept me going was the knowledge that I'd see my pretty mate in the morning.

\* \* \*

I was up before dawn, already restless. Sleep had been out of reach from the moment I left Calliope. Every breath I took without her beside me felt wrong. Empty.

The memory of her soft, tentative reaction to my kiss had looped in my mind until I thought I'd go mad from the wanting.

When the sun finally started to rise, I stopped pacing the floor and did something about it. Summoning the head chef with a direct command, I had him prepare a breakfast tray with options I thought Calliope would enjoy after seeing which items she gravitated toward when we shared dinner. Soft scrambled eggs with peppered bacon, ricotta crepes with honey and walnuts, fresh chocolate croissants, seasonal fruit, and strong coffee.

Then I took the elevator up, rolling the cart to her suite myself. My demon snarled with satisfaction, clawing at the edges of my control. He approved of my decision, though for different reasons. He didn't want to feed her. He wanted to claim her.

Patience, I reminded him even though mine was fraying.

The corridor outside her suite was quiet. The wards thrummed steady and strong. When I lifted my hand to knock, the door opened before I touched it.

Calliope stood there, blinking up at me with sleep-heavy eyes and tousled hair. She wore one of the hotel's midnight-blue robes, cinched tight at her waist, and nothing on her feet. Her freckles were more visible in the morning light. So were the delicate shadows beneath her lashes.

My restraint nearly snapped.

"I brought breakfast," I explained, my voice rougher than I intended.

She yawned, blinked again, and stepped back with a sleepy smile. "You really weren't kidding about the full-service experience here."

I rolled the cart over to the table, but my eyes stayed locked on her like a starving man at a feast.

"I wanted to feed you," I murmured as she poured a cup of coffee.

Her robe slipped slightly, revealing the smooth line of her collarbone. She didn't seem to notice. Or maybe she didn't care.

"Is this one of your hospitality perks?" she asked lightly, curling into the chair with her mug clutched between her hands.

"Only for you."

Her smile faltered, and her eyes lifted to mine. When our gazes met, the air between us crackled with something wild and inevitable.

Calliope set her coffee cup down and stood slowly, her expression unreadable. But her steps were sure as she crossed the room and came to stand directly in front of me.

My heart pounded like war drums as she stared up at me for a moment, her pretty green eyes searching mine. Then she rose onto her toes, cupped my jaw, and kissed me.

There was no hesitation in her this time. Her mouth pressed to mine with surprising force, soft lips parting on a sigh that went straight to my core. I responded before my brain had time to catch up. My arms wrapped around her, drawing her flush against my chest as I deepened the kiss. I poured everything I'd held back into it. Each stolen look, thread of tension, and ounce of need.

Calliope moaned softly, and I nearly lost my mind.

My tongue brushed hers, tasting the lingering sweetness of honey and coffee. Her fingers slid into my hair, tugging just enough to drive me insane.

As we kissed, the rest of the world disappeared around me. There was nothing but the two of us, getting lost in the moment together. My perfect fated mate.

We stumbled backward, my grip shifting so I could lift her effortlessly and carry her into the bedroom. Her legs wrapped around my waist with instinctual ease, and I was rewarded with another needy little sound that almost undid me.

My knees hit the edge of the mattress, and I sat, letting her straddle my lap. Her hands slipped to my shoulders, then to the buttons of my shirt. She began undoing them, one by one, as her kiss grew bolder. Hungrier. My control frayed with every brush of her fingers against my skin.

I broke away just long enough to tug her robe loose, but she tensed the moment it slid off her shoulder.

Not just a hesitation. A full body pause.

I froze. Even my demon stopped snarling in my head.

I pressed my hand against her wildly beating heart, waiting until her gaze locked on mine.

“Before we continue, I have to tell you something,” she whispered, her bottom lip trembling.

My own heart thudded like it was made of lead. Nothing she could say would make me stop wanting her. Calliope was meant to be mine.

But I wasn’t going to pressure her for something she might not be ready for yet. I tried to tame my demon half that wanted to claim her right fucking now. Before she understood what being the other half of my soul meant.

I cupped her cheek gently, forcing myself to draw a breath that didn’t come easy. “You can tell me anything, baby.”

She stayed silent for a moment, remaining perfectly still. Her green eyes were wide and conflicted. Her breathing was ragged, lips still swollen from our kiss.

She cleared her throat and looked down, her freckled cheeks filled with a pretty pink color. “Um, I’ve never done this before.”

The thought of her with anyone else sent a lick of possessive fire through my veins, but I forced a light tone as I asked, “No holiday flings during any of your travels?”

Shaking her head, she whispered, “I’m a virgin.”

The words hit like a thunderclap, unexpected but clarifying. Everything in me went silent. Not out of dismay or disappointment. But reverence.

I had never been someone's first. Not in all my centuries. And I sure as hell had never wanted to be...until now.

Now it wasn't just my heart that pounded but my cock also throbbed at her confession.

I used my thumb beneath her chin to gently force her to meet my gaze. "You mean I get to be your first? Not just the first but only? Because when you let me take you, that's it. You're mine, Calliope. Body and soul."

"Yes, and I didn't want to ruin the moment," she said, cheeks coloring as she started to pull back. "I know I probably should've?—"

"Stop." I caught her hips, keeping her in place. "You didn't ruin a damn thing. Not even close."

Her breath hitched. "Really?"

"You have no idea how hard it is not to lay you back on this bed and make you mine in every possible way," I growled, my forehead pressing to hers. "But I'm not going to take anything from you. Not when what I want is for you to give it freely. Without fear. Without doubt."

Her fingers curled into my shirt, and her voice trembled. "I don't want to be afraid of you."

I pulled her tighter into my arms. "Then don't be. I'll earn your trust, Calliope. However long it takes."



### CALLIOPE

I stayed curled in Adan's lap for a long time, his promise circling in my head. His arms stayed wrapped around me, and his chest was warm and solid beneath my cheek. The intensity between us hadn't faded, not completely. It hummed beneath the surface, but he didn't push. He just held me.

I needed that more than I'd realized.

For the first time in my life, I'd practically thrown myself at a man. And not just anyone. A demon—something I didn't even know existed twenty-four hours ago. One who claimed I was his fated mate.

It should've been too much. But even now, with the heat of his body surrounding me and my pulse still racing, all I could think about was how natural it had felt to kiss him. My body had responded like it was waking up for the first time.

And maybe it was.

I'd always felt out of step with other women my age. They talked about hookups and flings, dating apps and guys they'd met at parties. I thought something in me was broken for never finding someone who truly sparked my interest. Not until Adan.

I knew that sleeping with guys you just met was a thing, but part of me worried this was all moving too fast. That I was losing my grip on reality and none of this was

real.

I tilted my head back and studied Adan. “You meant it when you said I’m your fated mate?”

“I did.” His gaze was steady, and there wasn’t a hint of doubt in his deep voice. “There is no one else for me, Calliope. Not now. Not ever.”

His words sank into me, warming places I hadn’t let anyone reach before.

“I’m still trying to wrap my head around what being your fated mate means,” I admitted softly.

Adan didn’t reply right away. His fingers traced a slow, reassuring pattern across my lower back first. “It means you’re mine. In a way that has nothing to do with possession and everything to do with connection. It’s a recognition that happens once in a demon’s life, if at all.”

“Once?” I breathed.

“We don’t get second chances. Demon mating is final. Absolute. The moment I saw you...” His hand stilled. “Something ancient inside me woke up and refused to go back to sleep.”

I shivered, not from fear, but from the weight of what he was saying. “Is it like that for all demons?”

He nodded. “For those of us lucky enough to find the other half of our soul, yes. But too many demons spend centuries without their one.”

The emotion in his voice stole my breath.

After a long pause, I whispered, “Exactly how old are you?”

“Older than most buildings you’ve ever stepped foot in. I was born before this country existed.”

I blinked at him, trying to process that. “So when you said plural centuries, you meant...”

“Three.” He said the number so casually, I almost missed it. “I’m three hundred and two.”

“That means you’re two hundred and eighty-two years older than me.” My brain almost stalled as I did the math. “Being a demon must have its advantages because you definitely don’t look it.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere.” His palm stroked up my spine. “But I didn’t make it through those years untouched.”

“What do you mean?”

He looked away, his jaw tight. “My father is Abaddon.”

The name didn’t mean anything to me. “Who?”

“Some call him the Destroyer. Others say that he’s the king of a swarm of demonic locusts. A general in hell. A beast made of smoke and teeth.”

My mouth went dry. “And he’s your father?”

Adan nodded again. “I inherited his power and part of the reputation that came with it. The supernatural world expected me to follow in his footsteps, including him.”

The shadows in his voice made my heart ache.

“But you didn’t.”

“As soon as I could get free, I left and chose something different for myself.” His chest lifted as he heaved a sigh. “I’m still tied to him in some ways, though. Which is why I chose the name for this place...because he’s also known as the demon of the abyss.”

My eyes swept the luxurious room around us—the stone walls, the magic etched into the foundation, the layers of history humming beneath it all. “You chose to build this place. Not destroy it.”

His gaze snapped back to mine, and I saw something flicker there. A quiet kind of awe. “Nobody has understood so quickly before.”

I beamed him an impish smile. “Maybe it’s a fated mate thing.”

“Could be,” he agreed with a grin. “You’re my first and only so I’m sure there will be lots of things we will learn about our bond together.”

The absolute certainty in his voice cracked something open inside me.

And I wanted more. Not just answers or explanations. All of Adan, too.

“Can I see what you really look like?”

His eyes bled to black and back to blue again. “You already have.”

“No,” I whispered. “I mean...your demon form.”

Adan didn't move right away. His expression turned guarded, and for a moment, I thought he might say no. Then he stood, his tall frame casting a long shadow across the stone floor. "You sure you're ready for that?"

Oddly enough, I was. "Yes."

"Stay exactly where you are."

My breath caught as the air around him rippled. The warmth of the room deepened into something heavier. The ceiling lights flickered, the sconces dimming to a low golden glow. And then he began to change.

A low crack echoed through the suite as his bones started to realign. His back arched, and with a low snarl, his body began to expand. His shoulders grew broader. His muscles thickened, flexing as his clothes dissolved in a whisper of smoke, replaced by iron armor that latched onto him like second skin. Black horns pushed free from his skull, ribbed and slightly curved at the top. And a long tail flicked behind him, shaped similar to a scorpion's and ending in a magenta-tinged tip.

The sound of leathery wings unfurling sent a shiver down my spine, and I watched in stunned silence as they stretched wide behind him. They were massive. Powerful. And with their magenta coloring, beautiful in a way I hadn't expected.

His eyes were the last to change. The deep blue I had come to recognize bled away, consumed by a swirling fire that danced in pure black sockets. Yet even then...I saw him.

Not a monster. Not a beast.

Still Adan. Just bigger and with demonic features.

The Abyss responded to his transformation. The stone floor pulsed beneath my feet, and the chandelier above us dimmed further until it glowed with a soft, flickering heat.

Adan stood motionless, letting me take him in. His breathing was even, but his jaw was tight. As though he was bracing himself.

I rose slowly, never taking my eyes off him.

He was massive. At least six-foot-eight now, every inch of him solid and fierce in an otherworldly kind of way. His armor gleamed across his shoulders and forearms, gleaming iron molded to his body as though it had been forged just for him. His torso and thighs were bare, showing off the raw power of his body.

My steps were slow as I approached him. Every instinct in me should've screamed to run, but all I felt was awe.

I reached out and touched the center of his chest. His skin was warm, the beat of his heart steady beneath my palm.

"You're still you," I whispered.

The fire in his eyes flared.

And then—quietly, reverently—he whispered back, "Only with you."

I felt Adan's breath hitch beneath my palm, just slightly. Even with all that power, he was holding back for me.

The realization settled inside me like a truth I hadn't realized I needed. Adan was a demon feared by others, descended from one of the most powerful creatures in

existence. But with me, he was gentle. Patient. Even vulnerable.

I knew deep in my bones that I didn't need to be afraid of him. Or of what being his fated mate meant.

If I listened to my head instead of my heart, I'd take a step back to give myself time. But I threw caution to the wind and slid my hand up from his chest to cup his cheek. A low rumble vibrated in his throat as he leaned into my touch.

"I'm not afraid of what you are." My voice shook, not from fear but from the depth of emotion surging inside me. I didn't know where it came from, but there was no denying I felt an irresistible pull to Adan.

His large hand rose to cover mine where it rested against his face. "You don't know how much that means to me."

"I think I do," I breathed.

I still didn't understand so much about this world and the bond between us. But I didn't need all the answers to know that I wanted the opportunity to explore whatever was happening between us. To experience the passion I felt for the first time while I had the chance since my trip was only supposed to last for three more days.

I stepped closer until his body nearly enveloped mine. His wings slowly lowered to wrap around my back.

My voice didn't waver this time when I said, "I want you."

ADAN

For all the years I'd existed, I'd never heard anything so precious. My demon surged with feral hunger at Calliope's confession, rising like a tide in my blood and demanding I take her now. Brand her as mine in every possible way.

But I couldn't. Not yet.

She didn't know what that kind of demon claiming meant. Not in the permanent, soul-bound way it would change everything for us.

Before that happened, Calliope deserved to choose me fully, not be swept away by instincts she didn't understand. So I clenched my fists at my sides and wrestled my darker half back down where he belonged.

Still in my demon form, I closed my eyes and let out a slow breath, drawing my power inward. I felt the shift begin—bones realigning, flames dimming. My horns retracted, wings tucking in and fading into smoke. Heat rippled across my skin as the armor melted away, replaced seamlessly by what I'd been wearing.

When I opened my eyes, Calliope stared at me with open wonder. "Your clothes came back. Just like that."

"Demonic perks. Comes in handy when you don't want to traumatize hotel guests."



Her soft laugh wrapped around my ribs like a tether, grounding me at this moment with her.

“You sure?” I asked, just to be certain, even though my last thread of restraint was close to snapping.

Calliope didn’t hesitate. “Yes.”

That was all I needed.

In a single, fluid motion, I bent and swept my fated mate off her feet, cradling her against my chest like the priceless treasure she was to me.

Her eyes widened, a surprised gasp leaving her plump lips as her arms twined around my neck. “Adan?—”

“I’ve waited lifetimes for you,” I murmured as I carried her toward the bed. “Now let me worship every inch of your perfect body.”

She rolled her eyes with a snort. “You better not be expecting perfection because you won’t get it.”

“We’ll have to disagree since you were born to be mine.”

I laid her on the mattress, and she sat up slowly. I reached for the tie at her waist, moving carefully as I undid the knot. The robe slipped from her shoulders, revealing the soft slope of her collarbone and the tops of her breasts. My breath left me in a slow exhale as I took her in.

Calliope didn’t see herself as I did. To me, she was utter perfection. And she was mine.

She reached for the hem of my shirt, and I helped her tug the material over my head, tossing it aside.

She brushed her hands over my bare chest. “You’re so warm.”

“That’s because hellfire lives in my blood.”

Her hands flattened over my heart, and her lips parted, but she didn’t speak. Then again, my almost-human mate didn’t know what hellfire was, so she couldn’t possibly understand how rare I was. Not yet, but we’d have forever to learn everything about each other. I would do whatever it took to make that happen.

I’d start by giving her what she wanted.

I leaned in and kissed her again, slow and deep. Letting her feel everything I hadn’t said. Hoping she understood this wasn’t just desire. It was destiny. And I was going to make damn sure she felt like fate had made the right choice.

Her bottom lip trembled as she looked up at me, blinking slowly. Her green eyes were hazy with passion.

My demon was pushing to at least get between her legs if I wasn’t going to brand her right now. But I knew that I couldn’t rush her first time. My pretty little mate needed to know how special she was.

Wrapping my arms around her waist, I helped her to lay against the pillows. Then I slowly kissed down her neck and shoulders, savoring the taste of her soft skin.

“I’ve been dying to taste your beautiful pussy since you walked through my door,” I growled as I trailed my lips down her stomach, stopping at the waistband of her panties.

Pink spread over her pale skin, but Calliope didn't act like a blushing virgin as her body vibrated with anticipation underneath me. "Then taste me, Adan. I want that too. So much."

My urge to mate was riding me hard, and it took everything I had to remove her panties as if they were delicate tissue paper instead of ripping them from her body.

Leaning in, I kept my gaze locked on hers as I swiped my tongue against the length of her slit, relishing in the way goose bumps prickled on her thighs and the green of her eyes darkened.

I had the ability to touch her with more than just the physical, but I didn't want to overwhelm her during our first time, so I held back from using my powers. I wrapped my hands around the back of her thighs so she was spread before me, her arousal already hitting my nose.

I'd barely even touched her, and my mate was already so wet and ready for me.

Flattening my tongue against her pussy, I swept my tongue through her arousal, her thighs already trembling around me. But I needed more. I wanted to feel her come hard on my face and lap up every inch of her.

I slowly hooked a finger inside her tight channel, letting her adjust to the size of my thick digit before closing my lips around her clit. I sucked hard, fucking her with my finger in a slow rhythm that had her bucking her pussy against my mouth.

My mate was inexperienced, but she knew what she wanted, her fingertips going to my hair as she thrashed, her orgasm coming hard and fast as she cried out my name. "Adan! Yes, oh yes!"

With her release coating my tongue, I had to soothe my inner demon from claiming

her. His snarl echoed in my head. Mine. Mine. Mine.

As her inner walls clamped around my finger, I focused on bringing her to another orgasm. Gently biting down on her clit, I worked another finger inside her.

Her screams of pleasure bounced off the walls, and I couldn't take it anymore. She let out a mewl of disappointment and breathed my name as I sat up and looked down at her beautiful face flushed with color.

"I think you're ready for me to put my big cock in you until you're filled with me," I murmured. "The next time you come, I want to feel you do it around my dick while you scream my name."

She gripped my forearms and panted, "Yes. Please."

I growled, trying to tame my inner demon as I crushed my lips to hers while I undid my pants and shoved them down my legs. It took everything I had to pry my lips from hers so that I could sink inside her sweet pussy. But I wanted her to watch as I took her for the first time. Needed to see her reaction as I filled her tight heat.

Even just pushing the tip in was a fight, but she was so warm. And wet. Her body was needy for mine as she pushed her hips closer, as though she couldn't wait for me to bury my cock deep inside her.

I moved slowly, inching my dick into her pussy as she adjusted to my size, little moans escaping her perfect lips until I filled her to the hilt.

Controlling my inner demon, I stilled so she could adjust to being filled by me. A tear leaked from the corner of one of her eyes, and I kissed it away, hating that I caused her pain, even while I reveled in the fact that I was her first. And only.

She was so wet and tight, I wasn't sure how long I could last. Then she shifted her hips with a soft sigh. "Oh, wow. That feels...good."

"I think we can do a fuck of a lot better than good, baby." I reached between us, stroking her sensitive clit as I pulled out and thrust back inside her pussy.

Her inner walls clamped down on me, and I chuckled. "That's right, my pretty mate. I'm gonna make you scream my name again, but this time I'll get to feel you fall apart around my cock."

I leashed my demon while I pounded in and out of her tight heat, determined to make that happen before I found my release. It didn't take long for her entire body to shudder around me. Her arousal coated her thighs as she came hard, her breath coming in short, heavy bursts.

"That's it, baby, come for me," I commanded, pinching her clit between my finger and thumb.

I rode her through her release until intense pleasure roared through my system, groaning as our bodies rocked to the same rhythm, exploding together.

When her shudders stopped, Calliope fell against the pillows, her body spent as her eyes slowly closed while she breathed heavily.

I wanted to stay connected to her. Wanted to take another orgasm from her. But I knew her body couldn't take mine again so soon.

I slowly pulled out of her perfect pussy, almost sinking right back inside when I heard her whimper as though she already missed being filled by me.

After getting out of bed, I padded toward the bathroom before coming back with a

warm washcloth to wipe between her legs.

She sighed softly. “That feels good.”

Her eyes were still closed as she snuggled into the pillows. I stroked my palm down her spine. “Still hungry?”

“Famished now.” She flashed me a mischievous grin. “I worked up quite the appetite.”

“I’ll bring you a chocolate croissant, some fruit, and coffee while I get the kitchen to make us a fresh breakfast.” I was going to make sure she ate, but the rest of the stuff I’d brought had gotten cold while we were otherwise occupied.

I would do anything to take care of Calliope and give her every reason to stick around so I could convince her to accept my demon brand and cement our mating.

### CALLIOPE

I stayed curled beneath the sheets, my body still tingling in places I hadn't known could feel like that. The warmth of Adan's touch lingered on my skin, along with the echo of his voice—low and reverent, like I was someone he treasured.

I'd just given my virginity to a demon I'd known for less than a full day, but I didn't regret the decision. What should have been reckless had instead felt inevitable. Like crossing a threshold I'd been walking toward my whole life without realizing it.

I wasn't sure what to make of the deep sense of rightness still humming beneath my skin, except that it must be connected to the whole fated mate thing. The concept of knowing you'd be with someone forever without even the tiniest bit of doubt was foreign to me. I didn't know if I could trust it, but I definitely wanted more of those mind-blowing orgasms.

I propped myself up on one elbow, tucking the sheet around my chest to keep myself covered, when Adan returned with a tray in his hands. The scent of chocolate croissants and fresh fruit hit me first, followed by the richer undertones of dark-roast coffee.

“Room service offers breakfast in bed now?” I teased.

“Only for you.”

The wicked curve of his lips was dangerous for my libido, so I forced my gaze away from him before I started something my body wasn't quite ready for again. Not while I was deliciously sore from our lovemaking.

I noticed the antique bell sitting on the small table beside the bed. It was brass and delicately engraved with elegant scrollwork. I lifted it and asked, "Is this for summoning you?"

Adan's brow arched. "That wasn't there last night."

I gave the bell another little shake. It chimed sweetly, the sound almost musical. "Because I was thinking it might come in handy."

He walked around the bed and set the tray beside me, then studied the bell more closely. "It's a twin to one in my suite. I haven't seen a second since the day I moved in. The Abyss must have placed it here."

"I wonder why," I murmured as I set the bell back down on the table.

A slow grin tugged at his mouth. "Because it sees you as the lady of the manor already."

I remembered the mysterious woman in the window last night and how she'd called him my lord. "Oh."

"It probably recognized you before I did since you managed to find your way here when humans normally don't." He poured us each a cup of coffee before setting the carafe on the table next to the bell. "If not, I would've given it away when I put you on my private floor in the room next to mine. No one else stays here."

My pulse skipped. I wasn't sure I was ready to unpack the weight behind his words.



Instead, I reached for a croissant and took a generous bite. “Well, I guess I’ll have to ring if I want a refill.”

He leaned down and whispered near my ear, “Careful. That bell might summon more than coffee.”

I flushed so hard I had to focus on chewing so I wouldn’t choke. We sat in comfortable silence, nibbling on pastries and fruit until an entirely new breakfast spread was delivered. A discreet knock sounded at the door just as we finished the last bite of fruit. Adan rose, slid on his pants with effortless grace, and crossed the suite. I slipped on my robe before he returned with the wheeled cart.

This breakfast was even more elaborate than the first—an egg soufflé, truffle potatoes, thick slices of quiche, and a variety of sweet and savory crepes. It looked like something served in a five-star restaurant.

“You weren’t kidding about the full service.” I gave him a wide-eyed look as he poured me another cup of coffee.

“I meant what I said. I want to take care of you.”

His words were simple, but they landed hard. So much of my life had been spent doing everything on my own. It was a little jarring to realize how nice it felt to have someone else do something for me.

We ate side by side on the bed, leaning against the pillows. The food was amazing, but I was suddenly more aware of the way our arms brushed with each bite and how his thigh warmed the space next to mine.

After setting down his fork and knife, Adan prodded, “I want to know more about you and your world.”

I hesitated, unsure where to start. But something about the quiet, steady way he looked at me made it easier to speak.

“My mom raised me alone. She had me after a one-night stand. Said she never even got the guy’s last name. Just that he was gorgeous and mysterious, and she was young and reckless.”

Adan’s expression didn’t shift, but the way his fingers stilled around his coffee mug told me he was listening intently.

“She was amazing, though. Did her best. We didn’t have much, but I never really felt like I was missing anything until she got sick.”

His hand came to rest gently on my knee, grounding me.

“She died two years ago. Cancer. It was fast. I stayed with her until the end.”

Adan didn’t speak, just let the silence stretch gently around us. I hated talking about my mom, but I felt safe here, like I didn’t have to fill the air with words unless I wanted to.

“When she was gone, I had this moment where I realized nothing was holding me in place. No reason to follow a normal path, go to college, settle down somewhere. It felt like the world had cracked open, and I could go anywhere. So I did.”

He wrapped his arm around my shoulders, his voice low. “You don’t have to keep running anymore, Calliope. Not unless you want to.”

Something shifted in my chest. Like the hollow places in me weren’t so empty anymore. I didn’t know if The Abyss would become my new home, but I was starting to believe it was possible.

After I took one last bite of quiche, I slipped out of bed and padded toward the bathroom. A quick shower and a fresh change of clothes later, I felt a little more like myself. Or at least, the version of who I was before I walked into The Abyss.

Adan waited near the door, fully dressed again and watching me with a gaze that said he was more interested in climbing back into bed.

“You keep looking at me like that, and we’ll never leave this suite.”

“Don’t tempt me,” he growled but offered his hand. “Come on. There’s more I want to show you.”

He led me through hallways I hadn’t seen the night before. A conservatory lit by a glowing orb overhead, casting a warm, sunlike glow over the flowers below. Including deep purple lilies—one of which he plucked and tucked behind my ear. A library with books that hummed faintly, as though they were whispering secrets. A vaulted lounge with floating lanterns drifting lazily beneath a skylit ceiling.

“I’m beginning to think this place is one giant illusion,” I teased as we paused outside a gilded gallery room.

Before he could respond, a faint chime echoed through the air. Adan’s expression shifted.

“I need to check something at the front desk.” He brushed a kiss against my cheek. “I’ll come find you as soon as I can.”

I stayed in the same general corridor, letting my fingers trail over the carved stone as I walked. The hotel was quieter now, the soft echo of my sandals barely carrying over the distant hum of magic in the walls.

I hadn't planned to wander far, but something tugged at me. The gentle pull wasn't physical. It was more like the flicker of a thought I couldn't shake.

I turned a corner I didn't recognize, then another. And that's when I saw it. The black door.

I stopped short, my breath catching in my throat.

This wasn't the same hallway we'd visited last night. I was sure of it. Yet there it was. A chill slid down my spine.

I should've turned around. Walked in the other direction and waited for Adan to find me far, far away from the door he'd warned me about. But my feet didn't move. Not the right way, at least.

I stepped closer, barely breathing. My fingers lifted before I could stop them. I pressed my palm flat against the black surface...and it swung open.

ADAN

The moment the wards shrieked in my blood with that specific frequency, I knew exactly which door had opened.

I didn't wait. Didn't speak. Barely breathed.

One second, I was at the reception desk, scanning the visitor ledger while Lyra updated me on a guest issue. The next, I was gone, the walls of The Abyss blurring as I raced through them. My power surged ahead of me, flaring in angry pulses as I followed the screaming pull of the black door.

"Adan!" Lyra called after me, her voice tight. "What happened?"

But I couldn't stop to explain. Not when Calliope had gone into a room filled with dangerous objects...and held a secret only a few trusted demons knew.

The hallway twisted in on itself as I turned a corner, space warping to give me speed. I shoved through the last bend and came skidding to a halt outside the door that should never have been opened by her.

"Calliope," I breathed.

She was just over the threshold, her back to me, framed in the flickering light of a chamber she was never meant to see. Dust rose around her ankles. Shelves of

forbidden artifacts lined the walls, each item humming with dark power. But none of it mattered.

Because her hand hovered less than an inch above the one thing that could damn us both.

“Don’t!” I bellowed, launching forward.

But it was too late. Her fingertips brushed the hilt of the sword.

A pulse of darkness erupted from the blade, slamming into the room like a shock wave. The air thickened with magic so old and foul it turned my stomach. Runes along the chamber floor ignited in bloodred light, flaring in a circular pattern beneath her feet.

The curse had awakened.

“Calliope!” I grabbed my mate around the waist and pulled her back, shielding her with my body as the surge rebounded. She stumbled, wide-eyed and breathless, staring at the sword still humming on its pedestal.

“What...what is that?” she whispered.

I didn’t answer yet. First, I came to terms with the truth I had just discovered.

No human could trigger that curse. The blade only responded to one kind of blood. Demon.

I held Calliope tighter, feeling the slow tremor in her limbs, the sharp inhale that wasn’t quite fear. She believed she was fully human, but she had just awakened a curse forged in hell.

Which meant her father had to be...

Fucking hell.

I closed my eyes, gathering control. I had to stay calm. Needed to think.

This wasn't just about Calliope anymore. The curse she triggered would have sent an invitation to a supernatural assassin bound by blood magic and payment centuries old. One who would now begin hunting me.

And if she'd gone any deeper into the room...

My gaze snapped to the far wall. The veil there shimmered, thin as breath. The portal hadn't opened, thank the flames, but she'd been too close.

That door should have stayed hidden. There was only one explanation—The Abyss had let her in.

Her voice brought me back. "Adan? Are you okay?"

I turned to face her, heart thundering. Her cheeks were flushed, and her pupils were wide from the residual energy. But she had no idea what she'd done.

"We have to leave this room."

She didn't argue. She just nodded, still dazed as she let me guide her away.

But my mind was spinning.

If Calliope had demon blood and was lured to this room, my father might already know about her. My fists clenched. The last thing I needed was Abaddon's attention

turning toward my mate before we were fully bonded. But I also couldn't rush her into it because she deserved better.

"Where are we going?"

"My domain." Her soft laugh made me realize how demon-like that sounded. "My rooms take up the rest of the tenth floor. The wards are the strongest there since I'm at my most vulnerable where I lay my head at night. You'll be safe."

Like most demons, I didn't sleep much, but when I did, I only had The Abyss to keep me safe.

"And you, too," she mumbled.

Touched more than I could say over her concern for me, I squeezed her hand. I couldn't remember the last time someone was worried about my safety as much as their own. "I'll be fine, baby."

As we walked, her fingers stayed laced with mine, though I felt her glance at me more than once. She could sense my tension. My restraint.

The corridor darkened behind us as I led her through a rarely used passage. Not many had ever walked this path. Just myself, and now her. The door to my private quarters opened without a key, responding to my touch alone. When I stepped aside to let her in first, she hesitated only for a second before crossing the threshold.

She took in the space with quiet awe. The furnishings were darker here—polished obsidian, onyx wood, and low-burning violet sconces that never flickered. The Abyss had clearly responded to my mood and sparked a fire in the hearth without instruction.



Calliope turned to me, concern shining from her green eyes. “Adan, please talk to me. What was that sword? Why did it react like that when I touched it? Does it have something to do with why you brought me to your rooms and not my suite?”

I wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed with Calliope and pull her close. Not even for sex—which had been fucking incredible—but just to hold her. To prove to myself that nothing in that damn room had hurt her. Instead, I needed to have a tough conversation with my pretty mate.

This wasn’t how I had pictured today going. After hundreds of years, I’d finally found my fated mate, and now I needed to give her news that could change how she thought about herself. But I refused to keep secrets from Calliope. It would only lead to distrust, and I never wanted her to think that she wasn’t safe with me.

I led her over to my favorite chair next to the fireplace. After sitting down, I pulled her onto my lap. With her cradled in my embrace, I began to answer her questions.

“That sword was a relic from a couple of hundred years ago when I was a different person. One with a curse that you triggered.”

Her pretty green eyes widened as she echoed, “A curse?”

I cupped her cheek. “The thing is, you shouldn’t have been able to awaken it since demon blood magic was used. Which can only mean one thing...your father wasn’t human.”

Her breath caught. “That’s not possible. My mom said she didn’t even know his name. Just that he was gorgeous and mysterious.”

I flashed her a grim smile. “That tracks.”

“So I’m part demon?” She blinked up at me, still absorbing the truth.

“I don’t know what kind, but the blade confirmed what I suspected the moment you walked into this hotel. You didn’t get here by accident, Calliope. The Abyss called to something in your blood.”

She lifted trembling fingers to her mouth and took a shaky breath. “That seems impossible, but so does everything else that’s happened since I stepped foot into The Abyss.”

“I didn’t want to tell you like this,” I murmured. “But you deserve the truth.”

She looked down at her hands. “I feel like I’ve been pretending to be someone I’m not without even knowing it.”

I tilted her chin back up. “You’re still you, Calliope. This just means there’s more to discover. I have centuries of experience with things like that.”

A small laugh slipped from her lips, but it faded quickly. “What happens now?”

I wanted to brand her. Fuck her again. Keep her safe from the assassin who would come. But all I said was, “Now, you stay here. With me. We’ll do our best to learn what we can about your demonic bloodline while we get to know each other better.”

She looked up at me, eyes wide and searching. “Here in your rooms? Or here on the same floor in the suite you gave me?”

“Preferably right here with me.” I brushed my finger over the pulse point in her wrist, enjoying how it sped up at my touch. “My quarters are bound to me more than any other space in The Abyss. No one enters unless I allow it. The wards are layered and old. You’ll be safer here than anywhere else in the world.”

Her throat worked as she swallowed. “Because of the curse?”

“There’s an ancient order that promised blood payment if the sword was ever disturbed. They’ll come for me.”

Calliope’s brows drew together, and she shook her head. “But I touched it. Doesn’t that mean?—”

“No,” I interrupted, not wanting to hear the words spoken aloud. The thought of her being in danger would send my demon into a rage unlike anything the world had seen before. “They’ll come for the one the curse is tied to. That’s me.”

No one would touch my mate. Not while I still breathed. Even death wouldn’t take her from me.

12

### CALLIOPE

Everything I thought I knew about myself wasn't true. The only solid thing I could hold on to was Adan. The man who seemed torn apart by the thought of me being in danger, yet shrugged off the risk to his own life.

"Please keep yourself safe, too. For me."

"You don't need to worry, baby." His arms tightened around me. "I'm not letting anything take you from me. Or me from you."

His air of utter confidence eased some of my concern. "Good."

"If I lost you, my demon would burn this entire world to ash."

He seemed to brace himself, as though he feared my reaction to what he'd just said. But instead of scaring me off, his protectiveness only made me want Adan more. "I don't need you to tame your demon half. I want every part of you."

His eyes bled to black with swirling flames as he replied, "I would fight fate itself if it tried to take you from me."

"Now that I know I have demon blood too, maybe I won't just stand beside you and can fight with you if it ever comes down to that." It dawned on me that Adan's demon might be able to shed some light on what I just found out about my parentage.

“Do you know who my father is?”

He shook his head. “No, but it doesn’t matter to me. Human, demon, shifter, or witch...you’re mine no matter what.”

As his eyes turned back to blue, I curled against Adan, his arms a solid anchor in a sea of uncertainty.

I’d walked into The Abyss less than two days ago, thinking I was just a travel blogger trying to salvage a ruined itinerary. Now I was apparently the daughter of a demon, the fated mate to another, and caught up in a curse that had triggered an ancient assassin to come after him.

It should have felt like too much, but I had a sense of all this being inevitable. Like the pieces of my life that had never quite fit were finally starting to make sense.

“How’re you holding up?”

“I keep thinking back to something that happened last year,” I murmured, the words slipping free before I could second-guess them.

Adan stroked his thumb against my waist. “Tell me.”

I shifted so I could see his face, needing the grounding force of his gaze. “It was in New Orleans. I was there for a week, mostly wandering the Quarter, taking pictures, stuffing myself with beignets. I ducked into this tiny shop near Royal Street with crystals, herbs, and the whole vibe.”

He stayed quiet, listening with a stillness that let me know I had his full attention.

“A woman was doing tarot readings in the back. Probably just for tourists, but I was

curious. So I sat down, and she shuffled the deck like she'd done it a thousand times. But when she laid out the cards, she froze. Her reaction wasn't theatrical. She genuinely looked disturbed."

"What did she see?" he prodded after I paused for a moment.

"That's the thing. She didn't explain. She just stared at the cards and then at me, as though she wasn't sure what she was looking at. Then she gathered everything up, told me I had too much shadow in my chart, and basically shooed me out the door."

Adan let out a low breath. "She must have been a true psychic who sensed your demon blood."

"Back then, I thought it was just some scam. But now, I think you're right." I rubbed my arms despite the warmth of the fire. "She saw something in the cards she couldn't explain."

"Something beautiful and unique."

The way he said it—with quiet reverence and heat—loosened the tension in my chest just enough to let everything else rush in.

I didn't know who my father was. What kind of demon blood I carried. Or how things would go down with the curse I had triggered.

But I knew what I wanted.

Adan.

Twining my arms around his neck, I suggested, "This might sound wildly irresponsible, but how about we forget about all this serious stuff while we distract

ourselves the very best way possible? In your bed.”

“I think my mate is as smart as she’s gorgeous.” He stood with me cradled in his arms and carried me into his room, where he set me on the bed.

The mattress was more comfortable than anything I’d ever lain on. I briefly wondered if The Abyss put some sort of fluffiness spell on it.

Adan crashed on top of me, his breath tickling my neck as his kisses trailed down to my collarbone. “What’s going on in that beautiful head of yours?”

“Hmm?”

“You stopped moving and did this little snort that sounded like an almost giggle.”

I was unable to hold back my giggle. “I was just wondering what kind of magic you used to make this bed so plush.”

“That’s nothing.” His fingers trailed down my neck to my hip, brushing the exposed skin where my shirt had ridden up. “Do you want to see something better I can do with my magic?”

He bent over me and placed the lightest kiss against my bare skin. I shivered as I watched his blue eyes darken with black swirls, heat flooding between my legs in anticipation.

“Uh-huh,” I breathed.

“My kind call it a phantom touch,” he explained, running just the tips of his fingers down my side.

“Like a ghost thing?”

His deep chuckle sent a sensual shiver down my spine. “Maybe I should just show you.”

“Please.”

A pulsing throb started low in my core, like a vibrator set to the lowest setting—except nothing was actually touching me.

“Whoa,” I gasped.

His grin was wicked. “More?”

“Yes,” I panted.

With his gaze locked on mine, the pressure picked up in my core until I was gasping and pushing my hips forward as if I could somehow deepen his phantom touch.

“Does my good girl need more?” The vibrations grew stronger inside me, and I couldn’t hold back the moan, gripping the sheets as I came hard, my arousal soaking my panties with him barely touching me. At least not physically.

“Wow, that was amazing.”

“I would happily spend the rest of my very long life watching you come for me.” I briefly considered asking him how many years demons lived, but then my ability to think clearly was wiped away when he asked, “Do you want more? See where else I can touch you?”

“Yes, please,” I begged, squirming as I clenched the sheets in my fists.



He undid my jeans, and the pulse between my legs heightened. Every part of me was on fire, no matter where Adan used his phantom touch. Every new sensation had me prickling with goose bumps. I couldn't get enough of it.

I reached forward to grab him, but then immediately fell back to the bed as if I were tied down.

He laughed, shaking his head. "Not yet, baby. Let me take care of you first."

"Is this another way you can use that phantom touch?" I demanded.

"Maybe," he said, grinning as the pulse quickened between my thighs before he stripped my jeans and panties from my body and drove his tongue inside me.

The combination of a ripple of sensation and his flattened tongue had me coming so hard I felt stars prick my vision and flow through my body.

Then another sensation started low, warm. Going from my core to my butt.

As soon as I felt a warm ripple against my puckered hole, I bucked my hips closer to Adan's awaiting mouth, stunned by my reaction.

"You like that, baby?" he growled into my pussy.

"Uh-huh," I whimpered, the vibrations now going through my entire lower half, every part of me pulsating.

"Soon, I'll claim every part of you, but I can't wait to feel your tight pussy wrapped around my cock again tonight."

He sealed his words with a lick through my wetness, his phantom touch exploding in

a hard vibration that had my arousal pooling down my thighs.

“Fuck,” he murmured, quickly stripping out of his clothes and positioning himself between my legs.

I clutched his shoulders as he notched the head of his dick at my entrance. I was still vibrating with aftershocks of my last orgasm, and the sensation heightened all of my senses.

Grabbing my thighs with his phantom touch, he wrapped them around his waist so I was arched off the mattress and completely at his mercy. Then he thrust all the way inside me.

I moaned, wiggling my hips to adjust to his sensual invasion.

His lips curved into a smug grin as he stripped my shirt and bra off, his thumbs brushing over my pebbled nipples. The combined sensation of his thick dick inside me, his fingers toying with my breast, and the ripple of sensation against my puckered hole quickly pushed me toward the edge. I couldn't even form words anymore, my whole body shaking as I screamed, bucking to meet his hips over and over as he filled me to the hilt.

“That's it, baby, come for me again. I want us to finish together, and I'm not sure how much longer I can hold out,” he commanded.

I met his next thrust, a new throbbing pulsation against my pussy as if he stuck a fluttering vibrator against me but there was nothing but the air between us...and his knowing smile.

“Yes, oh yes! Adan,” I screamed as tears pricked my eyes. My orgasm ripped through me so fiercely that I collapsed onto the bed, my eyes closed as I tried to control my

breathing while I came down from a deep high.

My body shook again as I felt Adan spill inside me, his groans mingling with mine before he collapsed on top of me, his heart thundering. He peppered my neck with kisses, not saying a word as we caught our breath.

His eyes were still heated when he finally looked down at me. “Was that enough of a distraction for you?”

“Maybe,” I teased, pursing my lips as though I was considering my answer. “You should try again just to be sure.”

13

ADAN

The sun hadn't yet risen, but I was already dressed.

A full day had passed since Calliope touched the cursed sword—long enough for the shock to dull but not disappear. She'd fallen asleep in my bed last night, curled against me as though she had always been there, her breathing steady and unguarded. The image had seared itself into my mind.

Now, she lay wrapped in the blankets, one arm flung across my pillow, the strawberry-blond waves of her hair haloing her face. She looked peaceful. Entirely human, despite what I now knew.

The fire had burned low overnight, casting shadows across the floor. I didn't reignite it. I didn't need the warmth—not when my blood ran hot with too many conflicting instincts.

Calliope didn't yet grasp the kind of danger she'd awakened by entering that damn room.

I stood by the window, watching the horizon begin to glow with morning light. My wards were holding. The hotel guests still slumbered, unaware of what was coming. But that wouldn't last.

Blood would be shed, and I was determined that it would not be mine. I'd fight harder

than I ever had before. Which said a lot, considering the enemies I had defeated in the past.

A psychic buzz sounded in my head, a distinctive pattern telling me it was Kastiel.

Yes?

Something has happened.

I didn't want to leave Calliope alone. Not yet.

Come up.

I crossed the bedroom and stalked through the living area, opening the door before he could knock on the hard surface. My mate needed all the rest she could get.

My head of security strode inside. "The wards flared and re-stabilized at the border of the western quadrant. I checked it personally."

My shoulders tensed. "Was it a breach?"

"Not exactly." He shifted his stance. "It wasn't physical. More like a projection. Took the shape of a woman's voice. Called your mate's name."

My jaw clenched. "It tried to lure her."

"That's my read. It's good she was in your quarters. She never heard it. Didn't get close, but it could've been a test run. A lure. Whoever's coming is curious about her when they should be focused on you."

I raked my fingers through my hair. "Then we need to be prepared for anything

because I refuse to risk my mate's life."

A low growl built in my throat, so quiet it barely disturbed the air, but Kastiel stilled anyway. He recognized the edge in my posture. The rage held just beneath the surface.

The assassin had made a fatal error. My mate had been hunted before she even understood what she was. Touched by a force older than blood and bold enough to test my defenses. This wasn't just disrespect...it was a challenge. One I would answer with hellfire.

Kastiel took a step back in silent acknowledgment, giving me space as I crossed the room.

The faint rustle of sheets in the other room warned me that Calliope was stirring. Her sleepy voice followed a second later. "Adan?"

I turned sharply, instincts snapping taut as I saw her standing in the doorway of the bedroom, wrapped in nothing but my robe. The thin tie was knotted loosely at her waist, and the deep neckline exposed far too much of her soft skin.

My demon surged. No one had the right to see her like this except for me.

Kastiel started to glance in her direction, but I moved before he could. I was across the room in a breath, tugging her gently but firmly back into the bedroom and kicking the door shut behind us.

Her feet were bare against the stone floor, hair tousled from sleep, and cheeks flushed from surprise.

"You okay?" she asked, her voice softening.

“I will be. Once you’re dressed.” I ran my fingers down her bare arm, voice dropping to a murmur. “I’d hate to have to kill one of my most loyal employees. I consider Kastiel to be a friend, but I’m the only one who will ever get to see you fresh from our bed.”

Her lips parted in surprise before curving into a smirk. “I should probably point out that you’re being ridiculous, but your possessiveness was hot.”

I kissed her forehead, letting her feel the restraint in my touch. “We’ll come back to that later. For now, let’s get you dressed.”

Her green eyes searched mine before she nodded. And my world steadied.

Since we’d moved her belongings to my quarters yesterday, it didn’t take long for her to get ready to face our guest.

Calliope stayed close as we re-entered the living room, her gaze sharp now despite the remnants of sleep. Kastiel turned when we stepped inside but kept his gaze on me. He knew better than to look at her.

I inclined my head. “Kastiel, this is Calliope. My mate.”

“It’s an honor.” He bowed slightly, fist pressed over his heart, an old gesture of loyalty among demons.

She blinked at the formal gesture, then flashed him a hesitant smile. “Nice to meet you.”

“She stays with me,” I added, my voice low with authority. “At all times unless I say otherwise.”

Kastiel's mouth twitched, but he didn't push. "Understood."

There was no time to waste. I swept my hand through the air and activated the glyphs that lined my private quarters. They flared violet, then sank into the walls like embers fading into ash. "I want every protective layer around The Abyss reinforced. Lock down the exterior wards first. Then move inward."

"My team is already working on it. The outer veil's doubled." Kastiel's tone was clipped but steady. "But we've got movement on the eastern ridge. One of our regulars noticed as they were leaving and notified Lyra."

"Notify all our guests. They have one hour to check out or stay at their own risk."

Kastiel nodded. "I'll let Lyra know. What should we tell them?"

"The truth." I tugged Calliope against my side. "My mate awakened a blood curse, and we're being hunted by something old and vicious. Any guest who chooses to stay could become collateral damage and will only have themselves to blame."

"That should thin the herd." He smirked. "Or provoke a betting pool."

Calliope's eyes widened. "Really?"

"Demons tend to have an odd sense of humor," I explained with a chuckle.

"And a deeply ingrained faith in Adan to ensure they're safe while staying at The Abyss," Kastiel added.

Calliope tilted her head back to smile up at me. "I share their confidence."

Her unwavering trust meant everything to me, and I was determined to never give her



a reason to regret it.

I brushed a kiss against her temple. “Thank you, baby.”

I exhaled and shifted my attention to the magic that tethered me to the building. The Abyss thrummed in response. The wards were adjusting—folding tighter and layering thicker. Beneath our feet, the floor pulsed with protective glyphs. Silent sentinels woven into the bones of the hotel.

Kastiel stepped closer. “This place saved me, you know. You gave me a purpose after I crawled out of the pit I made for myself. She’s your mate. I’ll die before I let anyone touch her.”

My throat tightened. Releasing Calliope, I clapped him on the shoulder once, brief and firm. “I appreciate the sentiment, but do me a favor and help me ensure the assassin is the only one who loses their life.”

He gave me a sharp nod, then faded into the shadows.

I turned to Calliope. Her brow was furrowed, but there was no fear in her eyes. Only curiosity.

Danger was coming, and she had no idea just how close it already was.

She moved closer, her arm brushing mine as she studied the thickened glow of the wards pulsing beneath our feet. “Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Just stick close to me.”

“You won’t get an argument from me.” She rose onto her toes to brush her lips against mine. “It’s my new favorite place to be.”

There was so much I needed to tell her. About the mating brand my demon was pushing to give her before the assassin got too close. How it would bind her to me permanently, heart and soul. That it would increase her lifespan...and possibly even awaken whatever power might lie dormant in her blood.

But I couldn't. Not yet.

She'd just found out she had demon blood. She'd stepped into a world she didn't even know existed and had taken every revelation with grace and fire. Calliope deserved to choose me freely...not as a reaction to danger. For now, keeping her alive was all that mattered.

Even if I had wanted to say anything, the choice was taken from me when the temperature dropped. Not from a breeze. Nor a subtle shift.

It was a sudden drop. Like someone had opened the door to the void and let its breath slip in.

I straightened instantly. The air thinned and shadows stirred. The low golden sconce closest to the door blinked out.

Even before I turned, I knew.

The Abyss didn't shudder. It bowed.

Power rippled outward in a wave of pressure as the hallway bent around him. Not in submission, but a grim recognition. A thousand layers of warded stone couldn't mute his presence.

My father stood at the edge of my domain, still as death. Towering. Armored in black. His eyes held no flames, only darkness.

“The girl will be fine.”

### CALLIOPE

The air itself seemed to tighten, drawn taut by something I couldn't see yet. But I could feel it. My skin prickled as the sconce by the door blinked out with a soft puff of darkness.

Adan stepped in front of me like a shield. "Abaddon."

My breath caught. His father.

I hadn't expected him to look quite so normal. With how Adan had spoken of him, I assumed he would always appear more monstrous than man, twisted and snarling. But the figure who stepped into view was worse because he didn't need to roar or bare teeth to be terrifying.

He was even taller than Adan when he was in demon form. Broad and encased in black armor that looked forged in smoke and shadow. There was no color in his eyes. No flame. Only void.

Adan didn't move. He just stood between us, tall and braced.

Abaddon's gaze slid past him. Landed on me and stayed there.

"So this is the girl," he said, voice as smooth as it was brutal. "You've already told her who I am?"

Adan nodded once, sharp and tense. “She knows. And she’s mine.”

“I’m aware, son.” Abaddon’s mouth curled faintly at the corners. It wasn’t quite a smile but something more dangerous. “And she should know. Especially since it wasn’t you who woke the blade. Or made the gate you protect sing like a blood-borne heir had finally come home.”

My pulse stuttered. I didn’t understand everything he said, but one point was clear...he somehow knew that my father was a demon.

“Gate?” I echoed.

“My son can explain.” His obsidian gaze didn’t leave mine. “What he can’t share because he doesn’t know is that it remembers what your blood forgot. You are something in between, Calliope Ash. Half-wrought. Half-lost. But that won’t last forever.”

Adan growled low in his throat, but Abaddon didn’t flinch.

“Let what slumbers in your blood awake.” He tilted his head. “Old things are stirring, and my son will need what lives inside you to survive what’s coming.”

The air thickened again, and I felt it—deep in my chest. A thrum I hadn’t noticed before.

As suddenly as Abaddon appeared, he stepped back into the shadows. His voice came one last time, cold and certain. “The girl will be fine.”

Then he was gone.

The silence left in his wake almost felt heavier than his presence had. Like the room

itself had been holding its breath. Or maybe that was just me.

I stared at the now empty doorway, every nerve in my body on high alert.

“That was your father?” I asked, my voice barely above a whisper.

Adan didn’t move. “Yes.”

That one word landed like a stone in my chest.

Abaddon hadn’t spoken loudly. He hadn’t raised a hand. But it hadn’t been necessary. He was something ancient and unshakable. The pressure he carried lingered in the air, like the room needed a moment to return to itself.

My throat felt dry. “With how you described him, I thought I would be terrified if I ever met him. But I wasn’t.”

Adan’s gaze flicked to mine, searching.

I wrapped my arms around myself and admitted, “It’s more that I’m scared of what he saw in me.”

His brows drew together, and he stepped closer. “Don’t be afraid of what lies in your blood, baby. He saw potential, and so do I.”

The way Abaddon had looked at me as though he could already see something forming in my blood that I didn’t understand had shaken something loose in me.

“My mom never really talked about my father,” I explained. “Whenever I asked, she changed the subject. But she always got nervous during storms. Even when it was barely raining.”

Adan listened without interrupting, just rubbed his palm down my arm in a comforting gesture.

“I used to think she was just being dramatic,” I went on, my voice thick with the tears that always came when I talked about her. “But maybe she knew that something inside me wasn’t normal. Or at least suspected.”

A strange warmth stirred low in my belly, curling outward like the slow spread of embers.

I pressed my palm over my stomach with a gasp, and Adan tugged me close, covering mine with his, firm and steady. “What’s wrong?”

The warmth inside me didn’t fade. It intensified. Not painfully but heavy, as though something old was stirring in my blood, yawning awake after too long in the dark.

I turned slowly, my eyes drawn to the wall across from us. One of the protective glyphs shimmered faintly. It was no brighter than the others, but somehow called to me. Not with sound or even a touching sensation. Just a magnetic tug...like gravity.

Before I could second-guess the impulse, I stepped away from Adan and reached out. My fingertips brushed the center of the symbol, and it flared to life beneath my touch, glowing with the same violet hue I’d seen react to him.

But this time, the color didn’t dim. It pulsed.

Beneath my feet, the stone warmed while the air thickened. The room seemed to lean toward me the way it had bowed for Abaddon. An acknowledgment without submission.

My breath caught in my throat as the space around me shifted, folding inward. The

air darkened. And just for a moment, I wasn't in Adan's quarters anymore.

I stood before a throne made of jagged and sharp obsidian. Instead of being elegant, it was violent. Primal. Ancient.

Flames coiled at its base, flickering in unnatural colors—deep indigo, shiny gold, and the same magenta I'd seen shimmer at the tip of Adan's demon tail. The heat should have burned, but it didn't. The air felt charged with electricity. Similar to the moment before a lightning strike.

I couldn't see the figure seated on the throne, but I felt him.

A pressure built behind my eyes, and a distant rumble echoed in my ears, like thunder muffled by miles of stone. Then a voice whispered my name, low and cold.

“Calliope.”

I stumbled back with a gasp, yanking my hand away from the glyph. The light vanished, and the room snapped back into place like a string pulled taut.

My knees buckled, but Adan caught me before I hit the ground, his arms strong around my waist.

“What in the world was that?” I whispered, twisting in his hold to wrap my arms around his muscular frame.

“I don't think it was from this world.” He tugged me close and stroked his palm down my spine. “I think the demon who sired you just made himself known.”

“My father?”



I blinked up at him and shook my head. I'd spent the past two years without a single living relative, feeling like I'd been set adrift by my mother's death. But the man who'd gotten her pregnant might be out there somewhere. A demon.

The air around me slowly settled, but the buzzing inside didn't. It was like my blood had turned into a current I couldn't shut off. I'd felt something ancient reach for me, and I hadn't recoiled. An instinct deep inside me had responded.

I drew in a shaky breath, only half steady on my feet. "I don't know what's happening to me."

Adan guided me into the bedroom and over to the edge of the bed. He sat beside me, his hand never leaving mine. "With how the glyph responded to you, it must be the power my father mentioned, already starting to awaken."

The words should've scared me, but they didn't. Nothing did with Adan beside me.

I glanced down at our joined hands. "I know I chose not to continue my education, but I think I need a crash course in 'Demon 101.' Maybe a syllabus. Class schedule. Office hours."

That earned a small smile from him, the kind that chased away the shadows. "We'll figure it out together."

I knew we had more pressing matters to discuss, but I couldn't help but ask, "Do you think we'll be able to find out who he is? My father?"

His thumb brushed over my knuckles. "I think we already have part of the answer. The throne you saw wasn't just demonic. It was primordial. My guess? He's one of the old ones whose name the underworld still whispers."

A chill spread over my skin, but I nodded. “At least that’s a step in the right direction, I suppose. I guess we should focus on how to use whatever’s inside me. Your father said we’d need it soon.”

Adan’s smile faded. “We’ll start slow. Glyph exposure, then layered enchantments. Maybe even guided channeling if the energy continues to surface.” He paused. “I have allies who specialize in awakening latent power. Trusted ones.”

“What if I can’t control it?” I asked, giving voice to my biggest fear.

He pulled me onto his lap. “Then I’ll stand between you and whatever your power does. Every time. Until you can.”

My throat tightened with emotion. “You’re not afraid?”

“Losing you would be a fuck of a lot worse than dealing with a power surge. We’ll make sure it doesn’t come to that.”

He said we, not you. And somehow, that made all the difference.

I nodded slowly. “We’d better get started.”

15

ADAN

We didn't know much about Calliope's powers but quickly learned she could draw them forth using my glyphs. They seemed to be related to the weather, a storm brewing each time she connected to my magic.

It was good that we dove straight into preparing for the attack because it came less than a day later, in the middle of the night. My territory was mostly empty, with only a handful of guests who'd chosen to accept the risk of staying.

The moment the first ripple hit the wards, I felt it in my bones.

I waited in the heart of The Abyss. The air had shifted, thickened into something ancient. Calliope was behind me, just beyond the arched threshold of the atrium. I'd warded the space heavily, layered every glyph I knew into the walls, floor, and glass ceiling above us. Shards were a risk, but I wanted my mate to have access to the storm brewing outside in case she needed it. That didn't ease the fire licking under my skin, though.

The assassin bound to the curse Calliope had awakened was here. I'd expected him to try the wards again first. Another projection, maybe. But he was done testing.

The chandelier flickered overhead, casting fractured shadows across the floor. Somewhere far above, the wind moaned against the roof.

A presence stepped through the far archway. His eyes gleamed like forged steel, colorless and deadly. His long black coat was streaked with ash. And his boots didn't make a sound as he crossed the stone floor.

"You've always been hard to kill." The assassin's voice was the barest rasp of sound. "But with the curse triggered, it's either your blood or mine."

"I didn't touch the blade," I replied, my tone steady even while I sent a warning to Kastiel and the others who had stayed.

"I know." His gaze slid past me to where Calliope stood in the shadow of the atrium. "But the curse doesn't care. It demands your blood."

"She's under my protection," I growled, stepping between them and cutting off his line of sight.

He smiled faintly. "Only while you're still alive."

"Even in death, she'll still be mine," I growled.

My demon surged forward. Fire coiled down my spine, but I held it back. This wasn't going to be a raw power fight. Not at first. He was too old and clever. He'd survived this long in a job that few survived because he didn't walk into traps. Obvious or subtle.

But his normal battle strategy wouldn't work. He wasn't just facing off against me. Calliope was here too, and she was a complete unknown.

The moment she touched the glyph and stepped forward, a ripple of energy moved through the room. The assassin felt it too. I saw it in the way he paused. That was his mistake.

I lunged, shifting into my demon form faster than I ever had before. I hit him hard, my shoulder slamming into his chest. He staggered but didn't fall. He was too skilled for that. His blade flashed from its sheath, silver-black and tipped in poison.

I ducked the first swing and sent a blast of hellfire from my palm. He twisted, and the flames scorched the floor instead of his skin.

The Abyss responded to me, glyphs flaring along the columns. The room itself braced for the fight.

He came in low, slashing for my side. I blocked the strike with my forearm guard, sparks erupting from the contact. Pain lanced down my arm, but I didn't stop. I couldn't, the smallest misstep could put me in the ground.

I threw him back with a burst of magic that cracked the stone beneath our feet. He rolled and landed in a crouch, breathing hard but grinning.

"You've grown stronger," he said, eyes flashing. "But you're still just a lord's son playing king of his insignificant patch of land."

"No." I bared my teeth. "I'm the one guarding the gate to hell."

He lunged again, faster this time. I met him head-on, fists burning with hellfire, claws half-shifted. He twisted in a different direction and crashed through the outer edge of the atrium. Glass shattered overhead in a glittering arc, rain pouring through the opening.

Calliope didn't scream or retreat. My fierce amazing mate stepped forward.

"Adan!" Her voice rang out behind me, and I felt her magic rise. Wild and unfamiliar, but potent.

The assassin paused, sensing it too.

Calliope hadn't had enough time to fully understand her powers, let alone control them, but we'd learned that she could call upon them with the help of my glyphs. She touched another, this one carved into a support beam. The symbol lit beneath her fingers with the same storm-kissed hue I'd seen earlier. And then something extraordinary happened.

The ward bent toward her. Unlike every other time, it didn't flare or defend. The magic answered her call.

The room pulsed. A gust of wind swept through the shattered window, but it wasn't natural. The air circled my mate in a tight spiral, tugging at her hair and dancing over her skin.

The assassin turned toward her, but Calliope didn't look afraid. Her eyes blazed with green fire. "You're not taking him from me."

She raised her hand, and lightning struck through the open ceiling, crashing down between her and the assassin, making him stumble.

The assassin snarled, teeth flashing as he reeled back in surprise. He hadn't expected her to wield power. And he sure as hell hadn't expected The Abyss to answer her.

"You brought a conduit into the fight," he spat. "She doesn't even know what she is."

"Not yet, but she will."

He pivoted and lunged for her. It was the wrong fucking move.

I roared, letting my control snap. My wings spanned wide enough to block the

archway. I launched forward, claws extended, and tackled him in midair. We crashed into a pillar, stone cracking beneath the force.

Hellfire surged through me, hotter than it ever had before. Fed by rage, power, and the instinct to protect my mate.

I slammed my fist into his ribs over and over again until his coat burned and the stench of scorched leather filled the room. Then he twisted free and vaulted backward, blood dripping from his mouth.

“She’s more than a distraction,” he spat. “She’s fueling you.”

It was more than that, but he’d never understand because he didn’t have a mate.

A glyph flared to life near Calliope’s hand, one she hadn’t touched yet. But it recognized her. The Abyss was beginning to shift its allegiance. Not from me, but to us as a mated pair, even though I hadn’t branded her yet.

A low hum rose from the walls. The storm was now building inside the hotel’s bones. Thunder rolled again, this time beneath the floor.

The assassin bared his teeth and surged forward again, ignoring the burn of The Abyss’s wards as they tried to repel him. His blade flashed, and I met him with mine—a conjured weapon of raw hellfire. Steel shrieked against fire, but I didn’t back down. Not when Calliope was still standing behind me, holding the full weight of the storm in her hands.

I caught a glimpse of her out of the corner of my eye—her palm pressed to the glyph, her eyes alight with power. Lightning danced around her feet. The very air bowed to her will. Her power had awakened, and she had never looked more beautiful.

The assassin realized it too late. He turned his attention toward her, blade shifting mid-strike.

“No!” I roared.

Calliope stepped forward, and her voice rang out. “You will not touch him or me.”

She lifted her other hand, and a current of wind slammed into the assassin’s chest, lifting him off his feet. He hit the ground hard but still tried to rise. Then I was on him.

I landed the final blow with both hands wreathed in fire. Not to kill, but to hold him in place. To bind him.

“Now, Calliope!” I shouted.

She moved to my side. Her fingers curled into mine, and together we pressed our hands to the glyph between us. The Abyss answered.

Power erupted through the floor—an explosion of storm light and hellfire interwoven into a single, devastating force. The assassin screamed as it consumed him. His body began to crack, as if the magic binding him to this world was being undone.

“You should never have come here,” I growled.

He vanished, leaving nothing but ash and a scorch mark where he fell.

The wards fell still, and the air stopped crackling.

Calliope stumbled forward and crashed into me, her body trembling with the aftershocks of raw power. I shifted back to my human form before I caught her,



pulling her tight against my chest.

“It’s over,” I murmured.

She looked up at me, storm light fading from her eyes. “We won.”

I nodded, pressing a kiss to her brow. “Together.”

### CALLIOPE

The power hadn't fully left me. It hummed under my skin like a second pulse, just quieter now that the danger had passed. "Whatever had been buried in my blood is wide awake now."

Adan cradled me against his chest, his arms holding me together as my body trembled with the aftershocks of the power I'd unleashed. His lips brushed my temple, murmuring something low and soothing, but the words didn't register. Not over the ringing in my ears and the thrum of something wild still singing through my blood.

"And it's a beautiful thing," he murmured against the top of my head.

I stayed in his arms, our breathing ragged in the quiet. The assassin was gone, but the storm still flickered outside. Adan's hands were still burning, but hellfire didn't scare me. It felt as though it belonged to me...like he did.

I'd just helped defeat a supernatural assassin. Me.

I tightened my grip on Adan's bare shoulders, grounding myself in the now-steady rhythm of his breathing. I could still smell smoke and ozone, but beneath the lingering scents from our battle was all him—leather, dark spice, and heat.

Just as I was ready to celebrate the fact that we had survived, the air shifted again.

My spine stiffened, and Adan cursed softly under his breath as shadows thickened at the edge of the shattered atrium. The space hadn't even settled from the battle, but something new was already pressing against it.

Two presences bled through the remaining wards, and a voice echoed across the broken atrium. "Looks like my daughter saved your ass, Deville."

Adan exhaled sharply but didn't loosen his hold on me. "Your timing's impeccable, as always."

Two figures stepped into the fractured light. I recognized Abaddon instantly but not the other man.

His presence wasn't oppressive like Adan's father's. It was raw and fierce. He moved like thunder, and his hair looked like windswept smoke. His armor was traced in cobalt and pale gold. He was both beautiful and terrible.

And he had the same storm-kissed eyes as me now that my power had awakened. Pale green, edged in silver.

He tilted his head. "I'll give your mother credit where it's due. She made something extraordinary."

My knees might have buckled if Adan hadn't still had an arm wrapped around my waist. "You're?—"

"Typhon." His mouth curved but not into what I'd call a smile. "Your father."

"Not sure you can call yourself that when you're just meeting the girl," Abaddon muttered with a shake of his head.

Adan shifted to my side, keeping his arm around my shoulders as we faced our fathers. “Never thought I’d see the day you’d be handing out parenting advice.”

Abaddon didn’t seem bothered by the insult. He just shrugged it off. Which was as it should be, considering the stories Adan had shared with me of what his life was like growing up. The things his father had asked him to do were inhuman, even for demons.

Typhon ignored their byplay, and his gaze slid back to me. “You’ve done well for yourself, daughter. Though I can’t say I’m thrilled that your mating bond is with his bloodline.”

His chin jerked toward Abaddon, and the disdain in his voice wasn’t subtle.

Abaddon crossed his arms over his chest. “Don’t let your petty jealousies cloud your judgment. You have no reason to complain.”

Typhon snorted, the faintest curl of wind stirring around his boots. “Your boy waited until after the assassin came to brand his mate.” He glared at Adan. “Did your father teach you nothing about how demon matings work?”

“I didn’t forget.” Adan’s arm tightened around me. “I waited because she deserved time to breathe before the world started demanding things from her. Including me.”

Typhon’s gaze sharpened, and something ancient flickered behind his storm-touched eyes. “And now that she’s awakened? You think she’s ready?”

I lifted my chin and huffed, “I’m more than ready for you to stop speaking as though I’m not standing right here.”

Typhon’s lips curved into a pleased smile. “Tell me then...are you ready to become

Adan's mate?"

I tilted my head back to look up at the man who'd stolen my heart. "I thought I already was."

"You are, baby." He claimed my mouth in a deep kiss, not caring that our fathers were watching. "We just need to complete the bond so you'll be officially recognized as mine in the supernatural world."

"Sweet words, but she hasn't been branded yet." Typhon stretched a hand out to me. "You're unmarked. Unbound. I could take you with me if you wanted. Let you learn what your bloodline is truly capable of, away from this place."

"The Abyss is her place," Adan growled. "And she's not going anywhere."

Typhon quirked a brow. "That's not your decision."

"No," I said, stepping between them. "It's mine."

Both demons stilled.

"I'm not going anywhere. The Abyss is my home now. With Adan." My heart thundered, but my voice didn't shake. "I'm more than ready for whatever we need to do to complete the bond."

"You heard the girl." Abaddon laughed and slapped Typhon on the shoulder in a gesture strong enough to knock down a lesser man. "Though I'm guessing you wished you hadn't, considering what they'll be doing soon."

I wasn't sure what they were talking about, but I didn't let my confusion show on my expression because I didn't want to give my father another reason to push for me to

leave. After our battle with the assassin, the last thing Adan and I needed was to take on the powerful demon who'd gotten my mother pregnant.

"There's your answer. You had twenty years to find Calliope and claim her as your daughter. I won't let her be taken from me now."

Typhon didn't flinch at Adan's words. He just looked at me. There was something in his expression I hadn't expected to see—regret.

"Now that I've seen how you are together, I won't try to take her," he said finally, his voice quieter than before. "But I had to come and see for myself what kind of power my blood passed down. And to make sure she survived her awakening."

The tension in Adan's frame didn't ease, but he didn't interrupt my father.

"I owe you an explanation, Calliope. For not being there. For letting you grow up without knowing what you were."

I swallowed, unsure what to say. I hadn't expected an apology from him. Or anything, really.

"My mother said she never knew your name," I managed. "Just that you were beautiful, mysterious—and gone by morning."

His mouth twitched. "That sounds about right."

Anger stirred, but not the kind that burned. It was more like a cold ache that had been waiting quietly beneath my skin. "You could have found me. But you didn't even try, did you?"

"I did, but I waited too long," he admitted. "By the time I realized your mother had

carried my child, she was already gone.”

My breath caught. “From cancer, but she passed away two years ago.”

Typhon nodded slowly. “I know. I saw her burial but from a distance.”

The ache bloomed sharper. “Why didn’t you come then?”

“Because I didn’t feel like I had the right,” he explained, raking his fingers through his hair. “I’m not used to being anything less than confident, but seeing you, I had no clue what to do. How to tell you who I was without terrifying you.”

His explanation wasn’t enough to ease my pain. “You didn’t give me the chance to decide.”

“I didn’t, and I’m sorry for that,” he conceded with an apologetic smile. “I never expected to have a child. I’ve lived longer than you can imagine without a fated mate, and offspring with anyone else is almost unheard of in our world.”

I looked up at Adan, and he nodded, confirming that what my father said was true.

“I won’t pretend I know how to be a father, but I am your blood. I’d like to be part of your life now, if you’ll let me.”

I stared at Typhon, searching for some false note behind the words. But all I saw was a man who had made too many mistakes and didn’t want to make another.

Adan didn’t speak, but he laced our fingers together, anchoring me.

“I don’t know what having a father looks like,” I admitted. “But I’m willing to try.”

Typhon's posture softened. "Then we'll start from here. And if you ever want help exploring your storm born gifts, I'd like to be the one to help you understand them."

My pulse kicked up at the promise, but I didn't back away. "Deal."

Typhon gave me one final glance before turning toward the shattered archway. "You chose well, daughter. He may be Abaddon's son...but I can see he'd burn the world down for you."

Then he disappeared into the wind.



17

ADAN

Typhon had barely disappeared before my father turned to me with a smirk that made me want to set something on fire. Namely him, even if it wouldn't do much harm.

“Well, I'd linger, but we both know what comes next. And even I'm not quite that much of a bastard.”

“Debatable,” I muttered.

He chuckled, unbothered. “Brand her well, son.”

Then he was gone.

Calliope shifted beside me, and I turned to face her fully. Her skin was still flushed from power, but her storm-kissed green eyes held steady on mine.

“You okay? With what Typhon said?” I refused to call him her father when he hadn't earned the title.

She hesitated, then nodded slowly. “I think so. I don't know what having a father in my life looks like, but I think I'm open to finding out.”

I reached up and brushed her hair back from her face. “You were incredible tonight.”

“I wasn’t alone,” she whispered. “I had you.”

The words hit harder than they should. I’d spent centuries keeping everyone at a distance. Never wanting to let them in. But with Calliope, there was no space to hide. “You’re the fire in my veins now. The tether that holds me to this world.”

“I probably should have known something was not quite human about me when we met.” She pressed her palm against my chest, over my heart. “Your darkness calls to me. Just like you do. That’s not exactly what most people would call normal.”

“It is when you’re a demon who just met their fated mate,” I reassured her. “You set fire to the darkness and made it something beautiful.”

“Stop.” She sniffled with a smile. “If you keep being so sweet, I’m going to cry.”

“Hold those tears back for one more minute, baby.”

She blinked up at me with wet eyes. “There’s more.”

“Yes, baby. The most important part.” I cradled her cheeks in my palms. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

One of the tears spilled down her cheek, and I swept it away with my thumb.

Hearing those three words from her was everything. My demon surged inside me, greedy and exultant. I curled my hand around her waist and pulled her closer.

“More than I ever thought I could love anything. You’re mine.”

Her breath caught, lips parting, and I knew she felt the shift between us. This was no longer just fate. Loving each other was a choice we'd both made.

And I was done waiting.

With one arm around her waist and the other beneath her thighs, I lifted her easily, holding Calliope against my chest like the treasure she was. Her breath caught, but she didn't protest.

Curling into me, her fingers rested lightly at the base of my neck. "I can walk, you know."

"Too slow," I growled, already moving.

We stepped through the ruins of the atrium. The scent of scorched stone and lingering ozone still hung in the air, but The Abyss had already begun to repair itself. Wards shimmered faintly along the edges of the damage, weaving threads of healing magic through the cracked floor and shattered glass.

Kastiel passed us near the southern arch, his sleeves rolled up and blood still drying along his knuckles. He gave us a once-over, nodded, and went back to barking orders at the cleanup crew. Lyra stood farther back, overseeing the movement of a massive shard of glass that had embedded in one of the columns. Her eyes met mine briefly, then shifted to Calliope and softened.

Neither of them said a word. They knew I was at the edge of my control and beyond ready to fully bond with my fated mate.

Calliope buried her face against my collarbone, her voice barely a murmur. "They all know what we're about to do, don't they?"

I didn't slow my pace as I answered, "They know not to interrupt."

The hallway darkened slightly as we reached the tenth floor. The wards pulsed once, acknowledging me and the precious woman in my arms. As I reached the door to my private quarters, it swung open without a sound.

I carried her inside.

And this time, I wasn't letting Calliope go until she was fully mine.

I laid her on our bed, my demon pushing to go faster while I paused to savor the sight of her beauty spread out before me.

I was desperate to have her, to solidify the bond between us. My mate clearly felt the same because she stripped out of her clothing as quickly as I did.

But before we lost ourselves to our passion, I needed to make sure she was fully on board with what I had planned. "I know you enjoyed my phantom touch when I used it before, but I'm not sure how you'd feel about me using it to claim every part of you."

She blinked those bright green eyes, her cheeks already flushed as she whispered, "What does 'every part' mean?"

While stroking her jaw with my fingertips, I used my phantom touch to send a slight flutter against her puckered asshole.

She moaned, her eyes widening. "Oh."

Even though Calliope knew I loved her and that she was mine, I still had a beastly desire to claim her. To fill all of her. "I'll be gentle, baby, I promise. And you can tell

me to stop at any time.”

She answered by pressing her lips to mine as she took my hands in hers, trailing them lower to cup her breasts.

This woman drove me crazy and knew exactly what to do to get my inner demon going wild. I growled, deepening our kiss as I tasted her sweetness.

“Turn over,” I murmured into her mouth, gripping her waist as she wiggled against me, flipping her so she was on her stomach, ass in the air.

And what a beautiful ass it was. I let my phantom touch give her a squeeze that had her yelping in a pleasant surprise before she spread her legs farther, giving me access to that tight little hole.

Leaning forward, I gently blew on her skin, using my touch to send a low pulse straight to her pussy at the same time.

“Oh yes,” she moaned, pushing her ass closer to me as if she couldn’t wait for me to claim all of her.

I slowly pressed my finger against her hole, letting another phantom flutter spread through her pussy.

“Adan,” she whimpered, gripping the sheets in her fists.

“Be patient, my good girl. I promise you’ll be rewarded for it.”

Reaching a free hand to my side table drawer, I pulled out the lube I’d stashed away for this moment. Then I made sure to douse my fingers before sliding just the tip into her puckered hole while sending another deep pulse to her pussy.

Calliope breathed out, relaxing against my fingers.

I wanted to push all the way in, to claim what was mine, but I knew I had to take it slowly, no matter how ready she seemed to be. Or how much my demon was pushing me to brand her as ours.

I hooked my finger and slid it in, slow and steady, all the way to the knuckle. Then I sent a longer pulse to her pussy, making sure it rippled through her walls and up to her clit. Wetness dripped down her thighs as she pushed her ass closer to my fingers, wanting more.

“You’re so wet and needy for me, baby,” I whispered, adding just the tip of a second finger inside her tight hole.

“Take me, Adan,” she begged.

I sent a deep vibration through her, making her toes curl as she cried out. Her ass squeezed my fingers with her orgasm.

I growled, unable to hold it back anymore and doused my cock with lube. When I eased my fingers free, her tight little hole clenched as though reluctant to let me go.

I sent an invisible caress straight to her clit, watching Calliope press her beautiful face against the pillow before I edged just the tip of my cock against her waiting hole. I didn’t want to hurt her and knew there would be no way I could hold back once my inner demon was unleashed, so I gave her another strong pulse between her legs, feeling her wetness drip onto both of us.

“Fuck, baby,” I growled, inching slowly into her.

She wiggled her ass against me, begging for more as she moaned, gripping the sheets

and giving in to the pleasure I was giving her. Her dark hole was so tight that I couldn't move after I filled her to the hilt. I had to let her adjust to my size as I sent phantom pulses through her pussy that I made sure vibrated against her swollen clit.

"Please, Adan. I want you to claim all of me." Her voice came out in hot pants. "Brand me. Bond us together forever."

I gripped her hips, giving her a hard thrust as I sent another wave to her begging pussy.

Her body was limp against me, so I pulled her upright, her back against my chest as I held her stomach.

She reached back, gripping my neck and then my hair as she moaned.

I sent a small wave to her breasts, the tight buds puckering as she moaned, her body vibrating against me.

"That's it, baby. Give me another one so we can come together and my demon can brand you," I demanded, sending a wave from her breasts all the way down to her pussy.

She screamed, her body going taut against mine as warmth flooded us both. I moaned into her ear as I filled her, her tight little ass taking every last drop as I sent low fluttering pulses through her body.

At the height of our orgasm, I flattened my hand against the curve of her breast and allowed my demon to come forward just enough to leave his mark on her soft skin. Instead of hurting, it heightened her pleasure. And mine.

It was unlike anything I'd ever felt before, and when the shudders subsided, I tilted

her head back so I could capture her mouth. “You’re fully mine now, Calliope.”

“Yes, I am,” she replied with a drowsy smile.

I pulled out of her as gently as I could and placed a soft kiss on her lips before lifting her, letting little aftershocks stroke her sensitive pussy and asshole as I carried her to the bathroom, setting her in the tub before turning on the water.

As the basin filled, she glanced down at her chest and gasped.

“It really is a brand,” she whispered, awe and wonder in her voice.

I traced my fingers over the red flame on the swell of her breast. “Nobody will ever see it, but every supernatural will now instinctively know that you belong to me.”

Tilting her head back, my pretty mate narrowed her eyes. “And what about you?”

As a half human, Calliope couldn’t shift into her demon form, but mine had taken care of the task for her, wanting to wear his mate’s mark. Turning my wrist over, I showed her the brand that resembled a tornado on my inner wrist. “They’ll also know I’ve been claimed by you.”

Marked by fate, claimed by instinct, bound by something deeper...I was never meant to exist without Calliope.



### CALLIOPE

The Abyss had changed in the ten years since I first arrived, but not as much as I had.

Watching the storm clouds gather over the distant mountains, I stood at the window of our private quarters. My hand rested on the curve of my belly, feeling the gentle flutter of life within. Our baby was due in a couple of months, and the thought filled me with awe.

Adan approached from behind, wrapping his arms around me. His touch was warm and grounding.

“You're up early,” he murmured, pressing a kiss to my temple.

“I couldn't sleep,” I admitted. “Too much energy in the air.”

He chuckled softly. “The Festival of Midnight tends to have that effect.”

I hadn't been thrilled when he told me that we'd been tasked to host a once-in-a-century celebration when the veil between realms was at its thinnest. But as I planned the event with Lyra's help—and input from Abaddon and Typhon, of all demons—I'd quickly warmed to the idea.

The celebration was a time of magic, connection, and reflection. Tonight, The Abyss would host beings from across the supernatural spectrum, all gathering to honor the convergence.

Adan's palms moved to my belly, fingers splaying gently.

"Are you sure you're up for this?" he asked, concern evident in his voice.

I turned to face him, placing my hands over his. "I'm fine, and so is the baby. Besides, we have plenty of help."

As if on cue, a knock sounded at the door.

"Enter," Adan called.

The door opened to reveal Typhon, his presence as commanding as ever. His storm-kissed eyes met mine, softening as they landed on my belly.

"You're glowing," he remarked as he stepped into the room.

"Must be the pregnancy," I replied with a smile, though it felt deeper than that. There was a joy inside me that had nothing to do with hormones.

He approached, placing a hand on my shoulder.

"I've reinforced the wards around The Abyss," he said. "Nobody who hasn't been invited will get through tonight."

"Thank you."

Adan nodded in agreement. "We appreciate it."

Typhon's gaze shifted to Adan, a hint of amusement in his eyes. Their relationship was another thing that had changed over time, but only after my father proved himself to my mate.

“Don’t think I didn’t notice your nervousness,” he teased.

Adan rolled his eyes. “Just being cautious.”

Typhon clapped him on the back. “As you should be. But rest assured, nothing will harm your mate or my grandchild under my watch.”

“My child,” Adan growled, disliking the possessive way my father spoke of our baby.

Another knock interrupted the moment, and Abaddon entered, his imposing figure filling the doorway.

“Am I interrupting a family moment?” he asked, a smirk playing on his lips.

“Just discussing security,” Adan replied, his frustration with Typhon fading under Abaddon’s more ominous presence.

Abaddon nodded. “Good. Because I won’t let anything through the gate that intends to harm my daughter-in-law or grandchild.”

Even as Adan sighed over the fact that neither of our fathers ever referred to the baby as just ours but their grandchild, the mention of the gate brought a chill to the room. Hidden deep within The Abyss, the gate to hell was a constant reminder of the balance we maintained. It was the very place where I had once triggered a curse, unaware of the power I held.

Now, that power was honed. Controlled. I had become a guardian, weaving storm magic into the fabric of The Abyss’s defenses.

As the day wore on, preparations for the festival took shape. The grand hall was transformed, adorned with shimmering lights and ethereal decorations. Vases with flowers from the conservatory were placed throughout the space, mostly deep purple

lilies since they were the first bloom Adan had ever given me.

Guests began to arrive, their varied forms and energies filling the space with a palpable buzz. I moved through the crowd, greeting old friends and new faces alike. The baby kicked, as if sensing the pulse of magic and celebration around us. I smiled, sharing a knowing glance with Adan across the room.

As the evening wore on, the energy in the room shifted. The realms were drawing close, the divide between them wearing thin. The air grew charged with anticipation.

From my vantage point, I noticed Kastiel standing at the edge of the gathering, his eyes fixed on a woman cloaked in shadows. Her aura crackled with a mysterious energy, and she seemed equally intrigued by him.

Adan appeared beside me, following my gaze.

“I’ve never seen Kastiel so intrigued by a woman,” he remarked, a hint of amusement in his voice.

I leaned against his side. “Maybe he’s finally met his fated mate.”

He wrapped an arm around my shoulders, pulling me close. “Perhaps.”

As the clock struck midnight, a hush fell over the crowd. The veil was at its thinnest, and for a moment, the realms aligned. I felt a surge of power, of connection, and I knew that our child would be born into a world where love, magic, and unity prevailed.

As the festival bloomed around us, I held on to that hope of a world forged by love and magic, prepared to embrace whatever the future had in store.

Kastiel will get his story in Hellbent & Heartless !