



# Taming the Wicked Wolf (A Date with a Demon #2)

**Author:** *Kenzie James*

**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** Emilia turns to magic in a last ditch effort to protect herself from her ex-husband, who cant seem to take a hint. One pricey ritual and a potentially ruined dining room floor later, shes left with a wolf demon, but not the one she expects.

Silas has one job, play bodyguard to a powerful witch in exchange for her soul. The deal seems simple enough until he finds himself at the end of her leash.

As he helps Emilia find her strength, Silas realizes he desires more than he bargained for, he wants her heart as well.

Taming the Wicked Wolf is a mild-angst, high-steam standalone paranormal romance novella under 30k words with a guaranteed happily ever after.

**Total Pages (Source):** 17

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

ONE

Emilia

“That’ll be seven hundred dollars.”

I stop fishing my wallet out of my purse and look up at the bookstore owner, Martin.

He’s an older man, well-dressed and probably in his mid 50s, with gray eyes and short, wavy salt and pepper hair. He’s attractive in almost a Giles from Buffy the Vampire Slayer sort of way. Almost.

“I’m sorry, what do you mean, seven hundred? You told me it’d be four hundred when we spoke on the phone less than two hours ago. That’s a,” I run through the math in my head, “seventy-five percent increase.”

Martin stops, leaning against the doorframe leading to what I can only assume is his office from the small metal desk and computer set up behind him. “Things change. There were three more inquiries after I hung up with you. One gentleman was even planning to take the red eye to pick the book up in person.”

Of course, the man who can afford to take the red eye is a gentleman. As if I didn’t just drive 45 minutes, plus traffic and have to deal with the ridiculous parking downtown. I guess money talks and I should feel appreciative that he’s even giving me the opportunity with other much nicer offers on the table.

“Let me see it first.”

He gives me a nod and disappears into his office.

It's a nice bookstore, everything considered. One of those hole-in-the-wall hidden gems you stumble upon on a rainy afternoon, as though the gods themselves are trying to brighten your day. It smells like aged leather and the slightly sweet scent of yellowed pages.

The aisles can barely fit two people, the shelves stacked nearly to the ceiling with little concern for the paneled fluorescent lighting. Instead of feeling sterile, it's atmospheric. You could probably catch dust motes dancing under the air vent deeper within the stacks while looking for a first edition of a comfort book.

I would love to spend the entire day here, just searching endlessly for new favorites, under different circumstances.

Martin returns, book under arm, placing it onto the wooden counter between us, "Shades of the Occult by Michael Albert Hughes. First and only printing in 1985."

I pick it up, turning it over to inspect the spine when I notice a weathered gray stamp on the top edging that reads 'Riverside Public Library'.

"Is this a library book?"

"Ex-library copy, yes." He stammers, reaching up and adjusting his glasses.

The original dust jacket is nowhere to be found, leaving the gold leaf detail on the naked hardcover on full display. The cover chases away any doubt that this is, in fact, the book that I have been searching for.

Besides the scrolling title, the design has a partial ritual embedded in the background. Most people would mistake it for meaningless embellishments, but I recognize the

runes as those used in old protection spells.

A book with built in security, though I doubt it would hold up.

“You never mentioned this being a library copy over the phone.” I set the book back down on the counter.

“If that’s a problem,” he reaches for the book and I stiffen.

It should be a problem, but is the first copy I’ve seen pop up since I started searching six months ago. A stolen library book is, what, a misdemeanor and a hefty fine? It has to be one of the few remaining copies since I heard covens are snatching them up to burn.

My mother never bought into the tradition, she’s always been a solo practitioner and that’s exactly how she raised me. Neither of us has the stomach for authority figures, which is pretty ironic seeing how I married a sheriff’s son.

“No, no problem.” I sigh, setting out the four hundred dollars, as I pull out my phone to do a few financial gymnastics, “Here’s the four hundred.”

Okay, maybe there is a bit of a problem.

Since I paid rent last week, the extra three hundred is going to have to come out of my emergency fund, which means I’m even farther away from moving back home to Indiana. Not that there’s a scenario where I would leave this store without the book, I’ve already sunk at least two hundred and fifty dollars into the supplies.

With a click of a button, the money is in my main account.

When I look up, Martin is counting the cash, flipping the bills so they all face the

same direction.

“Is there an ATM close by, or do you take some sort of money transfer?”

He reaches behind the counter, setting a plastic display placard with three different QR codes, including one for crypto currency.

“You take bitcoins?”

“I sell rare first editions, books much more expensive than,” he flails a hand in the book’s direction, “that.”

Part of me wants to tell him the book's true potential, namely the fact that it contains a collection of real magical spells, including several rituals that can summon a demon.

I hold up my phone and scan the code, then notice the familiar bright red spine of a Harlequin Romance, and not just one, but a whole cardboard box stacked to the brim. There was a time in my life when I would go to the store and pick up a few titles a month. Now, it’s been hell to find them outside of second-hand bookstores or in ebook form.

“How much for the romance novels?” I ask with a nod.

Martin glances over his shoulder, “Oh, those , I’ll throw them in for free.”

I can’t help but smile to myself as I complete the payment, he might have screwed me over with the book, but those Harlequins alone are worth at least a hundred if not more. Though for me, they’re priceless.

He grabs the box, placing Shades of the Occult on top and slides it across the counter.

“It was a pleasure doing business with you. I hope to see you again.”

Of course, you do.

“Thanks.” I say, slipping into the saccharine sweet tone I use at the bar, then hefting the box into my arms and turning to roll my eyes.

With traffic, it’s a good hour and a half back to my small apartment in Moonstone Ridge. Just another perk of being stuck in a town that doesn’t even have a Target, it takes a good twenty minutes to reach anything that doesn’t look like it belongs on the set of a Hallmark movie.

The town itself is beautiful, filled with old brick and mortar buildings straight out of the 1950s, with the classic windowed displays. Everything is here, including the idyllic Mom and Pop grocery store.

I would actually love living in Moonstone Ridge, if I hadn’t been labeled an outcast after what happened between me and Chase, but that’s what you get for divorcing the beloved sheriff’s only son.

My heart races as I turn into my parking spot, the familiar pang of anxiety rippling up my arms and settling heavily on my shoulders. I hate that it’s come to this, I can’t even return home without feeling this deep sense of dread.

The lot is still full, which is a comfort, in my despair, it makes me feel a little less isolated.

I climb out of the car, bracing the cardboard box against my hip as I dig my keys out of my purse. It takes the short distance from the car to my door for my panic to wane.

My pit bull, Poppy, whines on the other side of the door. The sound of her claws tip

tapping on the linoleum floor a comfort as I let myself into my apartment. I got her from the local animal shelter a few days after moving in, she's a great companion, even though she didn't stop Chase from breaking in the first time.

Though this time it's all clear. No spontaneous love letters. No bouquets of roses waiting for me on my dining room table. No need for me to call the front office and ask for them to change the locks. Again.

"You did good, kid." I say, reaching down and scrubbing my hand over Poppy's muzzle as she rams her head into my lower thigh.

She growls out her appreciation and disappears into the kitchen, returning with her stuffed toy, squeaking out a staccato melody as I walk across the room to set the books on the coffee table.

Chase will never let me go. He ignored the divorce papers, forcing the judge's hand in the matter. He still tells me he's going to 'win me back, one way or another'.

I'm not going to wait for him to surprise me again.

I am summoning this demon tonight.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

TWO

Emilia

Okay, so maybe I'm procrastinating a bit.

It's already close to 6 p.m. when I finally make my way into the kitchen, pulling out a TV dinner and tossing it into the microwave to cook. Poppy dances around my legs, nudging against my knees hard enough I have to catch myself against the countertop.

"Hold on there, girly." I laugh, washing my hands as the microwave beeps behind me.

There isn't too much room in the tiny galley-style kitchen, so I set my food out to cool while I go to fill Poppy's bowl, then wash and replace her water dish. We then both sit down to eat in our respective places, the jingling of her food dish nearly overtaking the sound of the tv.

It only takes her five minutes before she's asking to go out.

I snap her harness in place and grab the matching leash. It looks aggressively pink against her fawn colored fur. One of the reasons I was drawn to her at the shelter was because of the markings on her paws that look like she got into a can of white paint. She's my little artist.

That and she warmed up to me immediately, though I wasn't aware until later it's just who Poppy was.



She's enthusiastic about every new human to the point where she threatens to become a tiny heat seeking puppy missile. It's sad that she was overlooked for her age and her breed, she truly is one of the sweetest dogs I've ever known.

We walk out into the cool night air. The city is holding onto fall for as long as it can.

The apartment complex is still fairly well lit, though after coming home a few months back with my lock busted thanks to Chase, I'm still highly aware of what might be lurking around the corner.

Each apartment is on a single story, I'm glad that I don't have upstairs neighbors. What I do have is sweet Mr. Jankowski in the apartment next to me. The tiny buildings resemble mushrooms with two apartments to each pod, from their flat-topped mansard-style roof painted in a faded brown color. There's only two windows per apartment, one right next to the front door, and one in the bedroom.

"Hey there, pretty girl." A familiar male voice says from behind me, "I hope you're staying out of trouble."

Speaking of the man himself. I turn to see Mr. Jankowski walking up the path from his parking spot with a white box in hand, tied with a bright blue ribbon. He's only a little taller than me at 5' 7", with short brown hair and skin that reflects many joyful summers in the sun.

As much as I would be flattered by the compliment, as far as he's concerned, there's only one 'pretty girl' here and she's losing a staring contest with a plastic lawn ornament sitting across the lot.

He's probably one of the few people in Moonstone Ridge who doesn't know who I am, or even care. All he knows is that I'm Poppy's minion. She runs the show.

That's the vibe of the apartment complex, just a bunch of castaways with nowhere to go. I had hoped that my shelf life would have extended past 35, but here we are. Starting over from square one.

"She's trying," I say, tugging on Poppy's leash to keep my tiny missile of a pit bull by my side. "We haven't had any other shoe incidents lately. What about you?"

His hazel eyes crinkle as he leans down and pets Poppy on the head, "My fish are as well behaved as they can be."

I nod to the box in his hand, "What did Katie bake this time?"

"Snickerdoodles," he looks up at me with a crease in his brow, "I hope you aren't allergic to cinnamon."

"No, but one of these days, you need to break it to her that you're diabetic. I'm sure there's a few safe baked goods she could bring you."

"But then, what would I bring home to you?" He smiles, holding out the box, "The way I see it, I am making two people happy."

I wrap Poppy's leash around my wrist a few times, then take the cookies. They smell amazing and I have spent too many years feeling guilty about receiving gifts, thanks to Chase. I'm going to enjoy these.

"Thank you, Mr. Jankowski."

"It's truly nothing, Emilia. You two have a good night."

With a smile, I lead Poppy back into the apartment. The snickerdoodles go on the kitchen counter and, despite her protests, Poppy goes in the bedroom. It's for both of

our safety, since we can't have her smudging the runes.

Now, I am free to begin the arduous task of moving my small dining room set into the living room.

I'm pretty sure the original creator of this ritual intended for it to be completed on some stone altar using white chalk blessed by the moonlight, and not the fake hardwood floor of my small dining nook with some pastels from an old art kit that I got as a white elephant gift. I really hope these don't stain.

The design is easy enough to recreate, which is usually the case with these older rituals, and thanks to the two semesters of Latin I took in college, I'm able to stumble through the incantation. It's the couple of changes I made that are really sticking with me.

This summoning ritual is a contract in the purest form. After a few months of research, I learned I could tweak that contract.

Usually, it would put out a call for a demon, as a "first come, first serve" situation. There's no way of knowing who or what you'll be summoning in the end, and not every demon is going to play by the same rules. Which is why I'm going to call this one by name, or technically, by rune.

The whole thing could very well blow up in my face, hopefully not literally, but I have to try.

After drawing the circle, I balance the book on my arm and read the incantation aloud, "Cineris et sanguinis," I pause, trying to translate it in my head, "ignis et carnis, exsurge coram me."

I hold the book against my chest, slicing my left hand with the pink pocketknife my

stepfather got me when I moved out, because of course, the ritual needs blood. My hand throbs as I squeeze it closed over the circle, wringing out a few drops onto the bright blue pastel markings.

As soon as the first drop hits, the floor shimmers like water rippling from the center out towards the first ring of ancient runes. These old witches were sure into theatrics because the runes crackle, a fuse lit and burning fast out towards the barrier of protection runes that I laid out, just in case.

Just imagine it, I summon a demon and it ends up burning down the apartment.

I glance over at the fire alarm hanging in the kitchen, wait for it to wail its displeasure at the magic. My own powers have never triggered it, but this feels like another beast entirely.

With a whoosh, a pillar of red smoke coils from the runes and stretches towards the ceiling, causing me to stumble backwards, catching my injured hand on the back of my dining room chair.

“Dammit.” I hiss out, dropping the book and pressing my hand against my middle.

I bite back the tears, shielding my bloodied palm, and lean over and scoop up the book. My gaze caught on the black boots with gold stitching standing in the middle of the summoning circle.

I straighten, following the dark charcoal slacks to a black long-sleeved henley unbuttoned halfway until I crane my neck up to stare into bright honey-colored eyes. Wait, is that American Eagle?

The demon tilts his head, shoulder length ink-black hair falling against his soft cheekbones. It’s strange, I was expecting him to look more demonic, but he

resembles an Abercrombie model. Tanned and tall, up in the 6-something range with the most defined shoulders I have ever seen. When did I become attracted to shoulders?

He's all lean muscle down to a trim waist, and a positively human body, except for two bright blue markings across his cheekbones and those canine-like pointed ears sitting on top of his head.

The ears alone mark him as a wolf demon, but he's nothing like the books described. According to the illustrations, he's supposed to have feathered wings and the tail of a serpent, whatever that means.

"You're bleeding all over the floor, little witch." He says, his voice smokey with the hint of an English accent.

"No," I shake my head, then glance down at the tiny drips of blood pooling at my feet, "This is impossible."

"It is quite possible and obvious. Are you alright? Did you hit your head?"

I spent six months learning the ins and outs of these runes, not to mention dropping nearly a thousand dollars on all the materials put together to summon a specific demon by name. This is a mistake. This demon doesn't look like he is a day over 25, 26 tops. I don't even know he has the authority to bargain for my soul.

"You're not him." I say.

The demon furrows his brow.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

THREE

Silas

“Just who were you trying to summon, exactly?” I ask, my ears twitching as I stare at the runes drawn at my feet.

From the looks of it, she pieced together the ritual in the dining room of her small apartment. If it wasn't clear that she's a witch from the light of her soul, I could tell with the subtle evidence of her craft woven throughout her home.

From the tiny bundles of herbs tucked away on shelves alongside more candles and crystals than any normal person would need, each color used for its own purpose. Then there are the leather-bound books on the far end of the apartment next to her couch, with little more than decorative markings on their spines. Witch's tomes passed down from generation to generation.

She even took her time drawing the runes, going as far to add an extra ring to serve as a protection spell, a failsafe if the ritual itself were to break for whatever reason. That explains the faint tingling sensation in my limbs from standing here. Such a clever little witch.

It doesn't take me long to find exactly what I have been looking for, my family's mark, more specifically the mark of my father, Marcellus.

“You were really expecting the Marquis of the Wolf Demons to answer your little summoning spell?”

Hurt flashes across her features, and I regret my tone immediately. I should have been more compassionate, she's clearly injured and possibly afraid.

Her expression hardens and I feel the warmth of her fire magic flare as she gives me a once-over.

"Yes. I did my research. He's one of the few wolf demons who takes it upon himself to protect the witches who summon him." She presses the book against her chest, a shield between us.

"Well, your summons has been answered," I sigh, "I am Silas, son of Marcellus." I incline my head in a subtle bow, "At your service."

"His son? Great." She scoffs, "How old are you?"

"I beg your pardon."

"You look like you couldn't be more than, what? Late 20s. Are those combat boots? Why are you wearing a henley? You're supposed to be from the demon realm." She sputters out, flailing a hand in my direction, though I notice the way her gaze lingers on my shoulders, my chest and, oh, my hands.

I have to admit she's fairly attractive.

Deep chocolate brown hair that falls over her shoulders and across her chest in gentle waves. Smooth tanned skin blessed by a sun goddess and bright and expressive red-brown eyes that could spark a flame at any minute, likely one of her innate powers, if what I am sensing is correct. And her body, ample hips and thighs with the calves of an Amazon, adapted to her short frame. From the looks of it, she barely reaches my shoulders.

Though her power is one of the most enticing aspects of her. Access to magic like hers would be a pretty prize indeed, and could help me secure my place in my father's court. I just have to be a bit more calculated in my approach.

"I am 237." I say with a smile, "I assume most of your research has come from those books and not from the mouths of actual demons, or you would know half-demons can pass through the veil, a sort of dual citizenship, as it were. I've lived many years in your realm and I must say, I am quite attached to your style of clothing. One does tire of wearing suits all the time."

Her chest heaves as she watches me, "Are you still able to make a deal?"

"What is your name, little witch?"

"Emilia."

"Yes, Emilia, I have made many deals, and I would be happy to make one with you."

She furrows her brows, her eyes flitting down over my body with a sneer. Okay, maybe I am laying it on a little thick.

"I need a bodyguard." She says, "My soul is yours in return."

"I was fully ready to barter with you, Emilia, why do you wish to give up your soul so freely?"

A shadow crosses her face, and she looks down, as to gather herself, "What's the use of a soul if you're doomed to live your life in fear?"

I hum my understanding.



“I have one request.”

“As you should.” I incline my head.

She holds up her wrist, and I notice the gold bracelet there with a single purple gemstone set in the center, “If you accept, part of the deal is that we will be bound by magic. So that you will know if and when I need help.”

I don’t see any other jewelry lying around, which can only mean one thing. A collar. While I am courting the witch and her powers, my own magic will be dampened and I will be, depending on her strength, submissive to her command.

“Is that really necessary?” Not that it’s an immediate no. How much trouble could a witch be in that she would require demonic protection in this day and age?

We haven’t overrun the human realm in hundreds of years, Hells, now most demons are more interested in staying here permanently. A few good friends of mine even have lives and families here.

“It’s my one condition, for my safety and the safety of others.”

I can’t fault her for that. As much as I wish to appeal to her, she has no reason to trust me and she is literally offering her soul for the simple task of protecting her.

“Fine. I accept your terms.”

I breathe and draw out a claw, raking it across my palm and holding out as an offering.

“Really?” Emilia stares at it with disgust.

“For your added security.”

She eyes me, then sets the book on the table behind her and crosses to the edge of the circle, placing her hand in mine.

I feel a jolt of power as our blood mingles, and the main ritual circle fades, sealing the deal.

“What the hell?” She yelps, pulling her hand away and staring down at it.

“And now your turn.” I shouldn’t have spoken up, but the binding spell could prove useful. As she said, I would know when she was in peril and a dead witch would be a waste.

Emilia lifts her right hand, wiggling her fingers over the purple gem. Bright wisps of magic lift from the stone, winding around her fingertips, her eyes fluttering closed. The sensation must be something .

With a flick of her wrist, the magic shoots out, settling around my neck, connecting us with a faint, shimmering magical chain. She closes her palm, and it dissipates, the spell taking root. With another wave of her hand, the final protection circle, my prison, disappears.

“I should have asked, what exactly am I protecting you from?”

“My ex-husband.” Emilia says, turning and walking across the room, pulling a chair away from the table.

“Is your ex-husband a gargoyle? A shifter? A vampire?” I follow her, glancing down at the spellbook. Is that a library book?

“He’s mortal.” She looks over her shoulder, “The sheriff’s son.”

Suddenly, her comment from earlier makes a little more sense.

“Stop.” I shake my head, “You are still bleeding. I’m supposed to protect you, I can’t have you dying from some sort of blood infection.”

“It’ll be fine.”

“Please.” I wrap my hand around her bicep, a strange warmth settling in my chest as she eases into my touch and allows me to guide her into the kitchen. The wound is pretty deep, which was likely a mistake. “You know, you could have just pricked your finger.”

Emilia glares at me, wincing as I run her hand under the faucet, cleaning the wound until the water runs clear.

“If I did, how would we have sealed the ritual?” She asks with a teasing lilt to her tone.

“There are other ways to consummate such a deal.” I can feel her anger stirring as she flexes hand, trying to pull it away, “A kiss.” I add, trying to ease her anxiety.

“I’d rather take the gash, thank you very much.”

I bark out a laugh, watching as she fights back a smile. A war for the ages.

“Pretty sure I have a first aid kit somewhere around here.” She holds her hand still, turning towards the cabinets on the other side of her small kitchen.

“No need.” I wave my hand over her palm, and the wound closes, leaving a faint pink

mark behind.

“How did you do that?”

“My magic works a little differently here, it’s not as strong, but I can manage a few tricks.”

“Was cleaning it just for show?” She looks at me, a brow raised.

“I was serious about the risk of infection.”

And maybe I just wanted to touch her.

A crash sounds from beyond the kitchen, followed by a yelp and frenzied barking. Emilia hisses a curse under her breath, rushing towards it.

“What is that?” I ask, following her towards the hall.

“It’s my dog, Poppy,” she forces out with a glance over her shoulder. “Stay.”

The command crashes into me, the magic locking me in place for a moment before fizzling out. Whatever binding spell she used isn’t strong enough to hold me. It hasn’t broken yet, though, I still see the slight flare of the green chain linking us together.

Interesting.

She opens the door, and a fawn colored pit bull charges out into the hall, both front paws crashing against my shins and bringing me to my knees.

Emilia looks down at me and smiles, “Good boy.”

A harsh breath escapes my lungs, and I can feel my cock twitch at her words.

Of course I have a praise kink.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

FOUR

Emilia

Maybe I overreacted by summoning Silas.

It figures when I finally take the step to protect myself, Chase is suddenly on his best behavior. No random calls from unknown numbers, no presents on my doorstep, and no surprise visits from his buddies at the sheriff's office.

Until now, I have felt like I have been standing on this precipice or hanging by a thread, and waiting for it to snap. He knows everything about me, that's what happens when you're with someone for nearly ten years.

I can't help but feel like one of these days the other shoe will drop, and he will play the last card in his hand and threaten to out me as a witch. Something I cannot easily run from.

Without the support of a coven, it would be the same as him painting a target on my back. A solo practitioner is easily expendable, since there's no threat to the collective.

Silas wouldn't let that happen though, would he?

For the past week he's been crashing on my couch, because "Demons aren't genies, they don't get put back in a bottle and set on a shelf." At least he isn't terrible as far as roommates go. He doesn't eat much and when he does, he makes enough for both of us. I've come home from work to late night waffles two nights in a row.

Poppy loves him too, the little traitor. I thought animals were supposed to be afraid of demons, but I guess I was wrong.

“Table five is watching mukbangs on his phone.” Carly Beth whispers as she passes, setting the tray on the bar.

I glance in his general direction, “He’s cute.” Pretty blue collar, with messy golden blond hair.

“I should give him my number.”

Carly Beth is one of the sweetest people I’ve ever met. She’s 24 and way more optimistic than I was at her age. She’s 5’10 and built like a runway model. Hazel eyes, deep auburn hair, with two bleached blonde streaks in the front to frame her face.

Sometimes I wonder why she befriended me, the divorced bartender with ex-husband drama, and not one of the other waitresses, but her friendship has been a lifeline in this tiny town. I only got the job because I tended bar back in Indiana to get a head start on paying off my student loans before Chase and I got married.

Mitchell’s Sports Bar is the hottest spot in Moonstone Ridge, since it’s the only place that stays open until 2 am most nights. All in all, it’s a pretty nice job.

The dark wood bar stretches across the length of the building with bottles of liquor lining the mirrored wall behind me. There’s plenty of seating and two pool tables, along with a small stage for live music and karaoke on the third Thursday of every month. Not to mention the dozen TVs constantly running replays of every sport you could imagine.

There’s also the added bonus that kitchen staff makes us French fries most nights we

work together.

“I don’t know.” I turn to her, “Remember what happened last time with that one guy who was watching book reviews?”

“Oh.” She sighs, “It was a nice three months, though.”

“Sure, but it has to be some sort of setup to lure women in. He’s at a bar at 10:30 at night watching people eat food on his phone. There’s a couple eating onion rings less than ten feet away.”

“You’re probably right.”

Carly Beth leans against the bar, eyeing me.

“What about you? You looked like you were off in your own little world just now.”

I move around her and tend to the customer at the end of the bar, pouring him two pints of the only imported beer we have on tap.

“There’s a lot on my mind.”

She hands me a ticket, “Is it Chase again?”

“When is it not Chase?” I grab the three beers from the fridge, wrapping them in a paper napkin and opening them before setting them on her tray. “No, I just have someone staying with me right now.”

“A male someone?”

“Yes. A friend,” I pause, “from college back in Indiana.” Shit, Silas has an accent, no,



this is fine, I'm sure there are loads of Brits who end up there.

"Is he cute?"

"Don't you have tables?"

"It's been, what? Two years since you guys separated? A year since the divorce was finalized? Do you ever think about dating again?"

I do, a lot, and for some reason that makes me feel a little guilty.

"In Moonstone? There's not really much of an opportunity." I look around the bar, okay, it's filled with men, but I know most of them wouldn't want anything to do with me. Nothing personal, of course. I'm attractive enough to get hit on regularly until they realize I am that Emilia. "I'd much rather live vicariously through you."

"So, you're saying that I should give table five my number?" Carly Beth smiles at me, her nose crinkling.

"I think you should do whatever you want."

She takes the tray and lifts her brows suggestively, then returns to the floor.

The kitchen closes around midnight, that's when the sports crowd thins out and we're left with the regulars. All we have to worry about is the random fight that could break out at the pool table.

While I clean up, I split my attention between Carly Beth and the hockey replays on the big screen off in the corner.

It's been a violent game, I count three different fights just in the first half.

“Must be a full moon tonight.” I mutter under my breath.

“Hey!” Carly Beth folds herself over the bar in front of me, “I had an idea.”

“Hm?”

“There’s a band playing in Madison on the 24<sup>th</sup> and I checked the schedules earlier and wouldn’t you know it? The stars aligned so that we both have that weekend off. We could drive up and make a girl’s weekend of it, rent a hotel, raise some hell.”

“We as in you and me?”

“Yeah.” She picks at a stray paper napkin on the bar, “We’ve worked together for almost two years and haven’t really hung outside of Mitchell’s and I thought it would be kind of fun.”

“I’m going to have to see if someone can watch Poppy, I’ve never left her home alone overnight.”

Carly Beth nods and smiles, “Yeah, sure, just let me know.”

I feel sick at the prospect of having to come up with an excuse later on, but Madison is Chase’s stomping ground and, as much as I want to go, the potential of running into him there is not entirely zero. He has shown up in the most improbable places before.

“Shit.” She hisses out, looking over my shoulder.

It doesn’t take me long to notice what she’s looking at when I see a couple of Chase’s friends walk through the door. Kyle, Chase’s best friend and the worst of them, breaks off and makes a beeline for us with a cocky little grin on his face.

Chase at least has the common decency to not show up at my job, which is why he sends his harbingers to do his dirty work. I know when I see Kyle, my ex-husband is not too far behind. It also makes the owner, Mark, a little nervous to have a sheriff's deputy sniffing around.

This is my ex's way of saying, "Look at how easily I can take all of this from you."

"Emmy," Kyle says with a nod, "Carly Beth."

Carly Beth rolls her eyes, turning towards him, "Kyle Evers, to what do we owe the pleasure?"

He looks down at his deputy's uniform, raising his brow, "Just got off duty." He leans against the bar, with his back to me, "We were hoping we could sit in your section. It'd be nice to see your pretty face after all the horrors I've dealt with tonight."

"Horrors, Kyle, this is Moonstone Ridge. All we have are those high school kids painting up the old shopping mall down on Meyers Street." She folds her arms over her chest, "Also, the kitchen closed twenty minutes ago."

I try to stifle a laugh, clearing my throat instead while I busy myself behind the bar.

Kyle glances over his shoulder for a second, "No matter, we'll have two Millers and a Guinness."

"Fine," she huffs out, motioning her wrist to shoo him off. "Go."

He pushes away from the bar and crosses the floor to join his friends in the booth at the far end of the room.

At least I don't have to stare at him for the rest of the night, though Ricky and Isaac

are looking at me like I owe them money.

“So gross,” Carly Beth turns to me, brushing off her arms with a shake.

I grab the beers from the fridge and twist off the caps, setting them on the tray, “How many times has he asked you out so far?”

“None.” She says with a laugh, “Thankfully, I think the poor guy is gun shy.”

Even if Kyle wasn’t 16 years her senior, I still think Carly Beth deserves a lot better than anyone from Chase’s friend group. To think at one point I considered them my friends.

They welcomed me to Moonstone Ridge and even introduced me to their girlfriends at the time. It makes sense that Chase got all of them in the divorce.

“Thanks for that, though. Watching you put him in his place made my night.”

“You gotta set those boundaries, Emmy.” She hums, grabbing the tray, “Or else these men will walk all over you.”

I glare at Carly Beth, and she flashes me a sweet smile, knowing full well that I hate when Kyle uses that nickname.

She’s right, boundaries are an entirely new concept for me, not that Chase would uphold them.

Which is why I’m curious what he’s up to right now. How long before he shows his face again?

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

FIVE

Silas

I had forgotten how boring the mortal realm can be, especially when I'm sitting around and waiting for something to happen.

It was different before, back when there wasn't all this technology. Everything had a sense of urgency. The witches that I would guard were always under attack or on the run. We would hop from town to town or hide deep in the woods until the monsters hunting them would show themselves. But now that they've effectively gone into hiding, there's really nothing for me to do.

To think a simple mortal holds so much sway over a witch as powerful as Emilia, to where she believes she needs a demon to protect her. She could make quick work with him with the right spell.

A single ritual could wipe his memories or sour this pathetic obsession. Though, I know modern witches have a thing against using spells that mess with someone's free will. Something about morals or the principle of the matter. It's quite a pity.

In order to stave off my boredom, I've taken to reading from that box filled with books that she keeps hidden in the hall closet. Tonight is a particularly entertaining story about a secret agent who uses several fantastical gadgets to gain information about his nemesis, before falling in love with a woman who turns out to be the villain's estranged daughter.

“She dyed her hair, Poppy,” I say, resting the open book on my thigh, “that’s why Anthony didn’t recognize her in the first few chapters. She was a blonde and wasn’t wearing her glasses in the original file.”

Poppy lifts her head from her spot on the floor in front of the television and stares at me for a moment, then drops with a huff, rolling onto her side.

“Some company you are.” I shift against the couch.

Emilia should be home soon, shouldn’t she?

I have become accustomed to her schedule, partially because there isn’t much for me to do in this small city aside from twiddling my thumbs and because I feel responsible for the dog’s well-being while her owner is away.

It’s odd how fast you can grow attached to such an interesting creature. I mean, the dog, of course.

Not that it’s out of the question for a demon to entangle himself with a witch, that is the whole reason I exist, after all. My father fell for one seeking revenge, let’s hope it’s not a family tradition.

I slip in my bookmark and set the book down on the coffee table then walk into the kitchen, Poppy’s collar rattles and I hear her trailing behind me, claws clacking on the fake hardwood leading into the cramped space.

“I already gave you dinner,” I say firmly.

She sits back on her haunches waiting for me to cave.

“Absolutely not. That will not work on me.” I open the fridge and grab the pitcher of

iced tea. I used to think of it as an abomination, but the last few centuries have softened me on the subject. Thankfully, Emilia doesn't have as heavy a hand when it comes to sweeteners or I doubt I would ever sleep.

Poppy watches as I pour the glass, and my resolve slips. I pluck a small dog treat from the ceramic container on the counter and toss it over to her. "Just between us."

I put the pitcher away and hear a low growl behind me.

"That's all you're going to get."

When I look at her again, she stares out towards the living room, her floppy ears folded flat to her head.

"Shh."

My own ears twitch, and I hear it, the faint click of the front door, like someone is trying and failing to fit their key in the lock. Strange.

I check the time, and it's a good two hours before I could expect Emilia home. It could be another tenant with the wrong apartment, these buildings look exactly the same at night, she might as well be living in the center of a bloody maze.

You would think if it were the wrong apartment, they would have figured it out by now. No, this is something different.

The door continues to rattle as I cross the room, Poppy growls a warning, but she stays put in the kitchen where I left her. Part of me wants to let my glamour slip just a fraction, enough for them to question their own sanity.

As soon as I reach the door, I flick the lock, holding onto the knob as whoever is on

the other side tries to turn it. I twist, yanking it open, and a man falls over the threshold, a bronze key slipping out of his hand and falling onto the carpet.

He looks up at me, eyes wide, lips parted, “Who the hell are you?”

“I could ask you the same thing.”

It strikes me I do not know what Chase looks like, and I never asked. Emilia doesn't have many photos in her apartment and the ones she has are of her and an older couple and a few candid shots of her with Poppy or at the bar. Nothing would suggest that she was ever married or had any man in her life.

That said, it's hard not to recognize the feral look of desperation as he gets to his feet, stuffing the key into his front pocket. He's quite ordinary, all things considered. A large and slightly crooked nose with brown eyes and dark, blond hair in need of a haircut, longer on the top so that it falls down over his brows.

He is just a man. Ordinary.

Still, there's a pit in my stomach at the thought that she cared for him. She loved him and he hurt her so much she put her life in danger to summon me. There is nothing monstrous about him, no dragon to be defeated. Not even worth the breath to speak his name, and she is willing to give up her soul and her magic to get away from him.

“I live here.” He straightens.

I breathe out a laugh, “No, I don't think you do.”

It's possible that he's stepped into the apartment once or twice, but there's no sign that he's lived here. The scent is all wrong. I breathe in, searching for a trace, but all I smell is Emilia.



“Yeah? Well, who the hell are you and why are you in my wife’s apartment?”

Ex-wife, I think.

“I am a friend, that is all you need to know.”

“Where is she?” His voice is deeper, laced with an empty threat that is almost laughable.

I take a step forward, forcing him back as I lean against the doorframe, “I think you know exactly where she is, which is why you had the confidence to break into her apartment. I’m just trying to figure out how. Do you have people watching her? Following her?”

Chase glances behind him, shifting from one foot to the other. A dog barks in the distance, and I can hear Poppy whimper a response in the kitchen.

“Tell her I came by,” He says, looking past me into the apartment, then levels a finger at me, “And I’m keeping my eye on you.”

“It was nice to finally meet you, Chase.”

He stares at me before turning on his heel and stomping down the pathway like a child.

I sigh, waving my hand, magic coiling between my fingertips, then easily pluck the bronze key out of thin air.

“You won’t be needing this.” I say, pocketing it.

As I close the door and lock it behind me, I’m left with more questions than answers.

Something bothers me, I can't put my finger on his motivation. Why is he going to such lengths to play these mind games? What is in it for him? What does he get out of it? It just doesn't make sense.

All I do know is I feel completely helpless. I could have revealed myself to him, scared him, cursed him or killed him, but all of those options would hurt Emilia in the long run, and I don't want that. Chase isn't a foe defeated through battle, the wounds he has inflicted run deep, and even when he is gone there will be a much larger web to dismantle.

I settle back onto the couch and pick up the book, but continue to read the same passage over and over, while waiting for Emilia to return home. I wonder if she's safe, if the bracelet is still working, and if I could sense if she was in danger.

The spell held well enough the other night when she saw a large spider in the bathroom, but who is to say if it will continue to hold? She could need me right now and I wouldn't even know.

After a while, I hear the telltale sound of keys against the lock again, this time it's Emilia. She gives me a faint smile as she closes the door, her eyes going to the book in my lap.

"Oh, that's a good one." She says, locking the door, "How far are you?"

"Not very," I shake my head, "I apologize, but don't know a better way to say this. Chase was here tonight."

"Here?" She looks towards the small dining room as though she's expecting something to be there on the table, her knuckles white as she grips the keys.

Her panic flares, the sensation settling deep in my chest. So the spell is still working.

“He’s gone.” I stand, crossing the room.

Emilia is stuck staring at the table until I reach out and gently rest my hand on her shoulder, bringing her out of her trance. She inhales, brown eyes blinking up at me.

“I think it’s time that you tell me everything that happened.”

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

SIX

Emilia

“What does the video say?” I ask, looking over my shoulder.

Silas is staring down at the phone, the video practically inaudible at this distance. I only catch a few key phrases, something about the latch and the strike plate.

We’ve been at this for over an hour already. I didn’t think I’d spend most of my day before I have to work an evening shift installing a deadbolt, but here we are. I’m on my hands and knees, the door wide open with a small drop cloth under me to catch the metal and wood shavings.

“Insert the bolt sleeve, then thread the tail piece through and connect it to the front. I think that’s the bit with the little latch.” He looks up at me, pinching his thumb and forefinger together and mimicking a turning motion.

He’s pretty cute and still not at all what I had expected.

When I think demon, I expect this old monstrous being who doesn’t understand the mortal realm because of how long he has been detached from it, not someone who prefers Dunkin Donuts coffee over Starbucks.

It really makes me wonder about his life, and how long he stays here. Does he have a reason to? Is there someone here waiting for him or is this just a vacation spot for him?

He didn't so much as blink when I told him about Chase last night. It was one of three times that I have explained the history. About how things were rocky before we moved to Moonstone Ridge as newlyweds, but Chase assured me we'd have fewer problems here closer to his family and how he'll be able to find a steady job.

When in reality, moving here is what changed everything. The small jabs came more often, along with the jealousy and restricting who I could talk to. He told me I was difficult to love, and I didn't understand how much stress he was under.

The breaking point happened when we were going to grab takeout, and I was sick with a cold. He took my slow movements as defiance and grabbed my arm, physically dragging me down Main Street, in front of half the town.

I began the petition for divorce and moved out that weekend while he was at work, scraping together the small amount of funds that I had for the first and last month's rent on this place. The only one my credit score would allow.

Silas just listened with his brows creased and told me I didn't deserve to be treated that way. That helped. Having someone look at it from the outside and agreeing that something terrible had taken place, that I wasn't crazy or I didn't throw away a perfectly good marriage over a misunderstanding.

The people in town were convinced I was the problem, someone even spread rumors I had an affair. Chase could never be at fault, he was the local boy with the silver tongue.

"Okay, I think I have everything ready. The stencil is down." I sit back on my feet and look at my handiwork, running my hand down the side of the door frame. "All you need to do is chisel out the spot for the faceplate and the strike plate."

"I'm not sure which surprises me more, that your landlord agreed to this," he says,

getting up from the couch, “or that you didn’t have a deadbolt to begin with. What did he say when you asked?”

“Well, his exact words were, “I don’t care. Do whatever you effing want, but if you mess up the door, it’s coming out of your security deposit.”

Joke’s on him. I lost all hope of getting my security deposit back the moment I brought Poppy home.

“Seems like a delightful fellow.” Silas holds out his hand and pulls me to my feet effortlessly, like I weigh nothing at all, “Hold on.”

“What is it?” I look up into beautiful golden eyes.

“You have a little something.” He smiles, lifting his hand and brushing his fingertips over my cheek, “There. I got it.”

“Thanks.”

It really is unfair how attractive Silas is and, oh. I catch the moment his eyes flit to my lips. Could he be thinking about kissing me? No, that’s impossible.

My brain all but short circuits as I feel the pressure of his thumb tracing lazy circles on the back of my hand. The sensation shoots up my arm and down my spine, making my stomach do a little flip.

I pull away and hold out the chisel between us, “I guess you’re going to need this.”

“Right.” Silas says.

If I didn’t know better, I would think he was disappointed. How could he be? He’s a

demon and I'm a witch, it could never work out. Not to mention he looks like he's close to ten years younger than me. How in the hell do demons age? Am I going to get older and he would stay the same? Maybe there's some sort of demon magic . . .

No. This is ridiculous. Nothing is happening between us. There has to be a rule in the demon or witch code that expressly forbids it. Surely, I would have been burned at the stake for this.

He drops to a crouch, pushing his long sleeves up to the elbow, showing off his muscular forearms as he gets to work, scraping off thin layers of wood from the frame.

"I'm getting something to drink." I say, turning on my heel and walking into the kitchen before he can respond.

There is no way I am developing a crush. I'm going to be 36-years-old. I thought we were supposed to outgrow this bullshit at some point. Not that I've had any real interest in dating since Chase and I got divorced. I haven't even had sex in three years.

Why in the hell did I think of that?

From my spot leaning against the countertop, I have a full view of the front door, watching Silas as he works, his muscles straining. He reaches up, brushing his shoulder length hair back, tilting his head as he finishes up.

"Okay." He calls out, closing the door and testing the lock a few times, then grabs the hardware from the coffee table, "Now we have this."

"Do you think that's overkill?" I walk into the living room, nodding to the box in his hand holding the brass chain lock.

To be fair, I'm the one that tossed it into the cart at the hardware store. I had this whole scenario playing in my head of me answering the door in a silk robe, which I do not own, and opening it just wide enough for the chain to pull taut like in one of those old tv shows set in New York.

Silas ignores me, peeling back the packaging and walking over to the frame, "Grab the pencil."

"Okay," I shrug, doing as he says.

He places one section of the chain against the door and nods for me to mark it.

"Isn't this supposed to be around eye level?" I ask, looking over my shoulder.

That was a big mistake. Silas is right behind me, his chest almost flush to my back with his hands braced on either side of my head, caging me against the door.

"Your idea of eye level is quite different from mine, little witch ." His warm breath feathers against my cheek.

I straighten, turning back towards the door feeling the brush of his chest against my shoulders, "Lower it a little."

He chuckles and moves the hardware, letting me mark the placement for it. We test to make sure it's level before we secure it to the door. This time, I hold the lock and he uses the cordless drill that we borrowed from Mr. Jankowski, covering my hand with his as he screws it in place.

It takes all of my focus to ignore how close he is and how he lingers, drawing out each movement. The way that he lets his bare skin brush against mine as we're tangled together in this odd configuration.



My nerves take over.

“I bet you don’t do this very often.” I say with a laugh.

“Strange enough, this is the first time I’ve ever installed a lock.”

“Seriously? I find that pretty hard to believe. Seems to me like you’d have women or men breaking down your door.”

I only mean it as a joke to lighten the mood, but something shifts between us the moment the words leave my lips. Maybe I touched a nerve or there’s something deeper.

Silas laughs, his hand brushing against my waist, the warmth of his palm radiating across my stomach. When I turn around, he’s already walking away and gathering up the rest of the tools we borrowed from Mr. Jankowski.

“And why would that be hard to believe?” He asks, staring down at the tool bag.

“For starters, you’ve been alive for over 237 years and you’re gorgeous, I’m not sure if that’s a you thing or something to do with being a demon. Let me tell you, some of those illustrations in the books don’t really do you any justice.”

Great, now I’m rambling.

“You think I’m gorgeous?” He turns to me, and the look in his eyes has me clenching my thighs together.

“Objectively.” I gesture, “even with the ears.”

In response, they go flat to his head, “What about my ears?”

The movement makes my heart squeeze. “Never mind.” I laugh, “We should probably get those back to him.”

“I’ll run them over.” He says, walking to the door then pauses, “You know, it would have been easier to use a spell to keep Chase out.”

“Easier.” I roll my eyes, “Even if I had access to that kind of magic, I don’t think I could manage something so specific.”

“You’re a powerful witch, Emilia.”

“I’m not sure what gave you that impression. It’s been so long since I’ve used any of my magic, we should consider ourselves lucky the ritual didn’t blow up.”

It’s the truth. I can’t even remember the last time that I’ve felt the fire at my fingertips. Chase wasn’t against me using magic in the beginning, but he would still make snide comments about it. Saying that I was being lazy or showing off when I’d use telekinesis to grab something off of the top shelf.

He’d joke about how he didn’t understand how I could lower myself to be with a mortal like him. It got to where I would only use my fire to light candles at night, then after a while, I couldn’t even manage that much.

I feel like I have lost so much of myself.

“You summoned me.”

“I was trying to summon your father.” I shoot back.

“If you have lost your fire, there are ways to get it back, Emilia. I can help you.”

I fold my arms against my chest, “How did you know about my fire powers?”

Silas follows the movement, his eyes lingering there before he looks at me, “Like calls to like, little witch.” He smirks, then slips out the front door, closing it behind him.

What does that mean? Is he half-witch?

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

SEVEN

Silas

Claws click against the fake hardwood as Poppy barrels through the dining room to the front door, nearly ramming her head against my shin, her tongue lolling out of the side of her mouth.

“I missed you too.” I say, holding the white box higher, while I try to lock the door and give the dog an appropriate amount of attention.

“Silas?” Emilia asks from the kitchen, “Is that you? It’s been nearly a half an hour. I was about ready to send out a search team.”

“I had the strangest conversation with your neighbor just now. We were talking about sports and then he asked me if I was allergic to tree nuts, to which I said no, then he shoved this white box in my hands.”

“ You like sports?”

I don’t miss the mocking tone in her voice, but when I look up, my mouth goes dry. Emilia stands just past the threshold leading into the small kitchen, she has changed out of her baggy t-shirt and yoga pants and into what she calls her work attire.

A low cut black sleeveless top, with a bright red lace bra peeking out underneath. It shows off the generous swell of her breasts and her soft stomach and her dark blue jeans almost look painted on, emphasizing her fuller hips and thighs.

I realize I would give anything to worship every inch of her. This woman has the body of a literal goddess, I should know, I have met one or two in my lifetime. Thanks, Dad.

“I, uh, no. I don’t follow them, but it’s easy enough to fake.”

“You should come to the bar. There’s usually a game on, that way you can form an actual opinion.” She walks over and touches the box, smiling. “Oh, cookies.”

“Is that what these are?”

Emilia takes the box from me, lifting the top, “His daughter Katie bakes them whenever they spend time together.” She grabs one and holds it up to my mouth, “These look like walnut chocolate chip.”

I pluck the cookie out of her hand, “Why are we the ones enjoying them?”

“Because he shouldn’t have the sugar and he loves her too much to refuse.”

Humming to myself, I inspect the baked good before taking a bite. It’s soft and chewy, without being undercooked in the center, a perfect mix of salty and sweet. “Jesus fucking Christ.” I groan, loud enough that Emilia looks at me.

At that moment, Poppy rears up and crashes against the back of her knees, making them buckle. I bite down on the rest of the cookie, freeing my hands up to wrap around her waist as she guards the white box, pressing it against her chest.

“Poppy!” Emilia yelps, her gaze traveling from the dog up to me, a soft smile pulling at her lips as she rights herself. She playfully reaches up and snaps off the excess cookie, popping it into her mouth. “They’re good, huh? I keep saying that she should sell them.”

Through what I can only assume is a miracle, the cookies remain unharmed, the only casualty is my pulse.

I watch, dumbfounded, as she takes the box into the kitchen. “Yes, she should.”

The little witch doesn’t know how much she riles me up with her gentle teasing. So much so that I can feel my blood boil, the demon side of my heritage stirring beneath my skin. I turn my back to her, willing myself under control. There’s no way of telling how she would react to seeing me in such a state.

My true form emerges when I’m fighting or fucking. There’s no way for her to know, she might mistake it for me going feral and attempt to put me down.

“Hey, Silas?” She asks, her voice so soft that I barely can hear it over the sound of my racing heart.

I continue to take even breaths, until the sensation subsides, “Yes?”

“Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course.” I turn to see her watching me, expression soft.

She swallows, and I wonder what it is she sees when she looks at me. It’s clear that she’s not afraid, but why would she be? With the spell tethering us together, as weak as it has proven to be, I am entirely at her mercy.

Even without it, after seeing the fear and vulnerability in her eyes last night, I knew I had to protect her. I would draw blood to keep her safe.

Which is why I should push whatever these feelings are aside. She couldn’t possibly feel the same about me, not with our deal hanging over her head.

“Do you really think I can, you know, help me get my powers back?”

“Yes.” I huff out a breath, “Emilia, what do you think happened?”

She shrugs, “I don’t know. I always thought that I lost them. I grew into them as a girl and maybe I just grew out of them. It’s all part of getting older.”

“Magic, especially a witch’s magic, is tied to their emotions. I can see yours right now, glowing as bright as a star.”

“Can you teach me how to find it again?”

Shit.

“I can try.”

Maybe I haven’t thought this through completely. Of course, I can help her. It’s probably just a case of her confidence being shot. I can already see glimmers of it returning, and it’s such a beautiful sight. Magic is personal, like a fingerprint. To remind her of the feeling, I would have to let her feel a bit of mine.

The process is intimate. This wouldn’t matter if I were a full demon, but since I have witch blood, it would allow her to sense my emotions, including this hopeless attraction.

“Good.” She says, “Poppy, go to bed.” She snaps her fingers, pointing to the large cushion against the corner of the living room.

The dog saunters over and grabs her lamb toy, squeaking out her grievances as she obeys, curling up on the pillow.

“You want to start right this moment?”

“You said that it would be easier if I could use magic.” She shrugs, walking over to kneel in front of the coffee table.

“Don’t you have work?” I step closer.

“Yeah, but we have time.” She points to the spot beside her and gives me a gruff, “Sit.”

The spell connecting forces me to my knees right next to her, the sudden movement surprising us both.

She chokes out a laugh, her hand flying to her mouth. “Oh, Gods, I am so sorry, Silas. I forgot all about the bracelet. Are you okay?”

“It’s fine. I’m fine.”

I try to glare at her, but can’t muster the ire. Her cheeks are flushed a rich pink, the color continuing down across her shoulders and chest, disappearing under her shirt. Gods, I would love to bury my face against her neck, filling my nose with her scent, feeling her soft body pressed against me.

I am so screwed. Though, maybe not. If I keep the touches light, just a brush of my fingertips. I should be able to do this without revealing too much.

All risks aside, I am curious to see how much power she has. This could be an opportunity for me to glimpse her potential to shatter the demonic hierarchy once and for all.

“How do we start?” She asks, her voice still bright with her laughter as she represses



a smirk.

“I don’t trust either of us enough to play with fire at the moment, so what other abilities do you have?”

She settles back, tucking her feet under her, “Just my telekinesis. That was the first to manifest. You can imagine how surprised I was when I moved my hairbrush one day and set it on fire.”

“We can start there and leave the fire for later on. Focus your energy on something lightweight.”

Emilia tries to hide her discomfort, but it’s clear she has some trauma attached to her magic that forces her to keep it contained to the point of being stifled.

I’ve had it happen several times throughout my life, but it’s hard to force yourself to look inward, especially when you’re afraid of losing control.

She scans the room, her attentions snagging on the half bookshelf in the corner. I pick out her target immediately, amidst the old dusty tomes is the single Harlequin romance I left there a few days ago after I finished it.

It has to be one of my favorites so far. The story is about a billionaire who has to fake date his receptionist to improve his emotional intelligence, all the while ignoring their clear sexual attraction.

Emilia lifts her hand, and I keep my eye on the book. After a few seconds, shuffles its way across the shelf then stops, like it’s hit an invisible block despite her hand shaking from the exertion.

“I can’t.” She slumps her shoulders.

She's still in her head.

"Why the Harlequin?"

"What do you mean?"

"You could have chosen the squeaky toy, it's made of thin rubber." I nod towards Poppy's toy bin, "Or maybe one of the herbs you have set out to dry on the dining room table. You chose the book, knowing you might fail. Why do you want to prove yourself right?"

Emilia frowns and pushes herself up onto her knees, "I didn't sign up for a therapy session. You were supposed to help me with my magic. If you think this is hopeless."

"Wait." I touch her elbow, allowing a trickle of my magic to pass through to her, "I never said you will fail."

She looks down at where we're connected, grabbing ahold of my forearm, her touch seeking my magic, then settles onto the floor.

"I will help. Try again."

"Okay," she breathes, holding her hand out.

I feed her enough magic to spark the flame. If you've been without for years, it's easy to lose sight of the sensation.

Suddenly, her magic overtakes mine, coursing through my body like an electrical current. It's been lying there, dormant for so many years, and now it's starving.

Not just a well of power, an untapped reservoir. She could lead her own coven if she

wished it or live as a queen in the demon realm, with all the lesser begging for scraps.

Above all else, her magic feels like home. Not the raging fire that I expected, built upon pain from the defiance in her eyes, but it's the warmth of sunlight. It's the comfort of a lover's embrace and the one thing that she never lost sight of. Hope.

The book slides further across the shelf and launches into the air, flying a good three feet before landing on top of the coffee table in front of us with a satisfying thud. Emilia lets out a whoop and rocks onto her knees, wrapping her arms around my shoulders.

"We did it." She says against my neck.

"No, you did it." I gingerly place my hand at her side. I cannot help but lean into her touch, turning to nearly brush my lips against her shoulder.

Emilia pulls away, her eyes searching my face. "What do you mean?"

"I only reminded you what it felt like."

"Well," she smiles, her gaze catching on my lips and making my heart skip a beat, "Thank you." She releases me and sits back, holding her hand out and making the book levitate an inch or so off the table without my help.

It doesn't seem like much, but it's far more progress than I had expected.

She closes her fist, and it drops, "I should get ready for work." She turns to me and presses a kiss to my cheek, then climbs to her feet, leaving the room.

Here I was afraid that she would know everything about me. I never once thought that I would taste her magic and, by extension, know the caress of her soul.

Now, I'm not sure I can think of anything else.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

### EIGHT

Emilia

It's a busy night at the bar and my entire body is humming, riding the high of using my powers for the first time in over four years. The world feels brand new. I'm able to feel the threads of magic woven through everything.

Silas swears up and down that he didn't do much, but I could still feel the warmth of his magic ghosting across my skin. It felt borderline erotic. I can't explain it.

This makes me wonder about something my mom told me right after Chase proposed.

She said, "He will never understand how it feels, Emmy. Don't dim your light so that his can shine brighter."

Young and rebellious Emilia saw that as her mother being a bitter old woman. Things didn't work out with my biological father. He left not long after I was born and my mom remarried by the time I was three. Dean has always been my dad, blood or not, and I think they are perfect together, but I still saw the comment as prejudice against my choice in partner. We didn't talk until after the wedding.

I wish I could go back and grab myself by the shoulders and shake. If I had only seen the kernel of truth in it, past my desire to be loved and cherished after being overlooked most of my life. Part of me felt lucky to have him. A small town legend that can charm anyone he meets.

Except for Silas. I'm not sure why, but that makes me happy.

Gods, I can't stop thinking about him. I don't even hate having him around. Part of me looks forward to seeing him sprawled out on the couch in the morning, dead asleep, with his ears twitching.

"Number thirteen just twisted his ankle, he's out in the third quarter and we're down 3 points. We're looking at a surge." Carly Beth says, her voice low, settling next to me. "Emilia?"

I turn, "Yeah? Oh, isn't that the quarterback? Shit. Okay."

She grabs my shoulder, "Wait, there's something different about you tonight. It almost looks like . . . Emilia, you're glowing."

My hand goes to my cheek, "I am?"

"Did you get laid?"

"What?! No." I nearly knock over the bottle of tequila in front of me.

"Shame." She replies, shaking her head, and ripping a page from her ticket pad and slapping it on the small opening to the kitchen, "Two bacon burgers and a side of onion rings." She turns back to me, placing her hands on her hips, "I don't know about you, but I am starving."

"Don't remind me." I bend down and grab a couple beers, placing them on her tray, "It's going to be a good thirty minutes before I can take a break."

Carly Beth snaps her fingers at me, "Thirty minutes? It's a date. Maybe then you'll tell me what's got you all worked up tonight." She flashes me a brilliant smile and

returns to the floor with the tray.

There's no way I can tell her the truth.

It's not that I don't trust her. I just never felt comfortable introducing someone to the world hidden in plain sight. Imagine learning that magic is real and fairies and vampires exist, and in fact, one might even work the night shift at the post office.

I don't have an actual confirmation on that one. Moonstone Ridge, despite its magical name, isn't full of supernaturals as far as I have seen and no one is rushing to out each other.

Shouts erupt from the floor, and I jump, looking up to see the substitute quarterback running towards the ten yard line, hopping over the opposing team to roll into the end zone, scoring 6 points and giving us the lead again with less than two minutes until the fourth quarter.

Looks like it's going to be a long night.

I smile and shake my head, taking advantage of the lull to put away the stray tequila bottles back onto the shelf behind me when I catch movement in the mirror.

No, no, no. It can't be.

Chase walks through the door, searching like a bloodhound, until he finds me in the mirror. I can read his body language from here, the tense jaw, the emotionless stare. He's pissed and making his way over to the far end of the bar. He's waiting for me to make the first move, just like old times.

I rub my hand over the amethyst bracelet, my heart racing, wondering if Silas will get here in time if I need him. Should I call for him?

From the looks of it, Chase just got off of work. He's still wearing his navy polo from the factory, which means he's been able to keep this job at least. Unless that's why he's here.

With a couple of steadying breaths, I walk down the bar, stopping in front of him.

"Evening, Emmy." He says, barely looking up from the plastic menu in his hand, "Are you still running happy hour or am I late?" He sets it down hard, finally pinning me with a glare.

"I thought we agreed my workplace was off limits." I keep my voice low, touching the bracelet again.

He watches me, "You also agreed to be faithful to me."

It's so ridiculous that it makes my head spin, "What in the hell are you talking about?"

"I met your new guy. How long have you been fucking him?" He leans over the bar and I catch a whiff of alcohol, he's been drinking, "Was it while we were still together?"

A crackle of magic pierces the air, and I turn to see Silas step out from the hall leading into the back room, his eyes filled with fire. How? He must have teleported somehow.

"I know good and well no one here in town would touch you," he looks me up and down, "I've ruined you for everyone else."

Silas searches around the room, then looks at me with a question in his eyes. It takes me a moment to realize he's asking for permission.



I shake my head no.

“What are you looking at?” Chase’s voice cuts through the hollering and he turns, pushing off of the bar.

All this time, I have been keeping myself in the cage he built all those years ago. I’ve carried this guilt, knowing that I broke his heart. I stole away a future without his consent. That was never true.

This was never about love. It was about control.

“I never cheated on you.” I say, my voice shakes.

He looks back at me, his expression cold.

“I gave you so much of myself and got nothing in return. Somehow, I thought that was my fault. I wasn’t trying hard enough or compromising enough to make things work between us.”

The entire bar is paying attention now, their cheers have completely gone silent despite the announcer’s voice building to a frenzied pitch. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Mike, the bouncer, waiting to intervene.

I’m sure he’s being cautious because knows exactly who Chase is, but it makes me feel better knowing he still has my back. Everyone does.

I have been trying to break free of my ex for so long that I didn’t notice the friendships I had made by being myself. People like Carly Beth, who would stick up for me at a moment’s notice, not out of pity or some sort of obligation. Because we aren’t just coworkers, we’re friends.

“Do you really think he’s going to stick around?” Chase points to Silas, “After he finds out what you are.”

“I don’t care.” The laugh that bubbles from my throat surprises me, “I will never choose you again, Chase. You don’t own me.”

“Moonstone Ridge is a small town, Emmy, you can’t avoid me forever.”

“That’s where you’re wrong.” I fold my arms against my chest, “You just walked into my work and showed your entire ass on one of the busiest nights of the week.” I glance over to see Carly Beth, who watches us with a smile on her face. “You’re going to leave me alone, because I am sure I have enough witnesses to press charges.”

He scoffs, “For what?”

“Harassment, for starters.” Carly Beth chimes in, saddling up beside me.

Chase straightens, scanning the bar. He clenches his jaw, then leaves, dodging Mike on the way out.

Sound slowly filters back onto the floor and I turn to Carly Beth.

“Go,” she nods, holding her hand out and gesturing towards my half apron, “Take a break and I’ll watch the bar.”

I pull the strings, untying it, then place it in her hand, making my way out onto the floor towards the back hallway where I had last seen Silas. Remnants of his magic hangs in the air and since I haven’t felt another pulse, I know he’s here somewhere.

A piece of me relaxes when I see him leaning over the jukebox, his long-sleeved shirt

stretching over broad shoulders. Again with the shoulders. The lights from the machine carve out his form, so he looks like a hero from one of my Harlequins.

I need to control myself. This is Silas we're talking about.

Before I can speak, he turns to me and exhales a breath, his ears twitching in response to something.

"Wait." I blink, walking towards him, "Did you just smell me?"

"Maybe," Silas shrugs, standing up straight and shoving his hands in his front pockets, "It's a wolf thing."

"Okay, Jacob."

"What?"

"Never mind," I lean against the wall, feeling like my legs are about to give out. I didn't realize how much I have been shaking until I stopped moving. It's catching up with me all at once.

"Hey," he takes a step forward, tilting his head, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," I rest my hand on my stomach, "I just can't believe I did that. How did you get here so fast?"

"Teleported." He looms closer, "You're looking a little pale."

"I need to," I flail my hand a little, losing my train of thought trying to stave off the panic attack, "is that part of the spell? The teleporting to my side when I'm in danger?"

“That’s one of my powers. Emilia, I think we should get you some air.”

“No, I’m okay, just talk to me. How does that work?” I make the mistake of looking up into Silas’ gold eyes.

Chase has never looked at me like that. Silas’ eyes are soft, full of compassion, but also hungry and searching.

“I step from one place to another,” he holds his hands up between us and puts them together, “Things just fold. The connection we have helps.” He gives me a smile, “You were brilliant, you know.”

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

“How exactly am I looking at you, Emilia?” He reaches out and tucks my hair behind my ear, his fingertips lingering at my jaw.

There’s a silent dare to his voice that makes me want to push. To see how far it will take me.

“Like you want to kiss me.” I tempt fate.

Silas looks wounded, as though I uncovered some hidden weakness, his eyes flitting to my lips, “Would that be so terrible?”

“Only if you’re trying to prove him wrong.”

“Fuck. Him.” Silas growls out, lowering his head until his face is a breath away from my lips, “If I want to kiss you, it’s because I have done nothing but think about you since you left.”

He smells so good, like linen and citrus with a hint of sweat. I'm lucky to catch its ghost throughout the house, sometimes it clings to my skin just enough that I can smell him as I'm falling asleep.

Tonight feels magical, and I'm not going to miss my chance. All it takes is a lift of my chin to kiss him, a gentle brush, his lips are much softer than I imagined.

He huffs out a breath, all the muscles in his forearms go taut as he traces soft circles against my jaw with his thumb.

Silas cups my face with his hands, kissing me back. This time it's not gentle. It's ravenous, filled with the same longing and desire that I feel mirrored in my chest.

I grab hold of his waist, feeling his muscles tense under my fingertips as he steps closer, pressing me flat against the wall. His tongue brushes over the seam of my mouth, urging them open with a playful nip to my bottom lip that shoots straight down to my core.

He grips the back of my neck with reverence, not possession. I feel like something precious he's trying to savor, and I'm taking my time memorizing the change in his breathing, the way he grabs my waist or threads his fingers through my hair.

I already know that I want this kiss to be imprinted upon my soul, something to dream about and long for whenever Silas leaves. Because this isn't permanent.

It takes every ounce of my resolve to pull away from him. I already miss the soft touch of his lips, the tease of his tongue.

The sound of the football game filters in, snapping us both out of our trance and bringing us back to reality. It feels like I've woken from a dream.

Silas takes a step back, his eyes never leaving mine, filled with the same raw admiration from before, but now there's concern knit into his brow.

"I should really get back." I move past him, walking towards the bar. After two steps, I feel a jolt of magic and turn, "You can stay for the rest of my shift, if you want." My voice trailing off.

He's gone.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

NINE

Silas

The world folds around me as I step easily from the bar, returning home. Home. No, home is my villa overseeing the coast back in the demon realm. Home is not a tiny apartment in a one Starbucks town like Moonstone Ridge.

But if this is true, then why do I feel so comfortable here? Surrounded by Emilia's things and her scent, frustrating and enticing at the same time.

As the faint smoke around me clears, I see Poppy lift her head and look in my direction. She huffs out a bark and stands, walking into the kitchen to bring out one of her toys, squeaking it as she stares up at me.

I look down at her offering.

"I'm fine." I say, more to myself than the dog.

It was just a kiss. We are both adults, and it doesn't have to mean anything. But it did. It meant more to me than any kiss I have had before.

In any other situation, I'd be licking my wounds in my own realm, searching for some chaos. I'd find a soul to twist or a fight that I might not win.

Is it the healthiest coping mechanism? Probably not, but that doesn't stop me. I should just accept that things end, but this never was given the chance to begin in the

first place.

If I was smart, I would have done everything to detach from her, but I don't see her as a soul to take and put on a mantlepiece, not anymore.

I could have played the doting pet and helped her regain her power from a far, it was in her all along she just needed to remember who she was and what she rightfully deserves.

I was a goner the moment I saw her standing there in front of me, blood dripping onto the floor, cross with me for not being who she had wanted.

Meanwhile, I couldn't look away from the slight scrunch to her nose and the crease in her brow backed up with that fiery spirit someone had reduced to embers.

I wanted nothing more than to bring it out, restore it, and feel the flames lick against my fingertips.

Now that I have touched her magic and tasted her lips, I don't think I can step away.

Poppy nudges my hand with a squeak of her toy, and I gently wrestle it away from her, tossing it into the dining room, watching as she nearly skids to a stop in front of it, scooping it up to repeat the entire process again.

I'm not supposed to be having these feelings, especially not for my charge. Of course, like everything else, the apple doesn't seem to fall far from the tree.

I thought this would be simple. Emilia offered her soul up to me without hesitation, all I had to do was keep my wits about me and stay the course until she felt the bargain was satisfied.



A soul of her caliber would have surely earned me the respect that I deserve and prove myself as the heir to my father's legacy, but now I can't bring myself to take it.

You would think this was my first deal. Allowing myself to be collared by the little witch, bound to her in ways beyond the usual expectations.

Though not bound to her in the way I long to be, body and soul.

"What the fuck am I thinking?" I scrub my hand over my face, then take the toy, and throw it again. Poppy's tongue lolls as she chases it.

It'll be several hours until Emilia returns home from work. Normally, I'd pick up another one of her books, but I have read so many romance novels over the past few weeks that I am seeing her in every main character.

Now that I've kissed her, I don't want to settle for a fantasy.

So, instead, for the first time in several years, I turn on the television.

"Are you watching Bake-off?"

Emilia's voice shakes me from my trance, I was lost watching a contestant make spun sugar to accent their lemon poppy bundt cake. I grab the remote and shut off the tv.

"Yeah, I guess I was. I can see why it was listed as one of the highest rated show on Netflix." I run my hands over my thighs, turning towards her, "Oh, I fed Poppy and took her outside."

"Thanks." She smiles, putting her purse away.

I look over at the clock, "I didn't realize it's almost four. I was thinking of making an

omelette, if you want one.”

“No, it’s okay. Carly Beth and I got burgers after work and time kind of got away from me.” She turns to me, “After the night I’ve had, I’m probably just going to turn in.”

“Alright,” I nod, “Have a good night.”

“Good night, Silas.” Emilia stands there looking like she’s going to say something else, then snaps her fingers, “C’mon, Poppy.”

I watch as she walks down the hall, Poppy trailing behind her. Maybe that was my only chance, now all I can do is stay the course and follow this through. Hold up my end of the bargain.

It’ll be rough living here with her, but as soon as Chase is less of an annoyance, I can leave, though I might stay in town for a while longer just to make sure he won’t return.

Then, Emilia stops at her bedroom door, her hand grips the handle, and she glances back at me before slipping inside.

Maybe all I have to do is wait for her.

I push up off the couch and change into my black lounge pants and grab the spare pillow and blanket I’ve been using from the hall closet. As I walk past Emilia’s door, I hear the shower turn on and my cock twitches at the thought of her stripping out of her clothes.

I can almost smell her coconut shampoo.

Willing my legs to move, I turn off the hall light and walk back into the front room, fixing my place.

It would be better if she had a second room, but sleeping on the couch isn't too bad. It's wide enough that I fit fairly comfortably. Sure, it's not my king sized bed, but I get to fall asleep surrounded by her scent. If I close my eyes, I can imagine she's right beside me.

I can still hear the shower as I settle back onto the couch, sinking into the cushions and letting my legs fall open.

The kiss must have driven me mad, because I am hard just thinking about it. The feel of her soft lips and the warm blush of her cheeks as she looked up at me with those brown eyes, searching and finding just how much I want her, something I have been trying to hide.

I listen to make sure the shower is still going, then slide my hand under my waistband, palming my cock and wrapping my fingers around my shaft, giving it a long languid stroke from base to tip.

I grip the elastic of my pants and shove them down over my knees to free my cock, letting my head fall back, continuing the slow torture as the fantasy takes shape.

Emilia is straddling my lap with her hair back in a ponytail, something I can grab ahold of as I kiss her neck and sink my teeth into the meat of her collarbone, deep enough to leave a mark. She's wearing that loose top from earlier, with the black cotton panties I catch a glimpse of occasionally when she bends over. The soft fabric nearly soaked through as she grinds against me, taking whatever she needs.

"Fuck," I moan, running my hand along my shaft and over the tip, gathering the bit of pre-cum with my palm.

I can barely hear anything over the sound of my breath as I fuck my fist, thinking about all the delicious sounds I can draw from her lips. The knot at the base of my cock already swelling as I stalk my release.

“Silas,” her voice is a soft sigh that could be mistaken for a whisper. It sounds so real. A little too real.

My eyes snap open and I find Emilia standing across the hall, her back flat to her bedroom door.

She looks like she stepped out of my fantasy, her hair cascading over her shoulder, damp from the shower. She’s even wearing a baggy shirt that barely grazes her thighs so I can see her shapely legs and the tiny dimples on her knees.

“Emilia.” I choke out, stilling my hand and moving to cover myself.

From here I can see the sharp rise and fall of her chest, the material of her shirt clinging to the hard peaks of her nipples and flowing over her ample breasts. I’m practically salivating at the thought of having them in my mouth.

“No,” she murmurs, her eyes focused on my cock, no, not just my cock, she’s staring at my knot. “You don’t have to stop.”

Her hand trails up her hips, lifting her shirt so I can see her stomach as it slips under the lace hem of her panties.

I must be fucking dreaming. I have died and, somehow, gone to heaven, that’s the only explanation for the sight in front of me.

I give my cock another slow stroke, watching as she presses her thighs together, the outline of her hand moving under the thin fabric of her underwear.

“You could come over here and let me take care of that for you.” I say, drunk on the view as I do my best to draw out every movement, savoring the tension building towards the base of my spine, “I bet my fingers would feel so much better.”

She shakes her head, “Just keep doing what you’re doing.”

My balls tighten at the whimper in her voice. I want to take her into my arms and tease her until she’s crying my name like it’s a prayer, but I keep doing what she wants, using the warmth seeping from my tip to fuck my hand nice and slow like I’d fuck her, nudging at her entrance with my knot until her legs are shaking.

“Good boy,” she breathes out, a hint of playfulness in her tone.

Damn, she catches on quick. It takes everything in my power not to come. I reach down and squeeze the base of my knot until the sensation ebbs, noticing her fingers moving quicker at the sight. Oh, that’s what you want.

I groan, holding the base of my knot as the other hand works my cock, and her response is immediate, the door rattling as she closes her eyes and rests her head against the wood.

“No,” I growl out, the sound loud enough that it shocks both of us into awareness, “Look at me, little witch. Look at what you do to me.”

She tilts her head down, her eyes shadowed in the darkness.

It only takes a few more strokes, my palm grazing over the head of my cock with every twist of my wrist, slick with pre-cum. My hand brushes against the base of my knot again and I whimper. Thick ropes of cum painting my hand and falling onto my bare thigh.

I look up just in time to see her orgasm taking her over, her brows creased as her lips part in a silent gasp. She continues rubbing her clit, her shoulders shaking until her hands stutter to a stop, slowly slipping out of her panties.

“You could give me a taste.” I quirk my brow, tilting my head.

Emilia huffs out a laugh and reaches back with her other hand, opening her bedroom door and stepping into the darkness.

I’m left alone. Again. Though this time, the air is thick with her arousal.

Fuck, I’m not getting any sleep tonight.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

TEN

Emilia

Chase hasn't shown his face since the incident on Thursday and when Mark got back from break he had Mike go through the security tapes, resulting in an unflattering grainy black-and-white photo of him being posted in front. He shares space with the people who used fake ids, those who skipped out on the bill or took part in the fabled bar fight of October 2022, which was just a month ahead of my time.

It feels good that someone has my back.

Though it's even more surprising that Chase hasn't shown up at the apartment after Silas swiped his key. Even his buddies have been absent from their weekly visits to check up on me.

"Tall rocker guy is back." Carly Beth whispers into my ear, poking at my side, "six o'clock."

The fabled 'tall rocker guy' that I missed with Chases' theatrics the other day. She's imagined an entire back story about him being on tour with his band, stuck in our small town on his way to Madison.

"Six." I nod, looking up in the mirror, catching his gaze.

He's gorgeous, strong cheekbones and a slightly crooked nose, with a sharp jaw and long wavy black hair.

“Silas.” I gasp, turning around.

He gives me a lazy smile, his ears twitching, “Emilia.”

I do a double take, looking over my shoulder at the human version of Silas, the powerful glamour that everyone else sees. It’s strange how a few features can change the look of someone’s face, like finding Clark Kent when you’re expecting Superman.

Suddenly, I realize how easy it would be to slap on some thick glasses and become an entirely different person. The two bright blue stripes on his cheekbones enhance the beauty of them, and of course, there are the ears on the top of his head.

“You two know each other?” Carly Beth asks, I don’t miss the underlying bid for an explanation later in the back room.

“He is my houseguest. Carly Beth,” I gesture between the two, “Silas.”

“Are you in a band?” She asks, resting her hand on her hip.

“No,” Silas looks at me, a brow lifting, “I haven’t been for ages.”

“Told you, tall rocker guy.” Carly Beth whispers to me then turns towards him, “I gotta get back to work. It was nice to meet you.”

Silas shifts in his seat, his fangs peeking through his smile, “What is she talking about?”

“Do you have super hearing or something?” I roll my eyes and walk closer to the bar, “Don’t worry about it. What are you doing here, anyway?”



“You suggested I took an interest in sports and why not start with Sunday Night Football?” He leans across the bar, a teasing smile slowly creeping across his face. His eyes drift down, his lips parting as he takes me in.

I’m immediately reminded of the looks he gives me in the middle of the night, dazed and devouring as he strokes his thick cock. It might have become a nightly occurrence.

I tried to convince myself that the first time was a fluke, a mistake, but I’m the one that stood there touching myself to the gorgeous wolf demon. Completely taken with the sight of his human-looking cock with the round knot at the base.

He looked even more feral, his gold eyes glowing in the dark, almost reflective, and the blue striped markings crossing down his ribcage and waist, similar to the ones on his cheekbones.

“You’re going to have to order something if you intend on staying and watching the game.” I say, grabbing a small laminated menu and placing it in front of him.

“Very well,” Silas sits back on the bar stool, his eyes roaming over the selection, “Would you recommend the Roadhouse Barbecue Bacon Burger?”

A couple walks up to the bar a few seats down, chatting and glancing over at us.

“If you want to pretend to be human, yes.”

“Then I’ll have that and whatever beer you think would be appropriate.” He says, placing the menu on the bar and sliding it towards me.

“How are you going to pay for this?”

He reaches into his back pocket, and I feel a spark of magic as he pulls out a credit card.

“Is this legit?” I ask, plucking it from his fingertips and looking at the name, “Silas James Wolfe? That’s a bit on the nose, don’t you think?”

He grabs it, sliding it back in his pocket, “I was in a hurry. Do you know how difficult it is to pick out a name?”

“Fair enough. Where does the money come from?”

“Several high yield bank accounts and a bit of legal trickery.”

Smiling, I jot down his order and put it in with the kitchen and then go to wait on the other customers at the bar. I feel Silas’ attention as I work.

The logical side of my brain tries to convince me I’m only looking over to make sure he’s not causing any trouble, but I know that’s not the case.

Ever since that one night, his gaze holds the promise of something more. I would give anything to explore that, but the truth is I don’t know where to start.

Neither of us is exactly jumping at the chance to have a conversation about our relationship, whatever it may be.

Though each time I check, he’s on his best behavior. The glamour is holding in place while he’s torn between watching me and the game, but the latter is slowly winning.

It’s funny to see a nearly 240-year-old demon captivated by the sport, though I know the feeling. I wasn’t that into sports when I started working here, just a casual hockey fan, thanks to my stepdad, but having a pro football team so close really changes your

perspective.

I grab his order from the kitchen and pour a pint of dark ale, and turn to see an older man explaining the game to Silas. Great, now maybe he can explain it to me. Carly Beth has tried a couple times, but I can't get the hang of it past the basic concepts. Run the ball until you score or until you're in range for a field goal. Conversions and all that other stuff are still a mystery to me.

Speaking of, Carly Beth stands at the other end of the bar, fiddling with her order pad. She gives me a nod, waving me over.

"What's the deal with you two?" She whispers, loud enough that I can hear her over the game.

I glance at Silas, "He's just staying with me while I figure all this Chase stuff out."

"But you like him." She pokes at my side, a smile on her face, "He likes you too. Geez, from the way he's eye-fucking you, I'm scared I might get pregnant if I walk between you guys."

"Is it weird? Because of the whole protecting me from my ex thing?"

"Chase really messed with your head, Em. If Silas is that into you and nothing has happened. He's a good one."

How can I explain to her that something did happen, and I was the one who initiated it? Sort of. She's right, though. Silas hasn't pushed. He hasn't even brought it up. To think a demon is better at respecting boundaries than my ex.

"That man dropped everything to make sure you were okay the other night." Carly Beth says, "I mean, it feels like he practically teleported. Who knows what kind of

speeding ticket he could've gotten?"

Technically, he did teleport, but I can't tell her that.

I look down at my bracelet. It wasn't the spell. He used his own powers.

Silas came running without me asking. If he doesn't feel bound to help me, then that means he's doing because he cares. It also means he might be kind of playing me by pretending to be all subservient. I should be mad, but I think I could have a little fun with this.

Silas watches the rest of the game, more invested than I thought he would be. Carly Beth does another round and returns, she hasn't taken her eyes off of us since the revelation.

"Did you find out anything about this weekend?" She asks, ripping off a ticket and shoving it across the window to the line cook.

"This weekend?" I ask, glancing at Silas, whose ears perk up, before I turn to her.

"Girl's trip up to Madison," she rests her hip against the bar, "us renting the hotel rooms."

"Oh, I'm still trying to find someone to watch Poppy for the weekend." I explain.

"I'm sure Mr. Jankowski could," Silas says, "He offered to watch her just the other day."

I turn to Silas, "What kind of conversation brought that about?"

"He said in the years he's been your neighbor, he's never seen you take time for

yourself.”

He has offered to watch her a few times before, especially when I go over to feed his fish while he’s out of town. I guess it couldn’t hurt to ask him.

“Perfect.” Carly Beth claps, threading her fingers together, “Does that mean you’ll go?”

Silas raises his brow, almost like he’s daring me to say yes. It really feels like the two of them are kind of ganging up on me at this point.

I want to say yes, desperately. It’s been years since I’ve gone to an actual bar where I’m not expected to serve drinks. The whole Chase situation isn’t behind me yet and it feels like I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop, but I’ve decided that I’m finished with putting my life on hold out of fear when I gave my soul up for demonic protection.

Silas could have intervened, but he let me stand on my own two feet. He trusted I would be okay, so maybe it’s time I trust myself as well.

“Sure, let’s do it.”

Carly Beth squeals, grabbing my arm, “This is going to be amazing. We can drive out early on Saturday to beat the traffic and come back Sunday morning.” She turns to Silas, “You’re coming, right? Since you’re kind of Emilia’s bodyguard.”

“Wait, I thought this was going to be a girl’s trip?”

“It still is. Wouldn’t hurt to have a guy around to protect us. Just in case.” She shrugs, “What do you think? Unless you’re busy.”

“I’ll be there.” Silas nods, shooting me a smile, “Emilia knows I would drop everything for her.”

His wolf hearing is a lot better than I thought.

## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

### ELEVEN

Silas

It takes us close to an hour and a half to reach Madison, all the while, Emilia expresses her anxiety about being away from Poppy over the weekend. It's adorable. She went as far as to make a list of essentials, including the dog's favorite toys and a couple treats, placing them in a small overnight bag.

She only calms down when Mr. Jankowski sends her the third photo of Poppy, excited to visit with his daughter Katie for the afternoon.

Madison is just like any other city. And, being like any other city, it's full of unsuspecting mortals living peacefully alongside the supernatural. I catch a few demons walking down the sidewalk with their human mates, or buying groceries from the bodega down the street like there's nothing more natural in the world.

From what I can tell, most of them are half-demons, like me, which begs the question if I would be happier here instead of trying to fit into a place where I'm not seen as an equal. My only worth comes from the power I can feed the collective through my deals, Emilia's power, though she's giving it willingly in exchange.

I find Carly Beth waiting in the lobby after Emilia sent me down so she could change. We stand in companionable silence for a while before she begins to pepper me with questions.

The usual, asking where I grew up and other facts that I could easily pass off without

extra explanation. Yes, I grew up in a small town in England. It was nice, quiet. Yes, my parents are still together and we are fairly close. A gentle prodding to make sure I deserve Emilia, which I sure hope I do.

“So, what classes did you two share back in college?” She asks, leaning against the wall, her attention split between me and the text conversation on her phone.

“College? Oh,” I clear my throat, “We first met in Art History, I took it for my Humanities credits.” The words feel foreign to my tongue, but I still deliver them, just as Emilia had instructed on the drive here.

Carly Beth hums in response, possibly in agreement or to refute the claim, I can’t tell.

“Was that before or after you were in the band?”

Shit. “Both.” The answer feels safe enough, but the truth is, as always, more complicated, “I’ve been in a few, none of them lasted past a few local concerts.”

She looks up from her phone and mutters under her breath, “Wow.”

I follow her gaze across the lobby towards the elevators and freeze, if I had a tail, well, you can imagine.

Emilia changed into a black skirt that barely brushes her fingertips, showing off her shapely legs with a low cut red top, her long hair falling over her shoulders. It’s a stark difference from the jeans and t-shirt she’s been wearing most of the day.

“We ready?” She asks, looking between us, then down at her phone, “It’s getting close to 8:30. The band should be out at 9.”

Carly Beth walks over, threading her arm through Emilia’s, “I’m ready.” She looks



back at me, “How about you, Silas?”

There’s a twinkle in her eye, as to say, isn’t she beautiful? She is so much that sometimes it hurts to look at her knowing that I cannot touch, not yet. Hopefully soon.

“Let’s go.” I say with a nod.

From the hotel, it doesn’t take long to find the general flow of the foot traffic naturally directing us towards the large dance hall. The building itself spans an entire city block, two stories’ worth of entertainment, though the entire second floor looks to be closed for renovations.

The venue is split down the center with a large bar that stretches along the length of the space, on either side, there’s a dedicated stage, one side is gearing up for the show while the other features a DJ with a crowd of people dancing in six fairly straight rows and off to the side there’s a large padded area with a mechanical bull in the center.

“This place is amazing.” Emilia says, looking back at me, the neon lights paint her a celestial being, “The bar. Oh my god, look, they have five bartenders. No, six. I can’t imagine having so much help.”

Recorded music blares from the speakers as the crowd lurks around the stage, watching as the silhouettes rush across to bring in equipment.

“If you want, I can grab you something while you find a spot up close.” I gesture toward the bar.

Emilia looks back at me, her brows creasing, “Yeah, uh, just a beer for me. Anything they have on tap.”

“I’ll have the same. You’re such an angel, Silas.” Carly Beth says over her shoulder, grabbing Emilia’s hand and leading her towards the stage.

A laugh catches in my throat, if only you knew.

It’s hard to keep my gaze from trailing down to Emilia’s round ass and thighs as she walks away. I’m not the only one who notices. She remains blissfully unaware of the way she turns heads everywhere she goes. It makes me even more lucky to have her attention.

There’s more weight to her lingering glances now that we’re far from Moonstone Ridge, like she’s broken free from the small town’s spell.

I lean against the edge of the bar and hold out my hand to flag down a bartender as I fish my credit card out of my pocket, making a mental note of where they are in the crowd.

“What can I get you?” The deep voice asks.

“Just two beers, whatever import you have on tap.” I glance over to see two charcoal eyes studying me. A pride demon, with rich red skin and two twisting horns jutting out from his head. The small tag on his navy polo reads, “Joe”.

“Don’t see many wolves these days.” He flashes a fanged smile, taking my card, “Want me to start a tab?”

“Yeah.” The word hangs on my lips as I turn towards him, “What do you mean by that? Not seeing many wolves.”

He shrugs, looking towards the concert. I feel a pang in my chest at the thought of him picking Emilia out, though it would be easy, she’s covered in my scent and I in

hers.

“I didn’t mean any disrespect.” He holds up his hands before passing my card back, “You’re one of the good guys. Protecting and bringing change, making a difference. I thought the entire line of demonic do-gooders died off long ago. From what my friends say, it’s hell back there. Everyone climbing over each other to feed the beast, so to speak.”

“How long have you been here?”

“Couple centuries, the nightlife keeps me sated. Not as well as if I was an incubus, but I do okay.” He nods, angling the plastic cup under the tap and filling it, then moving onto the other, “It’s a sweet deal. You have your own life, no overlords or demonic royalty to bow down to.” He places the two beers in front of me.

“Thanks.”

He inclines his head and leaves to serve another customer.

I grab the drinks, holding them up as I walk across the floor towards the pull of Emilia’s magic. What Joe said sticks in my mind.

“Silas!” Carly Beth waves me down, crossing the few feet to grab a beer out of my hands, and taking a hearty swig off of the top.

“Alright.” I raise my brows, holding out the other for Emilia.

She takes it gingerly, giving me a soft smile, “Thank you.”

The lights dim, and the crowd creeps closer, bodies pressing inwards closer to the metal barricade. Upbeat pop music plays and hollers erupt from all around us, Carly

Beth joining in singing at the top of her lungs.

Emilia looks around, taking a step back and crashing against my chest. She looks at me over her shoulder, then mouths an apology as the sea of people churns in time with the music.

I step forward and cage her in from behind to create a barrier from the rest of the crowd. I lean down, letting my lips brush against the shell of her ear, “I’ve got you, little witch.”

Goosebumps break out across her bare shoulders and neck, visible through the bright lights and smoke. I nearly forget to breathe as she leans back, her weight steady against my chest. She grabs hold of my hand, her fingertips chilled from the cold beer, and moves it further across her soft stomach.

I honor her silent request to hold her close. The rhythmic music thrumming through my body, chasing away my heartbeat, everything, until all I can feel is her warmth and her soft skin under my fingertips, wrapped in her scent.

This is the most we’ve touched in days, since our nightly ritual began. The experience has been spiritual, guiding her to the brink without even touching her, time after time, then watching her break.

Whatever we have isn’t fleeting. This little witch has buried herself deep in my heart, with her gentle touch, her magic, her soul breathing new life into my being. All I can hope is that she feels a fraction of what I do.

As if in my thoughts, she places her free hand over mine, intertwining our fingers as she sings out the chorus, tucking herself closer against my chest. With that, I am lost. Untethered. The world falls away, and there is only me and Emilia.

I don't want to do as much as move or breathe, in fear that I might startle her. I need to hold on to this moment for as long as I can.

An eternity, if the Gods allow.

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

### TWELVE

Emilia

It's nearing midnight. The concert finished up close to an hour ago and the tiny merch stall has cleared out. The only crowd left gathers on the opposite side of the bar.

I sit beside Silas and Carly Beth, on the edge of the dance floor, watching drunken line dancers spinning a little too wide and laughing their enjoyment into the night.

For some strange reason, I allowed Carly Beth to wrangle us into a game of 'never have I ever'. I'm quickly losing my buzz, still working on my third beer of the night. She has since moved on to Long Island iced teas and Silas is nursing a pale ale imported from England.

He's so close that I can feel the heat radiating from his thigh, my body singing whenever it brushes against my bare skin. I'm wound so tightly after having Silas' strong arms wrapped around my middle most of the set.

He behaved, never straying to cup my breast, though I was silently begging, pleading with The Gods that he might grow so bold.

But, no, he is ever the gentleman. He only caressed my stomach, squeezing and holding me like something precious.

Our closeness is all that mattered, not my body. Not what I could give to him. Is it weird that makes me want to reward him even more?

“Never have I ever shoplifted candy from the store.” I declare.

Carly Beth lifts her drink and takes a sip, “To be fair, my high school friend dared me to. It was a Twix.”

Beside me, Silas makes a face and drinks, clearing his throat, “Reese’s Pieces.” He glances over at me, “Never have I ever had sex on an airplane.”

Carly Beth drinks.

“Really?” I ask.

Silas shrugs, “Not much for air travel.”

Because he teleports. I choke out a laugh, covering my mouth to hide my smile, the expression perfectly mirrored in his eyes. They look softer than usual. I’d assume it was the alcohol, but he’s on his third drink and hasn’t once slurred his words or given me a slow blink. It makes me wonder if demons can get drunk.

“Oh! Never have I ever kissed my college ‘friend’.” Carly Beth nearly yells with excitement.

He watches me and lifts the beer bottle to his lips, taking a swig.

I sigh and roll my eyes, drinking from mine to Carly Beth’s raucous applause, while Silas continues to pin me with his gaze.

It’s the first time I’ve taken a drink in over half an hour, which has me feeling a little pathetic. I’m not trying to compare myself to a 237-year-old demon, but my best friend and coworker is nearly ten years younger and already has so much more experience than I do.

When I was her age, I was barely out of college and working two jobs. Most of my friendships kind of fell away after I started dating Chase, since I let him take up my entire world. I wonder how drunk I would be right now if I never met him, but I also wouldn't be sitting next to this gorgeous wolf demon or have half of the experiences I've crossed off my list tonight.

"Silas is such a good friend tagging along with us all the way to Madison." She says, leaning down and drinking out of the brightly colored straw.

"He is." I swallow, feeling his attention heavy against my skin, the nudge of his knee against my thigh nearly making me jump.

The music shifts and Carly Beth jumps up at the first few chords of a familiar melody, squealing, "It's my song! C'mon, Emilia." She reaches out, grabbing for my hand.

"I love you to pieces, Carly Beth, but I need to sit this one out."

"Okay," she says, glancing over at Silas, "Well, I'm going to go dance." She pushes away from the table, singing along with the song and swaying her hips in time with the beat as she makes her way out onto the dance floor, "Oh my, good lord."

"Friend?" He asks, his voice low.

"Yes, what else would you be?"

Silas grips the underside of my bar stool, dragging it across the floor, the music swallowing the screech, "Friends don't fuck their hands thinking about one another, sweetheart."

That one 'sweetheart' settles right between my legs, pulsing in time with my



heartbeat. I run my hands over the sweat on my glass, my chest heaving as he watches me.

“Witches don’t get involved with demons either.”

“You know that’s a lie.” He runs his warm fingertips across my jaw, hooking his fingers under my chin, turning my head. “Why are you so afraid of me, Emilia?”

“I’m not.” I say, lost in his gold eyes. “But what if he’s right, and he ruined me for everyone else?” My hands move on their own, running down his chest and stopping at his waist to gather his shirt into my fist. “I haven’t done half of the things you have. I haven’t had sex in a public place or in the back of a car. It’s only happened in a bed, missionary or nothing. Hell, he never gave me an orgasm. What if I can’t have one?”

Silas laughs, “Sweetheart, I’ve seen you come all over your fingers nearly a dozen times.”

“Alone, sure.”

He tilts his head, leaning close to me, “I could make you come.”

I shudder out a breath, my body almost shaking with need as he tucks my hair behind my ear.

“With my fingers, my tongue, or my cock, if all you want is to be proven wrong.”

It’s not, though. I reach for the remnants of my buzz, feeling it slip through my fingertips. If I was tipsy, this would have sobered me up immediately. So I have nothing to blame for the words that fall from my lips.

“Then why don’t you?”

“Here? Now?” He laughs, taking a sip of his ale.

“Silas, I tended bar at a place off-campus half of my senior year and well into grad school. I know what happens in the bathroom.”

“Don’t tempt me, little witch .”

“Why not? If I tell you to fuck me outright, it’d be considered a command.” I lift my wrist, shaking the gold bracelet.

Silas’ ears go back as he reaches between us, fingertips catching the shimmering faint green chain of magic that links us. One tug and it snaps with enough force to rattle the bottles on the table and nearly stealing the breath from my lungs.

“Tell me, Emilia.” He growls.

“Wait.” I breathe, my hands falling onto my lap as I look at the now useless chunky jewelry encircling my wrist. “You could have done that this entire time?”

“Of course, it was a first level spell.” He smirks and inclines his head, “I enjoy following your rules and being your good boy. Tell me exactly what you want, Emilia, all you have to do is say the word. You hold all the power.”

“Hey,” Carly Beth says, grabbing her drink and downing the rest of it, “I’m thinking of ordering another round. You in?” She pauses, looking between us, “Woah, did I miss something?”

“No.” I stammer, slipping off of my bar stool, Silas’ fingertips brushing back and forth against my thigh as I stand beside him, “Could you watch my stuff? I need

to—” I gesture towards the hall.

“Sure.” Carly Beth smiles, grabbing my purse, “I’ll go talk to the cute bartender.” She wiggles her eyebrows and bites down on her plastic straw.

“Not the one in the navy shirt.”

She nods her acknowledgement and walks off towards the bar.

I stand in the large hall just before the bathrooms, already losing my nerve. It’s probably for the best, since fucking in the bathroom isn’t really something I figured I’d ever have on my bucket list, anyway.

“How drunk are you?” Silas asks, fingertips gliding down my spine until his palm settles at the small of my back.

“I was tipsy maybe an hour ago.” I say, turning, “What about you? You’ve had three drinks.”

He smiles at me, “Demons metabolize things differently.”

“Do you think she suspects anything?” I look out towards the bar where Carly Beth is thankfully staying far away from the demon bartender, “He’s not dangerous, is he?”

“I think the entire bar suspects something and no, he’s a pride demon. He actually seems like a nice guy.” He takes a step forward, “Here, give me your hand.”

I look down, placing my hand in his outstretched palm, “What are we doing?”

“I’m getting us some privacy.” He slides his other arm around my waist and pulls me close, “Take a step back.”

“If you wanted to dance with me, you should have just said so,” I tease.

“Do you trust me?”

“Yes.”

“Then keep your eyes on me and,” Silas presses forward, and I stagger backwards, the world shimmering as magic surges around us. It crackles against my skin, filling me with this giddy warmth, better than alcohol.

The bastard teleported.

### THIRTEEN

Emilia

I crash against a hard surface, the doorknob rattling from the impact. Silas' large hand cradles the back of my head as he bends down, capturing my lips in a frenzied kiss. He barely gives me the chance to breathe, his large body caging me in. My entire being is humming with anticipation, I've wanted this for weeks. Dreamt of it.

His hand slips from the back of my head and wraps around my jaw, just short of my throat, holding me there with a gentle yet possessive grip as he teases my lips apart, brushing this tongue against mine, with a low groan that settles between my thighs.

I grab hold of his waist, pulling the dark gray button-down shirt from his pants, slipping my hands under the heat of his skin against my fingertips.

"Gods," he growls, lips a breath away from mine, "are you okay?"

"Yeah, can you kiss me like that every time we teleport?"

He laughs, taking a step back, "I can kiss you like that any time you want."

"Where are we?"

It's clearly a public women's bathroom, but a really nice one with rich maroon walls and black-and-white checkered tile floor, the marble countertop stretches across the far wall of the room, though from closer inspection it's just a covering. The small

flecks were fairly convincing from a distance.

I stare at myself in the mirror, hair mussed, cheeks flushed and lips plumped and he's barely touched me.

"Upstairs." He stands behind me, his hands caressing my waist and circling around my stomach as he buries his face against my neck, breathing me in and peppering soft kisses to my shoulder. "Freshly renovated and closed off from the rest of the guests. From what I can tell, they only rent it out for private parties."

"How did you know about it?"

He almost purrs as he continues to kiss my neck, "I got bored two beers in and did a little exploring."

"Hey."

Silas' human reflection stares back at me, soulful brown eyes peeking out from his long black hair.

"Drop the glamour, please?"

He sighs, a smile tugging at his lips as it falls away like sand showing the canine ears and light blue markings across his cheeks, his gold eyes predatory as he stares at my reflection.

"You like it?" He tilts his head.

I look over my shoulder, "You know you're gorgeous."

"Doesn't stop me from wanting to hear you say it, sweetheart." He threads his fingers

through my hair and kisses me.

It's unhurried and reverent, but then he nips at my bottom lip and tugs, deepening the kiss until it's feral, a fire, well fed and out of control.

He breaks away, his breath coming out in soft pants that feather against my cheek, "I could get protection. It's just on the other side of the wall."

"I used a spell years ago. I didn't want to risk it with—I also get regular checkups." I grab his forearm, moving it higher to urge him on until he cups my breast.

He rests his forehead against mine, "Demons are unique, but I still test to make sure. Everything is negative."

I reach up and cup his face, "You know, you could have just teleported us to the hotel room. This takes all the danger out of it."

He grabs my ass, "Does it?" He nips at my lips, nuzzling my nose, "The security guard checks the floor every ten minutes. Is that thrilling enough?"

"What?"

Silas kisses me again. His hands glide down to my skirt, fingertips sliding under the hem and inching it up over my thighs, until he's palming my ass and pressing me hard against the fake marble sink. "Fuck." He hisses out, looking up to watch me in the mirror, his eyes hazy with lust.

I barely have time to react as he grips my hips, pulling them away from the sink to bend me over, his reflection disappearing all together.

"What are you—" I gasp as he buries his face in my pussy, lips brushing over my clit

through my panties, his fingers digging into my thighs.

I've felt nothing like it before, the warmth of his mouth and the slight friction from my cotton underwear as he tongues my clit, spreading me wide and feasting like a man starved.

"You taste so fucking good."

My hands grip the sink, knuckles white, as he slips his finger under the hem of my panties and along my folds.

"You're so wet," he huffs out a laugh, the wet sound of his fingers dragging through my slick obscene in the large room, "Is this for me? All those nights abusing this pretty cunt while watching me come, wishing I was buried deep in you. Fuck, Emilia." He moves my panties aside, then closes his mouth over my clit, and sucks.

I double over, putting my hand over my mouth to stifle my moan as he rolls his tongue along the seam of my pussy. I'm so turned on it almost hurts, my clit throbbing in time with my heartbeat.

"Don't you dare." Silas yanks my panties down over my hips and gives my ass a quick slap.

The sensation sends a shock through my system that has me clenching around nothing, my hand falling away as I cry out.

"Good, I want to hear every sound. Every whimper. Every scream." He toys at my entrance, a finger slipping in enough that my stomach does a little flip at the prospect of being filled.

"Silas." I mutter, grinding my hips against his hand, "Please."



His tongue rolls over my clit, drawing lazy circles just to antagonize me until I'm left shaking with every pass.

I yelp at his sharp teeth grazing my ass as he stands, hips pinning me against the sink, until I can feel the thick outline of his cock through his pants.

When I look up at his reflection, his features have changed, golden eyes glowing bright along with the blue markings across his cheekbones with more appearing like stripes at the edge of his jaw. I suspect it's the same for the ones on his ribs, though I can't see them through his shirt. There's a wild look in his eye that makes me feel like prey. His hand slides between us, the unmistakable sound of his zipper cutting through my heavy breathing.

He runs his cock along my pussy, teasing my clit until he lets the head slide in. The stretch is almost too much. He's larger than anyone that I've been with, even without the knot, so much that I can feel every inch as he moves inside of me.

"Gods," he whimpers, his voice laced with need, eyes fixed on mine in the reflection.

It's so intense that I want to look away, but I can't, with the gentle thrusts of his hips we're casting our own spell, stronger than the soul bond.

Silas' mouth falls open as his eyes drift down to where we're joined, savoring every slow drag to let me grow accustomed to his size.

As good as it feels, I'm still missing that spark. It's like he reads my mind, leaning a little closer to change his angle. I chase the sensation, pushing my hips back against his, earning a curse from his lips as he bottoms out, his knot notching itself against my pussy.

He grits his teeth, flashing his fangs as he looks up at me in the mirror, eyes dark as

he pistons into me, the sharp movements striking flint and lighting me from within.

“That’s it.” He growls out, “I can feel it. You’re so close.”

“Oh, Gods.” I drop my head, my chest heaving as I feel that pressure building, squeezing my hand between me and the counter to rub my clit.

“Fuck, look at me,” he pleads, “Look at me, Emilia.”

I open my mouth in a silent scream, voice cracking as I find his gaze again, it’s too much. My eyes flutter closed as wave after wave of pleasure crashes over me until I can barely stand.

Silas doesn’t stop, he continues thrusting deep, his knot teasing the nerves of my entrance so much that I feel like I might actually come again.

“Give it to me.” I pant, “I want to feel it.”

He groans, his hips stuttering, the muscles in his arms tensing, “I’ll give it to you, little witch, but not now.”

With a few final thrusts, he buries himself inside of me, the brush of his knot teasing me even closer to the edge. I can feel it pulse, his release dripping down my inner thighs.

I feel hollow as his cock slips out, my body still vibrating from the force of my orgasm. I step out of my panties and pluck a few brown paper towels from the dispenser, wetting them, and wiping most of his cum from my thigh.

He cleans himself off and tucks his cock back into his pants, then grabs my crumpled panties off of the ground, and shoving them into his back pocket with a smile.

“Hey.”

“Souvenir.” He says with a quirk of his brow, his strong hands righting my skirt, his fingertips brushing over my thighs and lighting up my senses again.

“Fine.” I glare up at him, my expression faltering at the vulnerability in his eyes as he watches me, tracing a stray lock of hair and tucking it behind my ear.

The door to the bathroom rattles, threatening to pull it off the frame.

“Hey!” A deep voice on the other side calls out, “Unlock this door or I’m calling the cops.”

Silas hisses a curse in my ear, pulling me close to his chest, then teleports us back.

The sights and sounds of the venue threaten to overwhelm me as we walk out onto the floor. Carly Beth is waiting for us at the bar, but I can’t keep my eyes off of Silas. He gives me an easy smile as the tips of his fingers tease against mine.

I try to tell myself that it’s just the endorphins, but I know that’s a lie.

This has been building since I saw him sitting on my couch reading my romance novels. Day by day, little by little, I got to see more of him. Not just the cocky half-demon son of royalty, but also his submissive side and a fierce protectiveness that goes well beyond our bargain.

I’m not just falling in love with him. I am in love with him. I’ve just been too afraid to admit it to myself.

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

### FOURTEEN

Silas

Emilia's entire demeanor has changed since we left Madison. It's as though she has finally taken the first few steps to reclaim her freedom.

After the club, we spent the rest of the night talking in our hotel room until she fell asleep at nearly four in the morning, tucked against my chest.

I had been searching for a way to show that I was strong enough to be considered the heir of the wolf demons. Making as many deals as I could and expanding the influence of my family name, but for what? A pat on the head? I still felt hollow.

Turns out, all it took was a strong-willed witch to remind me that I never needed it. I was always worthy of my family because I am their son. I didn't need to prove it.

What will come of us when I tell Emilia that I no longer wish to keep our bargain? I'm not sure what the future holds. All I can do is hope I have the chance to show her she means so much more to me than the price of her soul.

"Silas?" Emilia asks, shaking me from my thoughts, the outside world rushing past the passenger side window.

"Hm? Sorry, what did you say?"

"I said that the playoffs are coming up, and I was thinking of getting Mr. Jankowski a

couple of tickets to the game as a thank you for watching Poppy.” She glances over then moves her hand off the steering wheel to my knee, “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. Tickets would be a great idea.”

“Shit,” Emilia hisses out, her shoulders tensing as she grips the wheel, “shit.”

Chase is standing at Mitchell’s front door, flailing his arms, arguing with Mike while Carly Beth leans against the wall, looking very uncomfortable with the entire situation.

There has been no sign of him since the night that I kissed Emilia, I had even thought he decided to give up. Now I know it was foolish of me, he was just biding his time to reemerge like the serpent he is.

Even now, his irritation is clearly surface level, all the emotion drains from his face as he finally notices our car turning into the parking lot.

“You should stay in the car.” Emilia says, grabbing her purse as she climbs out.

“And you should know by now that I am not leaving you.” I close the door and follow her closely, Chase’s gaze darts between the two of us.

“Don’t worry, the cops have been called.” Mike says, holding his hands out as though he’s trying to soothe the situation.

“Not sure how he found out, but he knows about Madison,” Carly Beth says, “I didn’t say anything. My mom doesn’t even know I went.”

“It’s fine, Carly Beth,” Emilia sighs, “Chase, what are you doing here?”

“I’m here because I’m genuinely concerned about you.” He stands tall, shooting a glare in my direction, “You let this stranger move in with you. I contacted your old school, there is no record of Silas ever being a student.”

“You contacted them illegally.” Emilia adds, “The only way anyone from that school would offer that information is if you had someone at the sheriff’s office pull some strings. That’s an invasion of privacy.”

“So, you won’t deny that Silas isn’t your ‘old friend’?”

Chase really thinks he has something with this, and sure, it might have been a misstep on our part not to come up with a better cover.

“That is none of your business, Chase.”

“It is my concern if you’re letting a stranger live with you and sleep in your bed. Did you even try to run a background check on him before you invited him in?”

“I sleep on the couch.” I say, earning myself a glare from Emilia.

While they continue to bicker about the legality of Chase’s prodding, something isn’t adding up for me. Not just his blatant disregard for the law, but a key detail that I think we’ve all overlooked.

He never visits her apartment when she’s home, he waits until she’s at work. It’d be easy enough to avoid her if he knows her schedule, but still there’s room for error, unless he has someone watching her 24/7. Not someone, but something reporting back her movements.

“Emilia.” I straighten, glancing back at her car, “The Spymaster’s Charge.”

“What?” she chirps.

“The reason Rafe knew where Sasha was during the first half of the book. Maybe that’s how Chase knows we were in Madison over the weekend and every other time that he has shown up at your apartment while you weren’t home.”

“Son of a—” Her face hardens as she realizes what I’m talking about. She turns on her heel and clicks the key fob, unlocking her car and leaning over the passenger seat.

“What are you doing?” Chase’s voice cracks, “What is she looking for?”

I look over to see Carly Beth with her phone out, I’m pretty sure she’s recording the whole thing.

“Is this a tracking device?!” Emilia’s voice is muffled by the car.

Chase leaps into action, rushing towards the car in long strides, his hand outreached.

“Don’t touch her.” I growl out as I watch his fingertips grazing her leg. I grab the back of his shirt and pull him away.

Chase staggers and turns to me. If looks could kill, I would be a dead man.

“Hands off of me!” He shoves back, hard.

The anger simmering in my chest has me take a few steps towards Chase, my powers flare and I let my glamour slip just a fraction, reveling at the pure shock in his eyes as he pieces everything together. Just how dangerous I can be.

“Silas. Stop.” Emilia commands, climbing out of her car with a small black device in her hand.

“Enough!” A voice cuts through the tension with a knife, a hand wrapping around my bicep and dragging me away, “You need to come with me.”

The officer isn’t much taller than Chase, coming up to a little over my shoulder and he’s wearing a dull brown uniform with a badge that reads ‘Deputy Evers’.

“Kyle, this is ridiculous. Is he under arrest?”

“He’s just being detained, Emmy, Chase has the option to press charges.” Deputy Evers says, placing the handcuff on my wrist and twisting my other arm back to secure the other, “C’mon.”

“It’s okay.” I mutter, walking to the sheriff’s car willingly.

His hand brushes over my ears, shoving them against my head as he pushes me into the backseat of the car, slamming the door shut. Of course, Chase is nowhere to be seen, he likely ran off after he saw my true form.

Emilia walks up to the window, tapping on the glass. The motor whirs as it slides down.

“You got two minutes.” Deputy Kyle barks.

“Silas, I love you. Don’t worry, I will get you out of this.” She rushes out, her hand going to my cheek.

“You love me?”

Emilia leans against the door and grabs my face and kisses me. The world around me shatters, but she rebuilds it piece by piece, filling it with new meaning. She loves me.



I lean in, inhaling her scent, committing it to memory until it's branded on my soul. "Time's up. Move away from the vehicle, Emmy." Kyle says as the car roars to life.

"Behave." She says, as the window rolls up, sealing her away from me.

## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

FIFTEEN

Emilia

My heart drops as Kyle's patrol car pulls out of the parking lot, Silas twisting in the backseat to watch me as they leave. The words just slipped out of my mouth without thinking. I can't believe I told him I love him.

I think saying it while he's in the back of a police car is worse than saying it during sex, right? It has to be.

Carly Beth walks up beside me, holding her phone.

"Where did Chase go?" I ask, looking around the lot.

I find his pickup parked in a corner space with the lights on.

"Emilia."

"Hold on." I hold up my hand.

The spirit of a goddess must have possessed me because I'm no longer afraid of Chase Reynolds, not anymore. I'm too pissed off to muster any sympathy for him. My fire burning bright beneath the surface of my skin. Frustration throwing gasoline over the flame.

This town has been nothing but hell since I got here. The sheriff's office ignored

every single one of my calls for help. He can't break in when he has a key. Being at the supermarket at the same time isn't stalking, Emmy.

I squeeze the tiny device in my hand until the plastic creaks. He must have placed it there months ago when I gave him a ride after his truck broke down. If it ever did.

I charge across the lot and rap on his window. Chase straightens, his face is as pale as the time he has food poisoning on our honeymoon. He rolls it down, continuing to stare straight ahead.

"You have made my life a living hell for far too long. I have done nothing, but play by your rules. Bend to your whims. That stops now." I say, pushing away the sting of tears in my eyes as I wave the little GPS device in my hand. "If you have ever had a decent bone in your God's damned body, you are going to call your dad and have him release Silas."

Chase glances over at me out of the corner of his eye, I notice his sharp inhale as he slides his keys into the ignition. Chase Reynolds is afraid of me. No, not just that, he is afraid of what I can do. I can't deny that I feel a little giddy at the thought.

I hold my hand up, focusing my magic on holding the keys, to keep him from starting the car, "You're not going anywhere. Look. At. Me."

"What the hell, Emilia?" His hands shake as he wrestles against the invisible force, his shoulders slumping as he falls back in the seat.

"You know he doesn't belong in that jail cell."

"Something tells me he can take care of himself." He spits out as he turns over the engine and peels out of the parking lot so fast that I have to jump back in order to keep my foot from being smashed.

I find Carly Beth leaning against my car, her thumbs tapping against her phone. I'm lucky that the parking lot is relatively empty or else Chase might have caused more of a scene.

"Hey, do you think you could?—"

"Already done. Mark called in someone to cover your shift and Alex owes me one, so she's gonna work a double tonight." She says, glancing up at me.

"I can do this on my own, Carly Beth, I don't want to get you fired."

"Family is more than blood, and you make this job bearable." She hesitates, holding out her phone, "I also have this."

Carly Beth presses play on the video.

She caught Chase's admission of guilt, a lovely and surprisingly flattering shot of my ass as I lean over the console to fish out the tracking device and, more importantly, the feral way that Chase rushes over to haul me out of the car before Silas, in his human form, grabs him by the shirt and pulls him away.

The video glitches as the two of them stare each other down, and when it returns, Chase looks horrified. It finally ends after Kyle shoves Silas into the back of his police car.

"There's at least three violations there, and Kyle put cuffs on him without reading him his rights or telling him why. Say the word and I'll have it uploaded to three different social media websites and delivered to the sheriff's email address."

"Hold on to it. The sheriff is a reasonable man, hopefully he'll at least listen to what I have to say."

“And if he doesn’t?”

“Then all bets are off.” I shrug and press my key fob, unlocking the car.

Carly Beth smiles.

The sheriff’s department is just a few blocks away from the bar and in true small town fashion, it still has its brick and mortar facade that looks plucked straight from a Hallmark movie.

I’ve only been here a few times outside of my former family obligations. Last time was when I tried to file a report over Chase illegally requesting a key to my apartment, the judge said I could only file for a restraining order with proof.

No one in a small town believes that your ex-husband is openly stalking you, especially when said ex has painted you out to be a liar. He did his best to spread rumors about me, especially how my infidelity lead him to file for divorce.

Carly Beth looks around, half nerves and half wonder, which leads me to believe she’s never set foot inside the building before.

“If you want, you can wait in the car,” I say, holding out my keys.

“I’m good, it just looks different from what I expected.” She wanders over to the small seating area in the lobby, picking through the magazines on the table.

I leave her, going to the front desk where Meredith is sitting with her glasses perched on her nose, eyeing the computer screen to her left.

She was always nice to me when I would visit, but something changed since then. Her blue eyes drift over as she pulls her glasses down, giving me a fake customer

service smile.

“Emilia.”

“I’m here to see Sheriff Reynolds about the man Kyle brought in, it must have been close to ten minutes ago.”

“I’m sorry, Emilia, I’m not allowed to speak about an active investigation. I cannot confirm nor deny that Deputy Evers brought anyone in.”

I sigh, looking over at Carly Beth, who is ready and waiting for me to give her some sort of signal. Instead, I take a couple of steps to my right and lean over the counter, gaining a full view of the sheriff’s office window.

My former father-in-law is in there looming over Silas while Kyle stands beside him, a faithful watchdog. Of course, they’re going to make the most of it. There’s under 3000 people in Moonstone Ridge, and zero crime.

“For fuck’s sake.” I roll my eyes and adjust my purse on my shoulder, “Do it, Carly Beth.”

“Hey,” Meredith leaps into action as I push past the small waist high gate and make my way towards the office, “You can’t go back there. Sheriff Reynolds!”

The sheriff looks out the window, his brows furrowing as he rushes out of his office, blocking the door with his wide frame. He’s gone a bit more gray since I’ve seen him last, with a few more creases worn around his eyes, but he still looks just like an older version of Chase.

“Emilia.” He says.

“Has he been charged?” I ask, gesturing towards Silas who is trying his best not to watch me from the window.

“No, I’m waiting for a few statements from witnesses.” Sheriff Reynolds folds his arms over his chest.

“Like me? I was there, Bill. Silas was protecting me.”

“Protecting you from what?”

I grit my teeth and fish out the small tracking device from my purse, holding it between us, “From your son.”

“From Chase? I wouldn’t be throwing accusations around like that, especially since?—”

“Sir, I think you’re going to want to see this,” Meredith calls from behind me.

Sheriff Reynolds glares at me, then walks over to watch the video. Carly Beth’s video. The family resemblance is striking, it only takes a few seconds before he turns the exact shade that Chase did when Silas revealed his true self. He looks over, focusing on the small device in my hand, then grabs the phone from the desk, punching in a number.

“Let ‘em go.” He says, holding the headset to his ear, “and get Chase down here. I need to have a few words with my son.”

The door to his office opens, and I turn to see Silas sauntering towards me, a cocky grin stretching across his face as he rubs at the skin on his wrists.

“Why didn’t you leave? You could have teleported.”

“I would never abandon you.” Silas brushes his fingers through my hair, then leans down and kisses my forehead.

I breathe out a sigh, turn towards Sheriff Reynolds, “By the way, I would like to file a police report.”



## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: August 5, 2025, 4:25 am*

### SIXTEEN

Emilia

The whole day has me feeling pent up, my fire is still there beneath my skin, bright and resolute. Not unlike when you slam two ice coffees before noon, but maybe that's my personal experience. It doesn't help that Silas has been quiet since we dropped Carly Beth off at her car.

He barely said a word on the drive back home. He remained lost in thought while watching the heart of the town pass us by.

Poppy greets us when we get home, first doing an elaborate little dance for Silas before she finally recognizes that I still exist. I'm not a jealous woman by any means, but sometimes she tests me.

I lean down and scratch her ears, then right behind her little cheeks as she sways back and forth from the force of her tail as I dwell on the silence.

Don't say it. Just don't.

"I guess it's over." I say, keeping my eyes on her as I stand.

Silas turns and looks at me, his brows drawn, "What do you mean?"

"With the police report, I have enough of a case to get a protective order against Chase." I still feel that weight on my shoulders, it hasn't fallen away yet, but that's

probably because things are unfinished with Silas, “The soul contract is fulfilled. You protected me from him. You’re free to go do whatever demons do.”

I look up to see a muscle tick in his jaw as he holds out his hand, flexing it to admire the scar on his palm, the twin to mine that solidified our deal. He laughs, deep and sardonic, then rubs his hands together, a flash of sparks spraying from the swift movement.

There’s a sharp pinch, then when I look down the mark is gone. The skin isn’t even pink. It’s as though we never made the bargain in the first place.

“What did you do?”

“I don’t do anything . That’s the problem, Emilia.” He says, letting his hands fall at his sides, “I slept there on your couch, I babysat Poppy while you were at work and I helped you install a deadbolt. That’s all.” He flails his hand at the door behind me. “I am not owed anyone’s soul. Especially not yours .”

“What is that supposed to mean?” I fold my arms across my chest, ignoring the barb settling between my breast.

Poppy ignores us both, walking into the kitchen with her toy. Sure, let mommy and daddy argue. There’s no reason for you to watch this.

“I have lived by one rule.” He holds up a finger, taking a step closer to me. “In all of my years, and all the deals that I’ve made. I broke it when I fell in love with you.”

His gaze pulls a ragged breath from my lips, I reach up and place a hand over my chest, Silas follows the movement with a tilt of his head, his eyes molten amber.

“I resented my parents for so long, but after all these years, I realize it’s because I

want what they have. Now, you're standing right in front of me and I don't know if I deserve it. Or if I deserve a life here in this place." He looks down, his ears laying flat against his head, "I don't even know if you would have me after everything that you've been through."

My mind is reeling, the hope building in my chest is almost painful. I forget to respond, letting silence gather between us like a storm.

"Did you mean what you said?" Silas asks, his voice even, but his ears give away his true feelings, "Back in the parking lot."

When I told him I loved him, just a knee-jerk reaction, a momentary slip where all of my carefully restrained emotions tumbled free and left me raw. It reminded me of how numb I have been, just surviving up to this point without something to fight for, I never saw my own heart or future as enough of a reason. Until now.

"I did."

His eyes soften as he closes the distance between us, reaching to touch my cheek.

I grab his wrist, my powers churning alongside my emotions. If I hurt him, I would never forgive myself.

"I can't." I look up at him, "There were a few moments where I felt like I was going to set the whole town on fire. I still have to find a way to control it."

Silas smiles, his ears straightening.

"You don't need control, sweetheart." His voice deepens, sending a jolt down to my core, "You need an outlet. Someone who can withstand the flames without getting burned, figuratively speaking."

“Maybe we could come to some sort of deal?” I tease.

“No more deals, Emilia, just you and me.”

He lifts his hand and a small light blue flame sputters to life in his palm, the same color as his markings. It’s not the size that matters, but the control, he keeps the magic contained within a perfect orb. It must be those 200 years of experience he has on me.

With a flick of his wrist, the fire engulfs the entirety of his palm, drawing me in. I take a few steps forward, placing my hand against his. The force of his magic sings through me, the exchange of power intoxicating.

There’s a softness to his magic, a vulnerability that he keeps locked away beneath his biting wit.

“Don’t be afraid.” He murmurs, moving closer and intertwining our fingers, “I can handle everything you give me. Let me take care of you.”

He’s not just talking about my magic, I can see it clear as day, this is his way of baring his soul to me. Not through words or actions, but with our raw, unbridled connection. A level of intimacy that I could never share with a mortal.

This is what he felt from me. This is what I gave him.

Silas’ magic is a balm to my senses, enough to quiet the flame licking at my skin like a cold midnight rain. His grounding force is exactly what I need, what I have craved for so long.

It was there beneath the surface, in every touch, every smile, every glint in his eye. I catalogued them without realizing how important he would become to me. How he

would help me fall in love with myself, the person who can be around him, because he allows me to take up space.

I press my palm against his, carefully testing my magic, allowing our powers to coalesce into a flicker of violet. I feed just as much of my flame into him, my body burning hotter, breaths coming in fits and starts as his demon form wrestles for superiority. It does nothing to dull the ache between my thighs.

Silas growls, letting go of my hand and threading his fingers through my hair as he covers my mouth with his with a clash of tongues and teeth. Licking, nipping and exploring as he threatens to devour me.

I slip my hand under his shirt, running my fingertips along the hard planes of his stomach and across his sides to squeeze, letting my nails find purchase.

He forces me to stumble backwards, legs tangling as the world shifts, bending around us, cocooned in his magic. I know it as well as I know my own.

The backs of my thighs hit the edge of the bed and I gently push Silas away, shoving my hands up over his chest taking his long-sleeved shirt along with it, “Off,” I breathe, the need in my voice foreign as I glimpse the bright blue markings on his ribs.

Silas pulls it off, balling the fabric in his hands and throwing it onto my floor where it belongs, letting out a groan as I attack, pressing my lips over his markings, finally able to kiss them and run my tongue along his soft skin.

He grips my hair in his fist as I draw my tongue over his nipple, pulling a long hiss from his bared teeth, “Emilia.” He moans, almost chastening, as he moves to grab at my sides, lifting my shirt over my head, fingertips already picking at the closure of my bra until the straps slide down my shoulders.

I let the material fall to the floor, Silas' warm mouth covering the peaks of my nipple, teeth scraping against the sensitive flesh before his tongue eases the sting away. His hands are already at my waistband, working my shorts down over my thighs as I blindly fumble with his belt buckle, abandoning it to tangle my fingers in his long hair, back arching against his mouth.

My body is still humming from the force of his magic, keeping time with the dull pulsing between my legs, my thoughts begging, screaming for friction. A touch, a taste, something while he lavishes my breasts with attention.

I gather his hair, gently guiding him to look at me, his eyes wild, staring at my lips as he heaves out a deep breath. Silas watches as I tug at his belt, switching places until he falls back onto my bed, his legs splayed wide, erection already tenting his pants.

He leans forward, reaching for me, but I press my hand against his shoulder.

"Are you going to be a good boy?" I tease, undoing his belt and tugging his pants down until he's resting there in his crimson boxer briefs, the hard outline of his cock visible through the tight fabric.

"For you?" His voice is all gravel, "Always."

As I lower myself between his legs, I watch his cock twitch, the knot at the base already beginning to swell and reminding me of how it felt, nudging at my entrance, promising a delicious stretch.

I lean forward, brushing my tongue over the spot of pre-cum seeping through the fabric, feeling him pulse against my lips. Silas lifts his hips as I peel away his boxers, his cock resting heavily against his stomach, the tip nearly touching his belly button.

"You're going to be the death of me, Emilia." He breathes out, his muscles tensing as

I wrap my fingers around his shaft, running my tongue along the slit and tasting the slightly salty fluid gathered there.

I've wanted to do this since I saw him fucking his hand and it's better than I could have ever imagined. I savor the feel of him in my mouth, soft and warm, his fingers tangling in my hair, brushing through it as he gathers it into his fist, not with a demand but in worship, curses laced between his deep breaths. His hips unsure, squirming as I take him as deep as I can, flattening my tongue along his shaft and teasing the sensitive spot under his head with every movement.

The heir to a demonic dynasty, pliable in my hands, begging and whimpering at the mercy of my mouth. A woman could get used to this.

I go slow, taking my time to learn what makes him shake, what makes him curse and what brings him close to the edge. Pressing against his fragile restraint until it threatens to snap, the knot growing, pulsing just beneath my fingers.

He chokes out my name like a prayer, his hands gently grabbing at my shoulders, and pulling me up, kissing me without reservation, groaning at the taste of himself on my lips.

"Please." He says, kissing me again, barely able to pull himself away as he presses his forehead against mine, damp with sweat, "I want to feel you."

I grip his shoulders, climbing onto his lap, a gasp escaping my lips as I feel his cock against my thigh, his hand reaching between us, eagerly running it along my cunt to tease me. All my thoughts go fuzzy from the sensation as his soft head circles my clit, slick with juices.

"Now who's in charge?" He laughs, low, his arm going around my waist to secure me, notching his cock at my entrance as he buries his face against my neck, "I've

been so good, Emilia, but now I'm gonna make you scream."

"Gods," I moan, barely able to think as he slides in easily, lifting his hips to sink deep, the swell of his knot sending sparks through my body with every thrust.

Silas wraps my hair around his fist, angling my neck as he breathes in my scent, a growl rumbling in his chest as he slowly fucks me, his teeth grazing the column of my throat, a warning of his retribution. His demon coming out to play.

It doesn't take long until he has me shaking with every thrust, the gentle curve of his cock brushing against my inner walls like it was made for me. My body runs hot as pleasure coils in my stomach, so tightly it almost hurts. His iron grip doesn't relent as he drives into me, his body shaking as his hips stutter.

I move my hips, chasing the pressure of his knot, the angle keeping it just a gentle tease.

"So fucking greedy." He growls, nipping at my earlobe, "Practically begging to take my knot. I can't breed you, but it won't stop me from trying."

Oh.

With one swift motion, I'm on my back, my head against the pillow as he lifts my leg, wrapping it around his waist, pressing into me. Each roll of his hips tears a moan from my lips, warmth spreading down my legs until I feel the satisfying stretch of his knot.

I cry out, grabbing at his shoulders, my nails digging into his flesh, leaving crescent moons in my wake. The pressure throws me over the edge, his thrusts draw out every crash of pleasure until it's too much.



Silas bites out a curse, his head falling against my shoulder as he ruts into me, filling me with the warmth of his release.

Our breathing slows, and he eases up onto his elbows, peering down at me through a curtain of black hair, ears flat against his head with a smile, looking between us.

I brush his hair out of his face, my heart threatening to burst at the way he leans into my touch, his eyes fluttering closed. His demonic features slowly fading away.

We stay entwined, exchanging glances and soft kisses, long after the sun sets.

Ready for the next dawn. Together.

### EPILOGUE

Emilia

Nearly One Year Later

I shouldn't be as nervous as I am, this isn't the first time that Silas has met my parents, but it is the first time he is picking them up from the airport. Alone.

It was a sweet gesture, but it also worked out perfectly for what I have planned, the small band burning a hole in my jeans pocket. I never thought I'd get married again, let alone want to, but all these months with Silas. It feels like a foregone conclusion, just the continuation of our story.

"It's not too late for me to grab some whiskey," Carly Beth says, slotting the tray of dark chocolate espresso brownies into the display, nudging them until they're straight.

"Gods no." I shake my head, looking down at the stack of napkins with the Moon Sugar bakery logo in the corner, a stylized sugar cookie in the shape of a crescent moon with the company name below it in a loose script, "I appreciate the offer, but we open in half an hour."

I didn't think Silas was serious when he floated the idea of opening a bakery in Moonstone Ridge, not that I doubted his ability. I knew he was feeling pretty listless the first few months in town, stripped free of his demonic calling and trying out the recipes that he learned about from Bake Off.

It was more that he blurted it out while his head was between my legs, punctuating the fact with a bite to my inner thigh. That origin story isn't going in the company brochure.

Turns out he's got a knack for business, makes sense with the wealth he's accumulated in his trips to the mortal realm. The whole thing happened so fast, it only took a month for him to decide to rent the space, then he hired Mr. Jankowski's daughter as one of the head bakers and not long after Carly Beth jumped ship at the bar and came to work for us.

I was happy to leave and focus on the bakery's marketing, putting my degree to good use. All it took was one viral video of Carly Beth icing a sugar cookie while dishing out celebrity gossip to put us on the map.

The bell over the door dings, Silas walking in, his long hair half pulled up, falling well past his shoulders. He's still gorgeous as ever.

His gold eyes find mine, brows furrowing.

"What is it?" I stand up straight, reaching back and undoing my apron as I walk around the counter to meet him.

"Just a warning, your mom is crying." He says, putting his hands on my shoulder, leaning in and pressing a kiss to my forehead.

I pinch his side, "What did you say to her?"

"Nothing." He chuckles, grabbing my hand and pressing it to his lips, "She's proud of you. Just brace yourself. I know how you two get."

He's talking about the first time she saw our new place, three bedrooms with a large backyard for Poppy. We were both in tears the moment she told me how glad she was

that I finally found my happily ever after.

That happily ever after in question squeezes my hand.

I had toyed around with the idea of leaving, but I couldn't. Not when Moonstone Ridge adopted me after the truth came out about Chase. Without the sheriff's support, he cut his losses and moved to Florida to be closer to his mom.

"Emmy, Silas." My mother's voice carries through the empty bakery, "It's beautiful."

She looks around at the modest storefront. There's a half a dozen tables with an old-fashioned glass display counter that stretches across the far wall, with the kitchen tucked in the back, along with our office. The soft pastels of the color scheme make the space look ethereal, like the name. Moon Sugar.

Behind her, my step-father, Dean, whistles, a big smile stretching across his face. With his salt and pepper hair and pale eyes, he's the ice to my mother's fiery spirit.

I twist my apron in my hands, "We have coffee and tea," I gesture towards the counter, "The case is fully stocked, our cookie of the day is a toffee almond crunch, but if you want my recommendation, I'd go for a sugar cookie."

"We'll have both." Dean says, putting his hand on my mother's shoulder.

Silas draws me close to his side, "Hey, you okay?"

"Yeah," I chirp out, looking to my parents and Carly Beth, then up at him, "Can I talk to you? Alone?"

I let him guide me back to the office, pacing over towards our desk as he closes the door behind us.

“What is it, my love?”

I reach into my pocket and grab the navy jewelry box, my nerves taking over as I toss it to him, wincing.

Silas looks at it, a long breath escaping his lips, ears standing at attention. It creaks as he opens it, gold eyes finding mine, bright and questioning.

“Emilia?”

“It’s not magic, at least in the traditional sense.” I swallow, trying to force the words out, “I just?—”

“Are you asking me to marry you?” He smiles, teasing, though the quiver in his voice lets his true emotion shine through. It makes my chest feel heavy.

I take a deep breath and walk over to him, “I know we were just playing around with the idea.”

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a modest diamond solitaire set in rose gold, holding it out between us, “Were we?”

A laugh bubbles out of my throat, my eyes burning from unshed tears, I cover my mouth, looking up at him, “Are you sure?”

“Never been more sure, my love,” he smiles, grabbing my hand and sliding the ring on my finger before plucking the rhodium plated band and slipping it onto his.

“It’s not quite a collar,” he says, flexing his hand, leaning down and brushing a featherlight kiss to my lips, “But I couldn’t think of a better witch to be bound to for the rest of my life.”