



# Wild Ivy (Kings of Thornfield #3)

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**Category:** Fantasy

**Description:** Love. Vengeance. Finality.

I've always been the hunter, but now I'm also the hunted.

Every clue we unravel entangles us further in a web of power and deception stretching far beyond the university.

In this supernatural game of cat and mouse, love is our most potent magic and our greatest weakness. The fight for our immortal happily ever after had better be worth the price of our souls.

This is a dark paranormal academia reverse harem with plenty of TWs. This takes place in an entirely fictional world set in the UK.

**Total Pages (Source):** 47

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 3:08 am*

## PROLOGUE

Ivy

Four Years Ago

“She’s such a miserable cow right now. I can take good care of you, Kai.”

I freeze outside my boyfriend’s bedroom door in his shared house. Lila’s soft voice filters through, and I hear Kai groan. That groan that means his dick is wet, and this time it’s not by me.

Shoving open the door, I barge in and confront my best friend and my boyfriend on his bed, her pussy stuffed full of his cock as she writhes about on top of him.

“Oh, hey, Ivy,” Lila says with a slow smile.

“What the fuck is this?” I grit out, hurt smashing through any sort of defences I had.

“I can explain!” Kai says, his expression panicked as he catches sight of me

“Explain what? That you’re balls deep in my best friend?” I snarl, rage and betrayal coursing through me.

Lila has the audacity to giggle, not even bothering to dismount from Kai’s cock. “Oh, come on, Ivy. You’ve been such a frigid bitch lately. Kai has needs.”

“Needs?” I repeat incredulously. “And you decided to fulfil them, you backstabbing slut?”

Kai finally shoves Lila off him, fumbling to get his dick back in his pants as he stands up. “Ivy, baby, I’m sorry. It just happened ? —”

“Just happened?” I cut him off. “What, she tripped, and her cunt just happened to land on your dick?”

“Don’t be crude,” Lila sniffs, reaching for her clothes.

“Crude? You’re fucking my boyfriend, and I’m the one being crude?” I laugh bitterly. “You know what? Fuck both of you. Have fun together.”

I turn to storm out, but Kai grabs my wrist. “Ivy, wait. It’s not what it looks like. Don’t leave.”

“Excuse me?” I stop and glare at him in disbelief. “It’s not what it looks like?”

I yank my wrist out of Kai’s grip, disgust and fury burning through me. “It looks exactly like what it is—you fucking my so-called best friend behind my back.”

“Ivy, please,” Kai pleads, his eyes wide. “I love you. This was a mistake.”

“A mistake?” I spit out. “Was it a mistake the first time? The tenth? How long has this been going on?”

Lila rolls her eyes as she pulls on her shirt. “Oh please, like you didn’t know. You’ve been so cold lately, pushing Kai away. What did you expect?”

“I expected loyalty!” I scream, rounding on her. “From both of you! I trusted you!”

“Well, that was your first mistake,” Lila sneers.

I stare at her in shock. When did she become so cold, so callous? Or was she always like this, and I just didn’t realise it until now?

“Fuck you both,” I say again and storm out of the bedroom, trembling with anger and hurt. How did this happen? Was Kai really unhappy with me? Why didn’t he just say so instead of going behind my back like a fucking snake in the grass?

“Ivy, wait.” Lila catches up with me and grabs my arm. “You’re being so dramatic. It’s just a little fun. Share and share alike. Nobody said we couldn’t all be together.”

I tense my arm and pull it from her hand. “All be together? I don’t fucking think so. You went behind my back. You knew I was having a hard time right now, and you used it as an excuse to get Kai’s dick inside you.” I shake my head as she chews her lip. “You are fucking dead to me. You both are.”

I stalk away from her, but she calls out, “Don’t do anything stupid, Ivy. You need me.”

“Like fuck I do. I need friends I can trust.”

“Kai isn’t worth this.”

“You should’ve thought about that before you rode him in front of me.”

“Don’t walk away from me,” Lila spits out.

I turn to face her and stick my middle finger up. “Dead. To. Me. Got it. Lose my number, you selfish fucking cunt.”

“Bitch!” she shrieks. “No one walks away from me!”

“Fuck you,” I mutter and pick up my pace, needing to get back home so I can curl up in a ball and cry.

But as I walk away, my breath coming faster, I realise that I’m not all that bothered about losing Kai. But Lila’s betrayal hits me harder than I care to admit. Since my parent’s death, I don’t trust easily, and she was the first person in a long time I thought I could rely on.

I was dead wrong.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 3:08 am*

1

IVY

Present Day

Bram's arms circle my waist as I launch through the air.

"You bitch!" I screech. "All that time? All that fucking time?" My fingertips brush her neck as my new power surges through me, dark tendrils of Death's essence reaching out. But Life is quick, dancing back just out of reach with an infuriating smirk.

"Oh, come now, Ivy. Or should I say, Death? You can't honestly be surprised," she taunts. "I've been playing this game far longer than you."

"You were my best friend!" I snarl, struggling against Bram's iron grip. "All those years, pretending to care about me before you fucked me over, and you were just manipulating everything from the shadows?"

Life - Lila - whatever the fuck I should call her now, shrugs carelessly. "I had to keep an eye on you somehow. David was getting too clever for his own good. I needed to make sure his little protégé didn't become a problem. Kai was merely a bit of fun."

"Well, too fucking bad for you." I spit. "I'm officially a problem now. A big one. A Deadly one and you are on my shit list, bitch!"

Her eyes narrow. “Yes, you are. I didn’t anticipate David passing on his mantle so soon. Doesn’t matter. You’re still new, untrained. This changes nothing.”

I feel the guys tensing around me, ready for a fight. But Life just smiles coldly.

“We’ll meet again soon, Death . Enjoy your little love nest while you can. Things are about to get very interesting.”

And with that, she vanishes.

“What the absolute fuck?” I growl, still struggling in Bram’s grip. I kick him in the shin by accident, on purpose, and he swears and lets me go.

“What the fuck was that?” Torin asks, one hand on his hip, the other waving vaguely at where Life-la was standing moments ago.

I open my mouth to explain, but he shakes his head at me. “Not her. You. What the fuck did she mean, ‘we’ll meet again soon, Death’?”

Narrowing my eyes at his question, I remember that they don’t know shit. I clear my throat and stand up straighter. “I am now Death. David Beech, formerly Death, has passed the baton. I have an army of souls ready and willing to do battle with Life to stop her from pausing the cycle.”

“Is that the Dummy’s version?” Tate asks with a snort.

I grin, glad he isn’t giving me the evil eye like Torin is. I can’t see Bram. He is still behind me, but I can sense a shift in his attitude. He perhaps was thinking I should’ve strangled Life to death after all.

“Sure is,” I remark. “If you have questions, now is the time. Not sure I can answer

them as this was sudden, and not exactly what I expected.” I twirl a lock of longer, pinky-blond hair around my finger and frown. There are strands of black now as well, but to be fair, I thought I would look like Death did. All skeletal and robe-y. Small mercies. I don’t think I’d rock that look as hard as this one.

I brace myself for their reactions. Torin’s eyes are narrowed, his jaw clenched. Tate gives me a supportive smile. Bram’s expression is unreadable, his blue eyes boring into me.

“So let me get this straight,” Torin says slowly. “You’re now Death. As in, collector of souls, that whole deal?”

“Pretty much,” I confirm with a shrug. “Though the job description’s a bit more complex than that.”

“And you didn’t think to, oh, I don’t know, discuss this with us first?” Torin’s voice rises in anger.

“There wasn’t exactly time for a group pow-wow,” I snap back. “It was kind of a now or never situation.”

“Bullshit,” Torin snarls. “You made a unilateral decision that affects all of us without even considering?—”

“Considering what?” I cut him off. “That it might inconvenience you? That it might complicate our relationship? Sorry if preserving the balance of life and death trumps your hurt feelings, Torin.”

He recoils like I’ve slapped him. Maybe I have, verbally, at least. “Considering that we might lose you.”



It hits me square in the heart, and I close my eyes and inhale deeply. “I did consider that. But this is world-ending kind of shit. The greater good.”

“The greater good,” he mutters. “Right.”

“Okay, the greater bad, then. Whatever. Either way, Life cannot simply stop death from happening. If everything and everyone just carried on living, reproducing, and so on and so forth, what would happen to the realms? They would be bursting at the seams with creatures and nature. How would that work? And what if people still got sick, but then never died? What then? They just keep on being in pain and suffering for eternity? This is bigger than us, Torin. I know you know that and are just being an alpha dick because I didn’t consult you about it. Even if I had, the decision isn’t yours to make. It’s mine, and I made it for all the reasons I’ve outlined and more. Can you understand that?”

Torin’s jaw clenches as he processes my words. For a moment, I think he might argue further, but then his shoulders slump slightly.

“I understand,” he says grudgingly. “Doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

“None of us like it,” Tate interjects. “But Ivy’s right. This is bigger than us.”

I shoot him a grateful look. At least someone gets it.

Bram finally speaks up. “So what now? We just sit around waiting for Life to attack?”

I turn to face him, seeing the barely contained violence in his eyes. “Not exactly. I have an army of souls at my disposal now. We need to strategise, figure out how to use them effectively.”

“An army of souls,” Tate muses. “That’s some serious firepower.”

“An army of the worst souls imaginable. But we’re going to need it,” I mutter. “Life’s had millennia to perfect her end game, and she knows me better than I thought.”

The reality of Lila’s betrayal hits me again, making my chest ache. All those years, all those memories - tainted now by the knowledge that it was all a lie.

Torin must see something in my expression because his face softens slightly. “I get it, Ivy. I just don’t want to lose you now that we’ve got you.”

“I know.” I want to sink into their arms and let them shoulder some of this crushing weight. But I can’t.

I take a deep breath, forcing myself to stay strong. “I’m still me,” I say. “I’m just more now. This power, this responsibility, is a part of me. But it doesn’t change how I feel about you.”

Tate pulls me into a hug. “We’re with you, Ivy. No matter what.”

I melt into his embrace for a moment before pulling back. “Thanks. But you need to understand that this isn’t going to be easy. Life isn’t going to stop. She’ll keep coming for me, for all of us. I can’t guarantee I’ll always be able to protect you.”

“We can protect ourselves,” Bram growls.

I shake my head. “Not against her. You saw how easily she appeared and disappeared. She’s ancient, powerful, and she knows me. That is deeply concerning.”

“So we learn,” Torin says firmly. “We prepare.”

A lump forms in my throat at their unwavering support.

“So what’s our first move, oh mighty Death?” Tate asks with a wry grin.

I snort, grateful for his attempt at levity. “Unfortunately, the first thing we have to check out is what damage we did when we reversed time during the ritual.”

Bram catches my eye, and the depth of his darkness shows. It has grown exponentially, and that is also a concern.

“You okay?” I ask him.

He nods slowly. “Getting there. This ancient power is interesting. Archaic in its wildness. It will take some getting used to. It is nothing like the refined Fae magick.”

“I get that,” I murmur, and he smiles.

“Yeah, I guess you do.”

2

brAM

Ivy's new power hangs heavy in the air, like a storm gathering on the horizon. I can feel it pulsing beneath her skin, dark and ancient. Something akin to what is flickering through my blood, trying to worm its way into my soul. It calls to the wild magick of hers, a siren song that is hard to ignore. I want to rip her clothes off and rail her in every hole she has while I worship her as a goddess, my goddess, but she is right. We need to see what the time reverse did to the rest of the world.

"So how exactly do we check for time fuckery?" Tate asks, breaking the tense silence.

Ivy's brow furrows. "I'm not entirely sure. This is all new territory."

"Maybe we start with the immediate area," I suggest. "Check the Thornfield campus, see if anything seems off or out of place."

Ivy nods. "Good idea. Hopefully, we didn't cause too much shit."

"Only one way to find out."

She smiles at me. It's a secretive smile, like she knows what I do. This isn't just about physical attraction and craving anymore. She is my destiny. Tate no longer has the monopoly on that, and I think Torin is fully aware of that, which is why he is in a mood. Not that his mood is unusual, but this is different.

“Oh, fuck,” he says when he pulls his buzzing phone out of his pocket and glares at the screen.

“What?” I ask, moving forward as he holds it up for us to see. I raise an eyebrow. “Oh, shit.”

“Oh, shit, indeed,” he snaps and ignores the call. “We really fucked up.”

“Okay, this might not be such a bad thing,” Ivy admits, and I snort at her attempt at diplomacy.

“Are you joking? Torin’s dead dad is back from the dead because of what we did.”

“We don’t know it was his dad calling. It could’ve been anyone with his phone.”

“Something tells me it was my dad.” His deadpan expression makes me stifle a snort of amusement.

“So that means Aspen didn’t kill him. It means your mother, Torin, is going to be out for blood. You’d better warn him.”

“Huge pass,” Torin grits out. “I wanted him dead in the first place, remember?”

I roll my eyes at Torin’s stubbornness. “Look, I get it. Your dad’s a grade-A asshole. But if he’s back, we need to deal with it. Ignoring the problem won’t make it go away.”

“Watch me,” Torin growls, shoving his phone back in his pocket.

“Torin,” I say sharply. “This isn’t just about you and your family drama. If your dad is back, that means other people could be too. We need to figure out the extent of

what we've done."

He glares at me, jaw clenched. For a moment, I think he might argue further, but then he deflates slightly. "Fine. But I'm not talking to him."

"Fair enough," I concede. "Tate, can you do a quick magickal scan of the area? See if you can sense any major disturbances or anomalies?"

Tate nods, closing his eyes and extending his hands. I feel the wave of his magick, probing outward. After a few moments, his eyes snap open.

"There are ripples. All over. Creatures who shouldn't be here, events that didn't happen before."

A chill runs down my spine. "How bad?"

Tate shakes his head. "I can't tell the full extent, but it's significant. The fabric of reality feels stretched. Like it's trying to accommodate all these changes at once."

"Fuck," Ivy mutters, running a hand through her hair. "We really cocked this up. We need to figure out how to stabilise things before it all unravels."

The weight of her new role is settling on her shoulders. Part of me wants to comfort her, but I know now isn't the time. We have bigger problems.

"Okay, first things first," I say. "We need to get out there and see what the situation is. Ivy, you need to speak to Ramsey and Josh. See what, if anything, is going on inside The Syndicate and The Resistance."

"Okay, but didn't Life take over The Syndicate?"

“Maybe, but maybe not. Maybe not all of it, anyway.”

Ivy nods. “Okay, I’m on it. Also, I need to tap into this army of souls bollocks. What if some of those souls are, you know, not souls anymore but back in their bodies?” She chews her lips, as the implications of that are not good, at best.

“Well, we already know Dad is walking around in his meat suit,” Torin snaps. “So probably, yeah, hundreds of others will be too. Don’t be surprised if we walk out the door and see Genghis Khan running towards us.”

“Genghis Khan?” Ivy snorts. “I don’t think Death was collecting souls for his army from that long ago...” But the look on her face says she thinks otherwise.

“I wouldn’t rule it out,” I mutter. “The point is, we have no idea who or what might be out there now, so we need to move quickly. Torin, I hate to say it, man, but you need to at least text your dad. Find out what he knows about coming back, if he knows anything. Does he remember, or what?”

Torin’s eyes flash dangerously. “No fucking way.”

“Torin,” Ivy says softly, reaching out to touch his arm. “I know it sucks. But we need information.”

He glares at her for a long moment before he gives in. “Fine. One text. That’s it.”

“Thank you,” she says, squeezing his arm.

I clear my throat. “I’ll head to the edge of campus, see if I can sense any changes in the wild magick.”

Ivy nods. “Everyone, be careful. We don’t know what’s out there.”

We head out and go our separate ways. I'm not keen on splitting up, but we need intel fast, and this is the most efficient way to get it.

I step out onto the grounds of Thornfield, instantly on high alert. The air feels different. It is charged with an unfamiliar energy that sets my teeth on edge.

As I make my way towards the edge of campus, I notice small things out of place. Trees that weren't there before. Buildings that look slightly different. Nothing major, but enough to be unsettling.

I reach the boundary where the wild magick begins to bleed through from the forest. Closing my eyes, I extend my senses, feeling for any disturbances.

The burst of power nearly knocks me off my feet.

"Fuck," I mutter, steadying myself against a tree. The wild magick is roiling and chaotic in a way I've never felt before. It's like someone shook up a soda bottle and popped the cap. All that pent-up energy explodes outwards, making my brain hurt.

I push deeper, trying to get a sense of what's changed. Flashes of creatures long extinct flicker through my mind. Beasts that haven't walked the earth in millennia.

And something else. Something dark and ancient stirring in the depths of the forest.

My eyes snap open as I feel a presence behind me. I whirl around, magick crackling at my fingertips, ready to attack.

"Easy there, wildling," a female voice purrs. "Hand my power back to me, and you won't get hurt."



3

IVY

Making my way onto campus in the hopes of finding Ramsey and Josh, my new powers hum under my skin in warning. But I'm not sure what it's warning me against. Looking around, I see everything looks mostly the same, but there's an undercurrent of wrongness, like reality might snap at any moment.

Before I can reach the boundary line, a chill runs down my spine. I whirl around, sensing a presence behind me.

"Well, well. If it isn't the new Death," a silky voice says.

I find myself face to face with a stunningly beautiful woman with long dark hair and piercing green eyes.

"Yeah, and who the fuck are you?" I ask.

She smiles, all teeth. "I'm hurt you don't recognise me, darling. Though I suppose it will take a while to sift through it all." Her eyes flash golden for a moment. "I'm Lilith. The first woman. The mother of demons. And I believe you have something that belongs to me."

I gape at her, unable to stop the frisson of sheer terror that ripples over my skin.

Lilith? Well, shit. Of course, reversing time would bring back one of the most

powerful and dangerous beings in existence, because apparently, that is how we roll these days.

“Sorry, don’t know what you’re talking about,” I say, trying to keep my voice steady. “I’m new to this Death thing.”

Lilith’s smile widens. “Oh, I’m aware, precious. Why do you think I’m here? David was such a bore with his immense power that could contain me, but you... Oh, little cherub, you are the icing on this little cake I’ve been given.”

“Meaning?” I croak.

“Meaning that whatever let me out of that prison has given me a second chance, but I want what the original Death took from me.”

“The original Death?” I ask stupidly, even though obviously there had to be one. David was one in a line of many.

She blinks, pursing her lips. “Mazzarat.”

“God bless you.”

Lilith frowns, and I cringe at the epically bad choice of sarcasm. Where is Ramsey with his hellhound Chihuahuas when you need him?

“Excuse me?”

“Nothing. I assume Matresshead was the original Death?”

She struggles to hold on to her disbelief. “Mazzarat !” She is so mad that she is practically spitting feathers.

I shrug, regaining some of my composure. “You can say it as loud as you like, I still don’t know who that is until you tell me.”

“He took a good chunk of my power when he collected my soul, power that I can see flickering under your flawless skin, precious. I want it back.”

I narrow my eyes at Lilith, trying to project more confidence than I feel. “Look, I’m not sure what power you’re talking about. But even if I did have it, I can’t just hand it over. That’s not how this works.”

Lilith’s smile turns predatory. “Oh, sweetness, I wasn’t asking.” She takes a step closer, her aura crackling with dark energy. “I’m taking what’s mine, one way or another and I’m fairly sure, you can’t stop me.”

I feel my power rise to meet her challenge, Death’s essence swirls around me, mixing with my own brand of chaos magick. The trouble is, I have no idea what this power is or what it can do. “I wouldn’t try it if I were you. I may be new at this, but I’m not defenceless.”

Trying to ignore Death’s power as I call my dark purple magick to the forefront, I see her eyes flick to it briefly.

She laughs, the sound like broken glass. “You have no idea what you’re dealing with, little girl. I’ve been around since the dawn of creation.”

“Maybe,” I concede. “But I’ve got my power, and I’m getting pretty good at using it.”

Lilith’s eyes narrow. “Looks like the new Death has some bite after all.” Her power flares, and demonic energy is pulsing around her, but I can see it takes a toll on her, and she is irritated that she doesn’t have her full capabilities.

“This should be fun.”

Just as we’re about to clash, a familiar voice cuts through the tension.

“Back off, bitch.” Ramsey stands there with the cavalry.

The yapping starts up almost immediately and I duck to the side as the Chihuahuas launch at Lilith. She shrieks as they snap her skin, but she vanishes too quickly for my liking. I was quite looking forward to the show.

“Nice timing,” I say, holding my hand up for a high five.

He slaps his palm against mine and recalls the demon dogs. “I’m not asking who that was, or why, or anything else.”

“Don’t. We don’t have all year. We need to talk. Where’s Josh?”

He frowns at me. “Who?”

“Josh. Your boyfriend.”

“What have you been smoking?” he asks with a slightly worried smile.

My heart plummets to my feet. “Oh, no, Rams.”

“What?”

“Fuck. Fuck!” It feels like my heart has been crushed. What did we do? How many lives did we mess with just to bring me back? Well, me and Tate back. Fuck. We were selfish arseholes, and now the people we care about are paying the price. Tears prick my eyes. “I’m sorry, Ramsey.”

“For what?”

I take a deep breath, trying to figure out how to explain this mess. “Okay, this is going to sound crazy, but just bear with me. I was lost in space, and Tate died. We did a ritual that reversed time, and it’s had some... unintended consequences, it seems.”

“Okay... I’m not really sure what to say.”

“Don’t say anything about that. I need to know if anything seems off with The Syndicate. Although now that I’m asking that, how would you even know?” I shove my hands into my hair in frustration. “This is a disaster.”

“What’s The Syndicate?” Ramsey asks, eyes narrowed.

I roll my eyes. “Okay, never mind. One day, hopefully, all this will be fixed. In the meantime, go about your life.”

He sighs. “I would ask, but I’m not sure I want to know.”

“You’re probably better off that way.”

We exchange an awkward smile, and we go our separate ways. I wish it weren’t like this, but it is, and we have to deal with what we’ve done. Somehow.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 3:08 am*

4

TORIN

I stare at my phone, thumb hovering over the screen. How the fuck am I supposed to text my dead dad? “Hey, heard you’re not dead anymore. What’s that like?”

Growling in frustration, I shove the phone back into my pocket. This is bullshit. I didn’t ask for him to come back. I didn’t want him back.

A chill runs down my spine, and I whirl around, fangs dropping instinctively. Something’s wrong. The air feels off. Charged with an unfamiliar energy that we definitely caused. This is a shitshow, but unlike other shitshows in the past, we have no idea how to fix this one. Unless somehow Bram can use that fancy new magick of his to move us back into the proper timeline. I don’t even know how that could happen, but we’ve seen a lot of crazy shit go down these last few weeks. So, who knows?

Crossing over the campus, I see Ivy crouched by a tree, looking a bit lost. I go to her and crouch next to her. “You okay?”

“We fucked up. I don’t know how we can fix it.”

“Yeah, tell me about it.”

Her blue eyes meet mine. “I’m sorry.”

Frowning at her, I place my hand on her knee. “You have nothing to be sorry for. We all did this, and we would do it again for the rest of eternity if we had to.”

She gives me a sad smile. “Thanks, Torin. But I feel responsible. I’m supposed to be Death now, maintaining the balance, and instead, I’ve thrown everything into chaos.”

I squeeze her knee gently. “We’ll figure it out.”

She nods, but I can see the weight of responsibility still heavy on her shoulders. Before I can say anything else, my phone buzzes in my pocket.

“Fuck,” I mutter, pulling it out. Sure enough, it’s another call from my dad.

Ivy raises an eyebrow. “You should probably answer it.”

I grimace. “Yeah, I know.” Taking a deep breath, I hit accept, putting it onto speaker. “Yeah.”

“Torin. We need to talk. Now.”

“Yeah, I figured,” I reply dryly. “Where are you?”

“Behind you.”

Ivy’s gaze meets mine before it flicks over my shoulder. She raises an eyebrow. “Yeah, that’s the vampire I killed.”

“Well, finished off,” his voice says over the speaker, and I cringe.

“Sorry,” she mutters.

He snorts and hangs up. I roll my eyes and straighten up, turning to face down my back-from-the-dead dad. Fun fucking times.

I steel myself to confront my dad. He appears exactly as he was. Although I'm not sure what I expected. Zombie vampire? Zompire?

"Torin," he says coolly.

"Dad," I reply, matching his tone. "I see reports of your death were greatly exaggerated."

His eyes narrow. "Cut the crap, Torin. What the hell is going on?"

I clench my jaw, resisting the urge to tell him exactly where he can shove his questions. "What do you remember?"

"Dying by beheading. One assumes I crumbled to ash, but here I am. What do you know?"

"It's complicated. The short version is we fucked with time to save Ivy and Tate. It looks like it had some side effects."

Dad's gaze shifts to Ivy, who's standing beside me.

"You're Death now," he states flatly.

Ivy nods. "As of about an hour ago, yeah."

He curses under his breath. "Perfect. Just fucking perfect. You idiots have no idea what you've done, do you?"



“Hey, watch it,” I growl. “We did what we had to do.”

“Watch it?” Dad snarls, his fangs dropping. “You arrogant little shit. You’ve thrown the entire supernatural world into chaos because you couldn’t handle losing your girlfriend.”

I’m ready to throw down, but Ivy speaks up. “Look,” she says calmly, “we know we messed up. But what’s done is done. Now we need to figure out how to fix it.”

Dad laughs bitterly. “Fix it? You can’t just ‘fix’ altering the fabric of reality. Do you have any idea how many ancient beings you’ve probably unleashed? How many cosmic balances you’ve upset?”

“Oh, I’m aware,” she growls. “Trust me. I’m fucking aware.”

I glance at her with narrowed eyes. Who has she come across already?

“We’re aware of the risks,” I grit out. “That’s why we’re trying to assess the damage.”

He shakes his head. “Unbelievable. I always knew you were reckless, Torin, but this? This is a whole new level of stupid.”

I clench my fists, barely holding back from decking him. “You don’t get to judge me. You lost that right a long time ago.”

Dad snarls and lunges, but Ivy moves into the space between us quicker than I can react. She slaps a palm against his chest, and he stops dead in his tracks. Before any of us can say a word, Dad starts to dissipate into a black mist that Ivy sucks up into her hand.

“Oh, you didn’t,” I snort in amusement. “Did you just take him back?”

“Looks that way,” she says, wiping her hand on her top as a shudder goes over her body.

I can see the black soul under her skin, and I stifle the urge to gag. “Is he gone?” I croak, hopefully. I don’t think I can fuck her ever again if he is there, watching.

She shakes out her shoulders. “Yeah, I think so. Not sure where to, but he’s gone.”

“Thank fuck for that,” I mutter, and she shoots me a sharp glare. I clear my throat. “Who did you come across?”

“Lilith,” she says with a frustrated sigh. “As in... the .”

I blink. “Okay, that’s not good.”

“You think, Captain Obvious?”

Chuckling, I grab her wrist tightly and pull her closer. Pressing her up against a nearby tree, her annoyed expression turns sultry.

“You want it right here?”

“You willing?” I murmur, fangs already dropping.

She tilts her head to the side, and I press my mouth against her exquisite neck. The scent of her blood pumps through her veins, and I let out a soft mewl before I bite down sharply. She hisses and writhes in my arms. I grind my painfully hard cock against her pussy as her blood coats my tongue.

I groan against her skin. Her fingers tangle in my hair, pulling me closer.

“Fuck, Torin,” she gasps.

I slip a hand under her shirt, palming her breast roughly as I continue to drink. Her taste is different now - darker, more potent. It makes my head spin in the best way.

Ivy’s hips buck against mine desperately. “Please,” she whimpers.

Without hesitation, I unzip her jeans and slip my hand inside. She is wet and slippery. I groan as my fingers slide over her clit.

Thrusting two fingers into Ivy’s sweet cunt, I reluctantly pull back from feeding from her. She moans, her pussy walls clenching around me.

“More,” she demands, rocking against my hand.

“Fuck, you’re so wet,” I murmur.

Ivy whimpers and rocks her hips, fucking herself on my hand. I twist my fingers to hit that spot inside her that makes her pant harder.

“Torin!” she cries out.

I can feel her getting close. Her pussy clenches around my fingers as I stroke her G-spot relentlessly. With my thumb, I rub her clit in time with my thrusts.

“Come all over my hand, bitch,” I snarl, wishing it was my dick inside her.

She comes hard with a strangled cry, clamping down on my fingers. I keep pumping slowly, drawing out her orgasm.

“Fuck, that was hot,” she pants.

I smirk and bring my fingers to my mouth, sucking them clean. “Delicious.”

Ivy’s eyes darken with renewed lust. “Any chance we can ditch real-life shit and head back to my house to continue this?”

“Who said we have to go back to yours? I’m game right here.” I smirk.

“With all these students watching? Huge pass.”

“The forest then,” I murmur and take her hand, pulling her across campus with her jeans undone, my dick aching to get wet just for a few minutes before we have to fix the world.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 3:08 am*

5

brAM

Panting, I stare at the canopy of leaves over my head as my back aches from hitting a stone large enough to be called a rock.

“Are you going to give in yet?” she asks.

“Are you going to tell me who is kicking my arse first?” I rasp, getting to my feet in one fluid motion.

She smiles, slowly and seductively, and lashes out. Her power hits my chest, and again, I find myself flying backwards, this time to hit a tree and slide down it as my lungs struggle to catch up.

She strides over, lifting her long, flowing black dress up and sits on my lap. She grinds down on my cock, rotating her hips. Her hands go into my hair, and she tugs viciously. “Give me back my power, you fucking arrogant dick.”

I grab her wrists, snarling as I try to push her off me. “I don’t have your fucking power, you psychotic bitch.”

She laughs, the sound like broken glass in a blender. “Oh, but you do. I can feel it thrumming under your skin.” Her nails dig into my scalp as she brushes her lips over my temple. “Give it back, and I won’t eat you alive.”

“Even if I did have it, I wouldn’t know how to give it back,” I growl. “Now get the fuck off me before I make you.”

Her eyes flash dangerously. “You think you can take me, little fae? I am Morrigan, the goddess of war, death, and fate. Even with my stolen magick, you are no match for me.”

Well, shit. No wonder she’s kicking my arse. I curse my parents to the ends of the realms and back. That book they gave me, clearly wasn’t just any old fucking book. I summon that power, but it feels different - wilder, harder to control, like it wants to get back to its mistress.

Morrigan’s grip tightens painfully. “Last chance. Give me what’s mine, or I’ll rip it from your corpse.”

“I told you, I don’t know how!” I snarl, bucking my hips to try to throw her off.

She hisses in frustration, her power flaring around us. I feel it probing at me, searching for something. Suddenly, her eyes widen.

“You really don’t know, do you?” she murmurs. “Interesting.”

Before I can respond, she crushes her mouth to mine in a bruising kiss. I struggle like fuck to get away from her, but she is too strong.

“Oh, you fucking cocksucker,” Tate’s voice rings out beside me.

His snarl is enraged as my gaze shoots up to his even while I’m being half-mauled to death by a kiss.

“Gererooffme,” I mumble.

He frowns as he can see, thank fuck, that I'm not in this position willingly. He reaches for Morrigan, but she holds out her hand, stopping him in his tracks, and continues to suck the life out of me. I squirm underneath her, but she clamps her thighs, keeping me still. I close my eyes, knowing she is trying to drain all the magick out of me, mine, hers and whoever else's might be lurking. I feel the magick coalesce inside my guts, and I brace myself. The snake awakes, coiling in my belly, and it launches up my throat and into her mouth.

Horried, she scoots back, and I breathe a sigh of relief. Tate is released from her magick and slams her back to the ground with his crackling black magick.

She hisses and glares up at him as the snake rears up, moving slowly from side to side like a cobra ready to strike. Then, in a bizarre turn of events, Morrigan stands down. She keeps her stare on Tate, but he doesn't let up the hold he has on her.

"You are messing with magick you have no business containing, warlock," she says.

Scrambling to my feet, I glare down at her. "And you had better keep your fucking hands and tongue to yourself in future."

She smirks. "Nice serpent, wildling. But this isn't over. You won't keep my magick. You are not equipped to deal with such power."

"Doing okay so far."

"What did you mean about me?" Tate interrupts.

She flicks her green-eyed gaze back to him. "I didn't know it was possible. I've never seen it before, but you, warlock, have managed to draw on your entire line of magick."

Tate's eyes narrow. "What do you mean, my entire line?"

Morrigan smirks. "Every warlock in your bloodline from the past. You've somehow tapped into all of their power simultaneously. It's unprecedented."

I glance at Tate, seeing the shock on his face. "Is that even possible?"

"Apparently so," Morrigan purrs. "Though I've no idea how he's managed it. Care to share your secret, little warlock?"

Tate shakes his head. "I didn't do anything. It must have happened when we reversed time."

Her eyes gleam with interest. "Ah, so you're the ones responsible for this delightful chaos. How fascinating."

"Fascinating isn't the word I'd use," I growl. "Now, what the fuck do we do about this mess?"

Morrigan laughs. "Do? Oh, darling. There's nothing to be done. You've unleashed forces beyond your comprehension. The only thing to do now is survive the fallout."

"Not good enough," Tate snaps. "There has to be a way to fix this."

"What exactly are you after?" I growl, ignoring Tate's desperation.

Morrigan's gaze bores into mine, hungry and predatory. "I want what's mine, wildling. The power you stole. But it seems you've bonded with it in ways I didn't anticipate. This complicates things."

"Yeah, well, tough shit," I snarl. "Find another way to get your jollies."



She laughs again. "Oh, I do like you. Such fire. But make no mistake - I will have my power back. One way or another."

"The snake is yours?" Tate asks, giving the serpent the evil side-eye.

"It is. Or was. It is his now," she hisses. "You and I are closer than either one of us expected."

"Fuck you," I snarl. "We are not close at all."

She smirks and pushes Tate's power away from her to rise from prone to standing as only a goddess can. She brushes off her dress. "We are intimate, dear wildling. You hold my power in your soul. It's more intense than if we fucked under the full moon. Don't you feel it?"

Before I can do any kind of soul-searching, purple magick blasts through the trees and hits Morrigan in the side. She is knocked off her feet, stumbling into a tree a few feet away. "If you even mention fucking my man again in any capacity, I will rip your hair out one by one, followed by your eyes and then your heart which I will burn. Are we clear, bitch?" Ivy moves into the forest with Torin by her side, looking vengeful and beautiful.

Morrigan straightens, eyes flashing dangerously as she faces Ivy. "Well, well. Jealousy in the form of Death. How delightful."

"Back off," Ivy snarls. "I've already dealt with one ancient bitch today. Don't make me add you to the list."

Morrigan laughs. "Oh, sweetness. You have no idea who you're dealing with."

"Actually, I do," Ivy retorts. "Morrigan, goddess of war and fate. And right now,

you're seriously pissing me off."

"You forgot death," Morrigan says, eyes narrowed.

"No, you forgot I am Death. Do you really want to find out what I'm capable of?"

Morrigan smiles sinisterly. I coil my magick, ready to protect Ivy from Morrigan's attack, when the snake slithers over to Ivy and wraps its body around her leg before curling all the way up her body.

Morrigan lets out a noise that could shatter your soul if you were human and less than morally corrupt. "You dare take my power, little girl. I will eat you alive."

"I'm not taking anything. It must like me more than you," Ivy says with a slow smile.

"But Bram? Be a love and take it back now?"

"No fucking chance," I growl. I can't. I simply cannot do this snake thing again.

Ivy shoots me a stare that withers the trees around us. They moan as Death is here and sucking the life out of all living things.

Except us.

"So you want her to keep trying to fuck her magick out of you? Is that it?"

"Don't be fucking ridiculous," I growl. "And don't you ever insinuate anything like that ever again. Do you hear me?"

"Ooh, lover's spat. How cute. Hand my magick over and it's all done with."

"No," I grit out, dragging my gaze from Ivy's. "I don't know where you came from,

but that power was not yours. At least, when I used it, it wasn't yours. It wasn't anyone's. It was in a grimoire?—”

“My grimoire,” Morrigan cuts me off.

“Of course it was,” Tate mutters.

“Where is it?” Her green eyes fix on Tate, and he clears his throat, moving back a few steps.

“Don't ask me. Nothing to do with me.”

Her gaze flicks back to me, and she glares at Tate for being a dick. Looks like I'm on my own here, but I know for a fact that I'm not giving up this magick. Not when I know we are going to need it to fix whatever the fuck mess we made in the first place.

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*Source Creation Date: August 6, 2025, 3:08 am*

6

IVY

I glare at Morrigan, the snake still coiled around my body. “Look, we clearly have a clusterfuck of epic proportions on our hands here. Fighting amongst ourselves isn’t going to solve anything.”

Morrigan’s eyes narrow. “You expect me to just let this thief keep my power?”

“I’m not a thief,” Bram snarls.

“We need to focus on the bigger picture here. In case you haven’t noticed, we’ve royally fucked up the timeline and unleashed who knows what into the world.”

Torin nods. “We need to stop fucking about and fix this mess.”

Morrigan laughs bitterly. “Fix it? You foolish children. There is no fixing this. The damage is done.”

“There has to be a way,” Tate insists. “Some ritual or spell to set things right.”

She shakes her head. “It’s not that simple. You managed a time reverse, somehow. The gods only know how. You can’t move time back to where you broke it.”

“Why not?”

She smiles at me again. “You are a little chaos bitch, aren’t you? Messing with reality and everyone in it like it’s nothing to you.”

I glare at Morrigan, bristling at her condescending tone. “Look, I get that you’re pissed about your power. But we’re dealing with something a lot bigger here. Reality itself is unravelling.”

“And whose fault is that?” she sneers.

“Ours, for fuck’s sake! Which is why we’re trying to fix it. Now are you going to help, or just stand there being a bitch?”

Morrigan’s eyes flash dangerously. “Watch your tongue, little Death. I could obliterate you with a thought.”

I laugh harshly. “Go ahead and try. I’m Death now, sweetheart. You can’t kill me.”

“But I’m the goddess of war, death and fate. Where do you think your power came from in the first place?”

Oh, shit . She has me there. I hadn’t even considered that. Damn you, David, for not giving me a history of this power!

I wanted to! You resisted!

Oh, fuck off.

I ignore the unsettling voice of David Beech in my head. That’s not how this works, is it? Can I hear the souls of all the beings across the past?

Closing my eyes for a brief moment, I stumble as the cacophony of voices

overwhelms me. Thousands, maybe millions of souls cry out in my mind. Past Deaths, victims, warriors, innocents. It's deafening.

"Ivy?" Torin's concerned voice cuts through the noise. His hand on my arm steadies me.

My eyes snap open, and I shake my head, trying to clear it. "I'm fine," I grit out.

Morrigan watches me with keen interest. "Ah, you're hearing them now, aren't you? All the souls you plural have collected."

"Shut up," I snarl, but there's no real heat behind it. I'm too overwhelmed.

She smirks. "It'll drive you mad if you let it. You will end up nothing but a wild, feral creature with no power and no way to control death around you."

Her words scare me. Seriously scare me. They terrify me because I know she's right. Pushing at the pressure that is threatening to explode my skull and splatter my brain out all over the forest, I focus on the pushback, and the voices fade to a dull roar in the background. For now.

Locking gazes with her, I know she is going to be no help, whatsoever. She is here for one thing and one thing only. Her power. So we either give it to her or we kill a goddess. It's too bad we need that power inside Bram to fix this mess we are in.

She must see the predicament we are facing in my eyes because hers narrow. She takes in all four of us and purses her lips. "This isn't over."

"It is for now," I say, but she has already vanished.

"Are you okay?" Torin asks, his hand still on my arm.

I nod, even though I'm not sure I am. The voices of countless souls are still there, just below the surface, waiting to overtake me again. "I'll be fine. We have bigger problems."

"No shit," Bram growls. "What the fuck do we do now?"

I run a hand through my hair in frustration. "I don't know. But we need to figure something out fast. Who knows what other ancient beings we've unleashed."

"Not to mention the fact that reality itself seems to be unravelling," Tate adds grimly.

"Okay, let's think," I say, trying to stay calm. "We reversed time to save me and Tate. There has to be a way to undo it."

"But Morrigan said we can't just move time back," Torin points out.

"Maybe not," I concede. "But there has to be something. Some way to stabilise things at least."

"There is," Tate says grimly, and I know before our eyes meet that he's right.

There is one way to fix this.

Put everything back how it was before they did the ritual to bring me back from the thousand realities.

"No," Bram states as he and Torin get up to speed. "No. We are not sending you back there."

"I don't think we have much choice," I murmur, my heart beating a bit faster as the snake slithers off under a bush. "We have to fix this, and that is the only way. That is

what was meant to happen, and we ruined fate by reversing what we did.”

“No,” Torin says defiantly. “We will find another way.”

“There isn’t one. It’s okay. Maybe being Death this time will make it easier.” I keep my tone light, but the dread inside me of being torn apart again courses through me. Can I survive it happening all over again, but more importantly, can I survive an eternity shattered into minuscule pieces and watching the worlds go by without me?



TATE

I hate that this is the only way, but it is. We fucked with fate, and now it's biting us on the arse. "It's the only way," I mutter, feeling the wrath of Bram and Torin burning into my soul. But they know I'm right.

Bram snarls, grabbing my shirt and slamming me against a tree. "Don't you fucking dare suggest that again. We're not sending her back."

I push him off, glaring. "You think I want to? But we don't have a choice. We fucked up. Fuck knows, bringing me back from the dead, probably also messed with shit. We have to set things right."

"There has to be another way," Torin insists, his voice tight with desperation.

Ivy steps between us, her eyes blazing with determination. "Stop it. This is my decision to make, not yours."

"The hell it is," Bram growls. "We didn't go through all that just to lose you again."

She turns to him, cupping his face. "I know. But we can't be selfish here. The fate of everything is at stake."

I watch the conflict play across Bram's features. He knows she's right, but accepting it is another matter entirely.

Ivy looks at each of us. “I love you all. But I have to do this. It’s the only way to fix what we’ve done.”

Torin makes a choked sound. “There has to be another option. We can’t just give up.”

“It’s not giving up,” she says softly. “It’s doing what’s necessary.”

I clench my fists, hating this but knowing it’s true. “How do we even do it? Send you back, I mean.”

She takes a deep breath. “That is the tricky part. It happened when I was fighting Life’s minions. The ritual is neither here nor there. I’m not entirely sure how we go back to the point in time where I scattered without causing even more damage.”

“Then we don’t do it,” Torin states, feet planted, arms over his chest. He has taken on the role of badass vampire mage, and he will smite anyone who looks at him wrong now. I know that look. He won’t let this happen.

Ivy sighs. “Torin, we don’t have a choice. The longer we wait, the worse things will get.”

“She’s right,” I say, hating every word. “We need to figure this out fast.”

Bram runs a hand through his hair, his eyes wild. “Fuck. There has to be some way to do this without losing you again.”

Ivy’s expression softens as she looks at him. “I wish there was. But we all know deep down this is what has to happen.”

“No,” Torin growls. “I refuse to accept that. We’ll find another way.”

I shake my head. “We don’t have time for denial. We need to focus on how to send her back safely.”

“Safely?” Bram scoffs. “There’s nothing safe about being torn apart across realities, and it’s not even about sending Ivy back to the thousand realms. It’s about the point in time that it happened. You are all missing the entire point of this. It isn’t the action, it’s the time. The fucking time.”

“Yeah, the fucking time we messed with,” Ivy argues.

Torin chimes in, and I retreat as they fight amongst themselves. Bram has a very good point. It isn’t about just randomly tearing Ivy apart, it’s the time.

“How did you do it?”

“Hmm?” I look up at the voice and see Morrigan standing behind a tree, staring at me. “Do what?”

“Take the power of your ancestors?”

“It wasn’t intentional.”

She giggles. “These things never are.” She lifts her chin to indicate the three still fighting. “They can’t see me, in case you were wondering.”

“Great, so it looks like I’m talking to myself.”

She shrugs. “Think, warlock. This isn’t about destroying Death, which is exactly what you will do if you tear that girl apart to scatter her.”

“You’ve been here the whole time?”

“Never left. I can’t. I’m tied to this place.”

“This exact place?” I ask with a frown.

She nods. “This is where I reappeared.”

Interesting.

“Are you saying you died once upon a time, and our fuck up brought you back?”

“In a manner of speaking, yes. Everything dies, Tate. It’s the way of the world. It’s why Death is so important. You can’t let her go through with this inane plan.”

“Then what do you suggest?” I ask out of desperation rather than trusting whatever she will say will benefit Ivy and not herself.

Morrigan’s eyes gleam with a predatory light. “What I suggest, little warlock, is that you tap into that ancestral power you’ve somehow awakened. The key to fixing this mess lies within you.”

I narrow my eyes suspiciously. “And how exactly am I supposed to do that? I don’t even know how I accessed it in the first place.”

She smirks. “That’s for you to figure out. But you know the deal. It’s all about intention. Focus on what you want to accomplish, not just reversing time.”

“That’s not very helpful,” I growl in frustration.

“Did you expect me to hand you all the answers? Where’s the fun in that?” She laughs, the sound grating on my already frayed nerves.

I glance back at the others, still arguing heatedly. When I turn back, Morrigan is gone, well, invisible at any rate. Fucking typical.

But her words stick with me. Intention. Focus on what we want to accomplish. Not just reversing time, but... what exactly? Changing reality back to what it was? Undoing the damage without losing Ivy?

I close my eyes, trying to quiet my racing thoughts. I reach deep inside myself, seeking that well of power Morrigan says is in me. I know the power is boosted, and I can feel it is different from what it was before. It's an immense weight on my soul, almost enough to drown me out completely if I let it.

Ancestral magick. The combined power of generations of warlocks flowing through my veins. It's dizzying, overwhelming. I struggle to focus, to harness even a fraction of it.

"Tate?" Ivy's voice cuts through my concentration. "What are you doing?"

I open my eyes to find all three of them staring at me. "I think I might have an idea," I say slowly. "But I'm not sure if it'll work."

"Anything's better than tearing Ivy apart again," Bram growls.

I nod. "Morrigan said something about intention. That we need to focus on what we want to accomplish, not just reversing time."

Torin frowns. "When the fuck did you talk to Morrigan?"

"Just now. She was here, but only I could see her apparently."

"What exactly are you proposing?" Bram asks, eyeing me warily.

I take a deep breath. “I think... I think I can use this ancestral magick to reshape reality. Not just reverse time, but actually change things back to how they should be without losing Ivy.”

“Is that even possible?” Torin asks sceptically.

“I don’t know,” I admit. “But it’s worth a shot, right? Better than the alternative.”

Ivy steps closer to me, her eyes searching mine. “What do you need us to do?”

“I’m not sure,” I say. “But I think we need to focus our collective power. All of us. Bram, you’ve got Morrigan’s magick. Torin, you’ve got your vampire mage abilities. And Ivy, you’re literally Death incarnate now. If we combine everything...”

“Yes, but I became Death after we came back from the alternate dimension. How can we be sure I will stay that way?”

I meet her gaze. “We can’t.”

Ivy grunts and slams her hands to her head. She drops to her knees with a keening sound.

Lunging forward, I crouch next to her, gripping her elbow. “Ivy?”

“Death... all of them... say no.”

“No?” I ask with a raised eyebrow.

“A collective and very firm no. It will rip Death out of me, and seeing as David is already gone?—”

“Death will be floating around?” Torin asks.

“Something like that,” she grits out, opening her eyes and fixing her gaze on me. “We can’t do this.”

“Then you tell those ancient fuckers to come up with a better plan. Any fucking plan, then,” I growl.

She nods, and I see movement in the trees. I look up to see Morrigan glaring at me. She is pissed, and I realise that was her plan all along, so she could what? Take Death’s power? She said Ivy’s power came from her. Fuck. This is a disastrous nightmare.

“You’re right,” I state, tearing my gaze from Morrigan’s. “We won’t do it this way. But we need to hurry and find out what we are going to do.”

“In the meantime,” Bram states coldly. “It looks like we’ve got company, and they aren’t here for tea and biscuits.”

I glance up and see that we are surrounded by an army of—what I’m assuming—are souls that are back from the dead.

“Oh, fuck,” Ivy snarls. “I guess you had better leave this to me?”

We both rise quickly as some axe-wielding maniac storms towards us with a battle cry that chills me to my bones.

8

IVY

I stare at the horde of not-dead warriors advancing on us, their battle cries sending chills down my spine. Fuck. This is not how I wanted to test out my new Death powers.

“Stay back,” I warn the guys, stepping forward. “I’ve got this. I think.”

Channelling the power of Death, I feel it swell through me like an icy river. I raise my hands, focusing on the approaching army.

The warrior swings his massive axe at my head, and I duck under it, feeling the whoosh of air as it passes inches from my scalp. As I come up, I press my palm to his chest and channel Death’s power.

The effect is immediate and much like what happened to Torin’s dad. I suck him into my palm, absorbing his essence and putting him firmly back where he belongs. “It’s not time for you to fight, and you definitely aren’t meant to be fighting me, you dickheads! Back in your box.”

I spin and slam my hand against another crazed lunatic lunging towards me. Death said this army was the worst of the worst. I believe him. The insanity in their eyes, the blood lust, is undeniable.

“Holy shit,” Bram mutters behind me.



Ignoring him, I whip through the horde of warriors, my hands a blur as I touch one after another. With each contact, their essence is absorbed into me, sending them back to whatever afterlife they escaped from.

“There has to be a quicker way than this!” I screech, hoping one of the Deaths will answer me.

They don’t.

Arseholes.

A massive brute of a man charges me, sword raised high. I duck under his swing and press both palms to his chest. He howls as I absorb his essence. A shudder goes through me as these terrible souls settle back where they were meant to be, and then a thought occurs to me.

“David, you utter cock. You knew they had escaped. This was on your watch!”

He chuckles in my head. “And what a perfect time to pass on the mantle.”

“Oh, you are dead. Deader than dead. Do you hear me?” I shriek, slamming my hand into another horrible being.

“This is getting dull.” Another voice echoes in my mind. “ Shall we help her out?”

“Oh, please do,” I snarl, kicking out at one not-dead fucker so I can get rid of another.  
“And who are you ?”

“Mazzarat.” The pissed-off tone makes it clear he knows I called him Mattresshead earlier.

“Well, Mazzarat . How about you give me a hand, and I promise to be the best damn Death any of you have ever seen?”

“Hmm, we’ll see.” He sniffs, still miffed off. “ Close your eyes and channel the power in an arc. You don’t need to touch them to bring them back.”

Well. Gee. That was hardly an epiphany. I’d have probably figured that out myself at some point soon. But I don’t bitch, instead, I do as he says, and when I open my eyes, I see the black arc, etched with deep purple, whip around the souls with a lasso. It tightens under my will and draws them kicking and screaming into a huddle in front of me before they fade from existence, disappearing into the void that is me.

Panting and sweating, I bend over, placing my hands on my knees. “That all of them?”

“Yes,” Torin says, looking around.

“ No,” Mazzarat says at the same time. “That was only the ones who were here.”

“Fantastic,” I growl.

Torin frowns at me.

“The ex-Deaths say no,” I explain.

“Great,” he mutters, earning himself a death stare from me. Or should that be a Death stare?

I straighten up, still catching my breath. “Okay, so there are more escaped souls out there wreaking havoc. How do I get to them all?”

“How many more?” Bram asks, scanning the trees warily.

I close my eyes, reaching out with my new Death senses. The awareness of souls floods through me. It’s an overwhelming tide of life and death across realities. I grit my teeth, trying to focus just on the escaped ones.

“Too many,” I finally growl. “Hundreds, maybe thousands. They’re scattered everywhere.”

“Shit,” Tate mutters. “We can’t possibly track them all down one by one.”

“No kidding,” I snap. “Any other brilliant observations?”

He glares at me. “I’m just trying to help.”

I sigh, running a hand through my hair. “I know, I’m sorry.”

“We need to figure out how to fix this,” Bram says. “Not just rounding up escaped souls, but the whole fucked up timeline situation.”

“What if instead of you tracking them down, we get the souls to come to you?” Tate asks.

“Oh, the warlock is smart,” Mazzarat pipes up.

I ignore the first Death, not even wanting to contemplate how old he is.

“Great idea in theory, but how do we do that? Not to mention, we still have this other thing to deal with.” I chew my lip, still heartbroken over Ramsey and Josh.

“What if one fixes the other?” Tate starts hesitantly.

All eyes go to him.

“Mazzarat?” I prompt when he has no snide comment. “Is he right?”

A resounding silence fills the forest where not even we dare to breathe while we wait.

And then Mazzarat speaks.

9

IVY

“The warlock is correct,” Mazzarat says, his voice somehow now echoing all around us. “Up to a point. If you can draw the escaped souls to a central location, it could create enough of a disturbance in the fabric of reality to allow you to reset the timeline.”

“Reset the timeline?” I ask warily. “What exactly does that mean?”

“It means undoing the damage you fools caused when you reversed time,” he snaps. “But it’s not without risks.”

“Of course it’s not,” Bram mutters. “What kind of risks are we talking about?”

Mazzarat’s response is grim. “Best case scenario, reality snaps back into place, and only you four remember what happened. Worst case... well, let’s just say universal annihilation is a possibility.”

“Fuck,” Torin mutters.

“So how do we do this without the annihilation part?” Tate asks, his face set with determination.

“We need to call them back to you,” Mazzarat states.

I nod slowly. “Okay, and then what?”

“Then you use your collective power to reset the timeline. All of you together have enough energy to generate enough force to have reality snap back into place. Think of it like a saggy elastic band that hasn’t quite fit around the circumference of the realms. You need to put it back into place.”

Bram looks sceptical. “And how exactly do we do that without tearing reality apart in the process?”

“Very carefully,” Mazzarat replies dryly. “It will require precise control and timing from all of you.”

I take a deep breath, trying to wrap my head around what we need to do. “Okay, so first, we need to draw all the escaped souls to us. How do we do that?”

“You’re Death now,” Mazzarat says. “Call to them. They’ll come.”

“Right,” I mutter. “Easy peasey.”

Closing my eyes, I reach deep within myself, tapping into the wellspring of Death’s power. I focus on the escaped souls, sending out a silent call across realities. Come to me. It’s time to return.

I chew the inside of my lip as my desperate call to the souls does absolutely fuck all.

“Again,” David whispers. “You can do this, Ivy.”

I nod and put my back into it. Come to me, you fucking cunts. Playtime is over, and it’s time to get your fucking arses back inside the void.

“That’s the spirit!” David cheers.

“Get ready,” I warn the others as I open my eyes. “This could get intense. They are pissed. ”

The air around us ripples and distorts. Ghostly figures materialise, more and more appearing by the second. Warriors, criminals, monsters - the worst of the worst that Death has claimed over millennia.

I stand my ground as the horde of angry souls drifts around us, their ethereal forms flickering and pulsing with malevolent energy. There are hundreds, maybe thousands of them, filling the forest as far as I can see.

“So, is this the army that will fight Life?” Bram mutters, his eyes wide as he takes in the spectral army surrounding us.

Life. Lila. I’d almost forgotten about that bitch with this little sidetrack we went on.

“Yes,” David says.

“Wonderful,” Bram says. “Although, I feel better about winning now.”

“Right?” I snort and then focus as a terrifying creature that looks about a thousand years old snarls in my face, his putrid breath and straggly hair plastered to his head with grease, making me want to throw up.

“Stay back,” I warn the guys. “This is going to get ugly.”

“Uglier than him?” Torin mutters, but I see them all take giant steps back. I don’t blame them. I would too, if I could.

The souls press in, their faces contorted with rage and madness. I can feel their fury, their desperation to remain free of Death's grasp. But I'm Death now, and I won't let them escape again.

I raise my hands, channelling every ounce of power I can muster. "It's time to go back where you belong," I growl.

A wave of dark energy pulses out from me, washing over the spectral horde. Many of them shriek and dissolve instantly, sucked back into the void. But others resist, pushing back against my power. Lilith is there, struggling against the tide of power, but she can't escape me. Not this time.

"Back in your box, bitch," I spit out, keeping an eye out for Morrigan, but she is nowhere to be seen.

"Fuck," I grunt, straining to maintain control. My planted feet sink into the forest floor as the pressure from the souls weighs me down before it dissipates into nothing.

As the last of the spectral horde fades away, I stumble backwards, exhausted. Torin catches me before I can fall.

"You okay?" he asks, steadying me.

I nod weakly. "Just peachy. Nothing like absorbing thousands of psychotic souls to start your day."

"That was... disturbing," Bram says, looking around the now-empty forest.

"No shit," Tate mutters. "So what now? We've got all the escaped souls back where they belong. How do we reset the timeline?"



I straighten up, taking a deep breath. “Mazzarat? Any tips?”

His voice echoes in my mind. “The hard part is done. I’m impressed, girl. I expected that to be a lot harder for you.”

“Fuck off, you old fucker,” I snap. “I’m not some little girl playing the part. I’m the real deal.”

“Oh, yes, you are,” he says, in a way creepy enough for my skin to crawl.

But then he seems to snap out of it. “The world is primed. Combine your powers and focus on the moment you want to return to. The exact moment before you reversed time.”

“And how do we do that without tearing reality apart?” Bram asks.

“Very carefully,” he states again.

I nod, trying to ignore the exhaustion weighing me down. “Okay, let’s do this before I pass out.”

We form a circle, joining hands.

I take a deep breath, feeling the power of Death buzzing through me as I join hands with the guys. “Okay, everyone focus on that moment right before we reversed time. Picture it clearly in your minds.”

I close my eyes, recalling the chaos and desperation of that moment. The sickening feeling of being torn apart across realities is easy to remember.

Our collective power builds, swirling around us in a vortex of energy. The air

crackles with electricity.

“ Now ,” Mazzarat’s voice echoes in my mind again.

We all concentrate, channelling our power towards that focal point in time. Reality bends and warps around us. Trees blur and twist, the ground ripples like water. I grit my teeth against the strain, feeling like my atoms are being pulled apart.

I scream as the vortex intensifies and the world fractures, splintering into shards of possibility. I catch glimpses of alternate timelines again. Versions where we failed, where we never met, where everything went wrong. But I push past them, zeroing in on that crucial moment.

Just when I think I can’t take anymore, there’s a deafening crack that reverberates through my entire being as reality snaps back into place. I gasp, stumbling as the world stops spinning.

“Did it work?” Torin asks, steadying me.

I look around, trying to get my bearings. We’re still in the forest, but we are alone. No sign of Life’s minions or Aunt Cathy. Did we reset, or did we change it completely again?

“I’m not sure.”

Bram nods, his eyes scanning our surroundings warily. “How do we know?”

“I’ll call Ramsey,” I say, already pulling out my phone.

“Ivy?” he answers on the first ring. “What’s up?”

“Oh, not much. How’s Josh?”

“He’s good... why?”

“Is he still part of The Resistance?”

“Yeees. Did you hit your head?”

“And you and I are part of The Syndicate.”

“Obviously. Ivy, are you okay?”

I smile in relief. “I’m great. I’ll speak to you later.” I hang up and pocket my phone.  
“It worked. Everything’s back in place.”

The guys visibly relax at my words.

“Thank fuck,” Torin says.

“So what now?” Bram asks. “We just... go on like nothing happened?”

I shake my head. “Not quite. We still have unfinished business.”

“Life,” Tate says grimly.

I nod. “Exactly. We reset the timeline, but that bitch is still out there. We have a scary as fuck army to take her down, but I have a horrible feeling they aren’t going to want to help after this shitshow.”

“Only one way to find out,” Bram says.

“Yeah,” I mutter, a slice of worry creeping over me. Morrigan definitely didn’t return to the void. She is still out there, and that concerns me more than I’d like. Chances are, she is going to align with Life to get what she wants, which is her power back at any cost. The stakes in this fight just got raised again, but I’m too exhausted to think about it right now. “Sleep?” I ask, already turning to head out of the forest, but I don’t even make it two steps before I collapse, and Bram catches me, transporting us back to my bedroom, where I curl up on the bed and face oblivion.

10

brAM

I watch Ivy pass out on the bed, concern etched on my face. She pushed herself way too hard with that soul-absorbing stunt.

“She’ll be okay,” Torin says, but he doesn’t sound convinced.

“She fucking better be,” I growl. “After all this shit, I’m not losing her again.”

Tate runs a hand through his hair. “We should let her rest. In the meantime, we need to figure out how to get this battle with Life underway.”

“You go do that, I’m staying with Ivy,” I say absently.

He lets out an annoyed huff, but he and Torin leave me alone with Ivy. I stare at her for the longest time, until I can’t stand it any longer. Using my magick, I gently flick her onto her back. Then I strip her naked before I crawl onto the bed, releasing my cock. It is raging hard, and I need it. I need her. Kneeling, I lift her legs over mine and pull her gently towards me until I can feel the dampness between her legs on my cock. She murmurs in her sleep, and I smile, gripping my shaft and guiding it inside her pussy. She wiggles a bit at the invasion, but she doesn’t wake up. I stifle a groan of sheer lust as the thought of fucking her while she sleeps hits my cock and makes it like a rod of iron. Inch by excruciating inch, I press inside her tight, wet heat, savouring every second of it. Her sleeping form beneath me shows how exhausted she is, but her pussy still clenches around me, welcoming my intrusion. When I’m

balls deep, her breath hitches, but she doesn't stir.

No longer able to hold back, I thrust. Slowly at first, then picking up speed as her walls grip me like a vice. I want to wake her up, see the lust in her eyes as we fuck like the wild beasts we are, but something holds me back.

I angle my hips, hitting that spot inside her that I know would have her moaning with pleasure. Sure enough, she whimpers in her sleep, arching into me. Using one hand, I cup her breast, squeezing the soft mound as my other hand grips her hip tightly. My cock slams into her over and over again, bringing me to the edge of climax. Just as I'm about to explode inside her tight cunt, her pussy clamps down as she comes hard in her sleep. With a loud groan, I shoot my load inside her, streams of hot cum that coat my cock as I give short, sharp thrusts, encouraging the orgasm that won't quit.

"Fuck," I growl as my cock stays rock-hard and is ready to go again. I pull out of her and scoop up some of the cum from her pussy, and turn her over, parting her legs so I can reach her asshole. After lubing her up, she wiggles her backside, and I smile. "You want my dick in your arse, filthy cunt?"

"Always," she mumbles into the sheets.

With a grin, I lift her hips and press my fingers to the puckered hole.

She moans, but she doesn't move. She lets me prepare her, and after a few moments, I drive my dick into her rear passage with a hiss of pure lust. "Fuck, you're so fucking tight. So fucking mine."

Ivy's body tenses as I push into her tight arse, but she doesn't move or make a sound. She is giving me what I want by pretending to still be asleep. She is a fucking goddess. I groan at the exquisite pressure around my cock, savouring this forbidden pleasure. Gripping her hips, I thrust, building a steady rhythm.

Her pseudo-sleeping form rocks with my movements, soft whimpers escaping her lips. Bruising her hips with my grip, I fuck her harder.

“That’s it, take my cock in your arse, like the filthy slut you are,” I growl, slamming into her.

She moans louder, and slips her hands underneath her body to play with her clit as I pound into her arse.

With a strangled cry, she climaxes, her whole body shuddering. The rippling of her muscles sends me over the edge, and I groan as I fill her arse with my cum.

“Two down, slut,” I growl, panting, and roughly pull out of her. Fisting my cock with one hand, I jerk off, wet with my own cum. I flip her over with magick and drag her closer to me. “Open that dirty mouth.”

She opens up for me, arching off the bed, her pink nipples peaked and tempting. She plays with her clit again, trembling as another orgasm thunders through her. I pump harder, tugging on my cock until I think I will yank it right off. My balls tighten, and I aim for her mouth, wanting my cum in all of her holes in a possessive claiming that I need right now.

With a guttural groan, I explode, shooting jets of hot cum across her lips and tongue. Some splashes on her cheeks and chin as she eagerly swallows what lands in her mouth.

“That’s it, take it all like a good little cumslut,” I growl, milking the last drops onto her waiting tongue.

She licks her lips, eyes heavy with lust as she gazes up at me.

I collapse beside her on the bed, pulling her against me. “Fuck, I needed that,” I mutter into her hair.

She nods, already drifting off again. I hold her close, my body still humming with satisfaction. But my mind is racing, thinking about what’s coming. The battle with Life looms ahead of us, and I have a feeling it’s going to make everything we’ve faced so far look like child’s play.

For now though, I push those thoughts aside and focus on the feel of Ivy in my arms.



11

IVY

I wake up feeling sore in all the right places, a satisfied smile on my face as I stretch languidly. Bram's arm is draped possessively over my waist, his warm breath tickling the back of my neck.

"Morning, slut," he murmurs, nipping at my earlobe.

I turn to face him, grinning. "Morning, asshole. I should kick your arse from here to next week."

He smirks. "Oh? You seemed to enjoy being used like a filthy whore."

"Mmm, I did," I purr, running my hand down his chest. "But now we've got work to do."

His expression sobers. "Right."

I sigh, sitting up. "Yeah, that pesky little problem."

Torin and Tate enter a moment later, both looking grim.

"What's wrong?" I ask, instantly alert.

Tate runs a hand through his hair. "We've got a problem. A big one."

“Bigger than Life trying to destroy everything?” Bram asks sceptically.

Tate nods. “Yeah. We think Morrigan is going to team up with Life.”

“Yeah, I’m way ahead of you with that. I figured as much yesterday. Wait, how did you know she hadn’t returned to the void?”

“Mr-I-was-watching-for-her didn’t see her,” Tate says, jutting his thumb out at Torin.

I flick my gaze at the vampire. “You could see them all?”

He nods. “Call it a perk of vampire sight. I can see things in slow motion when they are going at super speed.”

“Nice,” I mutter. “But I knew that bitch was going to be trouble.”

“It’s not that bad,” Bram says languidly, his cock already raging again and raring to go. I eye it up and wonder if the world will wait while I ride it into oblivion. I don’t wait for an answer to that. I mount him, sliding my pussy over his dick before ramming it roughly inside me.

He groans, gripping my hips as I rotate them.

“Now we’re up against a goddess of war, fate and death as well as Life. This is going to be interesting.”

“Unless Bram gives Morrigan her powers back to make her go away,” Tate says, slipping in behind me and cupping my breasts before squeezing my nipples roughly.

“Not happening,” Bram pants when I speed up, riding him like there is no tomorrow. I mean, fuck knows if there will be at the rate we are hurtling towards the unknown.

I take a deep breath, trying to think. “You might have to,” I moan, tilting my head to the side as Torin joins us and scrapes his fangs over my jugular. He bites down, and I come hard all over Bram’s cock, convulsing wildly. “We’ve-we’ve still got our army of psychotic souls, right?”

“She can still think, boys,” Bram groans. “We aren’t doing our jobs well enough.”

Tate drops his fingers to my clit and pinches it, twisting it harshly, which doubles my orgasm. Bram grunts and shoots his load inside me. Tate lifts me up as Torin releases me and scoops out enough cum to lube up my arse.

“In theory,” Tate says, shoving me forward over Bram and pressing his fingers to my rear hole. “But we haven’t exactly tested if they’ll actually follow your orders in battle.”

“Only one way to find out,” I say, trembling when Torin and Bram swap places, and he shoves his cock into my pussy.

Tate works his fingers into my arse as Bram also moves in behind me.

“We need a plan,” I pant, trying to focus through the pleasure. “We can’t just rush into this blindly.”

“Agreed,” Tate says, replacing his fingers with the head of his cock. He pushes in slowly, stretching me. “But how do we prepare for a battle against Life and potentially a war goddess?”

I cry out as he goes balls deep, my body twitching with pleasure between him and Torin. “We... we need to test the army first,” I manage. “See if they’ll actually follow my commands.”

Bram positions himself over the top of me as Tate shoves me even further forward. I cry out as Bram shoves his dick into my back passage, which is already stuffed with Tate's monster cock.

"Fuck!"

"And if they do follow you?" Torin grunts, thrusting deeply upwards as I go still and let my three men use me for their pleasure and mine.

I moan, and it's hard to form thoughts.

Tate and Bram increase their pace, pounding into my arse.

"Fuck!" I yelp again as they stretch me to my limits. "I meant test the army, not my holes!"

Tate chuckles darkly, pumping his cock in time with Bram and Torin. "Well, we might as well multitask." He grunts.

"You're sadistic," I pant out between moans.

"And you love it," Torin growls, flashing his fangs at me. His hands grip my hips, his claws digging into my skin tightly as he pulls out and slams back in again. The slight pain only heightens my arousal.

"We don't have time for this!" Bram growls, but he doesn't stop. If anything, he doubles down.

"Shut up... and... fuck me..." I moan, feeling an orgasm building that is going to blow the roof off this house.

My body is on fire, every nerve ending crackling with pleasure as my three men use me mercilessly. I can barely think straight, let alone form a coherent battle plan. But somehow, through the haze of lust, an idea starts to take shape.

“We need... fuck... we need to divide and conquer,” I gasp out between thrusts. “Split up the army... oh god... into specialised units.”

Tate grunts, his cock pounding into my arse alongside Bram’s. “What kind of units?”

“Based on... shit... based on their abilities,” I moan. “Fighters, spies, healers...”

Torin slams up into me. “And how do we figure out what they can do?”

I cry out as a particularly hard thrust hits just the right spot. “We’ll have to... fuck... we’ll have to test them. Put them through their paces.”

Bram’s fingers dig into my hips. “And you think they’ll just go along with that?”

“They had fucking better,” I snarl, feeling my orgasm building to a crescendo. “I’m Death now. They’ll obey or... oh fuck... or I’ll decimate them completely.”

“Can you do that?” Torin asks with more interest in that statement than his soaking wet cock buried in my cunt.

“I can do anything I fucking want! Keep riding me, you fucking prick!”

He grins and gives me what I want. My tits bounce so hard, they ache, but I don’t care right now. This feels too good. It feels like I’m alive for the first time since I came back from being torn apart.

“We need to... offer them something they want.”

“Like what?” Bram grunts.

“A second chance,” I pant, and with that declaration, I come hard, my body convulsing as waves of pleasure crash over me and cum gushes out of my pussy, dripping down my thighs.

“Fuck!” Torin roars. “Fuck, you’re breaking my dick!”

I giggle through my orgasmic bliss as he dumps his cum inside me, his cock pulsing hard with each spurt.

Tate groans and unloads into my arse, with Bram following soon after. They all pull out, and cum drops from my holes onto the sheets.

“Creampies,” Bram pants, pushing me onto all fours.

Tate lies underneath me as I push out the cum from my pussy. He sucks my clit into his mouth, using his tongue to lap up the cum while Bram laps up the creampie from my arse.

“Fuck, you guys are filthy,” I groan, my knees and elbows wobbling uncontrollably.

I collapse in a sweaty, panting heap on the bed, but they aren’t done with me yet. Torin pushes my legs apart and devours my sensitive pussy, grazing my clit with his fangs.

“Fuck!” I scream and writhe closer to his mouth. “Fuck, that feels good.”

He increases the pressure until he draws blood, and I climax so hard I see stars and little birdies circling my head.

“We need to talk about that,” Bram muses. “I don’t think that’s a wise idea.”

I groan, finally coming down from my orgasmic high as the guys back off. “What’s not a wise idea?” I ask Bram, but my brain is still fuzzy.

He frowns. “Offering the souls a second chance. We don’t know what they’re capable of or if we can trust them.”

I sit up, wincing slightly. “We don’t have much choice. We need their power to take on Life and Morrigan.”

Tate nods reluctantly. “She’s right. We’re outmatched without them.”

“So, what exactly are you proposing?” Torin asks, wiping his mouth.

I take a deep breath. “We offer them a deal. They fight for us against Life and Morrigan, and in exchange, they get a chance at redemption. Not freedom, but maybe... I don’t know, a less shitty afterlife? A place where things aren’t all doom and gloom.”

“Can you even do that?” Bram asks sceptically.

I shrug. “I’m Death now. I should be able to make some adjustments to their eternal punishment, right?”

“In theory,” Tate muses. “But we’d need to be careful about where and how you place them.”

“Agreed,” I say. “We can’t just unleash a horde of psychos back into the world, but also this is a last resort. If they won’t do as I command, then we bribe them.”

Torin nods. "So, how do we go about asking them to fight? Do they even know what they were reaped for?"

I blink as I contemplate that. It's a damn good question, actually. "Erm, guys?"

"What?" Tate asks with a frown,

"Not you. The ex-Deaths." I wave a hand dismissively at him.

Silence.

"Oh, now you're quiet," I grumble and climb off the bed, pulling a towel around me so I can go and shower and think in peace.

As soon as I hit the shower, the hot water cascading down on me in a torrent of heaven, David speaks. "Some of them are aware. The newer ones. The older ones aren't exactly a chatty bunch."

"Thanks," I mutter. "So, how am I supposed to get them to fight?"

"You stop being weak and be Death."

"Right, because that isn't what I've been trying to be."

"This is what I was talking about, Ivy. You can't be yourself anymore. It's not who you are. Pleasing these men, going off focus, ignoring the problems... it's not enough."

"It will have to be," I state coldly. "I'm not giving it all up."

"Then you have to figure out a way to become Death, the leader of the dead, while



still pandering to your mortal side.”

He goes quiet then, and none of the rest of them speak. The leader of the dead. That doesn't sound like a great job, but David is right. I have to stop being such a pussy about all of this. Second guessing myself will get me nowhere. Bribery? Fuck that. I will whip these souls into shape, and they will do my bidding whether they like it or not. But first, I have to take the immediate problem out of the equation.

Morrigan.

She is a large cat prowling amongst my pigeons, and I can't have her in the way and joining forces with Life. Bram is going to have to give up those powers. There is just nothing else for it.

12

IVY

“No,” Bram states, arms folded, fully dressed in black combat pants and a tight black tee as I march back into the bedroom, wearing only my pink fluffy towel.

“No?” I ask, although my voice goes up a notch, or five.

“You know what I mean. I know what you’re going to say. The answer is a definitive no.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” I say innocently, to the amusement of Tate.

He comes up behind me and plants a kiss on my shoulder. The marking of his name on my back flares up white hot, and I gasp. The brand has been relatively dormant since I came back, but now it seems to be back in full force.

“He’s been practising that since you left to shower,” Torin drawls from over by the window. He, too, is dressed and is staring out over the Thornfield campus with a melancholy expression.

“Fuck you,” Bram snarls, magick sparking at his fingertips.

“Enough, guys. We need to be on the same page here, and clearly, we aren’t. Bram, if you aren’t giving up those powers, what do you suggest we do to get Morrigan out of

our hair?" I put it to him straight. The ball is in his court.

"I don't know yet, okay? But giving up this power isn't the answer. We need every advantage we can get against Life."

I sigh, dropping my towel and reaching for some clothes. "And what about the advantage of not having a pissed-off war goddess gunning for us?"

"We can handle Morrigan," he insists stubbornly.

Tate snorts. "Can we? On top of Life and her minions?"

"Look," I say, pulling on a tank top and jeans. "I get that you don't want to give up the power. Your parents, for whatever reason, gave you that grimoire. The power chose to stay with you. But we need to think strategically here. Morrigan is a wild card we can't afford right now."

Bram's jaw clenches. "And what if we need that power to win? What then?"

I meet his gaze steadily. "Then we figure something else out. But right now, Morrigan is a liability we need to neutralise."

"She's right," Torin says, turning from the window. "We're spread thin as it is. We can't fight a war on multiple fronts."

Bram looks between us all, his expression stormy. Finally, he growls, "The trouble is, this power doesn't want to go back to her."

I narrow my eyes. "Oh?"

He sighs in exasperation. "You are right when you say it chose to stay with me. It did.

It has. Its original mistress was right there beckoning it to her?—”

“Through your mouth,” Tate mutters, and Bram shoots him a death stare.

“... but it wouldn’t go. It chose to stay with me. Personally, I think I need to find out why it decided to do that rather than mess about trying to hand it over against its will.”

That statement gives me pause. Magick, as we know, is sentient. Any way you swing it, it is. If Bram feels that the magick inside him is refusing to go back to Morrigan, then we have to believe him and take that seriously. Wild magick going even wilder is not a danger we need right now.

“Okay, then you need to do some soul-searching. Find out what this magick wants and why it wants to be with you and not her.”

He nods stiffly. “I’ll meditate and connect to it on its level.”

“Okay,” I say quietly, knowing he is pissed off that we are doubting him.

I watch Bram stalk out of the room, his body tense with anger. Part of me wants to go after him, but I know he needs space right now.

“Well, that went well,” Tate mutters sarcastically.

I sigh, running a hand through my damp hair before scooping it up into a ponytail. “It went as planned. We need to know what is going on, and he will find out.”

“And if he doesn’t?” Torin asks, his expression grim.

“Then we deal with that when the time comes,” I say firmly. “For now, we need to

focus on rallying this army of souls, and also, it wouldn't go amiss to try to find out what Life is up to."

Tate nods. "How do you want to do the soul thing? Summon them all at once?"

I shake my head. "No, I think we need to start smaller. A test group. See how they respond to my commands before we unleash the whole horde."

"Smart," Torin agrees. "Where do you want to do this?"

I consider for a moment. "The forest clearing where we fought those escaped souls before. It's isolated enough that we won't draw attention."

"No, Morrigan is tied to that place. She can't leave," Tate says.

"Further in then. I don't want to be too far from the place where I recalled them."

"When?" Torin asks.

"Now," I say decisively. "We don't have time to waste, but first, why are you so sad?"

He blinks. "Sad? I'm not sad."

"You are solemn, then. What's on your mind?"

"My mother is outside, waiting in her car. I'm contemplating what the fuck she wants."

Suspiciously, I peer out to see a fancy black Rolls Royce parked up. "We'd better go see what she wants."

“We?” he asks, turning to me.

“Yes. We. We aren’t splitting up any more than we already have. This is life or death now, pardon the pun. We stick together.”

His face relaxes as he nods, and we turn away from the window to head downstairs to see whatever it is his mother wants. I can only hope it isn’t more bad news.

13

TORIN

Ivy's face hardens as we approach my mother's car. She's right - we need to stick together. But part of me wishes I could shield her from whatever fresh hell my mother's about to unleash.

The back window rolls down smoothly, revealing Mom's cold blue eyes.

"Darling," she purrs, ignoring Ivy completely. "Do get in. We have matters to discuss."

Ivy bristles beside me. "Anything you have to say can be said to all of us."

Mom's lip curls. "Death."

Her eyes never leave Ivy's, and I see that this was her whole reason for coming. She is aligned with Life in a bid to be a true immortal, and she is checking out the competition.

"You heard?" Ivy drawls, unconcerned. "Did Life send you to have a look, to see if you could spot any weaknesses? Hmm? Too fucking bad, I don't have any."

Mom raises an eyebrow. "No? Seems to me you have three." She holds three fingers up and waggles them.

“Did you just threaten my guys?” Ivy splutters as I press my lips together, trying not to laugh. “You utter bitch. Try it, and you will see who wins that fight.”

Mom’s eyes narrow dangerously. “Such language. I see you’ve been a terrible influence on my son.”

I can’t hold back my snort of laughter this time. “Trust me, it’s the other way around.”

Ivy shoots me an amused glance before turning back to my mother. “Look, we don’t have time for cryptic threats and family drama. Either say what you came to say or fuck off.”

Mom hisses softly but recovers quickly. “Very well. I came to offer you a choice, Torin. Join us—join Life in this fight—and secure your place in the new world order. Or stay with... this,” she waves a dismissive hand at Ivy, “and face extinction.”

“Wow,” I drawl. “Such a tempting offer. Let me think...erm, how about no?”

“Don’t be foolish. You have no idea the power Life wields. Those who stand with her will rule. Those who don’t...” She lets the threat hang in the air.

“Will die?” Ivy asks, arms crossed. “Kind of smacks Life’s agenda right in the big, fat lips, doesn’t it?”

“Pretty much,” I murmur and lock gazes with Tate. Pretty fucking much. Have we just cracked something open here, even if we don’t know what yet? Tate raises an eyebrow as he seems to think so too.

Mom’s eyes flash with rage. “You little cun?—”



“Careful,” I warn, bending down to glare at Mom through the open window. “Choose your next words very carefully.”

Mom takes a deep breath, composing herself. “You’re making a grave mistake, Torin. Life will reshape this world. Those who stand with her will be rewarded beyond measure.”

“Yeah, I’m starting to think this is all a bit inflated,” Ivy spits out, and for one fleeting moment, her skin disappears, and she glares down at my mother through hollow eye sockets.

“You have no idea what true power is,” Mom hisses, unperturbed by this display.

“Oh, I think I do,” Ivy says coldly. “And I’m not impressed by Lila. She is a selfish cunt, and I will smash her into little pieces if it’s the last thing I do.”

Mom’s eyes widen slightly as she latches onto Ivy’s... slip-up? I’m not sure if it was intentional or not... “We’ll see how unimpressed you are when she rips your soul apart.”

Ivy tenses beside me, but her voice remains steady. “I’d like to see her try.”

Mom’s eyes narrow. “This is your last chance, Torin. Come with me now or suffer the consequences.”

I meet her gaze unflinchingly. “I’ve made my choice. I stand with Ivy.”

For a moment, something like regret flashes in Mom’s eyes. Then it’s gone, replaced by icy disdain.

“So be it,” she says softly. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

The window rolls up smoothly, cutting us off from her glare that could wither an ancient oak tree.

As the Rolls Royce pulls away, I'm not sure what to think.

Ivy turns to me, her eyes blazing. "Well, that was enlightening. Did she do this because she cares about you or to split us up?"

"As if that would happen. But I'm intrigued by this entire conversation."

Tate nods, his expression thoughtful. "Life's agenda. The whole 'new world order' bullshit. It doesn't add up."

"No, it doesn't," I agree. "If Life is all about, well, life - why is she so keen on the extinction of those who oppose her? Is it all a front, or is she really that hypocritical?"

Ivy's brow furrows. "Yeah, exactly. We're missing something."

I take Ivy's hand, lacing our fingers together. "We need to dig deeper. Find out what Life's real endgame is."

Ivy nods decisively. "Agreed. But first, we deal with the soul army. We can't afford any more distractions."

As we head across campus to the forest, we see everyone going about their lives, and I wish that we could do that. Instead, we are dealing with more problems than you can shake a stake at, and they keep piling up.

The forest looms ahead, dark and foreboding. As we step into the shadows, I feel a chill run down my spine. Whatever we're about to face, I have a feeling it's going to be unpleasant.

14

IVY

The forest grows darker and more oppressive the deeper we walk. Something about it feels different now - like reality hasn't quite settled back into place here. Or maybe it's just my new Death senses picking up on things I couldn't feel before.

"Far enough?" Tate asks as we reach a clearing about half a mile from where Morrigan is bound.

I nod, trying to ignore the cacophony of voices in my head. The souls are restless, eager to be set free again. "This should work."

"How many are you going to summon?" Torin asks, scanning our surroundings warily.

"Ten," I decide. "A small test group. Enough to see how they respond to commands without being overwhelming."

"And you can control which ones you call?" Tate's voice holds a hint of concern.

I shoot him a wry smile. "Guess we'll find out."

Closing my eyes, I reach into the void where the souls are contained. It's like dipping my hand into a churning ocean of darkness. Countless entities brush against my consciousness - some ancient and terrible, others more recently claimed. I try to be

selective, grabbing for souls that feel more... manageable.

“Um, Ivy?” Torin’s voice holds a note of alarm.

My eyes snap open to find not ten, but dozens of spectral forms materialising around us. Fuck.

“That’s more than ten,” Tate observes dryly.

“Really?” I mutter, sarcasm dripping from the word as I struggle to maintain control. The souls press in around us, their ethereal forms flickering with barely contained violence. I can feel their hunger for freedom, their desire to break free of Death’s control.

A massive warrior spirit lunges forward, spectral sword raised. Before I can react, Torin steps between us, his vampire speed letting him intercept the attack. His hand passes through the spirit’s form, but his mage magick crackles, forcing it back.

“Stop right there!” I command, channelling every ounce of Death’s authority I can muster. “Stand down, all of you!”

To my surprise, they actually listen. The warrior backs off, lowering his weapon. The other spirits settle into loose formation around us, waiting.

“Well,” I say, trying to hide my relief, “at least they can follow basic commands.”

“Great,” Torin mutters. “Now what?”

I straighten my spine, surveying my supernatural army. “Now we see what they can do, and more importantly, if they’ll actually fight for us when the time comes.”

But as I look at their hungry, violent faces, I wonder if I'm making a huge mistake. These aren't soldiers - they're monsters.

And I just might be unleashing hell.

There is only one way to find out, though.

The spirits shift restlessly, their forms rippling like heat waves in the air. Each one radiates different levels of malevolence, and I realise with growing unease that I can feel their crimes, their darkness, seeping into my consciousness.

"Right," I say, trying to project confidence I don't entirely feel. "Let's start with something simple. I need to know your capabilities."

A harsh laugh echoes through the clearing. One of the spirits, a woman with long dark hair and eyes like burning coals, steps forward. "You want to know what we can do, little Death? Are you sure you're ready for that?"

I meet her gaze steadily. "I wouldn't have called you if I wasn't."

"Liar," she hisses, but there's amusement in her tone. "You have no idea what you've got yourself into."

"Then enlighten me," I challenge. "Who are you?"

"I am Lilith." She pauses, clearly expecting a reaction. When I roll my eyes, she sneers. "Not that Lilith, you ignorant child. Though I was named for her. I was a witch in life, burned at the stake for crimes that would make your blood run cold."

"Fascinating," I drawl. "It's good to know the witch hunters got something right. But don't hand me your CV. I need to know if you'll fight when I command it."

Another spirit pushes forward. This one is a large man with battle scars crisscrossing his spectral form. “Fight? Of course we’ll fight. It’s what we were born for, what we died for. The question is, what’s in it for us?”

And there it is. The question I’ve been dreading.

“You get to exist outside the void temporarily,” I say. “Isn’t that enough?”

The warrior laughs, the sound like grinding metal. “You think that’s a reward? To be yanked from our eternal rest to fight your battles?”

“Rest?” I scoff. “Is that what you call it? Floating in darkness, reliving your worst moments?”

That gets their attention. The spirits stir uneasily.

“What are you offering?” Lilith Junior asks, her eyes narrowing.

I take a deep breath. This is the moment of truth. “Serve me well in this fight, and I won’t obliterate you all completely.”

“Obliterate?” the warrior snarls. “You don’t have that kind of power.”

“Don’t I?”

He blinks and shifts slightly. None of them really know what I can do. I don’t even know. But as long as they think I can do this stuff, then that’s all I need for now.

I note that the ex-Deaths are silent as the grave. It’s both annoying and a relief. I don’t need them wittering in my ear while I’m trying to be the big bad.

“In case you’ve forgotten, you’re all here because you earned your place in that void. I don’t care if you go back there, or I annihilate each and every one of you. The choice is yours.”

Torin and Tate move in closer to me, their magick crackling in warning as the spirits grow agitated. But I hold my ground.

“Besides,” I continue, “if Life wins this fight, there won’t be any more death. I’m guessing that means, no more of any of you.”

The spirits exchange looks. That got their attention. I can feel their growing understanding of what’s at stake now.

Lilith gives me a searching stare. “You speak of Life as an enemy. Yet isn’t she the natural opposite of Death? The balance?”

“She was,” I say grimly. “But now she wants to upset the natural order completely.”

“And you think you can stop her?” the warrior asks sceptically.

I lift my chin. “With your help? Yes.”

“Prove it,” Lilith challenges. “Prove you’re worthy to command us.”

I feel Tate and Torin tense next to me, ready for a fight. But this isn’t about physical combat.

“You want proof?” I ask softly. “Fine.”

I close my eyes and reach deep into the well of Death’s power. When I open them again, I know they’re completely black, void-dark. My skin becomes translucent,

showing the darkness flowing through my veins.

“I am Death,” I say, my voice echoing with the power of all those who came before me. “I hold dominion over your souls. I can grant mercy or eternal torment. The choice is yours.”

The spirits recoil as Death’s essence shimmers all around me. The trees wither around us, moaning and weeping. Lilith takes a step back, her burning eyes widening as she takes in the scene around us.

The warrior drops to one knee, others following his lead. “We serve Death,” he growls. “But make no mistake - we serve for the promise of something better, not out of loyalty.”

“Fair enough,” I say, letting my appearance return to normal. The drain of channelling that much power makes my knees weak, but I refuse to show it. “Now, let’s see what you can actually do.”

A slow, wicked smile spreads across Lilith’s face. “With pleasure.”

She raises her spectral hands, and dark energy crackles between them. The air grows thick with malevolent power as other spirits begin demonstrating their abilities.

The warrior manifests ethereal weapons, his expertise with them evident in every movement. Others show skills ranging from ancient magick to more modern combat techniques.

“Impressive,” Tate murmurs. “But can they affect the physical world?”

As if in answer, Lilith flicks her fingers at him, and he goes flying backwards, hitting a tree and slumping to the ground.



“Does that answer your question?” she asks smugly.

“Do that again, and it’s annihilation time,” I growl. “We are not your enemy.”

A ripple of discontent moves through the spirits, but none challenge me directly.

“What would you have us do, commander ?” Lilith asks, making the title sound like an insult.

I’m about to answer when a familiar voice cuts through the clearing.

“Well, isn’t this cosy?”

My blood runs cold as I turn to see Morrigan standing at the edge of the clearing, her green eyes gleaming with malicious amusement.

“I thought she couldn’t leave her spot,” I hiss at Tate.

“She couldn’t,” he replies grimly. “Something’s changed.”

Morrigan laughs, the sound like breaking glass. “Oh, many things have changed, little Death. Your meddling with time again has had interesting consequences. For me, at least. Or did you forget that I was there?”

The spirits shift restlessly, sensing the power all around her.

“What do you want?” I demand, though I already know the answer.

Her gaze fixes on something behind me. “I think you know exactly what I want.”

I don’t need to turn around to know Bram has appeared. I can feel his presence, feel

Morrigan's power inside him responding to her proximity.

"Still no," he growls.

Morrigan's smile turns predatory. "We'll see about that." Her eyes sweep over my assembled spirits. "Nice army you have here. Shame if something were to happen to them."

The threat hangs in the air as tension crackles between us. I can feel the situation balancing on a knife's edge, ready to explode into violence at any moment.

And somewhere in the back of my mind, I hear David's voice: "Now you see why we needed them. The real war is about to begin."

15

IVY

“Shame if something were to happen to them?” I repeat with a harsh laugh. “You do realise these are already dead souls of some of the worst criminals and murderers in history, right?”

Morrigan’s eyes narrow. “Perhaps. But I am the goddess of death. Who do you think they will obey once I get my power back?”

“Too bad you aren’t getting it back then, isn’t it?” Bram growls, seriously pissed off.

“We serve Death,” Lilith declares, her spectral form blazing. “Not some has-been goddess throwing a tantrum over lost power.”

The warrior joins her. “We know of you, Morrigan. You’re not what you once were. Even with your power restored, you’re just another pawn in Life’s game.”

That gets everyone’s attention. My eyes narrow as I look at Morrigan as the thought I had is confirmed. “Is that what this is about? You’re working with Life?”

“Don’t be absurd,” she snaps, but there’s something in her expression that makes me doubt her denial.

“It makes sense,” Tate says slowly. “Life promised you something, didn’t she? Just like she promised Torin’s mother true immortality.”

“Life promises many things,” the warrior growls. “But her endgame isn’t what any of you think.”

“What do you mean?” I demand, turning to him.

He exchanges looks with Lilith, who nods grimly. “We’ve been in the void. We’ve seen things. Life isn’t trying to preserve existence, she’s trying to reshape it completely.”

“Into what?” Bram asks.

“A world where she controls everything,” Lilith explains. “Not just life, but death, too. She wants to be the only power, the only force controlling all existence.”

“That’s why she needs Morrigan,” I say. “She’s collecting power from other ancient beings.”

“Very good, little Death,” Morrigan sneers. “But you’re missing one crucial detail.”

“Oh?” I raise an eyebrow.

“She already has most of what she needs.”

“Which is?”

But before she can answer, a familiar voice rings through the clearing.

“Now, now, Morrigan. You’re spoiling all my surprises.” Life, dressed as Lila, steps out of the shadows. “Hello, Ivy,” she says with Lila’s smile. “Ready to learn what you really signed up for?”

“Fuck you.”

“You know what I hate most about you, Ivy?” Life says, circling our group slowly.  
“You never knew when to stop asking questions.”

Her palm snaps up before I can react. A blast of pure energy hits me square in the chest, and suddenly, I’m being yanked backwards, not through physical space, but through reality itself.

“No!” I hear Bram shout, but his voice sounds distant, distorted.

The world tears apart around me like wet paper. For a moment, I see multiple realities overlapping, and it’s horrific. Life’s true form, ancient and terrible, superimposed over Lila’s face; Morrigan’s power streaming toward Bram like green lightning; my army of souls dissolving into chaos.

Then everything goes black.

When my vision returns, I’m floating in the void. But not like before, when I called the souls. This time I’m fully immersed in it, surrounded by endless darkness and the whispers of the damned.

“Welcome home,” Life’s voice echoes through the void. “Let’s see how well you understand your power when you’re the prey instead of the hunter.”

The darkness shifts around me. Countless souls stir to awareness, their attention fixing on me like predators scenting blood.

“What are you doing?” I demand, trying to sound commanding rather than terrified.

Her laugh reverberates through the void. “Teaching you a lesson about balance.

These souls you've been so casually threatening to destroy? They're part of the natural order too, and now they're going to show you exactly what it means to be hunted by death itself."

The first attack comes from behind. Spectral claws rake across my back. I spin, trying to defend myself, but how do you fight shadows in a realm made of darkness?

"You can't command them here," Life taunts in my head. "This is their domain, not yours. You're just another intruder now."

More souls emerge from the darkness, their forms twisted and dreadful. I recognise Lilith among them, but the real one, and she is not happy to see me.

"You wanted an army?" she hisses. "Congratulations. Now you get to face one."

I draw on Death's power, trying to assert control, but something's wrong. My connection feels muted and distant.

"Oh, did I forget to mention?" Life's voice drips with false concern. "I've been planning this for a very long time. The void isn't just a prison anymore; it's a trap, and you, my dear new Death, just walked right into it."

The souls surge forward, and the hunt begins.

16

TATE

One second Ivy is there, the next she's gone. She was ripped away by Life's power so fast that even my magick couldn't reach her in time. The clearing erupts into chaos. The souls she commanded scatter like smoke in the wind, some disappearing entirely, others turning on us with violence that I know they were just waiting to unleash.

"Where is she?" Bram demands, magick crackling around him as he advances on Life. "What did you do?"

Life—wearing Lila's face again, like an ill-fitting mask—just smiles. "I put her where she belongs. In the void with all her subjects."

"Bring her back," I snarl, my ancestral magick arcing from my fingertips.

"Or what?" Life asks, examining her nails with casual disinterest. "You'll try to smite me? Please."

Morrigan moves to stand beside Life, and suddenly, their alliance is crystal clear. "Now then," the war goddess says, her eyes fixed on Bram. "Shall we discuss terms?"

"Terms?" Torin spits. "You just sent Ivy to her death!"

"Death can't die," Life corrects him. "But she can suffer. She can learn her place in

the natural order, and you all can help ensure she stays exactly where I put her.”

The remaining souls swirl around us, their loyalty clearly shifted. Whatever control Ivy had over them is gone.

“Never,” Bram growls, but I can see the conflict in his eyes. Morrigan’s power inside him is responding to her proximity, but it’s recoiling, and not trying to return, as Bram said.

I process all this information in rapid succession. I need to think faster. We’re outnumbered and outgunned, and our strongest player just got kicked off the board. But there has to be a way...

“What exactly do you want?” I ask, buying time. “Besides Bram’s power?”

Life’s smile widens. “Want to negotiate, warlock? How pragmatic of you.” Her smile makes my skin crawl. Everything about her is wrong - the way she moves, the ancient power radiating off her in waves that set my warlock senses screaming.

“I’m listening,” I say carefully, positioning myself between her and Bram. Not that my magick would do much good if she really wanted to get to him.

“It’s quite simple, really,” Life says. “Bram returns Morrigan’s power willingly, and I’ll consider letting your precious Ivy out of the void. Eventually.”

“And if he doesn’t?” Torin asks, his vampire speed making him a dark blur as he moves to flank me in front of Bram.

“Then she stays there. Forever. Being hunted by every dark soul she so arrogantly thought she could control.” Life shrugs. “Either way, I win. The only question is how many of you I have to destroy in the process.”



The remaining spirits circle us like sharks, their forms flickering in and out of existence. That has to mean something, but what? Are they unable to exist for longer than a few minutes? Or has Life's presence disrupted their energy?

"You're lying," I say, my senses picking up something off about her aura. "You need something else. This isn't just about Morrigan's power."

Her expression tightens almost imperceptibly. Got you.

"Careful, warlock," Morrigan warns. "You're in no position to make accusations."

But I press on, drawing on years of magickal knowledge. "You said you've been planning this for a long time. Why? What changed?"

The flash of fear in her eyes is fleeting, and I could have imagined it, but I don't think I did.

"When Ivy changed time, she changed something else, too. Something that affects you."

Life's power crackles through the clearing, making the spirits scatter. "Enough talking! Choose now. Give up Morrigan's power, or Ivy stays in the void."

My ancestral magick pulses as understanding floods through me.

"The void," I say slowly. "It's not just a prison for souls anymore, is it? It's become something else. Something that even you're afraid of."

Life's form flickers, just for a moment, but it's enough to confirm my suspicion. The spirits around us shift uneasily, as if they can sense the truth in my words.

“The time change didn’t just affect the physical world,” I continue, piecing it together. “It changed the fundamental nature of death itself, and by extension, the void.”

“You’re just guessing,” Life sneers, but there’s an edge of panic in her voice.

“Am I?” I take a careful step forward, my magick ready. “Then why are the spirits flickering? They should be stable in your presence. After all, you’re Life itself. Unless...”

“Unless what?” Torin asks, his vampire senses clearly picking up on the same disturbance to the energy around us that I am.

“Unless the void isn’t just Death’s domain anymore,” Bram murmurs. “It’s become something new. Something neither Life nor Death fully controls.”

Morrigan shifts uncomfortably. “We should end this now,” she tells Life.

“No,” Life snaps. “Let them talk. Let them theorise. It changes nothing.”

But I can see it now. The way her borrowed form ripples, like reality is having trouble holding her together. The spirits aren’t flickering because they’re unstable. They’re flickering because reality is becoming unstable around Life.

“That’s why you need Morrigan’s power,” I say. “Not to fight Death, but to stabilise yourself. To stop whatever’s happening to you. You’re...” I let out a snort of pure amusement. “... dying!”

Life’s attack comes without warning - a blast of pure energy that would have obliterated me if I hadn’t already been coiling a shield spell. I fling it up, but even so, the force of it drives me to my knees.

Life's power crackles around me like lightning, but there's something off about it, something fractured. The knowledge that she's dying changes everything but also raises a thousand new questions. Questions we don't have time for as another blast of energy tears through my shield.

"You dare mock me?" Life's voice distorts, Lila's features twisting into Life's true form. "I am eternal! I am?—"

"Desperate," I cut in, throwing up another shield as spirits dive-bomb us from above. "And getting more desperate by the second."

Torin blurs into action, his vampire speed mixed with his mage magick, letting him despatch three spirits before they can reach Bram. But there are too many, and they're getting stronger as Life's control weakens.

"We need to retreat," Bram says, his magick creating shadows that confuse and disperse the spirits around us. "Now that we know?—"

"You know nothing!" Life's scream tears reality itself, making my ears bleed. The clearing warps around us, trees bending like they're made of rubber. "And you'll never find out more. Kill them all!"

The spirits surge forward en masse. I throw everything I have into a barrier spell, but I can feel it cracking under their assault. Torin grabs my arm, ready to vampire-speed us out of there, but Morrigan steps forward.

"Enough of this childish behaviour!" The war goddess's half-power explodes outward but still freezes everything in place. I dread to think what she could do with her full magick. "This isn't the plan, Life. We need them alive."

Life's form flickers violently. "Plans change."

“Not this one.” Morrigan’s voice is cold, sharp. “Not when we’re so close.”

For a moment, I think Life will ignore her.

“You have three days,” Life says, her voice eerily calm again. “Bring me what I want, or Ivy suffers eternally. Trust me when I say she will be suffering in there. The void is far worse than any of you can imagine.”

She vanishes between one breath and the next, taking the spirits with her. Morrigan lingers just long enough to give us a look that could mean anything, and then she, too, disappears.

I let my barrier drop, stumbling as exhaustion hits me. “Well,” I manage, “that was informative.”

“Informative?” Torin catches me before I fall. “Life is dying. Ivy’s trapped in some nightmare void, and we have three days to figure out what the hell is really going on. How is that informative?”

“Because now we know Life’s weakness,” I say quietly. “She’s running out of time, which means we are all running out of time. Life dies. We all die. That gives Ivy more power than anyone. She will be the only one left standing. It makes her a god.”

“So Life wants Ivy’s essence? The essence of Death? But the thing I can’t wrap my head around is how is Life dying?” Torin asks a damn good question.

I nod, already thinking ahead. “Exactly. It means we need to find out exactly what Ivy or the other Deaths, maybe, did to cause this. And more importantly?—”

“How to use it against her and save Ivy,” Torin finishes.

“Or the other way around,” I mutter. We may have three days to save Ivy, but something tells me we will be too late if we wait that long. She has already suffered too much with the fracturing of her soul. We can’t keep her in there for any longer than a few hours, at best.

“We need help,” I state.

“From who? Who can we even trust anymore?”

“Vex,” I spit out grimly. “Fucking Vex. Let’s go.” I wave my hand and transport us to the north of England, where Vex will be waiting with that smug grin of his.

Fucking dick.

17

IVY

Darkness pulses around me like a living thing, pressing against my skin with an almost physical weight. The void is nothing like I expected—not empty space or swirling chaos, but something worse—something hungry.

I can feel them out there, the souls I once commanded, now twisted into something feral by this place. Their hatred radiates through the darkness in waves. The hunter becomes the hunted. There's probably some cosmic justice in that.

A whisper of movement to my left catches my attention. I spin, reaching instinctively for my chaos magick. I have a feeling it will be feared more. At least, that is my hope.

“Come on then,” I mutter, backing up against what feels like a wall, though I can't actually see it. “If you're going to?—”

The attack comes from above instead. Claws rake across my shoulder before I can dodge. Pain flares, sharp and real, too real for a place that supposedly exists outside of reality. I kick out blindly, connecting with something that feels like smoke but hits like concrete.

A familiar laugh echoes through the darkness. Marcus. Of course he'd be here, waiting. How many other of those I've assassinated over the years are lurking in this nightmare?

“Not so powerful now, are you, Poison ?” His voice seems to come from everywhere and nowhere. “No one to hide behind. Nowhere to run.”

“I never hid behind anyone,” I snap, trying to track his movement through the darkness. My shoulder throbs where he caught me, but I can’t tell if I’m actually bleeding. Everything feels different here.

Another whisper of movement, this time accompanied by multiple voices - more souls joining the hunt. They’re toying with me. They could have swarmed me already, torn me apart. Instead, they’re drawing it out.

The darkness shifts again, and I know I have seconds before they attack en masse. I’m not helpless. I never was. I refuse to be now.

Taking a deep breath, I have one option right now.

Run.

I sprint through the darkness, letting instinct guide me. My chaos magick may not work the same here, but years as The Syndicate’s assassin taught me other skills. How to move silently. How to become a shadow. How to survive. How to kill without a trace.

“I remember how you killed me,” a voice whispers. I turn my head to see Dominic, a dark warlock who’d been trafficking supernatural children. “You made it look like a rival’s curse. So clever. So artistic.”

“Nothing artistic about this,” another voice joins in - Selena Winters, a blood witch who’d been harvesting vampire hearts, closes in, forcing me to a stop. “We get to tear you apart now, piece by piece.”

I duck behind a column, controlling my breathing. The void shifts around me, making it impossible to tell if I'm actually moving forward or just circling in place. But staying still means death. Or whatever passes for death in a place like this.

"You're just prolonging the inevitable," Marcus calls out. "We know all your methods, Poison. You killed most of us in different ways. We talk, you know."

"Nice, you've got a mother's meeting going on in here," I call out. "I'm honoured to be the topic of your conversations."

"Don't be," a soul hisses right in my face, and I rear back. It's the vampire paedophile I coaxed into biting me after injecting holy water into my veins.

A tendril of something cold wraps around my throat. I surge forward, barely avoiding the spectral fangs that snap through the space where my throat had been. The movement puts me in a more open area - vulnerable.

"Remember me?" A new voice, closer. Andrew Cliff, my very first hit. A vampire who'd been turning too many humans to avoid suspicion. "You were so uncertain then. But you learned quickly, didn't you? Became Death's perfect weapon."

I spin again and run in the opposite direction.

They're herding me. Each attack is pushing me in a specific direction. But why? What's worse than what's already hunting me?

"All those careful plans," Selena taunts. "All those creative deaths. Bet you never thought you'd end up here, did you?"

I need to think. The void operates on different rules. Rules I don't understand yet. But there has to be a way out. Life wouldn't have trapped me here if escape was



impossible. She wants something from the others, which means I'm leverage. Which means...

A flash of movement. I dive and roll, but not fast enough. Pain explodes across my back as ghostly claws infused with dark magick find their mark. The darkness seems to pulse with their satisfaction.

"Found your limits yet, Poison?" Marcus laughs. "Or should we help you discover what true supernatural torture feels like?"

Getting to my feet, I press deeper into the darkness, following the thrum of energy I can feel all around me. The void isn't just a prison. It's something else. Something is changing.

"Where are you going, little assassin?" Dominic's voice echoes. "There's nowhere to hide that we can't find you."

He's right about that. They can sense me here just as easily as I once sensed them in the living world. But sensing isn't the same as catching.

I launch myself forward as magick tears through the space where I'd been. The darkness shifts and warps around me, but that humming grows stronger. Like a heartbeat.

"Remember how you killed me, Poison?" A new voice now, Rachel Storm, a necromancer who'd been raising children as her personal army. "Slipped into my house like a shadow. Poisoned my tea with dried vampire blood. The agony lasted days."

"You deserved worse," I spit, ducking under a ghostly tendril that tries to snag my arm.

The words give me a burst of energy, reminding me why I became who I am. These weren't innocent souls. They were monsters. And I refuse to let monsters win.

I sprint forward, letting my assassin's training take over. In the living world, I'd learned to move through shadows. Here, in the void, everything is shadow. Instead of fighting it, I let it envelop me, become part of it.

Their enraged screams echo behind me as I weave through the darkness, changing direction randomly. My eyes are adjusting to the gloom, and I spot a wall to my right. I use it to propel myself forward, staying low, staying quiet. Just like hunting in the real world, except now I'm the prey.

Something whistles past my ear—a ghostly weapon of some kind. I don't stop to analyse it. Can't stop. Have to keep moving.

I sense the souls trying to surround me, but they're spreading too thin. They might know this place better, but I know pursuit. Know how hunters think, and right now, they're making the biggest mistake a hunter can make. They're letting their anger control them.

I see a crevice in the void's fabric and squeeze into it, making myself as small as possible. The souls rush past, their fury making them careless. Making them miss what's right in front of them.

As their voices fade into the distance, I finally let myself breathe. I need to think. Need to plan. The void may be their domain, but it's changing. The pulsing in the darkness has a life of its own.

Life trapped me here for a reason. She's using me as leverage, yes, but there's more to it. Something about this place scares her, and anything that scares a primordial force is worth understanding.

I press my hand against the wall of my hiding spot, feeling that steady thrum. Maybe getting out of here isn't about fighting or running.

Maybe it's about understanding what the void is becoming.

I stay perfectly still in my hiding spot, controlling my breathing like I learned during my first years of training. The souls are still out there, their rage vibrating through the void like a twisted heartbeat, but they've lost my trail for now.

The wall beneath my fingers ripples. It's almost like the void is trying to communicate, if I could just understand its language. I close my eyes, though it makes no difference in this darkness, and focus on the sensation.

It changes pitch slightly. There's a pattern to it, something almost familiar. It's like the pulse of my chaos magick, but darker. Older.

"Think, Ivy," I mutter to myself. "Life wouldn't trap you here without a way out. She needs something from them, which means..."

A ghostly hand suddenly plunges through the wall next to my head. I roll away, deeper into the darkness, heart pounding.

"Found a trace!" Andrew's voice rings out. "This way!"

No time left to hide. I sprint through the void, letting instinct guide me. The thrumming becomes a beat, and it grows stronger with each step, almost like it's leading me somewhere. But can I trust it? Can I trust anything in this place?

18

brAM

MistHallow Academy looms before us, surrounded by mist, unsurprisingly. It's a beautiful Gothic masterpiece of dark stone and twisted spires that pierce the misty sky. Magick radiates from every brick, every gargoyle, every shadow—old magick, wild magick, the kind that makes the foreign power inside me stir restlessly.

Morrigan's magick. Though calling it hers feels wrong now. It's changed since inhabiting my body, grown wilder, more feral. And it's refusing to leave.

"You okay?" Tate asks, noticing my discomfort. "Your aura's flickering."

"The magick here," I gesture vaguely at the academy, "it's making Morrigan's power restless. More restless."

Torin eyes me warily. "Restless, how?"

Before I can answer, the massive iron gates swing open with a sound like thunder. A familiar figure strolls out, all casual grace and calculated nonchalance.

"Well, well," Vex drawls, his eyes gleaming with amusement. "Look what the apocalypse dragged in."

He looks different from the last time I saw him. Less stud, more academic. It's disturbing. Some things should never change, and Vex's arrogant attitude is one of

them. Is this another fuck up? Please don't let it be another fuck up.

"You're looking very, not you," Tate says, clearly sharing my thoughts.

Vex snorts. "Still the same badass. But now with some responsibility. I'm a Teaching Assistant. Turns out corrupting young minds is quite fulfilling when you're getting paid for it."

"Great," I mutter as Tate rolls his eyes. But I'm glad to see he hasn't changed. "We need your help," I add as the power inside me writhes again, making me grit my teeth.

Vex's expression sharpens, the facade of casual amusement dropping away. "My help? Again? This is becoming a regular occurrence. Where is Ivy?"

"She isn't here. It's actually Ivy that needs your help," I grit out, much to Tate's annoyance.

"Oh? And what new mess has the little shifter got herself into now?" Vex asks with a smirk.

"Are you going to help or not?" Torin demands.

"Me? No." Vex turns, gesturing for us to follow. "But I know someone who can. Or at least, someone who understands what's really happening."

"So you do know what's going on?"

"Sort of. Professor Blackthorn is more up to speed."

We follow him through the grounds, past groups of students who stare at us with

undisguised curiosity. The magick here feels ancient, primal in a way that calls to the power inside me. It wants to reach out, to connect with the wild energy that saturates this place.

We reach a heavy wooden door carved with runes I don't recognise. Vex knocks once, then pushes it open.

"Professor Blackthorn," he calls out. "We have visitors from Thornfield."

The office beyond is exactly what you'd expect from a magickal academy's headmaster - floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, arcane artefacts, a massive desk covered in scrolls. The man behind it, however, is not what I expected.

Professor Blackthorn looks young, maybe late twenties, with sharp features and eyes that are a startling shade of blue. But there is definitely more to him than meets the eye. He is old and powerful and hopefully, our salvation in this dire situation we have found ourselves in.

"Ah," he says, standing. "Death's champions. I've been expecting you." His gaze fixes on me. "Especially you, Mr Sinclair. We have much to discuss about what's growing inside you."

"Growing?" I repeat, not liking the sound of that. The power writhes again in response to his words.

"Yes," Professor Blackthorn gestures for us to sit. "What you're carrying isn't just Morrigan's power anymore. It's evolving, adapting... breeding, in a sense."

"Breeding?" Tate's voice rises sharply. "What exactly does that mean?"

The professor's eyes narrow as he studies me. "Wild magick is like a living entity.

When contained within a vessel—particularly a powerful one like yourself, a Dark Fae Royal and one of Morrigan’s bloodline—it doesn’t remain static. It grows, changes, develops new characteristics. It is fundamentally yours now, Mr Sinclair. Unfortunately, this brings up a whole host of problems, which have nothing to do with the Life and Death predicament we are in.” He stifles his amusement.

“You’re a god now, asshole,” Vex states with that shit-eating grin.

“Err,” I stammer, as that thought had not even entered my head. “But why won’t it go back to her?”

“It’s not recognising her as its source anymore, not to mention, you are infinitely more powerful at your base level.” Blackthorn gives me a nod as if that fixes and explains it all.

The power inside me pulses, and it feels protective of me.

“So,” Blackthorn says. “Tell me about Life and what she’s done with Death.”

“Why don’t you start by telling us how you know all this shit?” Torin starts.

“I know everything,” Blackthorn states. “I get that Thornfield’s headmaster is a bit of a lacklustre feature, more puppet than hands on, so I’m glad you came to me with this and not him. Not that he has any idea what is going on under his own roof. He is ridiculous.” The last three words are muttered under his breath, but I press my lips together not to laugh. I have to agree. I don’t even think I’ve ever seen him, let alone spoken to him. We appear in a massive shambles compared to this place. It’s a bit sad, actually, now that I see what we are missing out on. It also makes sense why Vex jumped at the chance to abandon the ship. He is nothing if not a self-preservationist.

But aren’t we all...

My eyes narrow as my thoughts wander off in a direction that has nothing to do with the situation we are in.

“The void is changing. We have necromancers here who have been studying it since they felt the shift.”

Ooh, okay. That makes sense. I guess it does affect everyone, not just us, after all.

“Go on,” I prompt when he stops.

“Everything is changing,” Blackthorn says grimly. “When you altered time to save Ivy, you didn’t just change events. You changed the fundamental nature of reality itself. The void is becoming something new, something neither Life nor Death can fully control.”

“And that’s why Life is dying,” Tate concludes.

“Dying?” Vex straightens up with a frown. “Life can’t die.”

“Apparently, she can,” I say. “And she’s trapped Ivy in the void to force us to give her what she wants.”

“Which is?”

“Morrigan’s power.”

Blackthorn’s eyes narrow. “Life wants Morrigan’s power? How interesting. That wasn’t something I considered. Do you know why?”

“To save herself somehow? We don’t know. We are here to see if you can help us figure it out.”



Blackthorn rises, moving to one of the towering bookshelves. “The problem isn’t just that Life is dying. The problem is why she can die at all. She made a fundamental mistake - one that’s corrupted her very essence.”

“Lila,” I say, the realisation hitting me. “Lila was a real creature, and Life possessed Lila for too long.”

“Yes.” Blackthorn pulls out an ancient text, its pages crackling. “Immortal beings aren’t meant to inhabit lesser vessels, even supernatural ones, for extended periods. A few hours, maybe days at most. But Life...” He shakes his head. “She stayed in Lila’s form for years, playing at being Ivy’s best friend, manipulating events from within.”

“How do you know this?” I ask with a frown. “How do you know about Lila?”

“She is here on death’s door, Mr Sinclair.”

“Fuck,” I mutter.

“So being Lila poisoned her,” Tate concludes. “Being in a lesser vessel for that long... it changed her. Weakened her.”

“If Life dies, the void collapses,” Blackthorn says. “Everything collapses. The natural order depends on both forces existing in balance. Without Life, there can be no Death - there would be nothing to die. Except...”

“Except Ivy,” I say, the power inside me surging. “She would survive because she’s Death incarnate.”

“She wouldn’t just survive,” Tate adds his revelation from earlier. “She’d be the only thing left. A god in a dead universe.”

“That’s why Life needs Morrigan’s power,” I say slowly. “Wild magick is pure, primal. She thinks it can purge the mortality that’s corrupting her and make her a god, too.”

The power writhes inside me, and suddenly, its reluctance to leave makes perfect sense. It knows what Life intends to use it for.

“But she’s trapped Ivy in the void,” Torin says. “Why? If everything’s at stake...”

“Insurance,” Blackthorn says simply. “And containment. She needs Ivy, where she can’t interfere while she attempts to save herself. But she’s miscalculated badly.”

“How so?” I ask.

“Because the void is the one place where Death’s power is absolute. By trapping Ivy there, she’s given her access to power even Life doesn’t fully understand.”

The magick inside me pulses, almost eagerly, and I know now it’s been trying to tell me something all along.

19

IVY

The void is... different.

Not the endless darkness I remember, not the swirling chaos of lost souls. It's become something else entirely. Something that pulses with a strange, familiar energy that calls to my very essence.

Time doesn't exist here as I run faster than I ever thought possible. Or maybe it exists all at once. I can feel every death that ever was or will be, every soul that's passed through this place. They whisper to me, not in fear or anger like before, but with an almost reverent curiosity.

Life thinks she's imprisoned me. She doesn't understand what she's done.

"You feel it too," a voice says behind me, drawing me to a halt. It's familiar, but I can't place where I know it from. I turn to find another Death watching me with eyes that mirror mine. One of my predecessors, though, which one, I'm not sure. "The change."

"Everything's different," I agree, watching as reality ripples around us like dark water. "The void is responding to me."

"To us," another Death appears, this one older, wearing a form from centuries past. "We've all felt it. The shift in power."

“Mazzarat?” I murmur, but I need no response. I know I’m talking to the first-ever Death.

More of them emerge from the darkness - Deaths from throughout history, each one distinct yet somehow part of me. Part of what I am.

“Life made a mistake,” the Mazzarat says, moving closer. “She thought trapping you here would weaken you.”

“Instead, she’s given me direct access to the source of our power. To all of it.”

The souls that Life turned against me swirl nearby, no longer hostile but waiting. Watching. They know something’s coming. Something big.

“But why now?” I ask the assembled Deaths. “Why is everything changing?”

“Because Life has weakened herself,” the Mazzarat says, his form flickering like smoke. “By staying in a mortal vessel for so long, she corrupted her own essence.”

I frown. “Mortal vessel?” The penny hits the deck with a loud thud. “Lila?”

“Indeed. And now?—”

“Now she’s dying,” I interrupt as this knowledge floods my brain. “But that’s impossible. Life can’t die.”

“Can’t she?” Another Death—this one appearing as a young woman with silver hair—moves through the shifting darkness. “She chose to experience mortality, to live as one of them, and mortality, once tasted, changes everything.”

“What is Lila?” I don’t know why I need to ask this, I just do.

“She is a shifter, much like you once were. Not immortal in the everlasting sense.”

“So, was she always Life, or did I know the real Lila?” This is important to me. I need to know.

“You knew the real girl for a while. That is who you became friends with. Life took advantage of that.”

The void pulses around us, and I feel something stirring deep within its fabric. The souls draw closer, their whispers growing urgent.

“She stayed in Lila’s form for years. Playing at being my friend, manipulating everything from the inside. All that time... Kai...” I choke back the sob. I’m not upset over him exactly, although that betrayal stung. It upsets me that I thought Lila could be so cruel. I should’ve known something wasn’t right. I could’ve helped her. “Is Lila okay?”

“She is with those who can help her recover as much as possible. It is not clear what her outlook is.”

“Fuck,” I growl. “I’m going to kill that bitch!”

“Focus,” Mazzarat snaps his fingers under my nose as my rage gets the better of me. “All that time, she was poisoning herself, and now she thinks Morrigan’s wild magick can save her. Can purge the mortality from her essence.”

“But she’s wrong. That’s not how it works. That’s not how death works.”

The Deaths around me nod, their forms becoming more solid as power continues to build around us.

“The natural order requires balance,” Mazzarat says. “Life and Death, two sides of the same coin. But Life...” He shakes his head. “Life forgot that. She tried to control both sides.”

“And now everything’s at risk,” the silver-haired Death adds. “If Life dies, the void collapses. Reality collapses. Everything ends except...”

“Except me,” I whisper, feeling that revelation hit my guts hard. “I’d be the only thing left.”

The souls swirl faster, their whispers becoming a chorus of understanding. They’re not just watching anymore - they’re waiting. For me.

“But there’s something else,” I say, sensing it in the way the void responds to my presence. “Something Life didn’t consider when she trapped me here.”

The void pulses harder, and the souls’ whispers grow urgent. They know what’s coming. What has to happen.

“Life thinks she knows everything,” Mazzarat says, his form shifting like smoke. “She thinks wild magick will save her, that she can control death itself. But she’s blind to what’s really happening.”

“She doesn’t see it,” I say, watching as something new mingles with the darkness around my hands - a faint glow, barely perceptible but growing stronger. “She’s so focused on saving herself, on maintaining her control, that she can’t see what she’s actually done.”

The silver-haired Death moves closer, her eyes fixed on the light threading through my darkness. “She trapped you here thinking it would contain you. Weaken you. She never considered that the void would respond to you like this.”

“That by trying to imprison Death itself, she’d give me access to something more.”

The souls swirl faster, their whispers becoming a chorus of understanding. Life doesn’t know. She’s desperate to steal Morrigan’s power, to purge herself of the mortality that’s killing her. But she’ll never change. Even if she succeeds, she’ll keep trying to control death, to disrupt the natural order.

“Balance,” Mazzarat says softly. “That’s what she never understood. What she’ll never understand.”

Power surges through the void, through me, and I understand at last. This isn’t about saving Life. This isn’t even about stopping her. This is about what comes next. What has to come next.

“Both sides of the coin,” I say, watching as light and darkness dance around my hands. “Not fighting for control, but existing in harmony.”

The Deaths around me watch as the light grows stronger, weaving through the darkness like threads of dawn breaking through night. It doesn’t fight the void’s power, it enhances it, completes it.

“Life would never willingly share her power,” Mazzarat says. “She’s held it too long, become too corrupted by her own fear of ending.”

“But power isn’t meant to be hoarded,” I say, understanding flooding through me. “It’s meant to flow. Like the cycle itself. Birth, death, rebirth. Everything connected.”

The void shifts, and I feel something new stirring within it. Within me. Every soul that’s ever passed through here has left an imprint. Not just of their death, but of their life. Their beginnings, their endings, their transformations.

“She’s playing with forces she doesn’t understand,” David says, drawing my attention to him. “Thinking Morrigan’s wild magick can save her. But wild magick isn’t meant to be controlled.”

“No,” I agree, feeling the power build. “It’s meant to be part of the balance. Just like death. Just like life.”

“And what happens when Life finally fails? When her desperate grab for power destroys her?”

“Someone has to maintain the cycle,” I say, watching as the light and darkness swirl together around me. “Someone who understands both sides. Someone who’s lived it, died for it, been reborn in it.” That’s what happened when I was torn apart. I know that now. I died. It’s why Tate died. We are bound together by a fate so powerful, one can’t live without the other. It’s also why everything got so fucked up in the aftermath.

The souls press closer, their energies merging with the void’s power, with my power. They’re not just witnessing anymore - they’re contributing. Every life they lived, every death they experienced, flowing into this moment.

“Life thinks she’s won,” I whisper, feeling the transformation begin. “She has no idea what’s really coming.”



20

TORIN

Understanding dawns on Bram's face. Whatever has been going on with him since he obtained Morrigan's magick, it finally has a purpose, it seems.

"Bram?" I prompt as he remains still as a statue. "What is it?"

"It's not just Morrigan's magick Life is after," he says slowly, his voice tight with revelation. "It's where that magick comes from. The source."

"What do you mean? I thought Morrigan's magick was the source of the Death power. That's what she said."

"No," Bram says, shaking his head. "Older than that. Morrigan has to get it from somewhere, goddess or not."

"The balance point," Blackthorn says, standing abruptly and sending his chair scooting back to hit the wall behind him. "The place where life and death meet. Where wild magick originates."

"Yes, exactly," Bram agrees. "Think about it. Morrigan's power has always been different. Untamed. Because it comes from that intersection."

I'm not really following, but I nod anyway to make it look like I am. I shoot a quick glance at Tate, and he seems to get it, but then he always had more brains than the

rest of us. “And Life trapped Ivy in the void because...”

“Because she thinks that’s where Death’s power is strongest,” Bram’s eyes meet mine, urgent with understanding. “So when she returns, Life can take it from her. She thinks Ivy can absorb it while she’s there and return with god-like powers. Add to that Morrigan’s already god powers and... BOOM!” He makes an explosive gesture with his hands.

“But she’s wrong,” Blackthorn pipes up excitedly. “The void isn’t just Death’s domain. It’s the threshold. The crossing point. Where everything begins and ends.”

“So, you mean it’s Life’s domain as well?” I ask, getting more lost by the second.

“Yes. And she just gave Ivy direct access to it. She’s not just trapped in death’s domain...”

“She’s at the source of all Celtic god power,” Blackthorn finishes, his eyes gleaming.

“Celtic god power?” I ask, now not caring if I sound as thick as two short planks. “There are different sources of power dependent on culture?”

“Yes, obviously,” he says, giving me a look that tells me exactly what he thinks of my dumbarse question.

“Life has no idea what she’s done. She thinks she’s containing Death, but she’s actually given her access to something far more fundamental,” Bram adds, ignoring the sidebar.

“The power to become both,” Tate murmurs. “Life doesn’t understand. She can’t be saved because she’s forgotten what balance means. But Ivy...”

I actually think I get it now and test those waters. “Ivy has lived both sides. She understands the cycle in a way Life never could.”

“Not just lived both sides,” Blackthorn says, pulling an ancient text from his shelf. “She died for it. Was reborn in it. That kind of sacrifice leaves an imprint on the soul that can’t be erased. May I inquire how she died?” he asks, glaring at me.

“Died? She didn’t die. He did.” I point to Tate.

“She must have. To become Death, one has to die...” Blackthorn trails off, eyes narrowed.

“When she was torn apart,” I croak. “She must’ve died.” I glare at Tate. “It’s why you died. Or maybe you died and took her with you. Your fated bond...”

“Yeah,” Tate murmurs. “I think she died and took me with her. It makes more sense.”

“Fuck,” I breathe out and earn myself a sharp glare from Blackthorn.

“Well, now she’s in the one place where that imprint matters most,” Bram adds, his magick sparking around him. “Where the boundaries between life and death are thinnest.”

“But what does that mean for Ivy?” I ask, because that’s all I really care about. “How does this help us get her back?”

Blackthorn’s expression grows serious. “We don’t.”

“The hell we don’t,” I growl, taking a step forward, but Vex’s hand on my arm stops me, and he shakes his head.

“No, he’s right,” Bram says softly. “We can’t get her back because she has to choose to come back. And when she does?—”

“She won’t be the same,” Tate finishes. “Will she?”

“No,” Blackthorn confirms. “The void is changing her, just as it’s meant to. Life thought she was imprisoning Death, but she was actually initiating a transformation that’s been waiting to happen since the moment Ivy first died and came back.”

“You’re saying this was always going to happen? That everything was fate? It was all leading to this?”

A shimmer appears in the corner of the room, and I stare at it, wondering what it is.

“You may proceed,” Blackthorn says in a voice that smacks of authority.

Morrigan appears in the room, and Bram rises and spins, backing away from her. “No! It doesn’t want you.”

“I’m not here for that. You all seem to forget my full title.”

“Goddess of war, fate and death,” I mutter.

“Precisely, young vampire. Fate. You speak of fate, and you are correct. This is all fated to happen.”

“You are working with Life,” I spit out, pointing at her accusingly.

She shakes her head. “I don’t work with anyone. I wanted my powers back. If she thinks she can take them from me, she has another thing coming.”

“You don’t even have them,” I point out. “Bram does.”

Her eyes zero in on him. “Indeed. And he will give them back.”

“No, he won’t,” Bram says, but Blackthorn strides between them and raises his hands.

“We are not here to fight. You are both guests in my house. I suggest you tone it down a notch before you offend that house, and it removes you permanently.”

Morrigan’s lips curve into a wry smile. “Your house has no power over me, Professor. But I’ll respect its boundaries, for now.” She turns her attention back to Bram. “The magick chose you because it needed to evolve. To change, just as Ivy is changing.”

“What do you know about what’s happening to Ivy?” I demand.

“I know that Life’s desperation has blinded her to the truth,” Morrigan says. “The old ways are dying. The separation of powers - Life, Death, even my own dominion over fate - it’s becoming obsolete.”

“Because of what happened when we changed time?” Tate asks.

“That was merely the catalyst,” she replies. “The breaking point that set everything in motion. But this transformation has been coming for centuries. The world is different now. It needs different gods.”

“Gods who understand balance,” Bram says softly, and his magick ripples through the air, curling around its ex-Mistress.

“Yes.” Morrigan’s eyes gleam as she reaches out to touch it. “Which is why my

power won't return to me. It's found a better vessel. One who understands that balance is not about separation, but integration."

"Like Ivy," I say. "She's not just becoming more powerful. She's becoming something new entirely."

"The first of her kind," Blackthorn agrees. "A being who embodies both life and death. Beginning and end. Creation and destruction."

"But what about Life?" Tate asks. "If she's dying..."

Morrigan's expression hardens. "She sealed her own fate when she chose to cling to power rather than embrace change. The universe has no patience for gods who refuse to evolve."

"So what do we do?" I ask, feeling distinctly out of my depth. "Just sit here while Ivy transforms into some new kind of god, and Life dies?"

"Yes," Morrigan states simply.

"No," Blackthorn contradicts. "We prepare."

"Prepare for what?" Tate asks.

"For what comes after," Blackthorn says grimly. "When Life dies, there will be a vacuum of power. Nature abhors a vacuum. If Ivy isn't ready to step into that role..."

"Everything collapses," Bram finishes. "The balance between life and death will shatter."

"Life has no idea what she's done," I say, shaking my head. "She thinks she's just

containing Death until she can steal her power.”

“Her ignorance makes her more dangerous,” Morrigan says. “She’s tampering with forces she doesn’t understand, desperate to save herself. She doesn’t realise she’s actually accelerating her own destruction.”

“And Ivy’s transformation,” Tate adds quietly.

“Precisely.” Blackthorn moves to another shelf, pulling down more books. “Which gives us an advantage. Life won’t be preparing for what’s really coming.”

“And what exactly is coming?” I demand, tired of all this cryptic god talk.

Morrigan’s eyes meet mine, ancient and knowing. “The end of the old ways and the beginning of something entirely new. The question is not whether it will happen, but whether the world will survive the transition.”

“And that depends on Ivy,” Bram says softly. “On whether she can become what she needs to be before Life’s death triggers the collapse.”

I clench my fists, hating how helpless I feel. “So we really can’t do anything to help her?”

“We can make sure she has something to come back to,” Tate says firmly. “Make sure we’re ready when she does return.”

“And how exactly do we do that?” I ask.

Blackthorn moves back to his desk, spreading out several ancient texts. “By understanding exactly what’s happening in the void. The necromancers here have been monitoring the changes. The barriers between life and death are becoming more

permeable.”

“Meaning?” I prompt, because I’m really getting tired of everyone speaking in riddles.

“Meaning the void isn’t just a place of death anymore. It’s becoming something new. A place of transformation.”

“Like a cosmic crucible,” Tate adds thoughtfully. “Where Ivy is being remade.”

“But into what?” I ask, because that’s the real question, isn’t it?

“Something that encompasses both life and death,” Morrigan says. “A being of balance, not division. Which is why my power won’t return to me. It’s evolving, just as she is.”

“Through Mr Sinclair,” Blackthorn nods. “The magick needed a vessel that understood both sides. A Dark Fae with a connection to death, but also to life through his own transformations.”

“Great,” I mutter. “So we’ve got evolving magick, a transforming void, and Ivy stuck in the middle of it while Life thinks she’s just containing Death until she can steal her power.” I run a hand through my hair in frustration. “What do we actually do about any of this?”

“We prepare the way,” Blackthorn says, tapping one of the ancient texts. “There are rituals, ways to stabilise the transformation. To ensure that when Ivy does emerge, the world is ready to receive what she’s becoming.”

“No more rituals,” I growl.



“And if it’s not?” Tate asks quietly, ignoring me.

The silence that follows is answer enough.

21

IVY

The transformation isn't as painful as I expected. Instead, it feels inevitable, like watching storm clouds gather before the first drop of rain falls. Everything in my existence—my life as a shifter, my death, my rebirth as Death, and even my relationships with Tate, Torin, and Bram—has led to this moment, pieces of a cosmic puzzle finally sliding into place with an almost audible click.

The void around me pulses with an ethereal rhythm, no longer the empty darkness I remember. Now, it ripples with shades of midnight blue and deep purple, occasionally shot through with threads of silver that remind me of lightning in storm clouds. The assembled Deaths watch as power flows into me, their forms flickering like candles in a wind that doesn't exist. Not just Death magick now, or chaos magick, but something more fundamental. Life force mingles with the darkness, creating ribbons of energy that twist and writhe in impossible patterns. Where they meet, they create something entirely new - neither light nor dark but both, neither life nor death but something transcendent.

“You understand now,” Mazzarat says, his ancient form becoming translucent as more of the void's power transfers to me. His edges blur like watercolours bleeding into parchment, his voice carrying the weight of millennia. “Why it had to be you.”

I do. A shifter who became Death. Someone who's lived and died and lived again. Someone who understands both sides of existence in a way no one else ever has. The knowledge settles in my bones like winter frost, both chilling and clarifying.

“Life thinks she’s containing Death until she can steal Morrigan’s power,” I say, watching the energies swirl around me like a tornado in slow motion. Each strand of power has its own texture - death magick cool and smooth like silk, life force warm and vibrant like summer sunshine, chaos magick crackling with untamed potential. “She has no idea she’s actually accelerating her own destruction.”

“And your ascension,” David adds. His form is fading, too, becoming part of the growing power surrounding me. Where he stands, the void seems to bend and fold, reality itself making way for what’s coming.

“You’re all becoming part of this,” I gasp, watching as the other Deaths dissolve into pure energy. Their forms fractal and splinter, like breaking glass, each shard carrying centuries of memory and power. Some appear as ancient as time itself, others newer, but all of them flow toward me like rivers to an ocean. “Part of what I’m becoming.”

“We’re returning to the source,” Mazzarat explains, his voice growing distant, echoing as if from the bottom of a well. “All Deaths, all souls, all power - flowing together as it was always meant to.” His words resonate through the void, making the very fabric of reality shiver.

The void pulses with each transfer, growing stronger, more alive. The darkness takes on depth and texture, like black velvet under moonlight. This isn’t just about death anymore. It’s about the entire cycle of existence. Each pulse sends ripples through my consciousness, expanding my awareness beyond anything I thought possible.

I can feel it all now - every life, every death, every transformation in between. The natural order spreads before me like an infinite tapestry, threads of existence weaving together in patterns too complex for mortal minds to comprehend. It isn’t about separation, about drawing lines between this and that. It’s about flow. About balance. About the eternal dance between all things.

And Life, in her desperate attempt to control everything, has forgotten that most basic truth. Her fear has become a poison, corrupting the very essence she seeks to preserve.

I raise my hands, watching as light and darkness dance across my skin like aurora borealis in negative. The souls of the dead swirl around me in a tempest of memory and emotion, each one distinct yet part of a greater whole. I am not just their keeper anymore - I am becoming them, and they are becoming me. From the worst murderer in history to the innocent nun, they pour into me like water into the parched earth. Each brings its flavour to the power growing within me - the sharp tang of violence, the sweet nectar of compassion, the bitter ash of regret, and the bright spark of joy.

The chaos magick that runs through my veins proves to be the perfect foundation for this metamorphosis. Like bedrock beneath a mountain, it holds steady as power builds and builds. The realisation doesn't surprise me - chaos has always been about potential, about the space between what is and what could be. It's the perfect crucible for this new form of existence.

The remaining souls draw closer, their whispers a symphony of anticipation. Some sound like wind through autumn leaves, others like distant thunder, and still others like the last breath of a dying star. They know what's coming. What has to happen next.

But first, I have to complete this transformation. Have to become what the universe needs me to be. The power surges through me in waves now, each one bringing new understanding. Every wave has its own character - some crash like ocean breakers, others slide like silk across skin, still others burn like fever or freeze like arctic wind.

I see flashes of lives lived and lost, each memory crystal clear yet somehow distant, like watching through ancient glass. A mother holding her newborn child, love radiating from her like sunlight. A soldier taking his last breath on a battlefield, his

blood mixing with mud as thunder rolls overhead. A couple growing old together, their lives intertwining like ivy on a trellis. A child lost too soon, their potential hanging in the air like unsung music. Joy and pain, beginnings and endings, all of it flowing into me, becoming part of me. Each memory carries its own weight, its own lesson about the delicate balance between life and death.

My connection to Tate flares up, the soul mark on my lower back burning with an intensity that would have brought me to my knees in my old form. Now, it feels like a compass needle finding true north, reminding me of what's at stake. Our fated bond, which transcended death itself, pulses in time with the void's rhythm. The connection shows me how life and death could intertwine, become something more than just opposing forces - like two strands of DNA spiralling together to create something new.

Thoughts of Bram and Torin surface in my mind, their faces crystal clear against the swirling chaos. The sacrifice ritual that brought me back left visible scars on them that changed their essence, those are what truly matter. Their willingness to give everything, to risk their very existence, showed me the true meaning of both life and death.

The power continuing to flow into me takes on new dimensions. Each soul brings not just memory and power, but understanding. I feel the weight of centuries, of millennia, pressing against my consciousness. The knowledge of ancient Deaths mingles with the fresh perspective of newly departed souls. Kings and beggars, saints and sinners, their experiences blend together perfectly.

The void itself seems to breathe now, expanding and contracting with my transformation. What was once empty space now teems with potential. Colours that have no names in any human language ripple through the darkness. The boundaries between life and death, between being and non-being, blur and reshape themselves around me.

I can sense Life's desperation now, her fear radiating across dimensions like heat from a dying star. Her frantic attempts to save herself echo through the fabric of reality, creating discordant ripples in the natural order. But she doesn't understand the fundamental truth that's becoming clearer to me with each passing moment: you can't cling to power and expect to evolve. You have to let go, to transform, to become something new. Like a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis, change requires surrender.

As the final waves of energy wash over me, I feel my transformation nearing completion. The power settles into my new form like water finding its level, filling every space, every crevice of my being. My consciousness expands beyond the boundaries of what I once thought possible, encompassing aspects of existence I never knew existed. The void's pulse synchronises with mine until I can no longer tell where I end, and it begins.

Soon I'll have to leave this space between spaces, step out of the void and into a role the universe has never seen before. The thought sends ripples of anticipation through the souls that now make up my being. I only hope the world is ready for what I've become, for this new force that bridges the gap between life and death.

Because I'm no longer just Ivy, or even just Death. I am the cycle itself - birth, life, death, and rebirth united in one being. Every soul that has ever lived or died is part of me now, their experiences and wisdom flowing through me like blood through veins. The chaos magick that once seemed so dangerous now serves as the perfect foundation for this new form of existence, strong enough to contain multitudes, flexible enough to adapt to whatever comes next.

With that thought, I gather my new powers around me like a cloak made of starlight and shadow. The void pulses one final time, acknowledging what I've become, what we've all become together. As I prepare to emerge and face whatever awaits in the world beyond, I feel neither fear nor hesitation, only certainty and purpose.

22

TATE

The fated mark burns on my chest, a constant reminder of what's happening to Ivy. It's different now, though. Not the sharp, desperate pain from when she was first taken, but something deeper, more fundamental. Like my atoms are being rearranged to match whatever she's becoming.

I press my hand against it, panting slightly, feeling the steady pulse that tells me she's still there, still connected to me, even as she transforms into something beyond what any of us can comprehend. The mark feels warmer than usual, almost alive under my palm.

"A fated bond?" Blackthorn says, watching me with keen interest. "You can feel her changing, can't you?"

"Yes," I admit, dropping my hand. "It's like watching a star go supernova in slow motion. I can feel her expanding, becoming something more." My voice sounds strange, distant and hollow.

Bram's wild magick fizzles in response to my words, making the air thick with potential. "The power recognises it," he says softly. "Whatever she's becoming, it's connected to this." He holds up his hands, where silver threads of magick dance between his fingers. "It's not Morrigan's, it's not even mine. It's hers."

"All magick is hers," I comment, not in the least bit jealous, but in total awe of her.

Not that long ago, she was a shifter assassin and now she is a god. She is nothing short of incredible.

I catch Torin watching me, concern etched on his features. He knows me well enough to see past my calm exterior, to recognise the fear lurking beneath. The fear of what this means for us. For our future. Will she still be our Ivy when she emerges? Will our fated bond survive her transformation into something beyond Death itself?

“We need to focus on what we can actually do,” I say, forcing myself to think practically despite the storm of emotions threatening to overwhelm me. “You mentioned rituals to stabilise the transformation?”

Torin’s growl reminds me of his earlier objection to rituals, but this time, I meet his gaze steadily. “I know you don’t like it, but if it means the difference between the world surviving this transition or not, then we are doing it.”

“The rituals aren’t particularly painful,” Blackthorn interjects, pulling an ancient-looking tome from his stack. “These are more like anchoring points. Ways to ensure reality can adapt to the changes coming.”

Bram moves closer to examine the book, his magick sparking with interest. “These are old. Really old, steeped in Fae magick.”

“Yes,” Morrigan confirms, and something in her tone makes me look at her sharply. “From when the first gods were born.”

“The Fae?” I ask in surprise. Although I suppose that makes sense in a way. The Fae are an extremely powerful race.

The fated mark burns again, and this time, I catch fragments of something through it. Not quite thoughts, not quite feelings, but impressions of what Ivy is experiencing.



Power beyond imagination. Understanding beyond mortal comprehension. The very fabric of existence is reshaping itself around her.

“The preparations must be precise,” Blackthorn continues, either oblivious to or choosing to ignore the tension in the room. “We need to establish anchor points at specific locations - places where the barriers between life and death are naturally thin. As all this occurred at Thornfield, the surrounding forest will be one of those points. The sacred spring here at MistHallow. Vex, you can handle that. But the rest of you must return immediately to Thornfield.”

Vex nods, having remained mostly silent this entire time.

“How long do we have?” I ask, though I already know the answer won’t be precise.

“Until Life’s desperate actions trigger the collapse,” Blackthorn says grimly. “Could be days, could be hours. The void exists outside normal time, so Ivy’s transformation isn’t bound by our temporal limitations. But Life’s deterioration very much is.”

“Then we need to move now. Morrigan?” I turn to the goddess, expecting her to disappear or give some cryptic response.

Instead, she smiles, and it’s not entirely comforting. “I’ll do what I’ve always done and ensure fate unfolds as it should. But know what’s coming will change everything. The old pantheons, the traditional separations between life and death, even the way magick itself works in the world. Are you prepared for that?”

I think about Ivy, about how she’s never backed down from what needs to be done, no matter the cost. I think about our fated bond, about how it’s already changing, evolving with her. I think about the future. It’s uncertain, unprecedented, but full of possibility.

“No,” I answer honestly. “But I don’t think anyone can be truly prepared for this. We just have to be ready to pivot. To adapt.” I press my hand over the burn again, feeling its steady heat. “Like she is. Thank you, Professor. You have been a great help.”

He nods and I give Vex the finger, which he returns with that smug laugh of his before I transport us back to Thornfield in a whirl of magick, my spell depositing us at the edge of the ancient forest. The moment our feet touch the ground, I know something’s different. The air itself feels charged, like the moment before lightning strikes.

“Holy shit,” Torin comments, staring at the tree line.

The forest has changed. The ancient trees shimmer with an inner light, their leaves sparkle with colours that shouldn’t exist in nature. Patches of new growth burst forth in odd places. Flowers bloom and die in seconds, only to be reborn again.

“The barriers,” Bram says, his magick audibly singing in response to our surroundings, which takes him by surprise. “They’re already breaking down here.” Silver threads of power leap from his skin, reaching toward the trees like they’re being called home.

I press my hand against the fated mark, which burns hotter than ever. The forest recognises us - or rather, it recognises our connection to what Ivy is becoming. Every tree, every blade of grass, every particle of air seems to vibrate with anticipation.

“We need to find an anchor point,” I say, trying to focus through the overwhelming sensations.

“There,” Bram says, pointing to the clearing ahead where Morrigan was tied to.

“Yes.” There is a distortion in the air, like reality is rippling. “Whatever it is about

this place, it's a hot spot for magick and the ancient kind."

As we approach, the effects intensify. Life and death dance around us in dizzying cycles. A fallen log sprouts mushrooms that grow and decay in the span of heartbeats. Birds fly through the trees, their lifespans playing out in fast-forward until they fall, only to rise again as chicks from their own ashes.

"It's beautiful," I murmur. Here, in this place where the boundaries blur, the true pattern emerges - not opposing forces, but parts of the same whole.

"And creepy and, oh, let's not forget dangerous," Torin adds grimly, watching as a patch of ground cycles through seasons in seconds. "This is the start of it. If this spreads..."

"It won't," Bram says with surprising certainty. His magick has formed a barrier around him now, responding to the energy of the place. "That's what the anchor point is for. To contain it. To give it structure."

The clearing itself appears to be the epicentre. At its heart, reality seems thinnest, most malleable.

"How do we even begin?" Torin asks, looking overwhelmed for the first time since I've known him.

Bram steps to the left, his silver-threaded magick now whipping around him like a storm. "The ritual requires three points of power," he says, his voice taking on an odd resonance. "Life, death, and the space between. That's us. Vampire, fated mate, and..." he gestures to himself, his magick sparking. "Whatever I am now."

We form a triangle around the epicentre, and immediately, I feel it - a pull so intense it nearly brings me to my knees. The fated mark blazes like hellfire against my chest,

and through it, I sense something vast and ancient, stirring in response to what we're doing.

"Bram?" Torin calls out, tension clear in his voice. "The trees..."

The ancient forest has gone eerily still. No more rapid cycling of life and death. Just silence. Waiting.

"Start the ritual," I grit out, fighting against the increasing pressure of power.

Bram's magick explodes outward, forming a complex web of silver light between us. His eyes have gone completely black, and when he speaks, it's in a language I've never heard before - older than Celtic, older than the Fae themselves.

The same fucking language from the last fucking ritual.

"Grrr," I growl, already feeling myself go dizzy.

Torin growls as well to my right, also recognising and not liking where this is going.

The ground beneath us shakes. Roots burst from the earth, wrapping around our legs, but they're not normal roots. They're crystalline, translucent, showing both growth and decay simultaneously.

"Something's wrong," Torin shouts over the rising wind. "This isn't like what Blackthorn described! He said they weren't particularly painful!"

"He clearly lied!" I snarl, fighting with the roots, which are wrapping themselves tighter around my legs.

This is darker, more primal. The ritual isn't just stabilising the anchor point - it's

feeding it. Making it stronger. Through my fated bond, I feel Ivy's presence more strongly than ever, but there's something else, too. Something hungry.

"We need to stop!" I try to move, but the crystal roots hold me fast.

"Can't," Bram gasps, his magick now completely out of control. "It won't let me. It wants... it needs..." His voice breaks off in a grunt of pain as the silver threads turn black.

The clearing has become a maelstrom of wild power. Reality tears and mends itself around us in violent surges. I see glimpses of other places, other times - the void itself maybe, reaching through the weakened barriers.

"Bram!" Torin roars as our friend falls to his knees, still caught in the grip of whatever power he's channelling. "Fight it!"

But I realise what's happening. "It's not fighting him," I shout. "It's changing him. Like it changed Ivy. Like it's changing everything!"

The crystal roots crawl higher, turning our bodies into anchors for something far beyond our understanding. Through the fated mark, I feel Ivy's consciousness brush against mine - no longer just my Ivy, but something infinite, eternal, and for the first time, I truly understand what she's becoming.

23

brAM

The magick tears through me like a tempest. It's ancient, primal, a power that existed before the gods themselves. My Dark Fae magick, which still lurks underneath it, responds to it like a tributary being pulled into a vast ocean.

I try to maintain control of the ritual, but it's like trying to direct a hurricane. The words pouring from my mouth are from the grimoire, which is nowhere in sight. It's just in my head, and I know exactly what I'm supposed to do and say. It's the magick. It's Morrigan's influence.

Through the haze of power, I see Tate and Torin trapped like I am, crystalline roots climbing their bodies. The clearing has become a nexus point where all times, all realities, all possibilities converge. And I'm the conduit.

The silver threads of magick have turned black, not with corruption, but with something more profound. More fundamental. Like the space between stars.

Images flash through my mind faster than I can process them: Ivy in the void, her form shifting between human and something vast and incomprehensible. The Fae emerge from the spaces between realities. The first gods are born from the chaos of creation. Life and Death are not entities but concepts, patterns woven into the fabric of existence itself.

The magick shows me what I truly am, what I've always been without knowing it.

Not just a vessel for this magick, but a catalyst. A turning point. Like Ivy, I was made for this moment. It is fate. Our fate.

The pain intensifies as I fight against my own resistance. The crystal roots reach my chest, and I feel my heart syncing to a different rhythm. Not the pulse of life and death, but the space between them. Where true power lies.

For the first time, I'm seeing who I really am. What I was meant to be.

I stop fighting.

The black magick swells through me like a flood breaking through a dam. My consciousness expands, connects, and becomes part of something larger.

The revelation hits me with the force of a cosmic truth. I'm not just channelling this power, I'm becoming a fundamental part of it. Like Ivy's transformation into something beyond Death, I'm changing into something else. Something necessary for what's coming.

"I see it," I rasp. "I see everything."

The black magick spreads outward from me in waves, touching everything in the clearing. Where it passes, reality shivers and realigns. The crystal roots aren't just anchoring us, they're rewriting us into the very fabric of existence.

Through my expanded awareness, I feel Tate's fated bond beating, a direct line to Ivy and what she's becoming. I feel Torin's vampiric nature is no longer just a state of undeath, but something more fluid and adaptable. And I feel myself, transforming into a being of pure magick, a bridge between what was and what will be.

"Bram," Tate calls out again, but this time I hear the recognition in his voice. He sees

it, too. “You’re becoming like her, aren’t you?”

“Not like her,” I manage to say, even as the transformation continues. “Something different. Something complementary.”

The ritual reaches its crescendo. The black magick coalesces around us, no longer chaotic but purposeful. I understand now why it had to be us three - vampire, fated mate, and one of the original creatures. We’re not just stabilising an anchor point. We’re becoming the anchor point. Her anchor point.

Blackthorn is a fucking cryptic fucker, but he knew what he was doing.

Reality fractures one final time, and through the cracks, I see Ivy—no longer just our woman, but a cosmic force taking shape. Her awareness touches mine, and in that moment, I understand everything.

“Balance,” I whisper, the word carrying the weight of universal law. “That’s what she needs. What everything needs.”

The glowing roots tremble with dark light, completing their work. I feel myself settling into a new form of existence - not quite god, not quite Fae, but something essential. A keeper of this wild magick in its purest form, a guardian of the spaces between life and death.

As the ritual’s power finally begins to ebb, I look at my hands. The black magick flows through them now like liquid starlight, no longer external but part of my very being. I am both more and less than what I was - transformed, like everything else, by the tide of change Ivy has set in motion.



24

TORIN

The black magick fades from the clearing, but the geometric patterns etched into our skin remain. I trace the lines on my forearm, feeling how they pulse in time with my born vampiric nature. Twenty-one years of straddling two worlds - never fully fitting into the ancient vampire courts, never quite understanding their obsession with the old ways.

Bram stands transformed, power rolling off him in waves that make my heightened senses buzz. Tate's fated mark glows through his tee like a beacon. And me? I was drawn to Ivy, despite everything I'd been taught about keeping to our own kind.

"You okay?" Tate asks, his voice rough from the ritual.

I flex my fingers, feeling my innate vampiric power, but also something else now. Something new. "I understand now," I say slowly. "Why it had to be me. Why I was born in this time, for this moment."

The others wait as I find the words. The crystal roots might have retreated into the ground, but I can still feel their energy humming through me, connecting dots I never saw before.

"The old vampires, they're all about tradition. Rules. The way things have always been. But I was born into a changing world. Born vampire, but never truly part of their ancient hierarchy. I never fit in because I wasn't meant to."

“The perfect bridge,” Bram murmurs.

“Exactly. I was born with one foot in the modern world and one in the supernatural. The old covens always saw that as a weakness. But that’s exactly why Ivy needs me.”

The geometric patterns flare as I speak, confirming the truth I now know. “That’s why I was drawn to her from the start, because I represent what she’s trying to do, to bridge the gap between old and new. Challenge what everyone thinks has to be.”

Tate nods slowly. “You’ve never been bound by their ancient politics or their fear of change.”

“More than that,” I say, feeling the rightness of each word. “Being born a vampire in this era means I understand both worlds naturally. The old courts see modern times as a threat to their power, but I see how the supernatural world needs to evolve. Has to evolve.”

I think of all the times I frustrated my elders, questioning traditions that made no sense in today’s world. How they dismissed me as too young to understand, when really, I understood something they couldn’t—that change is inevitable.

“The courts and covens keep trying to hold on to their old ways, keep everything separate and controlled,” I continue, the revelation flowing now. “But look at the world. Technology, social media, global connection - the barriers between supernatural and human are already breaking down. Ivy isn’t just changing what Death is. She’s acknowledging what’s already happening and steering it toward something new.”

The patterns on my skin settle into a steady glow, accepting their new purpose. My unique perspective - being born into both modern times and an ancient vampire society - isn’t a weakness or a quirk. It’s exactly what’s needed. The old courts would

never accept guidance from Death, especially not a new, changed Death. They're too set in their hierarchies, too convinced of their own superiority. That they are beyond death, as ironic as that is. But they might listen to one of their own. Someone who understands their nature but isn't trapped by their past.

The dying ritual flares up again. I wonder if it gave me time to come to this realisation, or if the realisation restarted the ritual. I wasn't sure of my place before. It probably put a massive dent in the intent of this magick.

She's going to reshape everything, and when she does, the supernatural world needs to adapt, not fight it. I can help them see that. Help them understand that evolution doesn't mean losing what they are - it means becoming something more.

The air snaps with possibility and, if I didn't know better, approval for my epiphany. I'm a catalyst for necessary change, just like Ivy. Just like we're all becoming.

The magick surges through the clearing again, stronger this time, as if rewarding my understanding. The geometric patterns carved into my skin shift and change, no longer just glowing but sinking deeper, becoming part of me in a way I can't quite explain.

Bram grunts, his features catching starlight that isn't there. The darkness around him seems to deepen, not like shadows but like depth, endless and infinite. His transformation is completing itself, becoming permanent in a way that makes my vampiric senses sing with recognition of something ancient and new all at once.

Tate's mark blazes brighter, and I can see other marks beginning to appear on his skin, as if his first fate mark was just the beginning of something much more complex. They spread like a language being written in real time, each symbol holding meaning I can almost grasp.

The crystal roots burst from the ground again, but this time, they don't just ensnare us - they seem to be growing from us, through us, connecting us in ways that transcend physical space. All of it weaving together with my own changing self.

The ritual isn't just transforming us individually anymore - it's transforming the spaces between us, the fabric of reality around us. We're becoming anchors for whatever Ivy is doing in the void, foundation stones for her new reality.

The pain hits then, not like before but deeper, fundamental, like being unmade and then remade. I hear myself grunt, hear similar sounds from the others, but they seem distant, unimportant compared to the rushing in my blood, the burning in my bones, the sense of something vast and inevitable taking hold.

This is what birth feels like, I think distantly. Not my first birth as a vampire, but this second one, this becoming of something else. Something necessary. Something new.

The world fractures around us, and the real transformation begins.

25

IVY

The void has become a living thing around me, no longer just a container for souls, but an extension of what I'm becoming. Each beat of power brings new understanding, new connections forming between concepts that were never meant to touch. Life and death, beginning and ending, they're not opposites anymore but parts of the same infinite circle.

The remaining Deaths have almost completely dissolved now, their ancient power merging with mine. Their knowledge flows through me like rivers joining an ocean. Mazzarat's millennia of watching civilisations rise and fall, David's understanding of modern death in all its complexity, countless others adding their wisdom to the whole.

But there's something else happening, something I can feel through the chaos magick that forms my foundation. Three distinct energies thump in sync with my transformation, anchoring me to the physical world even as I transcend it. Tate, Bram, and Torin. They are each undergoing their own metamorphosis, becoming what they need to be for what comes next.

The fated mark connecting me to Tate burns like a supernova, but now I understand it's more than just a link between fated souls. It's a prototype for what's coming. Proof that the boundaries between life and death were never as solid as everyone believed.

I watch as new colours bloom in the void, impossible shades that reflect the merging of opposing forces. This is what Life never understood. She couldn't understand that true power comes not from control, but from synthesis. From allowing seemingly contradictory things to coexist and create something new.

The souls around me sing with anticipation as the transformation reaches its peak. We're approaching the moment when everything changes, when the universe itself must adapt to accommodate what I'm becoming.

But first, there's one more truth I need to understand.

The realisation comes like dawn breaking over dark waters. Life's desperate grab for power isn't just about control or fear. She's trying to prevent what she sees as the ultimate corruption: the mixing of life and death. But in doing so, she's become the very thing she fears. Her attempt to remain pure, to keep death separate and contained, has twisted the natural order far more than any blending of forces ever could.

I feel now, through the countless souls merged with mine, the way things should be. Death isn't meant to be an ending, just as life isn't meant to be a beginning. They're points on a circle, flowing into each other like seasons, like breath, like tides. The separation was artificial all along, a construct born of fear and misunderstanding. All these souls are waiting. Waiting for their second chance. Their rebirth. Many cultures believe in reincarnation, and they were right. This is the way forward. You don't get one chance. You get many. You get a chance to grow and be a better being. Not that it is a given. No one will remember who they once were. Okay, maybe some will, but it's a choice. A completely unaffected choice that you will make as you grow up. Yes, evil will still exist, and yes, some, probably many of these souls, will be reborn and do evil things again. But some won't. They will atone, even if they are unaware of it.

A tremor runs through the void, and I sense something massive shifting in the fabric of this reality. Through my connection to the others, I feel their ritual reaching its crescendo. Their transformations are nearly complete, creating anchor points for whatever I'm becoming. The geometry of existence itself flexes and reshapes around us.

"It was never about choosing between life and death," I say into the swirling darkness. My voice carries the weight of countless souls now, a chorus of understanding built from every death that's ever been. "It was about transcending that choice entirely."

The void pulses in response, and I feel the last pieces of my transformation clicking into place. The chaos magick in my veins has become something else - not order, exactly, but a deeper kind of chaos. The kind that births stars and shapes galaxies. The kind that holds the potential for everything. The kind that will release the oldest of these souls to go and live again.

My hair whips around me as the power builds like a storm about to break, and I know with sudden clarity what needs to happen next. Life thinks she's winning, thinks she's close to containing death forever. She has no idea she's about to face something that exists beyond her understanding of either.

I gather myself, feeling the weight of all I've become. It's time to show her - and everyone else - what true balance looks like.

The void holds its breath, waiting.

The souls within me shift and stir with the knowledge that some of them will soon be set free again, their collective energy taking on a different quality now that they understand. They're not just memories or remnants of who they were. They are potential waiting to be known again. Some have waited centuries, millennia even, for

this chance.

A medieval peasant who died of plague dreams of modern medicines. A warrior from ancient times imagines a world where conflicts are resolved with words instead of swords. A child lost too soon yearns for another chance to grow. Their hopes and desires weave through me like golden threads in a tapestry of darkness.

“You’ll forget,” I whisper to them, tears pricking my eyes as I feel their excitement, their fear. “You’ll start fresh, clean slates with new chances. But who you were, what you learned, it will shape who you become, even if you don’t remember why.”

The souls ripple with understanding. Some souls draw closer, eager for their turn, while others drift back, content to wait longer. There’s no rush now. This isn’t an ending anymore, but a waypoint. A chance to rest, reflect, and choose when to begin again.

Through my connection to the physical world, I feel the ritual’s power peak. Tate, Bram, and Torin are becoming something new, something that can help shepherd this transformation. They’ll be the first to understand, to help others understand, that death isn’t a wall but a door.

The power builds to impossible levels, reality bending around what I’m becoming. Life thinks she’s closing death’s door forever, but she’s about to learn that you can’t stop a cycle. You can only choose to be part of it.

I reach out with my new awareness, feeling the boundaries between life and death blur and reshape themselves.

It’s time.

The moment stretches like an infinite breath as I gather the ancient power within me.



The souls quiver and swirl, their collective energy building until the void itself seems to vibrate with anticipation. I can feel each one of them and their hopes, their regrets, their desperate desire for another chance.

“Be free,” I whisper, and with a gesture that feels as natural as breathing, I begin to release them.

They stream outward like a river of starlight, each soul a distinct point of luminescence in the darkness. Some shoot upward like comets, trailing memories behind them like stardust. Others drift like dandelion seeds on a summer breeze, taking their time, savouring the moment of transition. Colours paint the void in their passing: a deep blue of ancient wisdom, a bright gold of newfound hope, a soft silver of second chances.

A vampire queen who ruled for centuries streams past, her essence crackling with both darkness and the potential for something different. An ancient werewolf alpha who died protecting his pack brushes against my consciousness, his fierce spirit already yearning for a new form. Lilith, the dark witch who dabbled too deep in forbidden magick, dissolves into pure energy, her knowledge and power dispersing like smoke on the wind, ready to be reborn.

They aren't all seeking redemption. Some souls pulse with the same darkness that marked their previous existence, their fierce nature unchanged by death. A demon lord's essence burns hot and violent as it passes, their power seeking a new vessel to inhabit. Others carry the weight of centuries of supernatural politics and power plays, their ambitions undimmed by death.

But even the darkest among them now carry the possibility of change, whether they choose to take it or not. The head of an ancient vampire coven streaks by, their calculated cruelty tempered now with the faintest glimmer of possibility. A fallen fae warrior's spirit glows with both ancient magick and fresh purpose.

They flow outward in waves, generations of souls finding their way to new beginnings.

The void fills with their joy, their terror, their wild hope. The sound of their passing is like every piece of music ever written playing at once - a symphony of existence itself.

As the last wave of this round of souls dissipates, I feel the void fall away. The ritual space pulls at me, calling me to where Tate, Bram, and Torin wait. Their energy signatures burn like beacons through the darkness, transformed but familiar.

I materialise in the clearing, my feet touching solid ground for the first time since my transformation began. My guys have changed as I have. Bram's wild nature is now fully realised, Tate marked by fate in ways that go far deeper than skin, Torin radiating a power that bridges multiple realities.

The air around us shimmers with the aftereffects of both transformations - theirs and mine. Released souls continue to stream overhead, visible now in the physical world as streaks of light across the night sky, like a meteor shower of second chances.

I look down at my hands, seeing the power that courses through me made manifest. My skin glows with shifting patterns that tell the story of every death and rebirth since time began. My hair floats around me, each strand containing galaxies of possibility.

"Ivy?" Tate's voice breaks the silence, filled with awe. The marks across his skin ripple in response to my presence.

I meet his gaze, knowing that my eyes now hold the infinite depths of the void itself and the warmth of countless new beginnings.

“I understand now,” I say, my voice carrying echoes of all the souls that had been part of me. “We all get another chance. Again and again, until we get it right.”

Above us, the souls continue their journey, lighting up the night with the promise of renewal. Life’s power pulses against the edges of reality, but it feels distant now, almost irrelevant in the face of this greater truth.

The cycle hasn’t just been restored - it’s been transformed, and we’re all part of it, whether we remember or not.

26

IVY

Tate moves towards me first, his body marked with symbols that writhe and shift like living things. The fated mark we share burns between us, but now it's more. It's a bridge between what he's become and what I am. His eyes meet mine, and I see eternity reflected there, matching the void that now lives within me.

"Ivy," he breathes, wrapping his arms around me, and just my name carries weight I never heard before. Power recognising power. Equal and opposite, perfectly balanced.

The tears that slip down my cheeks leave trails of starlight on my skin.

Bram and Torin join us, and as they draw close, I feel our energies connecting, creating something entirely new. Four points of power, four different types of magick, form a perfect circuit, the last pieces clicking into place.

I look at each of them. My fated mates. Mine.

"The world's about to change. Everything we thought we knew about death, about what comes after... it's all different now."

"We know," Torin croaks, his voice hoarse from the magick sparking all around. He drags me away from Tate and slams his lips against mine in a bruising kiss. I rip at his clothes, needing to fuck him hard and fast to release the stress of the last few

hours, days? Who knows how much time passed while I was in the void?

“Fuck,” I growl against Torin’s lips, my body buzzing with need. The power coursing through me intensifies every sensation.

I rip his shirt off, buttons scattering across the forest floor. My hands roam over the geometric patterns etched into his skin, feeling the vampire energy vibrating underneath. Torin groans, his fangs extending as he bites my lower lip hard enough to draw blood.

The taste of copper explodes on our tongues. But it’s more than just blood now. It’s power, raw and primal. Torin’s eyes go black with hunger as he lifts me up, slamming me to the ground.

Savagely, he tears my clothes away. There’s no gentleness, no finesse, just desperate, frantic need. Within seconds, I’m naked, and he falls onto me, thrusting into me hard, both of us crying out at the intensity.

“Fuck, Ivy,” he pants against my neck.

I can only moan in response as he pounds into me. Every thrust sends shockwaves of pleasure through my body.

I reach out a hand to Tate and Bram, beckoning them to me.

“More,” I demand. “I need all of you.”

Clothes are shed in a frenzy as they join us on the forest floor. Bram’s hands find my breasts, kneading roughly as his mouth claims mine in a searing kiss before he releases me, his fingers trailing an icy cold path to my clit. Tate positions himself by my head, his cock brushing against my lips as Torin hauls me up to a half-sitting

position.

I open my mouth eagerly, taking Tate's cock in as deep as I can. Torin continues to thrust into me relentlessly, each movement sending sparks of pleasure coursing through my body, along with Bram's cold touch. He pinches my clit and twists it, sending rockets of lust into every cell in my body.

Our energies mingle and merge, creating a feedback loop of power and sensation. I can feel every touch, every heartbeat, every surge of desire magnified a thousandfold. The forest around us responds, trees swaying and leaves rustling despite the lack of wind.

Bram's lips trail down to suck and bite at my neck. His teeth scrape against my skin, and I tremble in their arms.

Torin growls, his thrusts becoming more frantic. Tate's fingers tangle in my hair as he fucks my mouth with deep, powerful strokes.

I'm overwhelmed by sensation. Torin pounding into me, Tate filling my mouth, Bram's icy fingers working my clit and his teeth at my throat. My body feels like it's on fire, every nerve ending alight with pleasure.

I can feel my climax building, a tidal wave of ecstasy waiting to crash over me.

Our energies spiral higher and higher, feeding off each other.

With a cry muffled by Tate's cock, I come undone. My orgasm rips through me with cosmic force. My pussy clamps down on Torin's dick with such fierceness he grunts, and his thrusts become erratic as my pussy milks him hard. With a roar, he slams into me one final time, his release flooding me with heat. The intensity of it triggers another wave of pleasure that has me shuddering beneath them.

Tate's grip on my hair tightens as he fucks my mouth faster, but then he pulls out, panting. I know he wants to unload in my pussy, not my mouth.

Bram's fingers are still working my oversensitive clit, sending aftershocks rippling through me. I reach for Tate as Torin moves aside, dragging him up for a fierce kiss.

"Inside me," I demand against his lips. "Now."

He grips my hips painfully hard, pulling me onto his cock. He sets a punishing pace, riding my pussy like this is his last day on earth.

My nails rake down his back as I arch into him. Bram's hands roam over my body, pinching and caressing. It's almost too much sensation, but I crave more.

"Harder," I gasp. "Fuck me harder."

Tate's thrusts become violent in their intensity. My arse is bruised and scraped from the rough ground underneath me, but it all adds to the hedonism of the moment. I welcome the pain, craving the intensity.

"Fuck, Ivy," he growls. "You feel so good."

Bram's mouth finds my breast, teeth scraping over my nipple. Torin's hands tangle in my hair, pulling my head back as he claims my mouth in a searing kiss.

Our energies swirl and merge, creating a feedback loop of power and sensation. I can feel every touch, every heartbeat magnified a thousandfold. The air around us crackles with electricity.

My climax builds again, a tidal wave of ecstasy waiting to crash over me. I cry out as Tate hits that perfect spot inside me over and over.

“Come for me,” he demands, his voice rough with desire.

That’s all it takes to send me over the edge. My orgasm rips through me, almost painfully. My entire body convulses with the severity of it. Tate follows me over, his release drenching my pussy as he grows through his climax.

Bram’s fingers find my clit again, working it mercilessly as Tate withdraws, letting Bram take his place.

“Mm,” Bram murmurs and drops his mouth to my pussy.

His tongue delves into my sensitive folds, lapping up the mixture of my juices and Torin and Tate’s cum. The icy coolness of his mouth contrasts sharply with the heat of my overworked flesh, sending new shivers of pleasure through me.

“Fuck,” I gasp, my hands tangling in his hair.

Torin moves behind me, lifting me slightly so I’m resting against his chest. His hands cup my breasts, thumbs circling my nipples as Bram continues his relentless assault on my pussy.

I’m quivering in response. Every nerve ending feels raw and exposed. Part of me wants to push them away, to curl up and process the enormity of what’s happened. But a larger part craves more and needs this physical connection to ground me after the cosmic transformation I’ve undergone.

Bram’s tongue flicks rapidly over my clit before plunging back inside me. I cry out, my hips bucking against his face. Torin’s grip on me tightens, holding me in place as Bram drives me towards another climax.

“That’s it,” Tate murmurs, watching us with hungry eyes. “Be a filthy slut and come



all over his face.”

“Ah!” I scream and do exactly that.

Bram growls against my pussy as I come, drinking in the flood of my cum. The vibrations send aftershocks rippling through me. My entire body feels like a live wire, crackling with energy and sensation.

As the intensity of my orgasm fades, Bram pulls back, his lips and chin glistening. He looks up at me with dark, hungry eyes. Without a word, he looms over me and claims my mouth in a fierce kiss. I can taste myself on his tongue, along with traces of Tate and Torin.

Torin pinches and twists my nipples as Bram kisses me.

“My turn, slut,” Bram growls against my lips. He kneels back and positions himself between my legs.

I’m so sensitive that even the brush of his cock against my clit makes me whimper.

Bram drives into me with powerful thrusts.

Torin pushes my tits up into a mound so Tate can suck my nipples.

“Fuck,” I gasp as Bram pounds into me relentlessly.

Torin holds me against his chest, his hands cupping my breasts as Tate sucks and nibbles on my nipples.

Bram’s thrusts are deep and powerful, hitting all the right spots inside me. I wrap my legs around his waist, pulling him in even deeper.

“You feel so good,” Bram groans, his eyes wild with lust and power. “How does a filthy slut have such a tight little cunt? Hmm?”

I can only moan in response, overwhelmed by the onslaught of pleasure. Tate pulls back, and Bram reaches out to grip my nipples tightly, pulling on them until the pain bites into them, and I cry out.

My climax builds again, impossibly fast, given how many times I’ve already come. But the power coursing through us all seems to have supercharged our stamina and sensitivity.

“Show us how much you love being fucked by all of us,” Bram rasps.

A scream rips from my throat as another orgasm tears through me, my pussy clenching hard around Bram’s cock.

“That’s it,” Bram growls as I convulse around him. “Take it all, you insatiable slut.”

He slams into me a few more times before burying himself deep with a guttural groan. I feel the pulse of his cock as he dumps his cum to mix with all the rest.

Bram grunts through the last of his orgasm and pulls out, sitting back, panting heavily.

Tate gives me a searching stare. “What happens now?”

I close my eyes, feeling the new awareness that fills me. “Now we reshape the world. Death isn’t an ending anymore. It’s a transition, a chance for renewal.”

“And Life?” Bram asks, his voice carrying an edge of concern.

“Life will die and be reborn, just like everyone else.”

27

IVY

My transformation, the release of souls, and our passionate reunion - have left me drained but changed. The air still shimmers with residual power, supernatural energies mixing with the natural world in ways I can now perceive with perfect clarity.

“We need to find Life,” I say, pushing myself up from where I’m nestled between Tate and Bram. “Before she realises what’s happened and tries something desperate. Well, more desperate.”

Torin sits up and stretches. “Can you sense her? With all your new... everything?”

I close my eyes, reaching out with my expanded awareness. My power swells as I search, touching the spaces between life and death where she should be. But there’s nothing—no trace of her overwhelming presence, no echo of her power.

“That’s not possible,” I mutter, pushing my senses further. I can feel every supernatural being in the network of realms. I can trace the path of every soul still streaming overhead to their new destinations. But Life is simply... gone.

Bram’s shadow-touched energy ripples beside me. “Let me try.” His power reaches out, diving into the spaces between realities where he can move freely. After a moment, he shakes his head. “Nothing.”

Tate's hand finds mine, our fated marks burning brightly in sync. "Could she have somehow hidden herself from you?"

"Maybe. Or maybe she's already gone through the cycle. Maybe in trying to stop death completely, she triggered her own rebirth."

We sit with that possibility for a moment, watching more souls streak across the morning sky.

"Nah," I say, shaking my head and dismissing my own theory. "She's hiding. Somewhere. She's scared."

"Lila," Tate murmurs.

"Hmm?" I ask with a frown. "You think she is hiding as Lila?"

"You know that Lila is a real creature?" he ventures.

"Yeah, I know. We should find her, warn her."

"She's at MistHallow. We went there looking for Vex to help us with this... thing. The Headmaster is something else. He told us Lila was there recovering."

"Oh, really?" I ask, my heart thumping. "How bad is she?"

"Not good," Bram mutters. "But I believe she is safe at MistHallow."

"Okay, good. I need to see her."

"Maybe after the dust settles?" Tate says in a weird tone.

But I get it. Lila was used and put in harm's way because of me. I'm probably the last person she wants to see, but I have to go and apologise, if nothing else, so she knows I'm sorry.

"Okay, later," I whisper.

"So what now?" Torin asks. "We just sit around and wait for Life to show up?"

"Well, we aren't sitting around here naked and covered in cum," I retort as my stomach rumbles with an embarrassingly loud growl. "Cosmic transformation apparently works up an appetite."

Bram chuckles and helps me to my feet. My legs feel wobbly, both from the transformation and our passionate reunion. Looking around at our scattered, torn clothing, I grimace.

"Uh, guys? We might have a small problem."

Torin waves his hand, chaos magick swirls around him, and I gawp. He catches me and snickers. "You aren't the only badass in town now, princess."

"Wow. Did that come from... me?"

He nods. "Yes. When we became your anchors here earlier, the mage magick inside me evolved...." He holds his hand up as I cringe, "... I know you hate that word, but it is what it is."

Suddenly, we're all clean and dressed, and I grin. "Well, look at you. All chaos-magey. Your mum is going to have a shitfit."

He chuckles. "One can only hope." He gives me a curious stare.

“What?” I ask, straightening my clothes.

“Did you see my dad in there? Was he one that got set free?”

“You care?” I ask carefully.

“Only if I have to look out for him.”

“It doesn’t work that way. The souls won’t remember their past lives. Or most of them won’t. Some will be born into bodies that can commune with their pasts. Not many, though.”

“Trust my luck, he will be one of them,” he grumbles.

I take his hand and kiss it. “Well, if he is, we will deal with it and him.”

He nods and says, “Let’s go home. Back to ours this time.”

The walk back to their house is surreal and necessary. I want to take in everything that has changed, and I want the guys to see it as well. Every step reveals new aspects of the world I never could perceive before. The trees whisper stories of centuries past, the ground beneath our feet pulses with ley lines of power, and the air is alive with possibility.

Bram moves through patches of shadow like they’re doorways, appearing a few steps ahead and then waiting for us to catch up. Torin’s chaos magick leaves pink sparkling trails in the air as he walks, and Tate’s new markings shift and swirl with each movement, responding to the energy around us.

When we finally reach the guys’ house, we step inside.

We head straight for the kitchen, and I watch Tate move around, pulling out ingredients. His new power is evident in every gesture. Even something as simple as making breakfast has taken on an almost ritualistic quality.

“Bacon, eggs and toast okay with everyone?” he calls out.

“More than,” I reply, my mouth watering already as the sizzle of bacon has never sounded so good.

We each retreat into our own thoughts as we set the table and wait for the food to be ready.

Soon, Tate sets four plates heaped with bacon, eggs, and toast on the kitchen table. The smell is heavenly, and we dig in ravenously, barely speaking as we devour the food.

Between bites, I observe my guys. They’ve changed, not just in power, but in essence. Bram’s shadows seem deeper, more alive. Torin’s chaos magick sparkles around him even when he’s not actively using it. The marks on Tate’s skin shift and dance, telling stories I can almost read.

As I finish the last bite of toast, I lean back in my chair with a contented sigh. “That was amazing. Thank you, Tate.”

He smiles, but there’s an intensity in his gaze that wasn’t there before. “You look exhausted,” he says. “You should get some rest.”

I nod and stand up. “We all should.”

As we head upstairs to the bedroom, everything that has happened comes crashing down at once.



We strip down and climb into bed, our bodies naturally gravitating towards each other. I end up sandwiched between Tate and Bram, with Torin at my feet. The physical contact is grounding, reminding me that despite all the cosmic changes, this—us—remains constant.

“Sleep,” Bram murmurs, his arm draped over my waist. “We’ll figure out the rest when we wake up.”

I close my eyes, letting the exhaustion take over.

28

IVY

Despite my exhaustion, sleep proves elusive after the first hour or so. I toss and turn in the bed, surrounded by my guys but feeling strangely disconnected. My mind races with everything that's happened, everything that's changed. The power coursing through my veins won't let me rest.

Finally, I give up and slip out of bed, careful not to wake the guys. I pad barefoot through the house in one of Torin's black tees, and to the kitchen, opening up the back door and breathing slowly. The night air is cool against my skin as I settle into one of the garden chairs, pulling my knees up to my chest.

The sky above is alive with stars, and I close my eyes, reaching out with my new senses. I feel the ebb and flow of life and death on a cosmic scale.

"Can't sleep?"

I open my eyes to find Bram leaning against the doorframe, shadows clinging to him like a second skin.

"Too much going on up here," I tap my temple with a wry smile. "How about you?"

He shrugs, moving to sit beside me. "Same. It's a lot to process."

We sit in companionable silence for a while, watching the light show in the sky.

“Do you think we did the right thing?” I ask finally, voicing the doubt that’s been gnawing at me. “Changing everything like this?”

Bram is quiet for a long moment, his blue eyes reflecting the starlight. “I don’t think there was a ‘right’ thing to do,” he says finally. “The old system was broken. Life had become corrupted, Death was fragmented. Something had to change.”

I nod, mulling over his words. “But what if we’ve made things worse? What if this new cycle, this rebirth of souls, leads to chaos?”

“It might,” Bram acknowledges. “Change always brings uncertainty. But it also brings possibility.” He reaches out, taking my hand in his. “You’ve given everyone a second chance, Ivy. A chance to learn, to grow, to be better.”

“Or to be worse,” I mutter.

“True,” he concedes. “But at least now there’s hope for redemption.”

I lean my head against his shoulder, drawing comfort from his solid presence. “Every soul, every life and death, it’s all connected to me now.”

Bram’s arm wraps around me, pulling me closer. “That’s why you have us,” he says softly. “We’re your anchors, remember? You don’t have to bear this burden alone.”

As if summoned by his words, I feel Tate and Torin’s presence before I see them. They emerge from the house, looking sleepy but concerned.

“Everything okay out here?” Tate asks, his voice rough with sleep. The marks on his skin glow faintly in the darkness.

I nod, managing a small smile. “Just couldn’t sleep. Too much on my mind.”

Torin yawns and stretches before plopping down on the grass at our feet. “Join the club. My brain feels like it’s been rewired.”

“That’s because it has,” I say, reaching out to run my fingers through his hair. “We’ve all changed.”

Tate settles into the chair on my other side, his hand finding mine. “Change isn’t always a bad thing,” he says, echoing Bram’s earlier sentiment.

“No,” I agree. “But it is scary. Especially when you’re the one responsible for it.”

“You weren’t alone in this, Ivy,” Torin says, leaning back against my legs. “We all played a part.”

I smile at them. My anchors. My loves. “I know,” I say softly. “And I’m grateful for that. For you. But I can’t help wondering about the consequences. About Life.”

“We’ll find her,” Tate assures me. “And when we do, we’ll deal with whatever comes next. Together.”

I nod, feeling some of the tension ease from my shoulders. Above us, another soul streaks across the sky, its energy signature distinctly supernatural - a vampire who lived for centuries, now heading toward rebirth.

“It’s strange,” I murmur, tracking its path. “I can feel each one’s history, their nature. That one was a vampire who’d grown tired of immortality and ended his own life, but with regrets. They’re happy about the change. Ready for something new.”

Torin’s new chaos magick ripples in response to my words, creating subtle patterns in the air. “So they maintain some awareness during the transition?”

“No, not really,” I try to explain what I sense. “They retain their essence, their core self, but the memories fade. It’s more like carrying forward lessons learned rather than specific experiences.”

“That’s why some choose to cluster together,” Bram observes, watching another group of souls pass overhead. “They’re hoping to find each other again.”

“Exactly.”

Tate’s fingers trace one of his new markings thoughtfully. “So it’s not just about dying and being reborn. It’s about choice. About what they carry forward and what they leave behind.”

The sky begins to lighten with the first hints of dawn, and I feel some of my earlier anxiety settling. The responsibility is still there, but it feels more manageable and shared between us, less of a burden than it did before.

“We should try to get some more sleep,” I suggest, stifling a yawn. “Who knows what today will bring?”

“Probably chaos,” Torin grins, his geometric markings glowing faintly.

“Definitely chaos,” Bram agrees, helping me up from my chair.

“Good thing chaos is kind of our specialty now,” Tate adds, pulling me close as we head back inside.

As we settle back into bed, I feel their energies wrap around me like a protective cocoon. This time, sleep comes easily, carrying me into dreams of infinite possibilities and new beginnings.

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When I wake again, sunlight is streaming through the windows and the bed is empty except for me. The sounds and smells of breakfast drift up from downstairs - bacon sizzling, coffee brewing, and multiple voices mingling in conversation.

After a quick shower—during which I discover that water now shows me glimpses of its journey from cloud to tap—I head downstairs, following the scent of food and coffee.

“There she is,” Ramsey’s familiar voice calls out. He’s sitting at the kitchen island, Josh beside him, both clutching mugs of tea. “Heard you had quite the adventure.”

“Ramsey?” I blink, surprised but happy to see my best friend. “How did you know?”

“Please,” he rolls his eyes. “You think I wouldn’t notice when the entire supernatural world’s energy shifted? Or rather, our employers did. The Syndicate’s been going crazy trying to figure out what happened.”

“Our employers...” I guess they still are. I haven’t exactly quit. Mind you, if anything, I am The Syndicate now. Hmm... interesting...

“The Resistance, too,” Josh adds, ignoring my muttering, his usually cheerful face serious. “Something big went down last night. The kind of big that makes every supernatural sensor we have go haywire.”

Torin hands me a mug of tea, for which I’m grateful. They can keep the coffee. I’m a tea girl through and through. The liquid swirls with tiny galaxies when I swirl it. I’m not entirely sure if that’s his magick or my new perception of reality. “We were just filling them in,” he explains.

“How much have you told them?” I ask, sliding onto a stool between Ramsey and Tate.

“Enough to know you’re somehow even more special than before,” Ramsey nudges me with his shoulder. “And that Life is missing.”

“We’ve literally just got off our phones. We’ve got both organisations looking for her,” Josh says.

“Oh?” I ask with a raised eyebrow. “And why are they even contemplating helping? What’s in it for them?”

Ramsey and Torin exchange a small smirk and then Ramsey clears his throat. “Torin put out a hit on her. Quite a handsome price.”

I snort into my tea just as I am taking a sip, and it shoots back out my nose, burning my nostrils as I let out a loud laugh. “Okay, that’s innovative. I’m impressed. And The Resistance?”

Josh smiles. “Whatever The Syndicate is doing, we are doing as well. It’s like keeping up with the Joneses in a weird, supernatural, shadowy organisation way.”

“Fun. So, anything?” I sniff delicately and wipe my nose on the cloth Bram hands me before taking another tentative sip of tea.

“So far, nothing. It’s like she’s completely vanished.”

“She has,” I confirm. “I’ve tried tracking her with my new abilities, but there’s no trace. It’s like she’s gone through the cycle already.”

“The cycle?” Ramsey raises an eyebrow.

I exchange looks with my guys, trying to figure out how to explain. “Death isn’t exactly final anymore. But it’s not something that affects the living—it’s just what happens after. A chance for renewal, for souls to choose their next path.”

“Reincarnation.” Josh nods sagely. “I always believed that was the case anyway.”

I shake my head, and he looks intrigued.

“You think Life has already gone through this cycle?” Ramsey prompts.

“No, I don’t believe so. It’s more like the default option because I haven’t got a fucking clue.”

Ramsey laughs. “Good to see some things never change, even when you’re a badass, whatever it is you are now.”

“Fuck you,” I growl, but shoot him a smile.

“She could be anywhere,” Bram says from where he’s sitting on the counter. “But if she’s already gone through the cycle, and I’m saying she has, she could have been reborn as anything, anyone.”

“Which makes finding her nearly impossible,” Ramsey concludes.

I nod. “Yeah, but I don’t think we should assume that, right now. Let’s keep looking first.”

“Well then,” Ramsey straightens up, slipping into handler mode. “Let’s pool our resources. Between The Syndicate, The Resistance, and whatever new cosmic powers you four have going on, we’ll find her.”



“Or at least figure out what she might be planning,” Josh adds.

I look around at all of them - my best friend, his boyfriend, my three loves. Each powerful in their own right, each ready to help. Maybe we can't track Life directly, but with all of us working together, we might find where she's hiding.

Torin slides a plate of breakfast in front of me. “Eat first, save the world later.”

“Anyone else hungry?” he asks, looking around at Ramsey and Josh.

“Already ate,” Josh pats his stomach. “Though I wouldn't say no to more tea.”

As Torin busies himself with the kettle, I dig into my breakfast, realising how famished I am.

“So,” Ramsey says, watching me devour my breakfast with amusement, “what exactly are we dealing with here? Besides the obvious cosmic makeover you four got. How powerful is this Life being?”

“Pretty powerful, but she is dying, so I'm guessing her power is dying as well.”

“Which means she's got nothing left to lose,” Bram says.

Josh leans forward, elbows on the counter. “But what would she want? What's her endgame?”

“Control,” Tate says immediately, his markings shifting. “It's always been about control for her. The old system gave her that - she could manipulate life, create it, corrupt it. Now...”

“Now the playing field's been levelled,” I nod. “Everything's connected. Life, death,

rebirth, it's all part of one cycle. She can't manipulate it anymore, at least not the way she used to."

"Which makes her desperate," Ramsey concludes. "And desperate immortal beings are never good news."

"Assuming she's still immortal," Bram points out. "The rules have changed. We don't know what she is anymore."

I push my empty plate away, thinking. "We need to..."

My words trail off as a sudden surge of energy hits me. My vision blurs, replaced by flashes of something. Someone. A familiar presence, but twisted, wrong.

"Ivy?" Tate's voice seems far away. "What is it?"

"I'm not sure," I blink, trying to clear my head. "I felt her. Just for a moment. But different."

"Can you trace it?" Josh asks, already pulling out his phone.

I shake my head. "It's gone now. But it felt wrong. Like she's trying to force her way back into the natural order, but she doesn't fit anymore."

"That can't be good," Ramsey mutters, pulling out his own phone. "I'll alert our teams, tell them to be on high alert for any unusual energy signatures."

I rub my temples, trying to make sense of the lingering sensation. "Wait! It wasn't random. She was reaching for something specific. Someone..."

"Lila," Bram says suddenly. "She's trying to get back to Lila."

Before anyone can respond, the air crackles with electricity, and Vex materialises in the middle of the kitchen, his usual smug face more concerned right now.

“Hey, Ivy, nice to see you again, little shifter. No time to really catch up. You need to come to MistHallow. Now. Lila’s getting worse. Her body’s shutting down faster than we can heal it. We think Life is trying to get back inside her to possess her again.”

“That bitch!” I spit out the words like poison.

“She knows Lila’s vulnerable,” Torin grits out.

“We need to go,” I say, already reaching for my guys. “Now. Before she can?—”

“The wards are barely holding,” Vex cuts in, his voice tight with worry. “Whatever Life’s doing, it’s tearing them apart.”

Ramsey and Josh exchange quick looks. “We’ll coordinate from here,” Ramsey says, already typing on his phone. “We can get teams in position around MistHallow’s perimeter as soon as we get the go-ahead. Alert Professor Blackthorn that backup is on the way.”

Vex nods and grabs my arm and Tate does the honours and transports us to MistHallow Academy. A place, I’ve secretly been dying to see since Vex first mentioned it, but had hoped it would be under better circumstances.

The last thing I see is Ramsey’s worried face before we vanish, racing through the void toward MistHallow and whatever nightmare Life has planned for her former vessel.

TATE

I've never liked the way Vex looks at Ivy. Even now, as we materialise in MistHallow's courtyard in the middle of a crisis, his hand lingers too long on her arm. But there's something different now. A strange sort of understanding between us since learning about our blood connection. Half-brothers, in the most twisted sense of the word. It doesn't make me like him more, but it does make me understand him better. He doesn't fancy Ivy in that way, at least I don't think he does. It's more that he is just a giant douche canoe. That is confirmed when he shoots me that smug look I want to smack off his face with my ancestral power. I grin when I think it is our ancestral power. Oh, how poetic that would be...

"Tate!"

Ivy's urgent tone snaps me out of my wayward thoughts. We follow Vex across the misty campus.

The air in MistHallow feels different from before. The gentle hum of protective magick is discordant, like an orchestra playing out of tune. My markings burn in response, sensing the wrongness.

"This way," Vex says, leading us into the main building. "We've moved her to a warded room, but it doesn't seem to be helping."

"How long has she been like this?" Ivy asks as we hurry down a corridor.

“She started declining rapidly about an hour ago,” Vex answers. “Then the disturbances started. We thought at first it was just her body finally giving out, but...” He shakes his head.

“It’s Life making her move,” I mutter. The energy is stronger here, and it’s twisted, desperate.

Bram’s shadows float around us as we approach the door, and Torin’s chaos magick sparks in response to the energy saturating the air. We’re all on edge, sensing the danger.

The sight that greets us when we enter Lila’s room makes Ivy gasp. The shifter’s body is barely holding together, her form flickering between human and something else entirely. The void between realities shows through her skin in places, like tears in a cosmic fabric.

Blackthorn is there and he gives Ivy a swift nod but otherwise ignores her for the moment as he and Vex exchange a quiet word.

Hovering around her, barely visible but unmistakably there, is Life.

Haggard, ancient, fragile looking, but still emitting power on a wavelength that concerns me.

“She’s trying to force her way back in,” I say, watching the way Life’s essence circles Lila like a vulture. “Using their old connection to anchor herself.”

“You can see her?” Ivy asks with a frown. “Where is she?”

“There.” I gesture vaguely, frowning back at her. “You can’t see her?”

She shakes her head.

“Nor me,” Bram murmurs,

“Nope,” Torin says.

“Vex?” I ask,

He shakes his head.

“Why can I then?” I mutter.

“Does it matter?” Ivy snaps, her agitation getting the better of her. She is trying to get to Lila, but she is unable to break past whatever barrier Life has up. “If you can see her, you can fight her.”

“She’s weak,” I say, studying Life’s form more carefully. “Trying to repossess Lila is taking everything she has.”

Life’s head snaps toward me, and for a moment, our eyes meet. There’s recognition there, and hatred, but also desperation. She knows I can see her.

“Tell me what to do,” I say to Ivy, not breaking eye contact with Life. “I can see her, but you’re the one who knows how to fight her.”

Ivy’s hand finds mine, and immediately, I feel her power rush into me through our connection. “We need to sever that link between her and Lila,” she says. “Can you see it?”

I can. It’s like a sickly golden thread stretching between Life’s form and Lila’s failing body. “Yes. But it’s not just connecting them - it’s the only thing keeping Lila alive

right now.”

“Fuck,” Torin mutters. “So if we cut the connection, we kill her?”

Life laughs - a horrible, echoing sound that apparently only I can hear. Her form flickers closer to Lila’s bed. “You can’t save her without saving me,” she speaks directly to me. “We’re bound together. Cut one thread, sever them both.”

“Cut one thread, sever them both,” I repeat out loud. “That’s what she said.”

“No,” Ivy says steadily. “There has to be another way. Tate, you can see both the connection and Life herself. What if...” she pauses, thinking. “What if, instead of cutting the thread, we redirect it?”

“To what?” Vex asks from where he’s strengthening the room’s wards with a brutal efficiency that impresses me. He can be focused when he wants to be, apparently.

“We need to break her hold first,” I say, watching Life’s essence pulse and twist. “Then maybe we can stabilise Lila without her. I think she’s lying. We have to risk it.”

Ivy hesitates for a fraction, but then she nods, squeezing my hand tighter in a sign of trust. “Together then. All of us. Tate, you’re our eyes - guide us.”

I feel their power flow through me. Even Vex adds his strength to the mix, his power feeling surprisingly similar to my own. Blackthorn moves in closer, maintaining the wards as Vex shifts his focus. Life’s barrier shimmers visibly now, a sickly golden dome around Lila’s bed.

“There,” I gesture with my chin. “The barrier’s weakest at the top, where she’s focusing on Lila. If we hit it there...”

Without warning, we strike together, our combined power slamming into Life's shield. For a moment, nothing happens. Then I see it - a crack, spreading like spider webs across the golden surface.

Life screams in fury and pain, the sound reverberating through my skull as I slam my hands to my ears. The connection between her and Lila wobbles dangerously.

"Again!" I shout.

Another blast of power, stronger this time. The crack widens. Through it, I can see Life's form becoming less stable, more frantic.

"You fools," she hisses. "You'll kill her!"

But I can see she's lying - the connection is weakening, yes, but Lila's life force is actually growing stronger without Life's parasitic presence. I turn my head to Blackthorn, when I realise this is his doing. The wards around Lila are healing and protection. They have been keeping her alive this entire time, which is why they cannot allow them to fail, even for a second.

My respect for Vex shoots up a notch. Or a hundred. His responsibility for this girl is admirable and I should take a moment to tell him if we get the chance later.

"One more time," I grit out. "Everything we've got."

This time, when our power hits, the barrier shatters completely. Life's form recoils violently, her essence scattering like smoke in a strong wind. She doesn't disappear entirely; I can still see traces of her fleeing through the walls, but her hold on Lila is broken.

"She's gone," I say, sagging slightly as the strain catches up with me. "For now."



“Gone how?” Ivy asks, hopefully.

“Not dead. Fled.”

“Oh, what a downer.”

I snicker as Blackthorn rushes to Lila’s side, his hands glowing with healing magick. “Her vitals are stabilising,” he reports after a moment. “Whatever you did, it worked. She’s no longer declining.”

“But Life’s still out there,” Ivy says grimly, looking around even though she can’t see what I saw. “And now she’s even more desperate.”

“Let her be desperate,” Bram says, his shadows curling protectively around us all. “At least now we know we can fight her.”

I nod, but something nags at me. The way Life fled... it wasn’t just retreat. It felt like she was heading somewhere specific.

“We need to figure out where she’s going,” I say. “Because that didn’t feel like running away. It felt like she was running toward something.”

“Or someone,” Torin adds quietly.

We all exchange worried looks, knowing this is far from over. But at least for now, Lila is safe. One small victory in what I suspect will be a much larger war.

30

IVY

I approach Lila's bedside slowly, my heart heavy with guilt. She looks so fragile lying there, her skin almost translucent, and dark circles under her eyes, making her look older than she is. The Professor's healing magick pulses steadily around her, but he steps back to give me space, sensing I need this moment.

"I'm so sorry," I whisper, taking her hand. It's cold, too cold, but at least it's solid now. No more flickering between realities. "I should have realised sooner that it wasn't you."

My voice breaks. Behind me, I feel Bram's presence, steady and supportive, but he doesn't interrupt. None of them do.

"You didn't deserve any of this," I continue, squeezing her hand gently. "Being used as her puppet, being trapped in your own body while she... while she used you to hurt people. To hurt me." I swallow hard. "It's all my fault."

Lila's chest rises and falls steadily, but she shows no sign of waking.

"We're going to find her," I promise fiercely. "We're going to end her, and then you can finally be free. You can heal without her poison lingering in your system."

I feel Tate shift behind me. "Ivy," he says gently. "We need to move. If Life's heading somewhere specific..."

“I know.” I straighten up, but don’t let go of Lila’s hand just yet. “Just... keep her safe?” I look between the Professor and Vex. “Both of you. Please.”

“With our lives,” the Professor promises.

“Thank you, Professor...?”

“Blackthorn. Headmaster of MistHallow Academy. Sorry I didn’t introduce myself earlier, time was of the essence.”

“Professor Blackthorn. I’m Ivy Hammond.”

“I know,” he says with a coy smile that widens my eyes. I glance at Vex, who snickers.

“Not me. You are legendary, little shifter.”

“Fuck off,” I mutter, my cheeks heating up when Blackthorn clears his throat, giving me a stern stare.

“Any idea which direction she went?” Torin asks Tate as I finally step back from the bed.

Blackthorn frowns. “Given the magickal disturbances I’ve been monitoring, she’s probably heading north of here.”

“What makes you say that?” I ask.

“There are many things that could possibly draw her attention, but only one thing that fits this particular situation.”

“What is it?” Bram asks.

“The Hollowed Grounds. Ancient ruins from before the Great Split. Temples, ritual sites, places where the veil between realities was deliberately weakened. The magick there is unstable at best, despite being protected.”

“That sounds exactly like somewhere Life would go,” I say, exchanging worried looks with the others. “How far?”

“A few miles through the forest,” Blackthorn answers. “But it’s not a journey to be taken lightly. The paths are treacherous, and the closer you get to the ruins, the more unpredictable reality becomes. The forest around the academy is... how can I put this succinctly?”

“Batshit crazy,” Vex chimes in with a grin.

Blackthorn glares at him. “That’s not quite how I would have phrased it, but yes. We can go with batshit crazy.”

“Do you mean that in the sentient sense?” I venture, with a worried frown.

“Not exactly sentient,” Blackthorn says.

“Oh, completely sentient,” Vex says at the same time.

Blackthorn gives him an exasperated sigh. “It’s more like reality becomes fluid. The forest responds to your thoughts and your fears. It’s why we’ve never been able to map it properly, despite many efforts. The paths shift, some landmarks move, and time...” He pauses, retrieving what looks like an ancient compass from thin air. “Time can sometimes behave differently there.”

“Differently how?” Torin asks.

“How often is sometimes?” I add.

“Some times,” he says with a shrug. “Hours can pass like minutes, or minutes like days. The deeper you go, the more unstable it becomes.” Blackthorn hands me the compass. It’s warm to the touch, humming with old magick. “This is attuned to the energy fluctuations. It won’t show you true north - it’ll guide you toward the strongest concentration of power.”

“Which is where Life will be heading,” I finish, watching the needle spin erratically before settling on me. I shake it, and it does the same. Frustrated, I hand it to Tate. He looks at it and then at me.

Blackthorn takes it from him and shakes it. With narrowed eyes, he purses his lips. “Hmm, seems this is useless in your presence unless you are moonlighting as an ancient temple, Miss Hammond.”

“Not that I know of,” I mutter, my cheeks red hot.

“You will have to follow your instincts. When you get to the treeline on this side of campus,” He gestures firmly. “Turn left.”

“Left. Got it.”

“Remember, nothing you see in those woods can be trusted completely. The forest has a way of getting inside your head. Making you see what you fear most, or what you desire most. Sometimes both at once.”

“Wonderful,” Bram mutters. “Just what we needed right now.”

“Stay together,” Blackthorn warns. “The forest tries to separate groups. Once you’re alone...” He doesn’t finish the sentence. He doesn’t need to.

“We don’t have a choice. Life’s already got a head start.”

“Be careful,” Blackthorn says softly. “And, Miss Hammond. Whatever you see in there, remember why you’re going. Hold on to that.”

I nod as we head out into the sudden darkness of night.

I don’t question it as we hurry across the campus grounds. The moon hangs low and heavy above us, casting long shadows that seem to move independently of their sources. As we near the tree line, the air grows thick with magick - old magick, the kind that settles in your bones and makes your teeth ache.

“Left,” I murmur, remembering Blackthorn’s instructions. The path curves away from the academy, disappearing into darkness so complete it seems solid.

Bram grunts. “I don’t like this. The shadows here are wrong. They don’t respond properly.”

“Define properly,” Torin says suspiciously.

“They’re not just absence of light,” Bram explains, frustration clear in his voice. “They’re something else. Something older.”

A branch snaps somewhere in the darkness, making us all jump. When I look back, MistHallow’s lights are already dim, as if we’ve walked miles instead of yards. The forest seems to press in around us, branches reaching like grasping fingers.

“Everyone stay close,” I say, fighting down my rising unease. “And maybe we

should..." I trail off, realising Tate isn't beside me anymore. "Tate?"

"Here," his voice comes from behind me. But when I turn, he's standing several feet away, though I hadn't heard him move. "I was right next to you a second ago."

"It's starting already," Torin says grimly. "The forest is trying to separate us."

"Probably because one or all of us is thinking it. We are foreigners here, remember? We are guests. We respect the nature, the forest itself and we respect the hallowed grounds on which MistHallow rests and which we walk. This isn't Thornfield anymore, guys. This is the real deal, and we treat it accordingly," I say firmly, already knowing that as soon as this is over with, I'm speaking to Blackthorn about a transfer. I want to be here. The energy of this place is complementary to what is swirling inside me. I have to be here. There are no two ways about it. I just hope the guys will be okay with a move, too. But I think they will be just fine.

"Got it," Tate murmurs. "Sorry, that was probably me."

"And me," Bram murmurs.

Torin holds his hand up.

"Clear your minds," I instruct as the path ahead shifts and wavers, but I force myself to focus on what's real and the reason we're here.

"We're here for Lila."

The forest whispers back, a sound almost like laughter, and I gulp when the chill descends, touching me down to my soul.

31

TORIN

The forest is alive in a way that makes my new chaos magick feel like a child's sparkler compared to a supernova. It pulses and breathes around us, testing our defences and probing for weaknesses. I can feel it pressing against my mental shields, trying to find a way in.

"Stop," Ivy suddenly murmurs, throwing out an arm to halt our progress. Ahead of us, the path splits into three identical routes, each disappearing into impenetrable darkness.

"Well, that's not ominous at all," Tate mutters.

I reach out with my magick, trying to sense which path might be safest, but the forest's energy interferes, sending feedback that makes my head throb. "I can't get a read on any of them."

"Look," Bram points to where moss grows on the trees. "It's different on each path."

He's right. The left path's trees are covered in phosphorescent blue moss that pulses like a heartbeat. The middle path's moss glows a deep, bloody red. The right path's moss is pure white, almost painfully bright.

"Red for blood, white for bone, blue for soul," I recite.



“Huh?” Bram mutters.

I shake my head. “The candles that burn. It’s an old vampire coven thing.”

“Nicely done,” Tate says, slapping me on the back.

Ivy nods slowly. “Blue. We take the blue path.”

“Are you sure?” Tate asks, eyeing the pulsing moss warily.

“No,” she admits. “But it’s left, and I think... I think the forest is trying to help. In its own way.”

“Well, only one way to find out,” I state and lead the way,

We’re barely fifty feet down the blue path when I hear it - my mother’s voice, calling my name. I freeze, knowing it can’t be real. I fucking hope, anyway.

“Torin?” Ivy squeezes my hand. “What do you hear?”

“Nothing,” I lie, forcing myself forward. “Just the wind.”

“Whatever you’re hearing, it’s the forest using your fears against you.”

“It’s my mum. She’s calling to me,” I admit, grudgingly.

“She’s not here,” Ivy says, looking around.

“Can you be so sure? She is Life’s minion.”

Ivy’s eyes narrow as my mother’s voice echoes through the trees again.

“Can you hear it this time?” I ask.

She nods. “Ignore it. Your mother isn’t here. She wouldn’t get her expensive shoes muddy in the forest.” She smirks to try to lighten the mood, and it works.

“Well, I can’t argue with that.”

“Torin, sweetheart,” the forest version of my mother calls, her voice dripping with false warmth that the real vicious bitch would never use. “Don’t you want to make your mother proud?”

“That’s definitely not her,” Bram snorts.

“The forest is really bad at impersonations,” Tate adds dryly.

Their casual dismissal helps. They’re right - my mother would never use that sugary tone. She’s all ice and sharp edges. This poor imitation just proves it’s the forest playing tricks.

Another snap, closer. My mother’s voice shifts, becoming colder, but still not quite right. “You could have joined us. You still can. All that new power, wasted.”

“Oh, shut up,” Ivy snarls suddenly. “You aren’t real, and even if you were, Torin has chosen his side, and it’s not yours.”

The air grows heavy with tension, like two powerful forces testing each other. For a moment, I think the forest might retaliate, but then the pressure eases, and it goes silent.

“Well, that was irritating,” I grit out.

“The forest isn’t evil,” Ivy says thoughtfully. “It’s testing us. But we have to set boundaries.”

“Respect for each other,” Tate murmurs.

She nods. “Exactly. We show respect, but we don’t submit. We don’t let it?—”

A scream cuts through the night - Lila’s scream. Ivy’s head whips around, her whole body tensing.

“Don’t,” I warn. “It’s not real. It can’t be real.”

Ivy’s jaw clenches, but she doesn’t move toward the sound. Smart girl. Instead, she grips my hand. “We keep moving.”

But the forest isn’t done with us. The screams multiply. Tate makes a choked sound that suggests he’s hearing his own personal demons.

“Close ranks,” I order, pulling our group into a tighter formation. My chaos magick swirls protectively around us, responding to my need to shield rather than attack. “Whatever you hear, whatever you see, remember that the forest is trying to separate us.”

The path ahead shimmers, like heat waves rising from hot pavement. Through the distortion, I see figures moving. They look like us, but wrong somehow. They are darker versions, twisted versions.

“Oh, that’s new,” Bram mutters, his shadows rising up, ready to attack. “Never seen a forest do that before.”

Our doppelgangers step forward, and I have to admit, these are better copies than the

voice mimicry. The other-me grins, chaos magick crackling around him with an intensity that makes my skin crawl. His eyes are completely black.

“This is what you could be,” he says. “What you will be, once you stop fighting your true nature.”

“Bullshit,” I snap. “My nature isn’t yours to define.”

The other-Ivy laughs, the sound sharp and cruel. “Such conviction. Such delicious denial. You all cling to your manufactured morality while power beyond imagination waits for you to embrace it.”

“They’re not real,” Ivy reminds us firmly. “They’re just the forest trying to...”

She trails off as the figures suddenly blur, merging and shifting until we’re facing Life herself, looking exactly like Lila again.

“Fuck this,” Tate growls. “We don’t have time for mind games.”

Before any of us can stop him, he launches a blast of pure energy at the apparition. It passes right through, but the impact seems to shatter something. The path warps and twists, and suddenly, we’re somewhere else entirely.

The air is thicker here, heavy with magick that tastes like copper on my tongue. The moss-lit trees have given way to ancient stone pillars, crumbling but still standing, covered in symbols that hurt my eyes if I look at them too long.

“Well, that’s not good,” I mutter, noting how my magick reacts to this place, coiling and writhing like it’s found something familiar. Something dangerous.

“Where are we?” Tate asks, his power fluctuating wildly.

“Still in the forest,” Ivy answers, though she sounds uncertain. “But deeper, maybe? Those pillars look like they belong in the Hollowed Grounds Blackthorn mentioned.”

Bram’s shadows are acting strange, stretching toward the pillars like they’re being pulled. “Something’s wrong here. The shadows are not behaving normally. Even less so than before.”

“Define normally,” I say, watching as one of his shadows actually breaks away, dissipating into the darkness between two pillars.

“That,” he says tersely. “That’s not normal. I can’t control them properly here.”

A low humming starts, seeming to come from the pillars themselves. It resonates with my magick in a way that makes me nauseous. The symbols glow with a sickly green light.

“Move,” I bark, shoving Ivy forward as one of the pillars suddenly crumbles, stone fragments floating upward instead of falling.

We run, weaving between the pillars as more of them start to collapse—or maybe reconstruct themselves. It’s hard to tell when gravity seems optional. The humming grows louder, becoming a physical pressure that makes my ears pop.

“The path!” Ivy points ahead where the ground drops away into absolute darkness. “We need to find another?—”

The words die as we all see it. A bridge of pure light spans the void, leading to what looks like a temple in the distance. It pulses with the same green as the symbols.

“Please tell me we’re not actually considering crossing that,” Tate says.

Another pillar explodes behind us, fragments swirling like a tornado.

“You got a better idea?” I ask, already knowing the answer.

“We cross,” Ivy decides, her voice steady despite everything.

The bridge forces us into a single file. It shakes beneath our feet as we step onto it. There is ancient power here, raw and untamed, exactly the kind of thing Life would want to harness.

As we cross, the humming reaches a fever pitch, and I catch glimpses of things moving in the ravine below—massive shapes that shouldn’t exist, eyes that shouldn’t see. But we keep moving, one foot in front of the other, while behind us, the pillars continue their impossible dance of destruction and reconstruction.

We’re almost to the other side when I hear my mother’s voice one final time, closer than ever.

“You can’t save them all, Torin. In the end, you’ll have to choose.”

I ignore it. The forest can try all it wants to get in my head. But I know who I am, who I choose to be.

We reach the temple steps just as the bridge dissolves behind us. Through the massive doorway, I can see more paths splitting off into darkness.

“Well,” I say, trying to sound lighter than I feel, “that was fun. Who’s ready for more?”

But when I look at Tate, I can see he’s not hearing me. His eyes are fixed on something - or someone - only he can see, and the colour has drained from his face.

32

TATE

They're standing there, just like I remember them. Mum in her favourite blue sweater, the one she wore to all my early magick demonstrations. Dad, with his billowing cloak, suddenly reminding me he was a professor. That was something I'd forgotten, or rather, just not remembered.

They look so real, so alive, not like my parents who abandoned me to the streets and a life of distrust.

"Tate," Mum says, reaching out. "We've missed you so much."

My grip on Ivy's hand tightens until I hear her hiss in pain. I didn't even realise I had reached out to her. But I can't let go. If I let go, I might run to them. And they're not real. They're not real.

"Son," Dad's voice breaks on the word. "We're so proud of you. Of everything you've become."

"Stop," I choke out. "You're not them."

"We never left you," Mum insists, taking a step closer. "We've been watching over you. We saw how you struggled. How you fought. How you protected others when no one protected you."

The worst part is, they're saying exactly what I've always imagined they would say. What I've desperately wanted to hear for years.

"Tate." Ivy's voice seems to come from far away. "Tate, focus on us. On what's real."

"We are real," Dad says firmly. "More real than these children playing at being heroes. Come home, son. We can be a family again."

And that's what breaks the spell. "My real dad would never tell me to abandon true power for anything less. He was a hardass that way, but it makes me see the light. You are nothing."

Their faces flicker, just for a moment, showing something else beneath. Something wrong.

"And my mum," I continue, my voice stronger now, "would kick my arse for even considering it."

The figures waver, like heat distortion, but they're not giving up.

"Please," Mum begs. "Please, Tate, don't leave us again."

"Leave you?" I choke on the anger that rises up. "How fucking dare you?"

Ivy squeezes my hand. "Tate. It's not them."

"Get out of my sight," I spit at them.

The figures start to blur at the edges, like watercolours left in the rain. But they have one last card to play.



“Don’t you want to know why?” Mum asks softly. “Don’t you want answers?”

For a moment, I waver. Because, yes, I’ve wanted answers for years. Every night on the streets, every time I saw other families together, every success and failure I couldn’t share, I wanted to know why.

“Of course I want answers,” I say finally. “But I want them from my real parents, not whatever this is. And if I never get them? I’ll live with that. I’ve been living with it for years.”

The illusion shatters completely.

“That’s it,” Bram mutters approvingly. “Show them what happens when they fuck with your head.”

I send a blast of pure energy through the shadows, dispersing them like smoke. The temple around us groans, and new paths appear in the darkness.

“I’m okay,” I say before anyone can ask, wiping my face roughly. “But I really want to punch something right now.”

“Good,” Torin says grimly. “Because I have a feeling this place is going to give us plenty of opportunities for that.”

He’s probably right. But as we move deeper into the temple, I keep hold of Ivy’s hand. Some questions might never be answered. But some answers I’ve already found.

The temple seems to huff as we move forward, like it’s disappointed its trick didn’t work. Shadows creep along the walls, and I catch glimpses of other shapes in them - faces I might recognise if I look too long, so I don’t look.

“That took strength,” Ivy says quietly, still holding my hand.

I try to smile, but it feels shaky. “Yeah, well, this place picked the wrong trauma to poke at. I’ve had years to process that particular mess.”

That’s mostly true. Doesn’t mean it didn’t hurt to see them, to hear their voices. Doesn’t mean part of me didn’t want to believe.

“Heads up,” Torin calls from ahead. “Got something weird up here.”

The passage opens into a circular chamber, its walls covered in what look like mirrors. But the reflections are wrong—they shift and change, showing different versions of each of us: me with my parents, me alone on the streets, me as I might have been if they’d stayed.

“Don’t look too long,” Bram warns. “Place is still trying to mess with our heads.”

“No kidding,” I mutter, turning away from a reflection that shows me living a life I might have had. “So what’s the play here? Rush through?”

The chamber vibrates, and suddenly, the reflections aren’t just in the mirrors anymore. They’re stepping out, becoming three-dimensional, surrounding us with might-have-beens and never-weres.

“Well,” Torin says dryly, “I guess ‘rush through’ just got more complicated.”

A dozen versions of us circle like wolves, each one a different possibility.

But the others are facing their own reflections, too.

“Don’t let them separate us,” I call out. “That’s what they want.”

“Too late to run,” Bram says, his magick swirling around his hands. “Guess we’re fighting our demons literally today.”

The reflections attack as one. A darker self launches forward with street-fighting brutality, while a privileged version weaves complex spells I never had the chance to learn. A corrupted one just grins and releases waves of tainted power.

“Any brilliant ideas?” Ivy asks as she deflects a blast from her alternate self.

“Yeah,” I grunt, pulling her down as a spell whizzes overhead. “Stop thinking of them as us. They’re not us. They’re just shadows wearing our faces.”

“Easier said than done,” Torin replies, barely dodging his fear-driven counterpart.

He’s right. These versions of us know our moves and our weaknesses. They’re everything we could have become, everything we feared becoming. And they’re not pulling their punches.

I duck under a wild swing from streetfighter me, only to catch a blast of corrupted magick that sends me staggering. These versions of us aren’t just strong - they’re coordinating and working together in ways we haven’t figured out yet.

“Switch!” Ivy shouts suddenly. “Stop fighting yourselves!”

It takes me a second to get it, but she’s right. We’re too evenly matched against our own reflections. But against each other’s...

I spin away from my alternates and launch a blast at Ivy’s controlled reflection. She can’t counter my raw power. She dissolves into shadow with a shriek.

“They’re what we’re afraid of becoming, but we didn’t become them, and we won’t.

Keep fighting,” I grit out as one of the Ivys unleashes a swarm of fucking bees in my direction. “What the fuck?” I growl as they buzz all around me. “Not cool.”

Real Ivy snickers, but it’s short-lived as one of Bram’s other selves launches at her, knocking her off her feet.

“Oh, fuck this,” she snarls, getting up and coiling a power that I know is going to blow the lid off this temple and probably us into a million pieces.

But I don’t stop her.

Instead, I yell to Bram and Torin, “Run!”

33

IVY

The power builds inside me like a tsunami, feeding off every repressed emotion, every time I've held back. The guys run, and that's good. That's right. Because what's coming isn't precise or controlled, or safe.

The shadows wearing our faces seem to sense it. They start to retreat, but it's too late.

I throw my head back and scream, letting everything out at once. The power explodes from me in waves of pure, wild magick. A magick that consists of death and life and rebirth. It tears through the temple chamber like a hurricane, shredding the shadow-copies into nothing, shattering the mirrors that birthed them.

Death's essence surges forth first. Dark, cold, and absolute. It's followed immediately by the spark of life, brilliant and warm, twining together with the void's power. Between them pulses the energy of rebirth, a shifting violent force that binds the others together in perfect, terrible harmony.

The power explodes from me in concentric waves, each one carrying a different aspect of my new nature. The first wave is pure death. It slams into the shadow copies, their false forms crumbling as their stolen life force is stripped away. The second wave carries life's energy, and where it touches the chamber's ancient stones, moss and vines burst forth, growing and dying in rapid succession. The third wave ripples with rebirth, transforming everything it touches. The mirrors don't just shatter, they dissolve and reconstitute themselves as sheets of crystal that reflect all possible

realities at once before they too crumble to dust.

Each wave builds on the last, gaining strength as they spiral outward. The temple's foundation recognises the power of creation and destruction moving through it. The walls respond like a living thing, groaning in either ecstasy or agony. I'm not sure which. Ancient magick stored in the stones releases in a cascade of sparks and shadows.

The cracks across the ceiling are in intricate patterns, almost beautiful in their destruction. Where the cracks meet, chunks of stone rain down, but they dissolve into stardust before they can hit the floor. The dust itself swirls in impossible patterns, dying and being reborn as different forms of matter.

"Holy fucking shit!" I hear Bram swear behind me. "Take cover!"

The power pours out of me, wave after wave, until every false reflection, every shadow-copy, every might-have-been is torn apart and reconstructed and torn apart again. Their screams echo through dimensions as they're caught in the cycle of death and rebirth, finally fading into nothing as my power cleanses the chamber of their twisted existence.

When the last wave dissipates, the silence is absolute. The destruction is complete, but through the holes I've torn in the ceiling, sunlight streams down, bringing with it the promise of renewal. Where the light touches the ruined floor, tiny flowers push through the cracks, blooming and wilting in endless cycles.

I drop to my knees in the centre of what looks like a magickal bomb crater.

"Holy shit," Tate breathes, picking his way back to me through the debris. "That was terrifyingly impressive."

I snort, trying to stand, but finding my legs aren't quite ready to cooperate.

"Spectacular," Bram says, offering me a hand up. "You okay?"

I take his hand, letting him pull me to my feet. "Yeah. I feel like I'm alive for the first time in my life."

"Unfortunately," Torin observes, looking around at the destruction. "I think you just redecorated a sacred temple."

"The temple will heal," a voice echoes through the chamber. We all spin toward it, powers at the ready. "You, will not."

Life stands in what used to be the doorway, but she looks different now. More fragmented, like she's barely holding herself together. Her form flickers between Lila's appearance and something ancient and terrible.

"Oh, please," I scoff. "You have no idea what you are up against."

"You're too late," she says. "The ritual has already begun."

Ritual? What ritual?

The guys and I exchange glances, and a feeling of dread comes over me. This is not good.

"What ritual?" I demand, but even as I ask, I can feel it. There's a new vibration in the air, a wrongness that makes my teeth ache. The temple's residual energy is being pulled toward something, like water circling a drain.

Life laughs, the sound distorting as her form continues to flicker between Lila and

something else. Something older than time itself. “You thought I came here to hide? To run? Oh no, little Death. I came here because this is where it all began. Where the separation first occurred.”

“The Great Split?” Bram murmurs. “Blackthorn mentioned it.”

“Yes,” Life’s voice echoes unnaturally. “When Life and Death were first divided. When the balance was created.” Her form stabilises briefly, showing something that looks almost human but isn’t. Not quite. “And now I’m going to undo it all.”

The ground beneath our feet trembles. Through the cracks I created, I can see light pulsing deep below, and it’s not the gentle glow of my renewal, but something harsh and sickly.

“You’re dying. This isn’t about controlling death anymore. You’re trying to reset everything. To go back to before the Split.”

“Very good,” she sneers. “You see, if there were no separation, there would be no death. No cycle. Just eternal, unchanging existence.”

“That’s not life,” Tate argues. “That’s stagnation.”

“That’s preservation!” Life shrieks, her form fracturing further. “No more loss! No more endings! No more change!”

“You’re insane,” Torin states flatly. “You’ll destroy everything.”

“I’ll save me !” The temple shudders with her rage. “And there’s nothing you can do to stop it. The ritual is already drawing power from the ley lines. Soon, it will reach critical mass, and then...” She spreads her arms wide, and we can see through them in places, like she’s becoming transparent.



“Actually,” I say, “I think there’s plenty we can do to stop it.”

Her eyes narrow. “You’ve spent your power, little Death. That impressive display of yours saw to that. You have nothing left to fight with.”

I smile, feeling my guys move into position around me. “Wanna bet?” I say, cracking my knuckles. “You clearly aren’t up to speed on what happened when you sent me to the void. Bad move on your part, Lifey. You should’ve stayed in the loop. I’m not just Death anymore. And I’m not alone.”

“The ritual—” she begins.

“Fuck your ritual,” I cut her off. “You want to talk about beginnings? Let me show you mine.”

The battle for existence is about to begin, and this time, I’m ready for it.

34

IVY

The first strike comes faster than thought. Life launches herself at me, her fractured form shifting between solid and void as she attacks. I meet her head-on, no longer afraid of what I am or what I can do. The impact sends shockwaves through the temple, and more debris rains down from the ceiling.

“Pathetic,” she snarls, her voice echoing with countless others. “You think your new power is enough to stop what’s already begun?”

Through our connection, I feel Torin’s chaos magick probing deep beneath the temple floor, searching for the source of that sickly pulse. Bram’s shadows dive into the cracks I created earlier, following the corrupted ley lines down. Tate’s power flows through our bond, amplifying everything. Life’s form flickers again, and I catch a glimpse of what she truly is - or rather, what she’s becoming. Her essence is fractured, like a mirror that’s been dropped. In the spaces between the cracks, I see the void peeking through. She’s not just dying; she’s coming apart at a fundamental level.

I smile. “Actually, yeah, I do because I am Death. I am Life. I am Rebirth. You are a has-been old witch with nothing left to live for. Bye now.”

“You don’t understand what you’re interfering with,” she shrieks as she hurls a blast of pure energy at me. I dodge, letting it crash into the wall behind me, which is more satisfying than burning it away with my magick. Where’s the fun in that? “This ritual

will restore everything to its natural state!”

“Quit bitching and fight,” I growl, done with this shitshow, once and for all.

Life hurls herself at me with inhuman speed, her fractured form leaving trails of void in her wake. I sidestep, catching her with a blast of Death magick that tears through her defences. She screams, the sound shattering what remains of the temple’s windows.

Life recovers fast, lashing out with tendrils of pure energy that slice through stone like butter. One catches my arm, burning through fabric and skin. The pain is immediate and brutal, but I use it, channelling it into my next attack. The wave of power that erupts from me catches her mid-strike, sending her crashing into a column.

She doesn’t stay down. She is stronger than she looks. Her form ripples, reconstructing itself even as pieces of her essence continue to fall away and disappear. She draws more energy from her ritual, using it to hold herself together.

I press my advantage, not giving her time to recover. Death magick flows from my left hand, Life magick from my right, the energies twining together into a shocking blend of power. The blast hits her dead centre, tearing through whatever remains of her physical form.

But it’s not enough. Not yet.

The temple floor buckles beneath us as the ritual reaches a critical point. Life’s broken laughter echoes through the chamber as reality itself begins to warp around us.

It’s time to end this.

The temple groans as another shockwave ripples through its ancient stones. Life's magick tears through reality, distorting everything it touches. I dive sideways as a blast of her power reduces a column to ash, rolling back to my feet in time to see her form splinter further.

Fragments of her essence scatter like broken glass, each shard showing a different reflection of what she once was. But in between those fragments, the void grows larger. Whatever she's doing with this ritual, it's destroying her as much as it's destroying everything else.

I launch another attack, combining death and rebirth in a spiralling wave of power. She deflects it, but the effort costs her. More pieces of her form crumble away into nothingness.

"Found it!" Torin's voice cuts through the chaos.

"Fix it!" I roar as the ritual reaches its peak, and we're running out of time.

I need to get closer to Life, to strike at her core while the guys disrupt the ritual. But she's not making it easy. Her attacks are becoming more erratic, more desperate. Wild power lashes out in every direction, carving chunks out of the walls and floor.

A blast catches me on the side, and pain explodes through my ribs. But pain is just another form of power now. I take it, transform it, and send it back at her tenfold.

We're both bleeding power and essence now, locked in a dance of destruction that's tearing the temple apart around us. But only one of us is whole. Only one of us understands what it means to be both death and life.

And I'm done playing defence.

Panting, I gather everything I have left. Every scrap of power, every ounce of rage, every lesson learned. The temple shudders as Life's ritual reaches its crescendo, reality warping around us. It's affecting me more than I'd like to admit. It's ripping my power away from me, but I will be fucked up the arse with a red-hot poker before I allow her to take what was freely given to me.

Tate's power slams through our bond, raw and fierce, joining with Torin's chaos magick beneath the temple, seeking weak points in the ritual's structure. Bram's shadows dance around me protectively, but I push the distractions aside.

I close my eyes, and time slows down. I inhale deeply and exhale, opening my eyes as I fix Life with a stare that could wither an ancient being.

Life's form fractures completely, becoming a whirlwind of broken shards and void-dark spaces. Her power lashes out wildly, desperate and unfocused, as she screams. A blast catches Bram, sending him crashing into the wall. Another nearly takes Torin's head off.

I don't think. Don't hesitate. I dive straight into the vortex of her broken essence, Death magick in one hand, Life in the other. Her power tears at me, trying to rip me apart at a molecular level. Pain becomes meaningless - just another sensation in an ocean of them.

The nexus beats once, violently. The ritual falters for just a fraction of a second.

It's enough.

I drive both hands into the heart of Life's fractured form, letting everything I am flow through me. Death. Life. Renewal. The endless cycle that can't be broken or corrupted.

Life screams, the sound tearing through dimensions.

And then?—

35

IVY

Everything implodes.

Life's ritual unleashes a powerful force, dragging us both into a swirling abyss of pure energy. Her scream cuts off as her essence shatters completely, the fragments swallowed by the void she created.

Pain becomes my entire universe. Every cell in my body feels like it's being torn apart and reassembled. Through the chaos, I feel the guys' power anchoring me, keeping me from being ripped away into the void with her.

The temple crumbles around us. Bram's magick lurches forward, wrapping around me like armour. Torin redirects the worst of the backlash, but it's like trying to contain an explosion with tissue paper.

In the heart of the minefield, time slows. The chaos parts like a curtain, and I see her real image for the first time. Not the broken thing she became, but the essence of Life itself. She's beautiful in a way that defies description, all light and possibility and the first breath of spring. Her form shifts between a young woman with flowers blooming in her hair to a mother heavy with child to an ancient tree spreading its branches toward the sun.

Our eyes meet across the void. In that moment, I understand her completely. I see her grief, ancient and bottomless as the ocean. I see her fear of loss, of change, of the

endless cycle that brings both joy and pain. I see her desperation to preserve everything in amber, to stop the wheel from turning.

Then she fragments like light through a prism, her essence scattering into millions of glittering shards. Each piece carries a memory, a dream, a possibility. They spin away into the void, into me, as seeds of new life carried on a cosmic wind.

The implosion reaches its peak. Reality stretches, distorting everything it touches. Colours blur. Sound becomes light, becomes thought, becomes matter. My bones vibrate at frequencies that shouldn't exist. The air feels like it's being pulled inside out.

Then everything snaps back.

The silence hits like a punch to the head. One moment, the universe is screaming, the next, nothing. The contrast is so severe it makes my ears ring. I slam into the temple floor hard enough to drive the air from my lungs. Every nerve ending fires at once, sending conflicting signals of hot-cold-pain-pressure-nothing-everything to my overwhelmed brain.

Through vision that won't quite focus, I see the others. Bram lies crumpled against a fallen column. Torin's sprawled face-down, one arm bent at an angle it shouldn't be. Tate's the only one still somewhat upright, on his hands and knees, blood dripping from his nose and eyes.

Above us, the ceiling groans ominously.

"Move!" I try to shout, but it comes out as a hoarse whisper.

I try to move, and my body screams in protest. Every muscle feels shredded, every bone bruised to its core. My magick flutters weakly inside me, drained almost to



nothing. But we can't stay here.

"Get up," I rasp, forcing myself to my knees. The world spins violently, and I taste copper in my mouth. "Get up!"

Bram stirs first. He stumbles toward Torin, who hasn't moved. Above us, a massive chunk of ceiling crashes down barely ten feet away, sending shockwaves through the floor.

Tate crawls toward me, leaving smears of blood on the ancient stones. His eyes are unfocused, but his hand finds mine. What's left of his power trickles through our bond, barely enough to help me stand.

"Torin," I call out, my voice raw. Bram's reached him now, carefully rolling him over. Torin groans, and with a sickening crunch, he snaps his broken arm back into place, which heals instantly.

Another section of the ceiling gives way. Bram's magick flies upward, barely deflecting the debris away from them. The effort costs him; he staggers, nearly falling.

The temple shudders again. The floor beneath us starts to crack, and the corrupted ley lines still unwind far below. We have seconds before the whole place comes down.

I look at Tate and see the understanding in his eyes. We both know what needs to happen.

"Last bit of magick," I say. "All of us. Together."

We've never attempted anything like this in our depleted state, but there's no choice. Death comes for everything eventually - but not today. Not like this.

Bram catches on immediately. His god-like magick, thin and tattered, stretches out to connect us all. I feel Tate gathering what's left of his power, weaving it with mine. Torin shoves his magick into the mix with a loud grunt of effort.

The temple's death throes intensify. Support columns crack and buckle. The floor starts to cave in at the edges, revealing the void-dark spaces beneath. It is pissed that the ritual was stopped, or maybe it's just pissed that it was awoken from its slumber. Either way, it's pissed, and we need to calm it down before it crushes us.

I close my eyes and reach for the power waiting. Death isn't just an ending—it's transformation, change, and a doorway to something new. I let that truth flow through me, through all of us.

"Hold on to each other," I manage through gritted teeth. "No matter what happens, don't let go."

The ceiling gives way completely. Tons of ancient stone plummet toward us as the floor disintegrates beneath our feet. Time slows, caught between one heartbeat and the next.

I pull on every scrap of power we have left, weaving death and shadow and chaos into something new. Something that tastes like possibility.

The world goes white.

And we fold.

Reality bends around us like paper, creasing along impossible angles. For a fraction of a second, I see everything at once: the temple collapsing into itself, the corrupted ley lines snapping like overtightened strings, the countless layers of existence stacked like pages in a book. Our combined magick tears through them all, searching for a

way out.

The sensation is indescribable - like being turned inside out while falling in every direction at once. If I thought being scattered across dimensions was painful, this is worse. I scream, my throat raw and bleeding. I feel Tate's hand gripping mine so tightly the bones grind together. Bram's magick screams as it's stretched to its absolute limit. Torin's magick dances wild and erratic through our impromptu spell.

We're burning up what little power we have left. If this doesn't work...

Then, something catches us. A current in the chaos, a thread of familiar power. It takes me a moment to recognise it.

Blackthorn.

I grab onto it with everything I have left. The others follow my lead, our combined magick wrapping around that glowing thread like drowning people clutching a lifeline.

The world twists one final time...

And spits us out.

We hit grass instead of stone. Clean night air fills my lungs, sweet and cold and blessedly real. Somewhere nearby, crickets are chirping as if nothing extraordinary has happened at all.

I force my eyes open and see the Professor standing over me, peering down with an inquisitive stare. "Well done, Miss Hammond," he says cheerfully. "Well done, indeed."

36

IVY

“Well done, indeed,” Blackthorn repeats, offering me his hand.

I take it, letting him pull me to my feet. My legs feel like jelly, and my entire body throbs with the aftermath of channelling that much power. But we’re alive. We stopped Life. We saved... everything.

“The temple?” I ask, my voice rough.

“Improving,” he says. “The ley lines are realigning themselves. It will take time, but the damage can be repaired. This forest and everything in it is nothing short of powerful.”

I look around, taking in our surroundings. We’re back on MistHallow’s grounds, the mist curling around our ankles like curious cats. The guys are sprawled in various states of consciousness on the damp grass.

“They need medical attention,” I say, watching Torin try and fail to sit up.

“Already arranged.” He gestures, and several figures emerge from the mist - healers, I assume, given their focused expressions and glowing hands.

“Professor,” I start, but he holds up a hand.

“Rest first. We have much to discuss, but it can wait until you’re all recovered.”

I want to argue, but exhaustion hits me like a tidal wave. The healers approach, their energy gentle but insistent. One of them guides me to sit on a nearby bench.

“The ritual?” I ask as healing magick seeps into my battered body.

“Completely dismantled so far as we can tell,” Blackthorn assures me.

I manage a weak laugh that turns into a cough. “Well, that’s good. I think.”

He studies me with those ancient eyes. “Focus on healing, Miss Hammond. We can talk more later.”

The healer working on me clicks her tongue disapprovingly. “Multiple metaphysical fractures, severe energy depletion, temporal displacement strain...” she mutters. “What exactly are you and what were you doing?”

“Have you got a year?” I ask sarcastically, earning another tut from her. “Let’s just say I’m the centre of the universe, and I’ll live.”

Bram snorts. “Think quite highly of yourself, don’t you?”

“Says you, oh god of... whatever the hell you are.”

“Speaking of which,” Tate adds. “Do we want to know what happened to Morrigan?”

“Maybe not yet,” I mutter. “One thing at a time.”

The last thing I hear before exhaustion claims me is Torin’s grumble, but I know they are okay so that I can sleep.

I wake to weak sunlight streaming through tall windows and the smell of old books. I'm in a massive four-poster bed, the sheets softer than anything I've ever felt. The room around me is a curious blend of ancient and modern.

"Welcome back," a familiar voice says.

I turn my head to see Vex lounging in a chair by the bed, his feet propped up on an antique table that probably costs more than my entire apartment.

"How long?" I ask, my throat dry.

He gets up to hand me a bottle of water. "Three days. The others woke up yesterday."

I bolt upright, spilling water everywhere. "Three days? Where are they? Are they okay?"

"Relax. They're fine. Recovering in their own rooms. Blackthorn insisted on keeping you all separated until the initial healing was complete. Something about your combined power being too unstable."

"And Lila?"

"Stable. Better, actually, now that Life's influence is completely gone." He pauses. "She's been asking for you."

My heart clenches. "I'm not sure she should see me yet."

"That's not your decision to make," he says firmly. "But it can wait until you're stronger."

I nod, sinking back into the pillows. Everything aches, but in a distant way, like my

body is remembering pain rather than actively experiencing it.

“So,” Vex says after a moment, “want to tell me what it feels like to be a god?”

I throw a pillow at his head. He dodges, laughing.

“Not a god,” I mutter. “Just different.”

“Different enough to need a new school,” he says casually.

I look at him sharply. “Meaning?”

“You can’t kid a kidder, little shifter. I know you want to go here. Who wouldn’t? I’m pretty sure Blackthorn will give you entry based on your, well, whatever you want to call it. The illustrious Headmaster from Thornfield is in his office right now.”

“Really?” I’ve never even seen Thornfield’s Headmaster. No one has, as far as I know. “Who is it?”

He rolls his eyes. “You will never guess in a million years.”

“Try me because I’ve lived a million years in the last few months; I think I can place an accurate guess. Swann?”

“Ooh, got it in one.”

“Fucker. Why did he skulk about like he was just some professor?”

Vex shrugs. “Beats me. But who gives a shit? You have outgrown Thornfield, and we all know it.”

I study him and notice the change in him. He is no less dangerous, no less sarcastic and annoying, but it's like he's levelled up. I like that for him. He is being challenged, and that is what Tate needs as well. All of us, really. Especially now.

“And the guys?”

“Blackthorn will hardly split up the fabulous four. Besides, having more Fae here will be good for his rep, not to mention he is very intrigued by Tate's ancestral power boost and Torin's explosive mage power. You know, seeing as he is a vampire mage, too.”

“He is?” I blink. “That explains... a lot.”

We fall into an easy silence, and I soak in the energy around me. MistHallow feels right in a way Thornfield never did. The energy here resonates with whatever I've become. And after everything that's happened...

“Does Swann know?” I ask. “About what happened? What we are now?”

“Let's just say he's been more involved than anyone realised.” Vex's expression turns serious. “There's a lot going on behind the scenes that's only now coming to light.”

I groan, pulling the covers over my head. “More secrets. Perfect.”

“Hey, at least these ones might work in your favour.” He pats the blanket lump that is me. “Get some rest. Blackthorn wants to talk to all of you once you're stronger.”

Sticking my head out from under the covers, I stick my middle finger up at him, but I'm smiling. Maybe this is exactly what we need - a fresh start somewhere that understands what we've become.



“Leave now so I can shower, at least.”

“See you around, little shifter,” he says and snaps his fingers, leaving in a flash of blue magick.

After a much-needed shower and change of clothes, I leave the room and find myself in a hallway filled with students. Some give me curious stares, others ignore me completely. I ask one of them to direct me to Blackthorn’s office. I think he is some kind of wolf shifter, although not a regular kind. He has power. An alpha in the making, perhaps?

“There’s been a lot of talk about you,” he says with a smile that seems genuine.

“Yeah? All good, I hope?” I joke.

He snickers. “Good enough. You will fit in well here, I think. Power is attracted to power, and everyone here has power.”

“So I see,” I murmur.

The corridors of MistHallow hum with ancient magick, and I feel at home here. I feel a pang for Ramsey and Josh, and I wonder if there is room for them here as well. If they even want to make the transfer.

The wolf shifter, whose name I didn’t get, leaves me outside Blackthorn’s office, and I knock, my palms sweating suddenly with nerves. I guess some things will never change.

“Enter!” he calls out, and I push open the massive door.

Blackthorn is behind a massive desk, and Professor Swann stands by the window. It

is jarring to see him in this context.

“Miss Hammond,” Blackthorn gestures to a chair. “Please, sit.”

“Ivy,” Swann turns from the window, and I shudder. Still just as creepy as always. “You’ve certainly made things interesting.”

“That’s one way to put it,” I mutter, taking the offered seat. “Sir.”

He waves off the formality. “I think we’re well past that. Though I do owe you an explanation.”

“Several, I’d imagine,” I say dryly.

“The Syndicate needs leadership,” he says, getting straight to the point. “With Death’s passing on the mantle and subsequent events, there’s been uncertainty about its future amongst the ranks.”

“Well, get right down to it, why don’t you,” I mutter.

He gives me a sharp glare.

I straighten in my chair and fix him with a level stare, eager to share my thoughts on this now that the opportunity has struck. “The Syndicate serves a purpose. It removes the worst of the supernatural world.”

“And now?” Swann prompts. “You are now Death, as it were. You are the head of this organisation.”

“I’m aware, although I hadn’t had too much time to think about it, my initial thoughts are that now it’s even more important. We’re not just eliminating those who slip

through the cracks of justice, we're giving them a chance at redemption through rebirth."

Swann nods approvingly, his black eyes lighting up in that creepy, creepy way that makes me shudder down to my soul. "That's what we hoped you'd say. There are many employees relying on this organisation."

"Including you," I say dryly.

He inclines his head, but doesn't grace me with an answer. He doesn't have to. I know the score.

Swann straightens from his position by the window. "I agree with your vision for The Syndicate, Ivy. It's time for evolution, not revolution. The organisation will support your leadership."

"I should fucking hope so. We leave The Resistance alone. They have their thing to do, and it's nothing to do with us. That is a hill I will die on..." I give them both a sickly sweet smile, "... and in case you haven't noticed, I can't die."

Swann looks like he wants to argue but finally, he nods. "Agreed."

"Now," Blackthorn says, opening a drawer in his desk, "there's the matter of your education to discuss." He pulls out several papers. "As much as Thornfield wants to keep hold of you, I believe you will be better suited to the protection and education MistHallow can provide."

I glance at Swann. He grimaces but says nothing. He can't. He has no rule over my life.

I pick up the formal acceptance letter and prospectus and stare at them for a moment.

“Just like that?”

“Just like that,” Blackthorn confirms with a slight smile. “MistHallow would be honoured to have you. All of you.”

I nod, knowing I’m exactly where I need to be. Hopefully, the guys will agree.

37

brAM

Recovery comes slowly, even for immortals. Each of us processes change differently. Some with quiet contemplation, others with restless energy that threatens to spill over. The three of us are gathered in my assigned room at MistHallow, trying to make sense of what we've become.

I watch Torin staring out of the window, his normally controlled vampire cool, fractured by flashes of power he can barely contain. Frost creeps along the windowsill where his fingers brush, and occasional sparks of pink magick dance around him like fireflies. The vampire mage—always so careful with his power before—now practically vibrates with it.

Tate lounges in an armchair, the picture of casual grace, but I can see the changes in him too. Ancient magick ripples beneath his skin, making his eyes shift colours like aurora borealis.

I sit on the edge of the bed, feeling the weight of ages in my bones. Knowledge and power pulse through my veins, whispering secrets of the universe that I'm not sure I'm ready to understand.

“So,” Tate finally breaks our contemplative silence, “This is new.”

Torin snorts, another layer of frost spreading beneath his fingers. “No shit, Sherlock. Fuck, I don't even know what to call us now.”

“Vessels,” I state, the word rising from somewhere deep inside, where ancient truth now resides. “We’re vessels for powers that needed anchors in this world. After what Life tried to do...”

“The universe needed a counterbalance,” Tate finishes, sitting forward. “And it chose us. Though I have to say, being chosen feels a lot like being hit by a metaphysical truck.”

“The universe needed Ivy,” I say. The truth resonates through me, down to my soul. “We were already bound to her. And she was already marked by Death.”

“More than marked,” Tate muses. “She was chosen too, long before any of us. We just got caught in her gravity.”

“Like she’s the centre, and we’re the points of a compass,” Torin adds. “Balance.”

It settles over us. Our connection to Ivy and our love for her made us perfect conductors for these cosmic forces. Light and Dark. Creation and Destruction. Life and Death. All in perfect balance.

“Speaking of our girl,” Tate says, shifting in his chair, “anyone else feeling that pull? It’s different now. Stronger.”

I nod. Even now, I can feel Ivy’s presence in the building, like Blackthorn’s magickal compass that kept homing in on her. The bond between us has evolved into something more powerful and more delicate. “It’s like she’s written into our DNA now. More than just a mate bond.”

“We’re going to need help figuring this out,” Torin says, frost finally receding as he takes a seat. “I nearly froze my entire room this morning just because I sneezed. And Tate keeps accidentally growing things.”

“One plant! It was one plant,” Tate protests, but he’s grinning. “Though I will admit, a fully grown oak tree appearing in the middle of the bathroom was a bit much.”

“We need to learn control,” Torin continues, ignoring him. “Before we accidentally reshape reality or something equally catastrophic.”

“MistHallow could help with that,” Tate suggests, his tone carefully neutral. “They understand ancient magick here in ways Thornfield doesn’t. And Blackthorn could be a good mentor. Solid, reliable, old enough to understand what all this is.”

I feel a smile tugging at my lips. “My thoughts exactly.”

“It makes sense,” he shrugs. “This place resonates with what we’ve become. It understands us.”

“I’m in, if everyone else is,” Torin declares.

A knock at the door pauses our conversation, but we all know who it is before it opens. Ivy steps in, looking better than she has in days. Her power reaches for ours automatically, completing our circuit.

“So,” she says. “Are we doing this?”

“Doing what?” I ask coyly.

She giggles. “Joining MistHallow Academy, you arse.” She perches on the arm of Tate’s chair. “But I’m serious. Thornfield has been home. We have friends there. Ramsey and Josh...”

“Who can visit,” Torin points out. “Or transfer too, if they want or can.”

“It’s more than just changing university,” I say, standing to join them. “This is about accepting what we’ve become. Learning to control it. Use it responsibly.”

Ivy nods. “The power here is different. Older. When I walk these halls, I can feel centuries of magick in the stones. It’s like the building itself wants to teach us.”

“I know what you mean,” Tate says. “That oak tree I accidentally grew? At Thornfield, that would have caused chaos. Here, the room just adapted. Like it was expecting something like that to happen.”

“Because it was,” Torin muses. “This place was built for powerful beings learning to control ancient magick. We’d be idiots not to take advantage of that.”

I move closer to Ivy, drawn by the constant pull between us. “We’d be starting over. New academy, new rules, new dynamics to figure out.”

She looks up at me. “That’s what I’m worried about. We just found our footing with each other. What if this changes things?”

Tate stands, taking her hand. “Everything’s already changed, princess. We can either fight it or embrace it.”

“And honestly,” Torin adds, joining our growing circle, “I’d rather figure out how to stop freezing things every time I get emotional somewhere that understands what we are.”

I take her other hand, feeling the familiar spark of our connection, stronger now than ever.

“Besides,” Tate says, his grin turning wicked, “think of all the trouble we can cause in a new academy. All those uptight, powerful supernaturals who need shaking up...”



“No trouble,” Torin growls, but he’s fighting a smile.

“Some trouble,” I counter. “Controlled, purposeful trouble.”

“Diplomatic trouble,” Ivy suggests, laughing.

“Educational trouble,” Tate adds.

And just like that, the tension breaks. We’re still us—changed, evolved, more powerful than ever—but still us. Still four people who found each other against all odds, who chose each other despite every obstacle.

“So we’re doing this?” Ivy asks.

“We’re doing this,” I confirm.

“Together,” Torin adds firmly.

“Always,” Tate seals it with a kiss to her temple.

Here at MistHallow, where ancient magick runs deep, and secrets are meant to be unravelled, we’ll learn to be what the universe needs us to be.

But more importantly, we’ll learn to be ourselves - together, balanced, complete.

The way it was always meant to be.

38

IVY

The healing wing of MistHallow is quiet in the early morning hours. I've been standing outside Lila's room for ten minutes, trying to gather my courage.

Vex said she was asking to see me, but that was a few days ago. I was unconscious, but it still makes me feel guilty for not coming sooner.

But at the same time, I'm not sure I'll ever be ready.

How do you face someone whose life you inadvertently helped destroy? Someone who was possessed and tortured because of their connection to you? The guilt sits heavy in my chest, a constant weight I can't seem to shake.

You can do this. For Lila.

The guys offered to come with me, but this is something I need to do alone. Some conversations need to happen without witnesses.

Taking a deep breath, I push open the door.

Lila is sitting up in bed, looking through what appears to be one of MistHallow's textbooks. She's still pale, but there's colour in her cheeks now, and her hands no longer flicker between realities. Her hair is pulled back in a messy bun, and she's wearing one of the academy's soft grey sweaters.

She looks up as I enter, and for a moment, we just stare at each other. The last time I saw her conscious, she was being controlled by Life, her eyes cold and cruel. Now they're just Lila's eyes. The warm brown I remember from years of friendship, currently filled with uncertainty and something that looks like hope.

"Ivy," she says softly, closing her book. "You came."

"Yeah." My voice cracks. "I'm sorry it took me so long."

"Don't be. I understand." She gestures to the chair beside her bed. "Will you sit?"

I move to the chair, perching awkwardly on its edge. Up close, I can see the faint traces Life left behind as subtle silver scars that spiral up Lila's arms like frost patterns, remnants of being used as a vessel for such powerful, corrupted energy.

"How are you feeling?" I ask, then immediately want to kick myself. What a stupid question.

But Lila just gives me a small smile. "Better. Professor Blackthorn's healing methods are intense, but effective. The episodes are less frequent now."

"Episodes?"

She looks down at her hands. "Sometimes I still slip. Between realities. It's like echoes of what she did to me. But they're getting shorter, easier to control."

Guilt crashes over me in a fresh wave. "Lila, I'm so sorry. If I had known?—"

"Stop." Her voice is firm. "This isn't your fault, Ivy. None of it was your fault."

"But she chose you because of me. Because we were close."

“She chose me because I was vulnerable and available,” Lila corrects. “And because she was a monster who enjoys destroying beautiful things. You didn’t make her do any of it.”

I swallow hard. “I should have known it wasn’t really you. All those things she made you do... the way she changed you... I should have realised something was wrong. I should’ve known you’d never fuck Kai behind my back...”

“Oh, gods!” she groans, covering her face with her hands. “She used my body like a whore. Kai wasn’t the only one... there were so many... Ivy...” She chokes back a sob, and I openly weep for her.

“I’m so sorry, Lila. Fuck. If I hadn’t been so wrapped up in my parents’ death all the time, maybe I would’ve seen it wasn’t you. But that’s no excuse. I should have known it wasn’t you.”

“How could you have known?” Lila cries. “We were eighteen, Ivy. Neither of us knew anything about possession or cosmic entities or any of this shit. We were basic shifters going about our little lives. As far as you knew, I just turned into a terrible person. It happens all the time in normal life.”

“But—”

“No buts.” She reaches for my hand, and I let her take it. Her skin is warm now, solid. Real. “I remember everything she did while wearing my face. Every cruel word, every manipulative action. The way she used Kai to hurt you, the friendships she destroyed, the chaos she caused. I remember being trapped inside myself, screaming, unable to stop any of it.”

Tears spill down my cheeks. “I’m so sorry you went through that.”

“I know. But Ivy, listen to me.” She squeezes my hand. “You saved me. You figured it out, you fought her, and you saved me. That’s what matters now.”

I squeeze her hand back, fighting through the tightness in my throat. “I missed you, the you that became my best friend. So much.”

“I missed you too.” Her smile is watery but genuine. “Even when she had control, even when I could only watch helplessly, I never stopped missing my best friend.”

The words hit me hard. Best friend. We were so close once, sharing everything from midnight snacks to our deepest secrets. Until Life ripped that away from us.

“Tell me about it?” I ask softly. “If you want to. If you can. What it was like?”

Lila is quiet for a long moment, her fingers tracing the silvery scars on her arms. “At first, it was like being underwater. Everything was muffled, distant. I could see what was happening, but it felt disconnected. Like watching a movie of my life instead of living it.”

She takes a shaky breath. “But then it got worse. She got stronger, and I got smaller. Pushed into this tiny corner of my own mind. I could feel everything she did with my body, hear every word she said with my voice, but I couldn’t stop any of it. The day you found me with Kai, I fought harder than ever. I knew what it would do to you, finding us together. I screamed and raged inside my own head until I thought I would go mad. But she just laughed. She enjoyed it, knowing how much it would hurt you.”

Tears are flowing freely down both our faces now. I move from the chair to sit on the edge of her bed, our hands still linked.

“After that, she started using my memories against me. She would replay our friendship in my mind, twisting everything, trying to make me believe I’d always

been jealous of you, that I'd always wanted to hurt you. Some days... some days, I almost believed her."

"But you didn't," I say fiercely. "You fought her."

"I did. Even when it felt hopeless, even when I thought I'd be trapped forever, I kept fighting. Because I knew you. The real you. Not the version she tried to paint in my head."

Something shifts between us then, some of the tension easing. This is still Lila - my Lila, my friend who loved silly movies and, always stole my chips and knew exactly how to make me laugh when I was sad.

"I have so much to tell you," I say. "About everything that's happened, about what I've become..."

"I know some of it. The professors talk when they think you aren't listening." She gives me that mischievous grin I've missed. "You're kind of a big deal around here, apparently."

I groan, making her laugh—a real laugh, one I haven't heard in years. "I'm still me."

"And thanks to you, I'm me again."

She leans forward, and I wrap my arms around her. She rests her head on my shoulder, and for a moment, we're just quiet together. I don't understand how Lila can be so forgiving after I let her down so badly. I will have to make it up to her, but I can. I have lifetimes.

"How did you end up here?" I ask, curious.

She shakes her head. “I don’t remember much. I remember wandering around in a forest and then waking up here.”

I nod and leave it at that. I don’t want to press her, and it doesn’t really matter. The main thing is, she did come here, and they helped her.

“So,” she says finally, poking my side. “Want to tell me what you’ve been up to?”

I tell her everything. About The Syndicate, about becoming an assassin, about meeting Bram, Torin and Tate, and about how they became not just my mates but my anchors, my family. I tell her about Ramsey and Josh. About Death’s mark and Life’s betrayal and everything that followed.

She listens, asks questions, laughs at all the right parts. And slowly, piece by piece, we begin to rebuild what Life tried to destroy. Our friendship might be different now, shaped by everything we’ve been through, but maybe that’s okay. Maybe we’re both different, too. Stronger for having survived, wiser for having suffered.

Our friendship is real.

And this time, nothing—not Life, not Death, not all the power in the universe—will take it away from us again.

39

TORIN

The teleportation back to Thornfield feels like descending into a tomb. It's fitting, given what awaits us there. My mother's presence lingers at the edges of my awareness—a cold, ancient malevolence that's haunted me since birth. She's waiting, I can feel it.

But we need to be back here for all our stuff and to say our goodbyes, and she needs to deal with it. The last thing I need or want is for her to arrive at MistHallow's doorstep for this confrontation.

“You okay?” Ivy asks as we walk across campus, slowly, not eager to confront this for various reasons.

“Peachy,” I grunt.

Bram and Tate follow behind us. We're stronger together now, our roles as Ivy's anchors have evolved into something deeper, more fundamental. But even that knowledge doesn't completely quiet the unease churning in my gut.

“We don't have to do this,” Ivy says softly. “We could ignore her.”

I shake my head. “She'll just keep coming. Better to end it now.”

The truth hangs between us, unspoken but understood. My mother won't stop. She's



had centuries to perfect her cruelty, to hone her obsession with power. Even Life's defeat won't change that, but I'm interested to see what's changed.

As we approach the townhouse, I see the Rolls Royce parked up and inhale deeply.

"Well, well," her voice carries across the night sky as she climbs out of the back seat. "The prodigal son returns."

"Mum," I say flatly. "Still alive, I see. Pity."

Her smile doesn't reach her eyes. It never has. "Such disrespect. After everything I've done for you."

"You mean after everything you've done to me?" I counter as Ivy, Bram, and Tate hang back to let me do this... whatever this is. "The years of manipulation? The attempts to turn me into your perfect little soldier?"

"I tried to make you strong to lead the coven. Instead, you chose weakness. Chose them."

I laugh, the sound harsh and bitter. "Weakness? Oh, you have absolutely no idea what you're talking about. But that's always been your problem. You never understood the difference between cruelty and strength."

Her facade cracks slightly, ancient vampire power leaking through like poison. "I understood enough to survive this long. To build our family's legacy?—"

"Legacy?" I cut her off. "You mean the trail of bodies? The enemies you've made? The allies you've betrayed?" I step forward, letting my own power rise. "What you did to Dad, not that he didn't deserve it, but still."

“Your father was weak,” she hisses, her perfect composure slipping further. “Just like you’ve become.”

“No,” Ivy says quietly, moving forward. “He’s become something you can’t comprehend. Something beyond your petty games and power plays.”

My mother’s laugh is like breaking glass. “You think because you’ve become Death that you understand power? Life showed me things beyond your comprehension.”

“Life showed you what you wanted to see,” Bram says. “She used your ambition, your fear of irrelevance, against you.”

“She promised me true immortality!”

“She lied,” I say simply. “And now she is gone. In her place is Ivy. If you really want to throw down with her, be my guest, although I wouldn’t recommend it. She will kick your arse all the way to the grave. You’ve been lying to yourself for centuries. Pretending your cruelty makes you strong. Your manipulation makes you clever. Your betrayals make you powerful.”

Her power lashes out, fast as a striking snake. But I’m faster now, my enhanced abilities letting me sidestep easily. Her attack leaves scorch marks on the pavement where I stood.

“I am your mother,” she snarls, her perfect mask finally cracking completely. Beneath it, I see what she truly is—an ancient, desperate thing, clinging to power and control like a drowning person clutches driftwood. “Everything I did was to prepare you!”

“To be just like you?” I cut her off again. “A bitter, lonely creature who betrays everyone foolish enough to trust her? Who aligned herself with a cosmic force she

didn't understand because she's so terrified of losing control?"

"You know nothing of control!" She launches herself at me, vampire speed making her almost blur. Almost.

I catch her wrist before her claws can reach my throat. The contact sends ice through to her veins.

"I know enough," I say quietly, holding her in place as she struggles. "I know that real strength comes from bonds freely given, not forced through fear or manipulation. I know that true power grows stronger when it's shared, not hoarded."

"Foolish boy," she spits, her face contorting with rage. "This girl will do nothing but cock up the universe. She has no idea the forces that are out there."

"And you do? Who cares? It is what it is. Nothing can or will change it."

Her other hand comes up, dark power gathering in her palm. But before she can strike, Ivy steps forward. The air itself seems to hold its breath.

"You've lost," Ivy says. "Life is gone. Your bid for power failed. The only question now is whether you'll accept that gracefully or force us to handle your assault?"

My mother's laugh holds an edge of hysteria. "You think you can kill me? I'm ancient, girl. I've survived attempts on my life from beings far older and more powerful than you."

"You haven't survived me," I say quietly. "Not yet."

She stills in my grip, finally seeing what I've become. What we've all become. Her power is impressive by normal standards—centuries of accumulated strength and

knowledge. But compared to what flows through us now? She might as well be a spark next to a forest fire.

“You wouldn’t,” she whispers, but there’s uncertainty in her voice now. “I’m your mother.”

“No. You never were,” I correct her.

“We’re giving you a choice,” Ivy says. “One last chance to walk away. To accept that your time of power is over.”

“And if I refuse?”

I squeeze her wrist tighter, feeling ancient bones creak under my grip. “Then you will find out that maybe some things are worse than death.”

For a moment, I think she’ll fight. Her power coils, ancient and deadly, ready to strike. But then something in her breaks. She knows she can’t win. Not against what we’ve become.

“Fine,” she spits, yanking her wrist free. “Keep your pathetic notions of family and loyalty. When it all falls apart, don’t come crawling back.”

“Trust me,” I say as she backs away, straightening her designer suit with trembling hands. “That won’t be a problem.”

She turns to leave, her dignity in tatters, but her spine still rigid. She pauses. “You could have been great, you know. Could have ruled beside me.”

“Ruled what? A measly little vampire coven that doesn’t even bear your name? No, thanks. Huge pass.”

She doesn't respond, she just climbs back into the car, and it shoots off into the night.

"Well," Tate says after a moment. "That was interesting. Do we trust her to stay out of it?"

"Yeah. I saw the dawning of understanding in her eyes. She knows she can't come up against us. Doesn't mean she won't be a thorn to everyone else, though."

"She will get what's coming to her one day," Ivy says. "Everyone always does. Even more so, now."

"Thanks," I say quietly. "I think that helps."

"Always," Ivy says simply.

"Now," Tate claps his hands together, breaking the heavy moment. "Who's ready to pack up and get the hell out of here?"

We head inside to gather our belongings, while Ivy heads back to the house she shared with Ramsey.

Something feels different now—lighter. It's like confronting my mother finally broke some ancient chain I didn't know was still binding me.

40

IVY

The house I share with Ramsey looks exactly the same, but everything feels different. I turn my key in the lock. Years of memories flood back - late-night mission briefings, impromptu cooking disasters, quiet mornings when words weren't necessary. It's funny how a place can be so familiar and so foreign at the same time.

The scent of jasmine tea hits me before I reach the kitchen. Ramsey is waiting, two mugs already steaming on the counter. Of course he knew I was coming. He always knows. That's been our dynamic since the day The Syndicate paired us together - him one step ahead, me charging forward anyway.

"So," he says, sliding one mug toward me. "This is it?"

I wrap my hands around the warm ceramic, grateful for something to hold on to. "Yeah. I guess it is."

He studies me over the rim of his mug, his expression soft but knowing. "MistHallow's a good fit for you. For all of you."

"It is," I agree, then hesitate. "You could come too, you know. You and Josh."

"I knew you were going to say that!" he exclaims triumphantly and holds his hand out as Josh saunters into the kitchen, grumbling and slapping a fiver onto his palm.

“So, is that a yes?” I venture.

His face turns sober again. “No, Ives. We need to stay here.”

Even though I knew deep down that would be his answer, it still stings. “Why?”

He sets his mug down, giving me that look that says I should already know the answer. The same look he gave me when I tried to convince him that starting a bar fight with a vampire coven was a good distraction technique. “Because someone needs to maintain order here. Keep The Syndicate running smoothly on this end. Make sure Thornfield doesn’t completely fall apart. But more than that, Josh and I have built something here. A life. A purpose. The Resistance and The Syndicate, that’s important. Maybe more important now than ever.”

“Because of what I’ve become?”

“Because of what everything’s becoming,” he corrects as Josh wraps his arms around me from behind and leans his chin on the top of my head. “The supernatural world is changing, Ivy. You’re part of that change, but there needs to be stability too. People who understand both the old ways and the new. The Syndicate can’t just be about eliminating anyone who pays the highest price anymore. It needs to evolve.”

“And that’s where you come in?”

“That’s where we come in,” he nods. “Me and Josh. We can bridge that gap here, while you and your guys forge ahead at MistHallow. Someone needs to stay behind and help guide that evolution.”

I take a sip of tea to hide the tremor in my hands. “I’m going to miss you. Both of you. It won’t be the same without my handler keeping me in line.”

“As if I ever managed that,” he snorts. “But we’ll miss you too, Ives.”

Josh kisses the top of my head and lets me go so he can stand by Ramsey’s side. “This isn’t goodbye forever,” he says, reading my thoughts. “It’s just a new chapter.”

“When did you get so wise?”

“Hey, I’ve always been this way.”

I grin despite the tears threatening to spill. “True enough.”

Ramsey and I smile at each other across the kitchen counter, years of shared missions, inside jokes, and quiet moments hanging between us. The bond between handler and asset was supposed to be professional and distant. Instead, we became family.

“You will always be my best friend,” I say suddenly, needing him to know. “That won’t change, no matter where I am or what I’ve become.”

“I know.” His voice is gentle. “You’re mine too.”

“You’ll visit?” I ask.

“Try to stop us,” Josh says. “I’m dying to see that place. It’s like legendary.”

“Yeah, someone has to make sure you’re not terrorising that poor academy too badly,” Ramsey adds with a laugh.

“I would never.”

“Yeah, okay,” he chuckles.



“Things are going to be different now,” I say after a moment, my fingers tracing the rim of my mug. “With The Syndicate, with everything. Being Death... it changes things.”

Ramsey nods, exchanging a look with Josh. “They already are. But different doesn’t mean worse. The old ways of The Syndicate - the secrecy, the rigid hierarchy, the ‘eliminate first, no questions asked’ approach - maybe it’s time for those to change.”

“They need to understand what’s changed,” I say, setting my mug down. “The Syndicate continues, but under new management. My management.”

Ramsey nods approvingly. “You’ve already got a lot of the assets on your side. The handlers, too. They are pretty much just shit scared of the new boss.”

I giggle. “Too right.”

“We need to show them that Death, Life, Rebirth, whatever you are now called, isn’t just taking over—she’s offering them a better way forward.”

“Exactly,” I agree. “No more taking contracts on innocents. No more political assassinations for the highest bidder. We focus on actual threats—we deep dive before we accept, and we only take the ones who prey on others.”

“Works for me. Let’s just hope everyone who is not already on board falls in line.”

“They don’t have a choice,” I say firmly. “Death isn’t asking permission.”

Ramsey grins, that familiar gleam in his eye that always meant things were about to get interesting. “Ready to go explain to a room full of assassins that they work for you now?”

“Always.”

The Syndicate’s about to learn that this isn’t a democracy. It’s my way or the highway. It’s a promise of change, and whether they like it or not, things are going to be different from now on.

Ramsey and I leave Josh and head across campus to the underground bunker where The Syndicate operates in Thornfield.

We glide right in, and no one bats an eye as they continue their work, going about their business as if nothing has changed. Not everyone is here, and that’s fine. Word will trickle down, and that’s how it’s always been done. Death was never a main feature here. Fuck knows I didn’t have a clue he was the head of the organisation until very recently, so I doubt anyone here knows either. Swann and maybe one or two others, if they’re lucky.

I spot Swann leaning over a rep and jabbing at the screen. He must sense me as he lifts his head up and then straightens, giving me a swift nod.

“Attention, everyone,” Ramsey calls out, his voice carrying authority. The bustling activity in the bunker grinds to a halt as all eyes turn to us. “There have been some changes in management, so listen up.”

The murmurs ripple through the crowd, and they are curious and concerned.

I step forward, feeling the weight of dozens of gazes. I take a deep breath, channelling the power that now flows through me.

“As of now, The Syndicate operates under new leadership. My leadership. You don’t need to know who I am and what I do. All you have to do is listen and do. Things are going to be different from here on out.”

Murmurs ripple through the crowd. I catch snippets of confusion, concern, and more than a little fear. Good. A healthy dose of fear will make this transition smoother.

“We’re no longer taking contracts indiscriminately,” I continue. “No more political hits for the sake of it, no more targeting innocents for the highest bidder. From now on, we focus on actual threats—those who prey on others, who cause true harm.”

“And who decides what constitutes a ‘true threat’?” a rep calls out. “Us?”

“Yes. You need to deep dive these people. There will be no more quick turnaround. It takes as long as it takes to determine if these creatures are truly evil and need wiping off the face of the earth. You are all masters of the dark web, so take your job to the next level.”

“Do we get a pay rise?” someone else whines. “This sounds like a lot of work.”

“It’s only a lot of work if you don’t know what you’re doing,” I snap. “In which case, you don’t belong here. Do you belong here?” I fix her with a vicious scowl.

“Y-yes, ma’am,” she stammers.

“In that case, do your job, and we will reassess pay grades and also a new hierarchy. Some of you will excel, and some of you will remain stagnant. That is the nature of the circle.”

“Understood,” Swann says, giving me some much-wanted, if not needed, backup.

“This isn’t a debate or a negotiation. The Syndicate continues, but we pivot. If anyone has a problem with that, the door is right there, don’t let it hit your arse on the way out.” I pause, letting my gaze sweep across the room. No one moves. “Good,” I continue. “Now, for those wondering about the practical changes, all current contracts

are suspended pending review. Ramsey and Swann will be overseeing that process. Any new contracts go through them first for approval.”

“What about our current targets?” someone asks. “Some of us are mid-mission.”

“Did you not just hear what I said? We need to make sure every hit aligns with our new objectives. Pull them back.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The room buzzes with whispered conversations and uncertain glances. I can feel the tension, fear, and curiosity. Some are excited by the prospect of change, others wary of what it might mean for their positions.

“One more thing,” I add, my voice dropping to a dangerous purr. “If I catch wind of anyone going rogue, taking unapproved contracts on the side, or leaking information about these changes... well, let’s just say I don’t take kindly to traitors.”

The temperature in the room drops several degrees as I let a bit of Death show. Good. Let them stew on that for a while.

“Any questions?” I ask sweetly.

The room remains silent, as expected.

“Excellent. Now, get back to work. You’ve got a lot of reassessing to do,” I say, letting the Death glamour fade.

As they get back to work, Ramsey smiles at me. “Well, that went better than expected. No outright rebellion.”

I snort. “Give it time. There’s always one idiot who thinks they can challenge authority.”

“And when they do?” he asks, raising an eyebrow.

I give him a wicked grin. “Then they’ll learn why Death isn’t just a fancy title.”

Ramsey shakes his head, but he’s smiling. “Remind me never to get on your bad side.”

“As if you could,” I say, bumping his shoulder with mine.

We watch as the bunker slowly returns to its usual hum of activity, though there’s a new undercurrent of tension. Change is never easy, especially for an organisation as set in its ways as The Syndicate. But it’s necessary.

41

brAM

The shadows around Thornfield sing with new voices now. Whispers that would have concerned me a month ago, but now feel as natural as breathing. I stand at the edge of the forest, letting my enhanced senses spread outward. The darkness isn't just an absence of light anymore; it's a living thing, a fundamental force that responds to my will like an eager pet.

I hold out my hand, watching as shadows coalesce into solid form. First a sphere, then a blade, then something more complex. A three-dimensional map of the academy grounds forms in my palm, every building and tree rendered in perfect detail by the interplay of light and dark. The wild magick that once belonged to Morrigan has evolved into something far more primal. It doesn't just shape reality; it reveals the spaces between realities.

"Show me," I whisper, and the shadows respond instantly. They spread out like ink in water, highlighting every living being on campus in shades of grey and black. I can see their life forces, their connections to each other, and the way they interact with the fabric of reality itself. In one corner, Tate practises with his ancestral power, each burst of energy leaving ripples in the darkness. Near the main building, Torin's vampire-mage signature burns like a cold star.

"Impressive," Morrigan's voice drifts from the darkness. "You've mastered more in days than most would in centuries."

She materialises like smoke condensing into her human form. Her presence is familiar and strange. Less solid, more ethereal. The power that once made her a goddess has transformed, just as I have.

“I thought you were bound to MistHallow’s grounds now,” I say, letting the shadow map dissolve back into darkness. “I felt it.”

She laughs and shrugs. “You called to me. I’m here. Show me what else you’ve learned.”

I flex my fingers, feeling the shadows respond. This time, I reach deeper, tapping into the essence of darkness itself. The shadows around us thicken, becoming almost solid. Then I step into them—not just moving through them like before—but becoming one with them.

My consciousness expands, spreading through every shadow on campus. I can see everything, feel everything. Every dark corner, every unlit space, becomes an extension of my awareness. It’s intoxicating and terrifying at the same time.

“Very good,” Morrigan murmurs. “But can you maintain control while divided?”

I accept her challenge. While keeping my shadow-sense extended, I begin manipulating the darkness around us. Shapes emerge as wolves made of living shadow, birds that take flight on wings of pure darkness. Each creation moves independently, yet remains connected to my will.

“You knew this would happen,” I say, letting my consciousness snap back to my physical form while maintaining the shadow constructs. “You knew the power would change me.”

“Goddess of fate as well. Did you forget?” She reaches out to touch one of the

shadow wolves. It nuzzles her hand before dissolving. “The power was never truly mine to begin with. It isn’t truly yours. You will pass it on one day. That is the circle now.”

I nod, because that makes complete sense to me. I create a sphere of pure darkness between us, watching as it pulses with possibilities. “It’s more than wild magick now. It’s something else entirely.”

She nods in agreement. “You’re evolving into a shadow god, for lack of a better term. A being with the ability to control not just darkness, but also the gaps between different dimensions.”

To demonstrate her point, I reach into those spaces now. The air ripples as I tear a small hole in reality, creating a window that shows us MistHallow’s grounds. Through it, I can see students moving between classes, their forms slightly distorted by the barrier between worlds.

“The old ways are dying,” Morrigan continues, watching as I seal the portal. “The ancient powers are seeking new forms, new purposes. What you carry now is the essence of shadow itself. The space between light and dark, life and death.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this was possible?”

Her smile is both sad and knowing. “Would you have believed me? Would you have accepted it if I had simply handed over the power? No. You needed to claim it yourself, to prove worthy of it.”

A commotion from the main building draws my attention. Through my shadow-sense, I feel Ivy’s presence approaching with Torin. They’re looking for me.

“They’re worried about you,” Morrigan observes. “They can feel the changes in your



power.”

“They can feel everything now,” I agree. “We’re all connected in ways I don’t fully understand yet.”

“That’s as it should be.”

I absorb this, feeling the rightness of it settle in my bones. “You’re not angry anymore. About losing the power.”

“How can I be angry about fulfilling my purpose?” She shakes her head. “I know now I was meant to guide this power to you, to help forge something new. The fact that I get to continue teaching at MistHallow, to help shape the next generation of supernatural beings... that’s more than I deserve after my actions.”

“Oh?” I ask with a raised eyebrow.

She giggles and presses her finger to her lips. “It’s a secret, my son. I’ll be the guardian of those sacred grounds, teaching those who come seeking ancient wisdom. It’s a fitting role for a former goddess, don’t you think?”

The shadows around us dance, responding to the truth in her words. This feels right. Complete.

“That makes sense. A reward for those who seek what you can offer.”

“See, you do get it.”

“And what exactly am I supposed to do with all this power?” I ask, creating complex patterns in the darkness almost absently.

“You’ll figure that out as you go. But I suspect it has something to do with maintaining balance in whatever new world order Ivy’s creating.” She pauses, studying me intently. “The ability to move through shadows, to exist in the spaces between realities - these aren’t just parlour tricks. They’re tools for keeping the balance between worlds.”

“That’s why the power chose me. Not just because of what I am, but because of where I need to be. What I need to do.”

“Exactly.” Her form starts to fade. “At MistHallow, you will learn to control what you’ve become. Help Ivy reshape the supernatural world. And when you’re ready, find me. There’s still much I can teach you about the ancient ways, even if I’m no longer their keeper.”

“Thank you,” I say softly, surprising us both.

She smiles, a genuine expression that transforms her face. “Thank you, Bram Sinclair, for showing me that sometimes, letting go of power is the most powerful thing you can do.”

As she fades completely, I feel the last pieces click into place. The shadow essence settles deeper into my being, no longer fighting or changing but simply existing as part of me.

“Bram?” Ivy calls out. “Everything okay?”

I turn to face her, letting them see what I’ve become. Shadows swirl around me like a living cloak, responding to my every thought and emotion. “Yeah,” I say, smiling. “Everything’s perfect.”

“Show off,” Torin mutters, but he’s grinning.

Ivy takes my hand, her power harmonising perfectly with mine. We're all becoming something new, something necessary for the world Ivy's creating. A world where ancient powers find new purposes, new vessels, new ways to maintain the balance.

42

TATE

The ancient oak at the centre of Thornfield's grounds has stood sentinel for over five hundred years, apparently. Funnily enough, I know now that my ancestors planted it when they first claimed this land, infusing it with their power and making it more than just a tree. Now, as I place my hand against its weathered bark, I can feel every moment of those centuries, every spell cast in its shade, every oath sworn beneath its branches, every Well whoever drew strength from its presence.

The connection hits like a thunderbolt, making my knees buckle. Power surges through me, something deep, wild. My blood turns to liquid fire in my veins, and suddenly I'm not just touching the tree, I'm connected to everything. Every blade of grass, every root system, every living thing on these grounds becomes an extension of my consciousness.

"Easy there, little spark." My grandmother's voice comes first, followed by her form materialising beside me. She looks exactly as she did in life, what little I can remember before she died. Her silver hair in a tight braid, green eyes sharp as emeralds, that familiar half-smile playing at her lips. "You're trying to drink the ocean through a straw. Let it flow naturally."

"Gran." The word catches in my throat.

She reaches out, and though I know she's not physically here, I swear I can feel the warmth of her hand on my cheek.

“You’re doing better than any of us expected,” another voice joins in. I know just by looking at him that he is my great-great-grandfather. I just... know . “But you’re still fighting the power instead of flowing with it.”

More figures emerge from the air around us - a gathering of Well ancestors spanning centuries. Sophia, fierce and proud in her Victorian dress, who once held off an army with nothing but her connection to the earth. Richard, who first bound our line to this land, his presence as solid as the ground beneath our feet. Elizabeth, who discovered how to tap into ley lines to enhance our natural magick. Dozens more, each carrying a piece of the power I now hold.

But not my parents. I didn’t expect them. I’m not ready for that yet.

“Show us what you’ve learned,” Gran says, but her tone makes it clear it’s not just a request. The ancestors gather in a loose circle, watching expectantly.

I take a deep breath and reach for the power again, this time trying to flow with it rather than control it. Green energy crackles between my fingers, but it’s different from before. Not just magick, but pure life force. The essence of growth and change and renewal itself.

The grass beneath my feet grows wild, flowers blooming out of season. Trees bend toward me like I’m their sun. But that’s just the surface. I can feel everything. Every cell dividing, every root spreading, every leaf reaching for the sky.

“Better,” Malcolm, my great-great-grandfather, nods. “But you’re still thinking like a warlock. The ancestral power isn’t about controlling nature. It’s about being nature.”

Elizabeth moves forward. “Watch.” She gestures, and suddenly, I can see the ley lines crisscrossing the grounds in rivers of pure power flowing through the earth. “Everything is connected. The trees, the soil, the air itself - it’s all one system. And

now, so are you.”

I close my eyes and reach deeper, letting go of my limited perspective. The oak’s life force mingles with mine until there’s no separation. I am the tree, feeling every ring in my trunk, every leaf catching sunlight, every root pushing through the soil. But it doesn’t stop there. Through the oak, I’m connected to every other tree, every plant, every living thing on these grounds.

The knowledge flows with the power - centuries of Well secrets, spells, and wisdom. I see how my ancestors worked with the land itself, how they shaped reality by understanding its patterns. Not just magick, but a deeper understanding of life’s fundamental processes.

“Now you’re beginning to understand,” Sophia says approvingly. “Try something more complex.”

I nod, letting instinct guide me. Green energy spreads from my hands into the earth, and the ground trembles as I reach for something older than magick itself. A grove of saplings bursts from the soil, but this time I’m not just making them grow - I’m participating in their growth, guiding it with the accumulated knowledge of generations.

“Excellent,” Richard says. “But remember, creation is only half the equation.”

He’s right. I shift my focus, and time seems to slow. I watch as leaves wither and fall, as branches age decades in seconds, as new growth springs from decay. The cycle of life, death, and rebirth plays out under my hands.

“The balance,” Gran nods. “That’s what makes our power different from ordinary magick. We don’t just use nature, we’re part of its fundamental processes.”

I reach deeper into the ancestral knowledge, and new possibilities unfold. The air shimmers as I draw moisture from it, forming clouds above our heads. The earth shifts and flows like water as I tap into its molten core. Seeds that might have taken years to germinate sprout in seconds, while others enter dormancy at my command.

“The elements themselves respond to our power,” Elizabeth explains. “Because we understand their true nature. Their patterns. Their purpose.”

To demonstrate, I reach out to the weather itself. Storm clouds gather overhead, responding to my will. But it’s more than just control - I can feel the complex interactions of temperature and pressure, the dance of water molecules in the air, the electric potential building between clouds and earth.

Lightning arcs down, striking the ground before me. But instead of destruction, it leaves a pattern of crystallised earth, fulgurite formed in the shape of the Well family crest.

“Show off,” Sophia laughs. “But well done. You’re learning to work with nature’s forces rather than against them.”

“But why now?” I ask, letting the storm dissipate. “Why did the power choose this moment to evolve?”

The ancestors exchange knowing looks before Gran answers. “Because it had to. The old ways are changing. The barriers between worlds are shifting. New powers are rising, and old ones must adapt or fade away.”

“Our line has always been about adaptation,” Malcolm adds. “About finding new ways to use ancient power. That’s why the ancestral magick chose you, Tate. You understand change. You embrace it.”

A surge of power ripples through the earth, making us all pause. Through my enhanced awareness, I feel reality itself shifting, responding to forces beyond normal comprehension. The very fabric of the supernatural world is changing, evolving into something new.

“You feel it, don’t you?” Elizabeth asks. “The transformation that’s coming?”

I nod, letting my awareness spread further. The changes aren’t just here at Thornfield, they’re everywhere. The supernatural world is evolving, and we’re at the heart of it.

“But I still don’t understand everything,” I admit. “There’s so much power, so much knowledge. How do I access it all?”

“You don’t need to know everything at once,” Gran says gently. “The knowledge will come when you need it. The power will guide you.”

As if to prove her point, a new memory surfaces. A spell my ancestors used to communicate across vast distances using the natural energy fields of the earth. Without thinking, I reach for it, letting the power flow through me. Green energy spreads out in a web, connecting to the ley lines Elizabeth showed me.

Suddenly I can feel everything happening on the grounds. I feel Bram, Torin and Ivy.

“They’re coming,” I say, feeling my friends moving towards us. “They felt the power.”

The ancestors begin to fade, returning to whatever plane they inhabit now. Soon, only Gran, Malcolm, and Sophia remain.

“Remember,” Malcolm says, his form growing transparent, “the power is yours now, but we’ll always be here when you need guidance. Just reach for us through the earth



itself.”

Sophia nods. “You carry our legacy, but you’ll forge your own path. That’s as it should be.”

Gran is the last to fade. “Make us proud, little spark. Though you already have.”

As their presence fades, I feel my friends approaching. The ancestral magick hums through my veins, stronger than ever but finally, completely under control.

“Holy shit, Tate,” Bram calls out as they reach the oak. “I could feel that display from the other side of campus. Since when can you control the weather?”

I grin, letting green energy dance between my fingers. “Since about ten minutes ago, apparently.”

Ivy’s power reaches out instinctively, connecting with mine where life meets death. “Everything okay? We felt the power spike all the way inside.”

“More than okay,” I say, meaning it. “Just getting some family guidance. You should have seen it, a Well family reunion.”

“Your mother?” she asks carefully.

I shake my head. “No, but that’s okay. She will come. So will my dad and the Black side. It’s all here when I’m ready.”

I smile at Torin, who returns it, and then, in the blink of an eye, he’s gone.

“Err, where did Torin go?” Ivy asks.

“Hopefully to somewhere he can have his little epiphany like me and Tate have,” Bram states.

“Good luck,” I whisper, knowing he can hear me wherever he is.

43

TORIN

“The thing about chaos magick,” Ivy’s Aunt Cathy says, perching on the edge of her desk in The Resistance’s hidden library as I spin towards the sound of her voice, “is that it doesn’t follow rules like other types of power. It exists in the spaces between. Between order and disorder, between what’s possible and what isn’t. Rather like you.”

“Did you bring me here?” I ask accusingly.

“Yep. Get over it. Sit down, kiddo. There’s a lot you need to know.”

I sit, surrounded by ancient texts and artefacts I can feel humming with power. The room seems alive with it, centuries of accumulated magickal knowledge pressing against my heightened senses. Being both vampire and mage means I can feel every pulse of energy, every whisper of power.

“What do you mean?” I ask, though part of me already knows.

She smiles, reminding me so much of Ivy it hurts. “You’re a contradiction, Torin. Vampire and mage. It is very rare in the grand scheme of things, even more so now. Two types of power that shouldn’t coexist, yet in you, they do. That makes you uniquely suited to understand chaos magick.”

“I know lots of vampire mages,” I argue. “Whole covens of them.”

She smiles at me like I'm dumb. I kind of love that about her. She doesn't bullshit. "No, what you know are vampires who used to be mages, who have traces of their magick lingering in their blood, but it fades, and they fake it with potions and spells. Your magick is in your soul, Torin. There aren't many like you, a handful. Your new Headmaster at MistHallow is one of them. A very old and powerful one. You will learn a lot from him."

Rising, she moves to a shelf as I absorb the 'faking it' part. How interesting and typically vampire to pretend to be something you aren't.

Cathy pulls down an old leather-bound book. The cover bears no title, just a complex symbol that shifts and changes as I look at it. "This was my first grimoire. All of the rules I'd been taught about power were more like guidelines when it comes to chaos magick. Ivy has surpassed all of this now, but you, you need to learn."

She sets the book before me, and the moment my fingers touch it, both my vampire and mage senses explode. Power races through my veins, raw and untamed. Images flash through my mind of possibilities, probabilities, paths not taken.

"Easy," Cathy steadies me with a hand on my shoulder. "Let it flow. Don't try to control it."

"It's different," I croak. "Not like normal magick. Not like vampire power either."

"Because it's neither and both," she explains. "What we know about chaos magick is that it is about potential. About seeing the cracks in reality and wedging them open. About understanding that nothing is fixed, everything is fluid. Chaos magick isn't about creating or destroying. It's about rearranging what's already there. Your vampire power and mage ability aren't just coexisting now, they're creating something new. A third type of power, born from the chaos of their intersection."

“Is that normal?”

She laughs. “Nothing about any of you is normal. You, Ivy, Bram, Tate - you’re all breaking rules that have stood for millennia. That’s why you’re perfect for this change.”

She gestures for me to stand. “Enough theory. Let’s see what you can do. Reach for both powers at once: vampire and mage. But this time, don’t try to balance them. Let them crash together.”

I do as she says, calling up vampire strength and speed while simultaneously reaching for mage power. Usually, I keep them carefully separated, using one or the other. This time, I let them collide.

The result is explosive. Energy crackles around me with that pink hue that I’ve come to know means chaos has been unleashed. My senses expand exponentially. I can feel every particle of magick in the room, every possibility hanging in the air.

“Good,” Cathy nods. “Now reach for the spaces between. The gaps in reality where things shift.”

Following her guidance, I extend my awareness. The world seems to fracture into infinite possibilities, every potential outcome, every might-have-been. Through my vampire senses, I can smell the age of the books, the residue of centuries of magick. Through mage sight, I see the patterns of power woven through the room.

But there’s something else now. A new way of seeing that combines both and transcends them. The gaps Cathy mentioned become visible as places where reality is thin, where probability bends.

“Reach for it with the new power that’s uniquely yours.”

I extend my hand, letting the hybrid energy flow. The gap widens, reality bending around my fingers. Through it, I catch glimpses of other possibilities, versions of this room in different times, different realities.

“Now, choose one,” she instructs. “Make it real.”

I focus on one possibility. A version of the room where ancient texts hover in the air, their knowledge readily accessible. With a twist of my new power, I pull that reality into this one.

Books rise from their shelves, pages fluttering open. Knowledge flows from them like water, visible as streams of light and shadow. I can read them all at once, my vampire speed and mage comprehension working together in a way they never have before.

“Remarkable,” Cathy breathes. “You’re not just combining powers, you’re creating a whole new way of working with reality.”

The effort hits me suddenly, and the books drop back to their shelves as my knees buckle. Cathy catches me, helping me back to my chair.

“That was...” I struggle to find words.

“That was just the beginning,” she says, eyes bright with excitement. “You’ve barely scratched the surface of what you can do.”

“The thing is,” Cathy says, “your power connects directly to what Ivy, Bram, and Tate can do. You’re the bridge.”

“The bridge?”

She nods. “Think about it. Bram works with shadow—the space between light and

dark. Tate connects to nature's patterns of growth and decay. Ivy walks the line between life and death. And you..." She gestures at the lingering pink energy around my hands. "You exist in all these in-between spaces at once. Vampire and mage. Living and undead. Order and chaos."

"That's why our powers work so well together. We're all dealing with different aspects of the same thing."

"Exactly. The boundaries between states of being. The places where reality bends." She closes her grimoire. "You understand, yes?"

I stand, steadier now, feeling the new power settling into my bones. "Yes."

Cathy nods. "You're all pieces of the same puzzle. Go, now. They're waiting. Just remember... don't fight the chaos. Work with it. Like water finding its own level, power will flow where it needs to go."

I head for the door, then pause. "Thank you. For helping me understand."

"Thank you for taking care of my niece," she replies softly. "The real work is just beginning."

I make my way back across campus to where I left the others, needing the mundaneness of walking right now. I feel different somehow. More settled in my new nature, yet also more aware of its limitless possibilities. Near the ancient oak, I find the others waiting.

"Where did you go?" Ivy asks.

"I was with your aunt, learning some new tricks," I say. It mingles naturally with Ivy's life-death energy, Bram's shadows, and Tate's natural force.

“How is she? I should go and see her before we leave.”

“She’s good,” I say.

She smiles and gives me a nod. I look around and we all understand our own power better now, but more importantly, we understand how they all connect.

The sun sets over Thornfield, casting long shadows that seem to pulse with possibility. In the gathering dark, our combined power lights up the night like stars come to earth. Different colours, different energies, but all part of the same grand design.

We are the bridges between worlds, the guardians of boundaries, the agents of change itself.

And we’re finally ready to embrace it.



44

IVY

The transition always feels like stepping through a curtain of starlight. One moment I'm in the physical world, the next I'm here, the place that used to be the Void—that terrible nothing that swallowed souls whole—now exists as something so beautiful it makes my heart ache.

I stand in what looks like an infinite cosmic nursery. Souls drift like luminous stars in every direction, their light casting soft colours. Some cluster together in spiralling patterns, while others float in serene solitude. Each one pulses with its own rhythm, its own story.

The space itself is alive and responsive. It's not just the end of the line anymore. It's an integral part of the cycle. Streams of energy flow like celestial rivers, carrying echoes of lives lived and lives yet to begin. The boundaries between what was and what will be blur here, creating something entirely new.

I've been working to understand this space since we transformed it, but it still takes my breath away. My power feels different here, something more nuanced. More complete.

Moving deeper into the cosmic expanse, I reach out with my awareness. Thousands of souls respond, their lights brightening or dimming in acknowledgement. Some have newly arrived, still carrying the sharp edges of their recent lives. Others have been here longer, their energies softened into possibility.

I approach a cluster of souls that have been here the longest. I grimace at the waves of violence and hatred that come from some of them, others are less angry, some are even happy. They are ready for the transition. My power extends naturally now, weaving through their light like threads through fabric. The first soul I touch blazes brilliant blue-white, eager for connection.

I begin the careful process of distillation. My power acts like a prism, separating the essential from the specific. It's not about erasing the past but about transforming it into something that can take root in a new life.

The soul brightens as we work together, its energy harmonising with the process. This one understands what we're doing and is actively participating in its own transformation. When it's ready, I create the path. It's not just a direction, but a thread of possibility leading to its next beginning.

With a final pulse of light, like a farewell wave, the soul streams away. Somewhere, a new life will begin, carrying with it traces of its former life.

I move to the next soul, this one a deep crimson shot through with gold. Its energy is more chaotic and resistant. As I connect with it, I understand why. This soul carried pain in its last life. Suffering, but the weight of causing suffering to others as well.

These are always the most challenging.

So, I work more carefully with this one. The soul struggles against this at first, wanting either complete forgiveness or total punishment. But that's not what this space is for. It's about rebirth.

Gradually, the soul's resistance softens. Its angry red light mellows into something more profound, richer. When it finally moves on, it is eager for that second chance.

Each one teaches me something new about this process. It's slow but I know I will speed up and be able to set souls free as one like I did in the beginning. For now, I want to take care. To make sure I do right by them.

But it definitely needs an expedited process, or the repercussions will be catastrophic. This is the downside, and where I still have much to learn.

I'm aware of how different this is from the old way. The Void was stagnation masked as peace. This living, breathing space of transformation is true peace. Not an ending, but an eternal dance of renewal.

A small group of souls draws my attention - these ones feel different, more focused. As I move closer, I see they're a group of the worst souls that Death has collected over the millennia. Some of them even the souls who tormented me when I first arrived here, my own kills. Nervously, I approach them, but there is no hostility now. They know I hold their future in my hands. I need to set them free, and what they do with their rebirth is up to them. Most of me thinks they won't change their ways, but you never know. They might surprise me.

We don't communicate. I just do my job, and they go on their way to do whatever it is they are going to do.

I turn slowly, my power extending with extra sensitivity. In a quiet pocket of space float two souls, their lights intertwined in a double helix of silver and gold. They're not newly arrived. Their energy has that softened quality that comes with time spent here. But they're not ready to move on either. They seem to be waiting.

The recognition hits me like a hurricane. I know these souls. Know them in a way that goes beyond sight or sense or power. The silver light holds echoes of bedtime stories and gentle hands braiding my hair. The gold carries memories of laughing lessons in shifting and pushing the boundaries.

“Mum?” My voice shakes. “Dad?”

Their lights brighten in response, pulsing with love so pure it brings tears to my eyes. They’re not exactly my parents anymore, I know that. The souls here exist in a state of in-between, neither fully who they were nor who they’ll become. But their essential nature, the core of who they were, remains.

I reach out with trembling power, not to guide or transform, but simply to connect. Their energy meets mine halfway, wrapping around me in what feels like an embrace. Memories flow between us. I see myself through their eyes: a beloved daughter, watched over even after they passed. They’ve been here all along, choosing to wait rather than move immediately into new lives.

Through our connection, they share more. They show me how they’ve been helping other souls adjust to this space, using their own acceptance of the cycle to ease others’ transitions. They’ve become guides in their own right, helping preserve the knowledge and wisdom souls bring with them.

But there’s something else, a gentle suggestion carrying hints of farewell. They’re ready now. Ready to move on, to begin new journeys.

Grief and joy tangle in my chest. “I’m not sure I can do this,” I admit. “Help you transition. It feels too much like losing you again.”

Their lights pulse with gentle understanding, then something more. Pride, encouragement, love. But in the circle now, nothing is ever truly lost. Everything transforms.

Taking a deep breath, my power flows differently now, coloured by love and memory and understanding.

They move in perfect sync, their lights still intertwined. Even as they prepare for separate journeys, their souls maintain a harmony that will echo into their new lives, I just know it. Fated mates. I'm sure they'll find each other again, and again, always finding their way back, lifetime after lifetime.

When they're ready, I create not one path but two parallel streams of possibility. Their lights brighten one final time. A farewell, a blessing, a promise that all things continue. Then they flow forward, accepting their rebirth with delight.

I stand in the starlit space, tears flowing freely. But they're not tears of loss. They are out there now and who knows, maybe I'll see them again one day, not as them, but who they have become.

That makes me smile and brush the tears away.

Love doesn't end. It changes form, becomes potential, and finds new ways to bloom.

Around me, thousands of souls continue their gentle drift, each one a story waiting to begin again. My power feels steadier now, more complete. I understand better what I am - not just a gateway between life and death, but a guardian of transformation itself.

I turn to the next cluster of waiting souls, ready to help them find their way forward. After all, every ending is just another word for beginning.

And in this space between spaces, everything is possible.

45

IVY

Aunt Cathy's house looks exactly the same as it did when everything went to hell and back, seemingly a lifetime ago. It appears the time reversal or the rest, possibly, fixed the roof.

The herb garden still blooms with organised chaos, wind chimes dance in the breeze. It's the same house I grew up in for the second part of my childhood, but everything else has changed. Especially me.

I find Cathy in the kitchen, naturally brewing what smells like her signature clarity tea. She turns as I enter, and for a moment, we just look at each other. Her eyes are bright with unshed tears, but her smile is warm and proud.

"So," she says, pouring two cups of tea, "it's time."

I settle into my usual spot at the kitchen table, wrapping my hands around the warm mug. "MistHallow is where I need to be," I say slowly, knowing she wanted me at Thornfield because that is where she is working with The Resistance.

Aunt Cathy nods, sitting across from me. "I know. I—," she trails off and chews her lip. "I applied for you to go there years ago, while you were still in high school. I wanted to see if they would accept you and give you another option if things went sideways here."

“Sideways? You knew something was coming?” I ignore the other part for now. This seems more important.

“There were rumblings, big ones. I needed an out for you if the time came. Turns out, you were what all the fuss was about.” She snickers into her tea and takes a sip. “The point is, they accepted you on your merit back then, which means a lot in the academic world. So now, yes, it is definitely the place you need to be.”

“Thanks,” I mutter, feeling pleased, if not a little irritated, that I had the option to begin with. I guess in the grand scheme of things, I was meant to be here. I never would’ve met the guys or become Poison, or Death, or any of those things if I hadn’t been here.

“You’ve done something remarkable, you know. Your parents would be proud.”

“They are,” I say softly, thinking of those intertwined souls in the space between. “I saw them, Aunt Cathy. In the soul space. They were waiting...”

She nods knowingly. “Of course they were. Those two always did have a flair for perfect timing.” She reaches across the table to squeeze my hand. “Did you help them transition?”

I nod, throat tight with emotion. “It was beautiful. And hard. But right.”

“Like most important things in life,” she says wisely. We sit in comfortable silence for a moment, drinking our tea and letting memories flow between us.

“I couldn’t have done any of this without you,” I finally say. “You took me in when I was lost, taught me when I needed guidance, believed in me when I didn’t believe in myself, even if it was from the sidelines.”

“Oh, sweetheart.” Aunt Cathy’s voice is gentle. “I just gave you a safe place to become who you already were. Everything else was all you.”

“Still.” I meet her eyes. “Thank you. For everything.”

She stands then, moving to one of her many cupboards. “I have something for you. I’ve been saving it for the right moment.” She returns with a wooden box, beautifully carved with symbols of life and death intertwined.

“Your father’s grimoire,” she explains as I open it carefully. “He was working on it for years with spells to help you through life. I found it in the house after... they passed.” She smiles sadly. “There’s room at the back,” Aunt Cathy points out, “for you to add your own discoveries. Especially about the soul space. Future Guardians will need to understand how it works.”

Future Guardians? It hits me when she gives me a lewd wink that she means my children with the guys. I hadn’t even thought about that. Is it even possible? I’m a true immortal. What does that even mean in the cycle that I’m the centre of?

Fucked if I know, but I guess we will find out one day.

For now, I’m happy with the way things are.

“Will you visit?” I ask, trying to keep my voice steady.

“Wild horses couldn’t keep me away,” she promises. “Besides, someone needs to make sure you’re taking proper care of that herb garden your dad told you to plant.” She taps the book, and I giggle.

“The boys are waiting outside, aren’t they?” Aunt Cathy asks knowingly.



“Yeah. It’s been three days since we came back to tie up the loose ends. I think we got them all.”

“Well, you can always come back if you didn’t,” she points out. “Ramsey and Josh will miss you.”

“I know. I will be back.”

“You’ve found yourself a good team there,” she says, pulling me into a tight hug. “Hold onto that.”

I hug her back. “I love you, Aunt Cathy.”

“I love you too, sweet girl.” She pulls back, wiping away a stray tear. “Now go on. Your new life is waiting.”

The guys are waiting outside, talking amongst themselves and look up when they hear me close the front door.

“Finally,” Tate says, “I was starting to think we’d need to send in a search party.”

“Or someone to help carry all the specialised weapons I’m sure Cathy tried to send with you,” Torin adds with a smile. “That woman is a badass.”

“She is. I just wish I’d known sooner. I thought for a long time she tolerated me because I was her dead brother’s daughter. But I think I was projecting, and she didn’t want to push herself on me. It’s a lot of time lost between two stubborn women.”

“But you are good now,” Bram says. “And there is a lifetime to be family.”

I nod. “I know.”

“You okay?” he asks quietly, gripping my chin and forcing me to look up at him.

“I’m okay,” I say, and mean it. “Ready for the next chapter.”

The guys look around and then at each other. “This is not how I thought this year would go,” Torin says. “To think how we started out at Thornfield, all the things we plotted and executed... it seems like a lifetime ago.”

“It was,” I say with a small smile. “But here’s to the Kings of Thornfield. How you’ve mellowed with your growing powers.” We all laugh, but I sober up and continue, “But that takes courage and strength. You should be proud you are wielding these powers responsibly.”

“Eww,” Torin says, pulling a face. “Don’t use the r-word.”

Our connection flares up under my skin, burning hotly but pleasantly. I smile and step into the middle of their circle. “Here’s another r-word. Ready?”

Torin nods, returning my smile.

“Ready for forever,” Tate says and kisses the top of my head.

“Ready for everything,” Bram adds.

Ready for everything.

Whatever the future holds, we are ready for it. Together.

Ivy

Four Years Later

The soul space shimmers with its familiar cosmic beauty as I guide another cluster of spirits toward their new beginnings. I've got this down to a fine art now. Thousands of souls in one sweep. It's a real time saver.

"Still working?" Bram's voice pulls me back to my physical surroundings.

I open my eyes to find myself in my favourite spot in our garden, the grounds of this cottage nestled in a forest about ten miles south of MistHallow Academy. It's not the ancient, enchanted, hauntingly sentient forest that surrounds the academy, but it's close. It absorbs the magick by osmosis, and one day, it will be a forest to be reckoned with.

The herb beds I planted have flourished, filling the air with healing scents. Aunt Cathy visits regularly to supervise my gardening, though mostly she comes to spoil us all with her cooking and tales of what The Resistance is up to. I'm not that hands-on with The Syndicate. They know what to do. Ramsey and Swann run that operation like two Brigadier Generals, and I'm happy to let them.

"Just checking in," I tell him, accepting his help to stand as Emmie rushes towards me and wraps her arms around my legs. I giggle and scoop her up, planting a kiss on her little button nose.

"Mama finished?"

“Yes, my little goddess,” I say, handing our daughter back to Bram so I can brush the moss and damp leaves off my jean-covered backside. “I’m finished for today.”

Bram pulls me close with his free arm, and I lean into his solid warmth. These quiet moments are precious, balanced against our busy lives. “Torin said the forest is growing in power. It is drawing magick from you, from all of us. We will have it up to MistHallow’s level in no time.”

I giggle. “Like two thousand years from now?”

“Pretty much,” he snorts.

“And what’s Tate been up to? I haven’t heard any explosions or creative cursing from the training area today.”

“He’s teaching his little protégés energy shields,” Bram chuckles. “He’s actually getting good at the teaching thing, when he’s not trying to prove he can bounce spells off three surfaces at once, of course. Blackthorn was right, once again.”

“Always is.”

Our laughter carries across the garden as we head back to the cottage we call home. Smoke drifts out of the chimney, letting me know Torin has started a roaring fire on this crisp autumn evening.

Bram catches my hand as we walk back. “Listen, we had an idea. We want you to be open-minded about it and not dismiss it right off the bat.”

“That sounds ominous,” I say, taking Emmie from Bram as she struggles to reach me, her demi-goddess magick, curling around me, pulling me closer to her. Even at three, she is a force to be reckoned with. She smiles and pats my cheek, her big blue eyes lighting up, and she tucks her head under my chin.

When we reach the cottage, Bram opens the door, and Torin greets us, gripping a bottle of blood like it's a lifeline. Whatever they have to say makes me suddenly nervous.

Tate rushes in behind us and closes the door. "Right, you're back," he says, getting down to business.

"Bram said you had something to say," I murmur cautiously.

"Yes. We want to open our own academy here in this forest. Yes, it will take time to build and grow, but we can start out small, it'll be very exclusive."

I blink at him, lower Emmie to the plush sofa by the fire, and take a moment to process what Tate said. Opening our own academy is an ambitious idea, but one that could have a lot of potential.

"An academy here, in this forest?" I ask, wanting to make sure I understand correctly. "To teach what, exactly?"

Torin gulps back some blood before he says, "We were thinking of focusing on teaching control and balance of powerful abilities. The kind of training we've had to figure out for ourselves."

Bram nods. "There are more supernatural beings coming into unique powers these days. They need guidance from those who understand what that's like."

"As I said, it would be small and exclusive to start," Tate adds. "But we have the knowledge and experience to help others navigate their abilities responsibly."

I consider this as I settle onto the sofa next to Emmie. The idea has merit. We've learned so much about balancing our powers and working together. Sharing that knowledge could be invaluable.

“What does Blackthorn think of this idea?” I ask.

“Who do you think planted the seed?” Torin says with a raised eyebrow. “He thinks it will be complementary to MistHallow, not competition. We’d focus on a very specialised curriculum.”

I nod slowly, ideas already forming. “It would take time to build up the grounds and facilities. But we could start small, maybe with just a few carefully chosen students.”

“We know it’s a big idea,” Torin says, “But we think it could really work. We’ve learned so much at MistHallow, and with our unique powers and perspectives, we could offer something really special, not to mention, it would give us something to do for eternity, you know.”

“Ah,” I murmur. “I get it.”

We have all been grappling with the idea of being true immortals in our own private ways. It’s typical Blackthorn to see that and to give the guys something to focus on.

“Plus,” Bram adds, “it would give us more control over Emmie’s education as she grows up. And any future children we might have...” He gives me an expectant stare.

“Not yet,” I mumble. But soon. I know it will be soon. I’ve felt the soul in the space that will be our next child. It creeps me out a little bit if I think about it too hard, but on the surface, it’s actually quite nice to know. He was a supernatural healer, so he was a good being in his life. I look around at my mates, seeing the excitement in their eyes, and focus on the topic of the academy. “You’ve really thought about this, haven’t you?”

Tate nods eagerly. “We have. We’ve even started sketching out potential curricula and thinking about what kind of students we’d want to attract.”

“It wouldn’t happen overnight,” Torin adds. “But that’s the beauty of it. It’s a project that will take time to build, and time is something we have a lot of now.”

“A name?” I ask to stall while I think. It’s a hell of a lot of responsibility and will be time-consuming, but the idea is intriguing, and it feels right.

“Archon Academy,” Tate says. “It will immediately signal to potential students that this is a place where leaders and powerful practitioners are trained, while maintaining an air of mystery and ancient wisdom. It was Morrigan’s idea.” He chuckles.

“Nice of you to give her the credit,” I say. “I like it. It is powerful.”

“So, are we doing it?” Bram asks, hope in his tone.

I inhale deeply and look down at Emmie, stroking her raven hair and loving her more than I ever thought possible. I want the best for her. We can provide that. Exhaling slowly, I smile. “Yes. We are doing it.”

The guys let out whoops of delight and relief, which makes me happy. They are excited and the idea is growing on me quickly.

I think of all the souls I’ve helped transition. I think of my parents, beginning their own new journeys. I think of Aunt Cathy, who just yesterday announced she’s taking on an apprentice of her own at The Resistance.

Everything changes. Everything continues. Everything finds its way back to what matters most.

“Now that is settled, there is something else,” Tate states.

“Oh, gods, what?” I groan.

“Tell Torin it’s totally possible to erect a shield while doing a backflip!”

I let out a loud laugh as Emmie giggles. “Do it,” she claps. “Do it!”

“Don’t encourage him,” Bram and Torin say together as Tate gets ready to show us his latest move.

Laughing, I rise to join them. The night air fills with the scent of the crackling fire, the forest around us, a new purpose and the magick that makes all of this possible. And somewhere in the soul space, new stories are beginning.

But this story—our story—feels like it’s exactly where it should be.

Complete. Balanced. Whole.