



Witch Hunter (The Demon Syndicate #1)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: What happens when a witch hunter stumbles upon the prince of the demon syndicate? You get an angsty enemies to lovers romance where the guy really hopes the girl doesn't find out who he is, and the girl hopes he doesn't notice that she's stalking him

Nova is a convergence someone who displays traits from two separate bloodlines.

She's a hunter as well as a witch who just received her first mission from the Council of Paranormals: investigate the reports of out of control magic in Seattle, an unclaimed territory.

What she doesn't expect is the intense connection with a mysterious paranormal when she first arrives. She has no idea what he is or who he is. She tries to stay away from him, knowing there's a good chance she might have to arrest or kill him, but she just can't stay away.

Dex is a Nephilim stronger than angels or demons, and hated by both. His adoptive father's syndicate laid claim to Seattle and has held it for the last twenty years.

Every day is the same making sure the territory is secure, protecting those within their borders, exacting justice and punishment when the rules are broken. Dex lives only for the violence and bloodlust. Until her. Nova makes him feel alive for the first time in his life, but can she survive what he is?

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Chapter 1

Dex

“Did you take care of it?”

Dex set his gun down on the sink and turned on the water as hot as it would go. He let it run over his hands, washing away the blood like it had never been there.

“Sir?”

He cleaned his fingernails next, and then grabbed the soap. Dex was careful to make sure every inch of his skin was clean. “It’s done.”

“Good, because if the humans get wind of this...the last thing we need is the Council on our ass. The boss would kill us.”

Drying his hands on a towel, he tossed it in the trash and grabbed the rubbing alcohol.

“I said it’s done.”

The alcohol stung the cuts, but it would get rid of any remnant of the blood that wasn’t his and speed up his healing. He tossed the bottle back into his box of first aid shit.

“I owe you one for this, Dex.”

Yeah, he owed him big time for this fuck-up. But Dex saved up favors and debts as if

they were more precious than diamonds.

In his world, they were.

“Is there anything else you need from me, anything I can help with, sir?”

“Leave.”

There was a strained silence and Dex gripped the sides of the sink, avoiding his reflection.

He heard footsteps and then the door closed.

Finally.

Porcelain cracked and he released the sink, standing up straight to face his own reflection.

Fuck.

A snap of his fingers and the towel in the trash caught on fire, eliminating any evidence that might get caught in the fibers.

Dex inspected the blood on his face, studying the way the red droplets caught the light. Then he wiped them off, turning the water on again until steam rose, filling the bathroom until the mirror fogged—covering the glowing orange red of hellfire in one eye.

And the silvery white of divine power in the other.

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Chapter 2

Nova

“Congratulations Novalie,” Madam Jadis, the head witch, told her as she handed over her new hunter’s license. “You’ve already received your first assignment, I hear.”

“I have, Madam. Thank you,” Novalie took the small black booklet with the Council’s logo on the front. Inside was her picture ID with empty pages for her future missions.

“A three-month trial, isn’t that right?” the witch asked. She was over two hundred years old, some said, but she barely looked sixty.

“Yes, Madam.” She hoped once the ninety days were over, they’d put her on retainer, but Nova was just glad to have a mission already.

“Well, good luck.” The head witch smiled, but it sent a shiver down Nova’s spine instead of reassuring her like she was sure it was supposed to. “The portal to Seattle is ready for you.”

Graduating at the top of her class had benefits, as did coming from a very long line of hunters. Nova was one of the few who received her license and her first job offer in the same day.

The Council watched them while they attended the university, eyeing the ones that

did the best like the humans did with their sports. When the time came for graduation and all the hunters to take their final tests – there were already contracts written up and waiting for the favored.

Nova bowed before the head witch, keeping her eyes down so the shifters didn't see her as a threat. None of the other witches seemed to care, but one day she knew they would – the day when they'd need her.

One day...she'd be the number one hunter.

Dismissed and ready to go, she turned and walked toward the double doors of the Council chambers, shoulders tensing as she turned her back on some of the most dangerous people in the world.

Outside was a line of hunters waiting to get their licenses. Some of them would receive job offers from the Council, some would get missions, and others would have to wait until they could prove themselves more – relegated to guard duty or patrols.

Nova strode toward her parents with a wide grin on her face, her bags already packed and waiting at their feet. Her mother grinned back and held her arms open.

She slammed into her mom and hugged her tight.

“You got a mission, didn't you?”

“I did.” Nova kissed her cheek and then hugged her dad.

He was the quiet one, the one who'd trained her most of her life, the one who understood her better than anyone. “I'm proud of you,” he murmured, holding her close.

Despite how much he'd tried to convince her not to do this – he was still proud.

He pulled back and studied her face, gaze lingering on the scar that had nearly taken her eye when she was only five. She'd gotten lucky, but it had marked her for the rest of her life.

Not even a healer had been able to get rid of the scar.

“Your sister would be proud of you too, Novalie.” Her dad kissed her forehead, and they both dutifully ignored the sheen of tears in each other's eyes.

“Come here, baby girl,” her mother said, holding out her arms again. “I'm going to miss you so much.”

“I'm gonna miss you too, Mom.” Nova held her mother tight and then kissed both her cheeks. “I'll text and email when I can.”

“Don't forget this.” Her mom handed her a necklace full of charms. “I'll send you more with your care package.”

She ducked down and let her mom place the titanium necklace over her head. The blessed silver charms tinkled against each other. From a witch, protective magic was a symbol of love Nova would never turn down.

If a witch cared enough to spend the time making magic for you, for nothing in return...you better fucking appreciate it.

“Be careful,” her mother chastised. “You're not invincible no matter what you think.”

“I will, Mom. Don't worry.”

Her mother stared up into her face with a worried look anyway. As always, her gaze lingered longest on the scarred eye, but not for the same reason her father's did. Her mom tapped the scar under Nova's purple eye – the unnatural one.

“This is because your mother is a witch,” she stated.

It was an order, not a statement – one Nova had heard since she was a small child.

“It's because my mother is a witch,” Nova dutifully repeated – as if there was ever a possibility she'd forget.

She'd been lucky the demon hadn't taken her eye completely, but even luckier that the small bit of magic she possessed was purple as well. It eased suspicions.

Her mother murmured a small protection prayer anyway, kissing the lid of the scarred purple eye first, then the blue one that matched her father's.

“Text us when you get settled,” her father said, voice gruff with emotion. “Make us proud.”

“I will.” Nova picked up her two suitcases and gave them a quirky grin. “I'll be back before you know it.”

Then she walked toward the portal that would take her to the coven building in Seattle where her new life would begin.

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Chapter 3

Nova

The apartment the Council supplied was nice enough – a one-bedroom, one-bathroom with a small living room and a kitchen. It had exposed brick and a nice balcony with a fire escape. Nova could smell the brine from the Puget Sound, and the sounds of the city were strange after a lifetime in a small town.

She studied the already furnished apartment, wrinkling her nose at the boring color scheme. It looked like some kind of setup for a magazine or something with silver accents, soft blues, and a lot of whites.

It wasn't really her style, but Nova didn't expect to be here long.

The mission from the Council was relatively simple.

All she had to do was some recon based on a few reports they'd received. For how long, she wasn't sure yet. Maybe a few weeks?

Some of the paranormals in the area were making their presence known and the one rule the Council enforced harder than any others – the entire reason the Council existed – was to keep the humans from finding out about the paranormal.

Observing the paranormals in the city was the only order she currently had. She assumed her handler would give her new orders based on the reports. If it was simple enough for one hunter to handle then she'd be ready, but if not then they'd send in a

whole team to help her.

Nova tapped her Council ID and considered it for a second.

Twenty-three years old, and finally doing what she'd been working toward ever since she'd lost her older sister.

She wasn't stupid, she knew she was green and naïve when it came to people. Her parents had homeschooled her, thanks to her scar and the resulting heterochromia. She'd spent thirteen years training as a hunter with her father and his family. Her mother had taught her as much magic as Nova was able to use so that by the time she finally left for the University of Morgana...

No one would ask questions about her scar with the abnormal eye color, or her dual bloodlines.

Her magic had manifested early, which was rare for those like her who had traits from two different paranormal races, but it wasn't all that strong. She was limited to a few, very basic moves. It wasn't like anything her mother could do, but it worked for what she needed as a hunter.

It was more than her sister had possessed though.

Gianna hadn't possessed any magic at all. Maybe if Nova had been better at magic, she could have done something...

She sighed and slid her ID under her mattress and turned away from the window. Those thoughts were poison she couldn't seem to give up.

It was nearly sunset, and she needed to get ready anyway.

Nova pulled the necklace over her head and inspected the charms her mother had made for her. She smiled as she selected a few and slipped them off the chain.

Tying the one for silence into the laces of her boots, she considered the others. Taking off her belt, she slid the one to hide her scent from shifters and vampires into the slots her father had made for just this sort of thing. No one would see the charms, no one would know what she was.

And the last one she hung on the earring of her left ear, fluffing her purple hair and letting the long, curly strands cover half her face. It hid the charm, the scar, and her unnatural eye.

She rubbed the small metal coin between her fingers and felt the way her mother's magic dampened what she was. Now she would look like little more than a human to anyone and anything that might not like a hunter sticking their nose into their business.

One last thing.

Grabbing a long-sleeved turtleneck, she slipped it on over her tank top, checking to make sure the black fabric covered the magic runes tattooed into her skin. The design was under her collarbones, the lines dark and thick with the matching tattoo down her left forearm and on her shoulder.

They helped her focus the little power she had to use it as a weapon.

Rare magic tattooed into her body to help protect her against those in the paranormal world that were far stronger than she was. The runes might just save her life one day, but her father had made sure to beat it into her that they were a last resort.

Hunters shouldn't rely on magic – all the ones who did ended up deader than dead.

Nova studied her own reflection and she grabbed her black baseball cap. She pulled it on to keep her hair in place over her eye.

Exploring the city would be fun.

She double-checked her keys. There were a few self-defense weapons on there that any normal human girl would have. Except her knuckles were made out of silver and her mace was actually a potion that would put any paranormal to sleep. There was also her father's hunter's knife in her boot.

That was it.

Her hands twitched for the weapons she usually wore on her person. Even though she had all the permits she could possibly need for someone in private security, thanks to the Council fast-tracking her through the system, she couldn't carry that kind of heat while doing reconnaissance.

If she saw anything, she wasn't supposed to engage, not without orders from her handler.

She slicked on some Chapstick and grabbed her wallet with all her human identification in it and some money. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw the sun had set and darkness was settling over the city.

Nova smiled and grabbed her jacket as she headed out, ready to see what the city had to offer.

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Chapter 4

Dex

The vodka wasn't strong enough some nights.

Dex ordered five shots and watched the bartender pour them carefully. He barely even saw the person serving him. All he saw was the hand and the liquid.

He was zoning out again which was dangerous, but it was very unlikely something would happen in a newly renovated 'barcade' owned by Grim Corp.

The sounds from the arcade section grated on his nerves and a headache settled in for the long haul.

Dex downed two shots like they were water, hating how fast his metabolism was. If he was lucky, he'd be buzzed for half an hour, maybe a little longer if he drank the vodka quickly enough.

Three more and he put a hundred-dollar bill on the bar. "Bring a bottle to my table."

The bartender stuttered his agreement and Dex stood, adjusting his leather coat. It hung heavy on his shoulders and was long enough the hem brushed against the top of his boots. It was a familiar weight – one he preferred when he had to pretend to be...as normal as possible.

"Hey."

He stopped, sensing someone standing too close.

“I was, um, wondering. Are you here alone?”

Dex looked down at the female standing in front of him, barely seeing her. It wasn't the dark lighting or the neon. His eyesight was better than perfect. Dex just didn't care enough to get a good look at her.

Humans were little more than animals. They were helpless and delicate. If he wasn't careful, he'd kill them all.

“I'm not interested,” he gritted out, tempering his voice as much as possible.

Even still, she jumped at the sound of it. The depth and rasp always scared them off even when he was trying to be careful. Prey always recognized a predator, even if the logic of humanity tried to play it off as something else.

“Oh, sorry to bother you.”

A flicker of guilt went through him as he pushed past her to the table he preferred in the corner.

The smell of her fear lingered, and it rankled.

Dex slumped into his seat, lifting one foot up to rest it on the bench. He threw his arm over his knee and watched the humans enjoy themselves.

It was a world he could never be a part of.

Maybe it wouldn't irritate him so much if he didn't feel like he didn't belong among the paranormals either.

Dex was...

He was a monster.

There was no other word that fit.

“Here’s the bottle, sir. Anything else I can get you?” The bartender had delivered the alcohol himself.

A witch by the smell of him. Not very powerful as he nearly felt human to Dex’s senses. “If anyone asks, I’m not here.”

After last night, he just wanted some peace and quiet.

There was only one number he’d answer tonight, and the boss rarely called him unless it was an emergency.

“Of course, sir. Anything else, just let me know.”

Dex nodded and drank straight from the vodka bottle. The sounds of Galaga intertwined with some song he didn’t recognize and for some reason it soothed him.

He let himself zone out again.

Only humans were in the bar so far, other than the bartender. A few more hours and the bouncers would show up – mean bear shifters that kept the peace thanks to their sheer size.

He settled in for a long night.

Dex could be at home gaming, reading, or watching TV, but no. He had to be out at

least five times a week to make sure they all saw him – that he wasn't just some made-up story the boss liked to use to scare the competition.

The door to the bar opened, letting in a cold draft that eased some of his headache. He closed his eyes and let his senses inspect the newcomers, assessing their potential threat.

Humans walked in and he dismissed them immediately. There was no scent of power, no tang of metal, and nothing in their emotions that insinuated they'd cause trouble.

At least not yet.

Then another human came in a second before the door slid closed.

His eyes flew open when he realized he couldn't smell anything at all.

Dex searched the humans as they walked toward the bar.

There.

A female who stood just inside the door, eyeing the place like she'd never seen it before. The lower half of her face was covered by her jacket as she studied the video games, the pool table, and then the booths that were set up for a nostalgic arcade feel...with alcohol and hot wings.

She didn't smell like anything – no emotion, no perfume, not even the scent of her body wash or shampoo lingering on the fabric of her clothes or in her hair.

It mentally had him sitting up and taking notice, but physically, he leaned back, letting the shadows cover his face.

A paranormal he'd never seen in Seattle before. This was definitely something the boss would want him to look into.

She slid her hands in the pockets of her leather jacket and scanned the room. Her gaze stopped – settling on him.

What the fuck?

For some reason, Dex felt like she saw more than just his boots and the general outline of his body, the bottle of vodka on the table, with his gloved hand wrapped around the cool glass. He kept completely still, watching her.

A blue eye studied that glove long enough he actually felt uncomfortable. Dex felt it in his stomach, like he'd suddenly been punched in the gut.

This couldn't possibly be a human.

She sighed and adjusted her cap before heading to the bar, just like everyone else.

But she was alone.

His eyes narrowed when the humans kept their distance from her, even the males who were notorious to hit on anything with tits.

Dex would have to get close enough to assess what she really was.

He sighed. This was the last fucking thing he wanted to do tonight.

At least she was kind of cute.

He smirked when her purple hair caught the neon light, accentuating the deep plum

color.

Definitely cute.

Focusing, he heard her order a drink. She enunciated each word like she was nervous the bartender couldn't hear her, and still he scented nothing.

A purple haze? Such a girl drink.

Dex signaled the bartender and even across the dark room, the witch caught it. He was a survivalist, and he knew Dex doled out the Corp's punishments. So, he bent over backwards every time Dex was there, but he was one of the few that also respected when Dex just wanted to be left alone.

The witch leaned over the bar to whisper in the girl's ear, pointing at the monster in the shadows.

"Your drink is on the house." Even with the noise and the whispered words, Dex could hear him.

He didn't know why he did it, but something about a girl coming out alone, ordering a vodka drink that matched her hair...

It was interesting, and Dex rarely felt intrigued by anything.

He rarely felt at all.

She glanced over her shoulder at him again, and he could see her cheeks flush even under the neon lights, but there was still no scent of embarrassment.

Based on the lack of power, he'd say she was a shifter with access to magic, but it

would be easy enough to find out if he could just get her to talk to him.

Walking across the bar would draw too much attention. Dex didn't want her on anyone's radar when it was a simple assessment. But a girl coming up to him? It happened all the time.

He smirked again when she took the bright purple drink and walked straight towards him.

Dex inspected her from head to toe, glad she couldn't see his face in the shadows.

The leather jacket had a high collar that hid half her face, the buckle across the throat glinting blue, red, and then green with the lights as she walked through the various neon colors.

When she ducked her chin down even farther, her hair fell forward, covering even more of her face. Was she really that shy?

The confidence in her steps would say otherwise, but he wasn't sure. It was difficult to get a read on her.

"Thank you for the drink," she murmured. Her voice was huskier than he'd anticipated, the words soft but clear.

Dex didn't say anything as he considered her bare hands – both wrapped around her glass like she was afraid to spill it, or maybe worried someone would try to spike it. The fingers were long and nimble, but her nails were short and plain.

The rest of her was completely covered by clothes or hair.

"I should go," she finally said, her cheeks pink over the collar of her jacket. "Thanks

again.”

“Sit?”

He’d meant for it to be a command, but for some reason it had come out as a request. Dex gritted his teeth, his hand tightening on the bottle of vodka ever so slightly.

Why was she in focus? Why her? Nothing else could ever pull him out of the trance he preferred to live in when he had to be out here, mingling. Dex never looked twice at anyone.

He didn’t have to, not when he was the most powerful monster in this city.

But for some reason, she was crystal clear, even when the bar around her was still hazy and unfocused.

“I’m not sure,” she murmured, glancing over her shoulder like she was afraid she might get caught talking to him.

Dex leaned forward ever so slightly, making sure she could see his sharp grin if nothing else. “Waiting for someone?”

She hesitated once, and then shook her head.

For some reason that didn’t make him feel better.

The glass clinked when she set her drink down. Then she carefully pulled out her chair and sat down, folding her hands on top of the table like she knew he’d want to know where they were.

Dex eyed the keys in her hand, noting the various self-defense weapons easily within

reach. He leaned back and sighed, letting his eyes lose focus once more.

Of course she was afraid of him. Why wouldn't she be?

“You can go if you want,” he told her, taking a long drink of his vodka.

It was stupid and Dex knew he should figure out what she was, but there was absolutely no power coming off of her. Even if she was a shifter, it wasn't anything he couldn't handle – nothing the boss would give a shit about.

Fear was boring.

Everyone was afraid of him. It was nothing new, nothing...interesting.

He drained nearly half the bottle before he realized she was watching him with that one glittering blue eye. How did she see anything with her hair in her face like that?

“I have time,” she told him, voice stronger this time. The rasp of it made him focus on her again before he'd even realized it. “What's your name?”

He grinned. So, the mouse had balls after all.

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Chapter 5

Nova

“ M y name’s Dex.”

Nova kept her hands still despite the urge to do anything else. She glanced up into the shadows again, eyes catching on the man’s white teeth that almost glittered when the light caught on them.

He had sharp canines and wasn’t afraid to show them off.

Vampire?

It was hard to tell with all the smells and noises of the bar. Nova had never come across a vampire before even on hunting trips with her family, and they didn’t have them at the university. It was only witches and hunters there.

Shifters always had a smell, her professors had said. It was a wildness that was difficult to mistake, and once she became familiar with it, she was able to pick out exactly which shifter by the nuances.

Then there were the obvious ways to recognize them. The wolves’ eyes glowed silver, and the large cats glowed gold. Bears were copper, and ravens were a ruby red. But they rarely showed that side of themselves among the humans. Exposing themselves was a death sentence if they were caught.

She dropped her gaze when she sensed his attention, studying his gloved hand instead.

The leather was so tight she could see the lines of his knuckles and fingers as if they were naked. For some reason, the sight of it stretching across his massive hand felt almost obscene.

Nova licked her lips and picked up her drink.

Definitely not a witch. After five years of training alongside them, she knew what they all smelled like, what they all felt like.

So, what the hell was he?

She tried to go through every paranormal she knew that had some kind of fangs, but shifters liked to display them sometimes too. Based on his inclination to hide in the shadows, she wanted to say he was a vampire, but somehow that didn't feel right.

He still hadn't asked her for her name, and she honestly had no idea why he even wanted her to sit down. Was this some kind of dominance game that the shifters liked to do, or was he trying to intimidate her?

"So, is Dex short for anything?" she asked, taking a sip of her drink.

Oh, this was good. Most bartenders fucked it up, but the vodka was well balanced with the blackberry liqueur, mixing perfectly with the cranberry juice.

"No."

She glanced up again out of reflex, and Nova felt her stomach flip.

The shadows were kind to him. They caressed his face, hid his eyes, lingered in his hair and along his shoulders. Darkness looked good on him.

Shit.

She looked down into the purple drink and suddenly felt ridiculous.

A stupid girl with purple hair, her purple drink, and...

Nova shoved down the urge to touch her hair and make sure her eye was hidden.

“And you are?”

“Didn’t think you cared.” She couldn’t help her smirk, even if she wouldn’t look up into his face again.

The shocked silence made her stomach flip again and Nova braced herself for the possibility of a fight. This guy clearly wasn’t used to backtalk.

“I don’t, I’m just being polite.”

For some reason his honesty made her smile wider.

The bar felt warm despite the cold Seattle winter. She reached for her zipper, moving slowly to ensure he didn’t see her as a threat. “I’m Nova.”

She could feel him watching her as she peeled off the leather and settled it on her lap. That attention zeroed in on everything she’d revealed, but the corner of her mouth lifted in a half-smile, knowing he still couldn’t see anything at all thanks to her turtleneck.

Except maybe her mouth.

“So, is Nova short for anything?” he asked, repeating her own words.

It was instinct to look up when that deep voice wrapped around her like a snake—smooth and silky.

That was a mistake.

The darkness slid back ever so slightly so she could see the color of his eyes even though the details were still hidden by shadows. They were a golden brown that looked like molten gold, but they didn’t glow. Those eyes were one hundred percent gorgeous human.

Her heart actually stuttered.

What the fuck was going on?

This was ridiculous.

Nova wasn’t even supposed to be engaging with anyone. She’d been hungry and thirsty from walking through the city and this place had seemed inviting with its arcade and alcohol. A simple meal and she was going to be on her way.

She shouldn’t have sat down, but she’d been curious who the dark figure in the corner had been.

“It’s, um, short for Novalie,” she admitted, feeling embarrassed for some reason. “But everyone calls me Nova.”

He didn’t move, but it felt like he leaned forward. “Which do you prefer?”

Resisting the urge to tuck her hair behind her ear, she reached for her drink instead, letting her eyes rest on his boot.

He sat like a bad boy with no regard for the rules, dirtying the booth bench with his shoes like he knew no one would dare say shit to him. The way the witch's eyes had widened when he'd told her the drink was on the house – she knew Dex either owned the place, or the witch was terrified of him.

Maybe both.

She shrugged, not really knowing how to answer his question. “I don't have a preference.”

No one had ever bothered to ask before.

Her sister had called her by her given name, or Lee. Nova loved that nickname, but after Gianna died, she hadn't let anyone call her that. It just hurt too much.

The silence between them grew until it was thick, but it wasn't uncomfortable.

She liked how dark the bar was, how it was lit with bright colors instead of normal lights. The glow allowed the patrons to see, but not in too much detail. The darkness was almost warm in here, curling around her feet like puppies.

Nova took another sip of her drink, closing her eyes.

The music pulsed through the bar, something grungy – a rock mix with a beat that teased her to dance. Something about this place hit different than everywhere else she'd been tonight.

It was the first place she felt comfortable, the first place she hadn't seen a single sign

of the paranormal.

Well, until Dex.

She opened her eyes to see him staring at her, the leather straining across his knuckles as he tightened his grip on the vodka bottle. The muscles in his jaw were tight too and she realized then just how sharp it was.

Sharp enough to cut.

He was definitely not human.

Nova almost asked him to play a game of pool with her, but there was an intensity in those golden-brown eyes that told her he wasn't really one to relax while other people watched.

She held his gaze instead and sipped her drink through the straw until it was gone.

A straw was annoying as hell, but this way she didn't have to tip the glass back and risk her hair falling away from her face, exposing her eye.

"I should go," she said, licking the taste of blackberries from her lips. "Thank you for the drink, Dex."

Nova left the glass on the table and stood, clenching her keys in her left hand. She slid her jacket on as she walked toward the door – not surprised when he didn't ask her to stay.

But she was surprised when she felt her stomach drop with disappointment as the door closed behind her.

Freezing cold wind whipped off the Sound and she tightened her jacket around her.

She felt ridiculous standing outside the bar as if she were waiting for him to come after her.

Nova knew she was running away. She couldn't eat wings knowing that dangerous pretty boy was staring at her.

Maybe she could find someplace else to grab a slice of pizza or something.

Then she wrapped the darkness around her like a cloak, fingers sliding through her silver knuckles just in case. She started walking without really bothering to think about where. It was Friday night, she'd find something.

The bar with the arcade would have to wait for another day.

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Chapter 6

Dex

D ex couldn't believe she just left.

He sat there considering her empty glass.

Should he go after her?

That would be the smart thing to do.

The girl would never see him, never even know he was there.

He definitely hadn't seen her before, and she wasn't a human. At least, he was pretty sure she wasn't. If she did something stupid in his territory, the boss would hand him his ass.

Dex sighed and stood.

Everyone who had been watching him and Nova was careful not to make eye contact, and everyone else shied away from him out of instinct.

The bartender took the vodka bottle with a nod. Dex would come back and finish it later, maybe another bottle after it would finally get him in that buzzed state. Thanks to Nova and her mysterious lack of scent, he was completely sober now.

And her lips.

They were fuller than he'd been expecting.

Dex glared, annoyed that he was even thinking about that. She could be an actual threat, and here he was, thinking about her fucking lips.

Why did she hide half her face anyways? What was under all those purple curls that she didn't want anyone to see?

Dex stepped outside and froze when he realized he wouldn't be able to follow her scent.

Hiking his coat up, he looked left and then right.

There – her purple hair.

Backing into the shadow of the wall in case she looked over her shoulder, he watched her closely. His eyes narrowed when he noticed the way light seemed to slide away from her, the shadows clinging to her unnaturally.

What the fuck was she?

The streetlights didn't exactly flicker when she passed, but they dimmed ever so slightly, and humans avoided her.

Interesting.

Dex went down the street after her and then turned into an alley. He jumped and grabbed the fire escape, pulling himself up, landing on the railing in a crouch. Then he leapt for the next level. Up and up until he reached the roof.

Walking along the rooftops allowed him to follow her without whatever senses she had becoming aware of him.

Where was she going?

He jumped from one building to the next easily enough, keeping an eye on the streets and the people walking along them. Friday night was always busy.

The light turned red and she stood there, waiting patiently at the corner.

Fuck.

She was leaving official Corp territory.

Dex considered the risk.

If his boss learned there was a new paranormal in town, one they couldn't accurately assess the risk of, he'd punish Dex for the fuck-up.

He crouched in the shadows and studied her again.

Nothing about the way she dressed told him anything other than she didn't want people looking at her skin, or her face. The way she carried herself – well, she wasn't afraid to walk alone at night.

Either she could actually take care of herself, or she was naïve enough to think it would be just like whatever small town she'd come from.

Nova could be nothing but an average shifter, but if he couldn't at least confirm that then who knows who else might find out she was here and what she could do before he could.

The light turned green and she started walking.

He gripped the edge of the roof and hauled himself up and over silently. Dex slid down the side of the building and then pressed against the wall. Nova was halfway across the street and he waited to see which way she would go.

Without hesitation, she turned right, shadows deepening around her as she left the bars and clubs behind.

Dex went to follow her, but something tickled his senses and he stopped.

Two shifters came up behind her, their eyes glowing silver.

Fuck. The last thing he needed was for them to see him following her. Dex waited, wondering if this was a coincidence, or if they were hunting her.

When she turned down the next street, he watched them grin and follow her. Then two more came up on the other side and Dex didn't hesitate.

He was across the street faster than the human eye could follow, but he stayed back so the wolves didn't catch his scent.

Nova was out of his sight and Dex didn't like it.

He came up behind one of the wolves and wrapped his hand around his face, snapping his neck with a quick tug. Before the other could react. Dex had a knife in his throat. Both their bodies went behind a dumpster to deal with later.

Every sense was on high alert now, and he gritted his teeth as the sound of blood dripping from his hand scratched against his ears.

Dex didn't have to kill them, but they were low-level competition chasing after something the Corp might be interested in. This he could explain away to the boss, not a dangerous paranormal he'd let slip through his fingers.

When he caught up to where he'd last seen the first two, Dex stopped and cocked his head, listening.

"Hey, baby," one of them said, voice low and vibrating with a subsonic growl. "Are you lost?"

Dex felt his blood boil and he closed his eyes, tipping his head back to breathe in the cold air. He couldn't afford to let his monster out, not right now when he had no idea who or what she was.

Besides, it would take nothing to kill these two as well if he had to.

"I'm not lost," she said in that husky voice. Why did it almost sound like she was laughing?

Dex opened his eyes and stuck to the shadows, following the voices.

They were inside an alley, hidden from the main streets. Dim orange light from the street put their features in sharp relief.

Both wolves were getting closer and closer, backing her up to a wall, but her hands were still in her pockets and her eyes were on the ground.

Smart.

If she knew about shifters, she'd do anything not to piss them off, and questioning their dominance was always sure to do that.

Whiny little babies.

But she wasn't even trying to defend herself.

He gritted his teeth in annoyance and looked up. Dex quickly inspected his surroundings to make sure no one could see him.

Between one breath and the next, he was on top of the roof, rolling his shoulders back to readjust his coat. He crouched down to watch and rested his arms over his knees, wondering if the shifters would out her before he had to step in.

"Why are you all alone?" the other one asked. "Don't you know it's not safe for something as pretty as you to be out alone at night?"

Dex wasn't expecting her to smile.

"Maybe I like being alone," she murmured, pulling her hands out of her pockets.

Brass knuckles covered her left hand, not her right. He sniffed once. No, not brass – definitely silver. Whatever she was using to cover her scent was messing with his head.

Was she planning to fight off two wolf shifters alone with nothing but those silver knuckles?

Interesting.

Shifters were strong, not as strong as he was, but they could kill her with a single punch. Dex chewed on his lip as he considered. Should he step in?

If they killed her, then his problem was solved. If she killed them, then he'd know

what she was.

He settled in to watch.

“Well, why be alone when you could hang out with us?” the one on the right asked.

They were easily twice her size.

Nova looked up at the one who’d spoken last, her blue eye shining bright even in the darkness. “You are very pretty,” she admitted. Dex snarled softly when he heard the truth in her voice.

“Then come hang out with us.” They both took a step closer, but she held her ground, dropping her gaze again.

That smile stayed on her face though and for a second Dex thought he saw the shadows retreat.

“I’m good but thank you for the offer.”

The one on the left shoved her back into the wall and Dex flinched when she didn’t even react. “It wasn’t optional.”

Fuck.

Could he sit here and watch her die?

Why did he even care at all? If they killed her, everything would be less complicated, and he could go back to his life.

Drinking and zoning out no longer held the same appeal though as it had only an hour

ago. Not when there was this mystery right in front of him.

“Look,” she murmured, her voice low and soothing, but her hands were still hanging at her sides which made Dex nervous. There was no way she could defend herself like that. “I’m just trying to find a good pizza place. Do you have any suggestions?”

The fucking balls on this mouse. Dex couldn’t help his grin.

“Actually, yeah,” the one on the right told her. “It’s just a few blocks over. Best pizza in Seattle.”

“Thanks.” She ducked under the guy’s arm and started walking in the direction of Zio’s Pizzeria.

Dex had to admit, they had good fucking pizza there.

“Hey, I wasn’t done with you.”

The wolf grabbed her right arm and Dex tensed.

She could be a paranormal unable to take on the speed and strength of a wolf and he’d be condemning her to a death sentence if he did nothing. Was that risk worth finding out what she was?

“You’re hurting me,” she said calmly, eyes still down.

Dex had better figure out what he was going to do and fucking fast.

“I think you should come with us,” the wolf growled, silver eyes flashing. Then he yanked her forward until she was pressed up against him.

Dex was up and standing without even realizing it.

Before he could make another move, there was a flash of purple and he froze.

Her left hand came up wicked fast. She punched the wolf right in the abdomen with the silver knuckles and a pulse of purple magic that sent him flying into the wall.

Before the other one could react, she crouched down and yanked a knife from her boot, angling it like she actually knew what she was fucking doing.

A witch? One who could fight?

“Just let me go,” she told them, voice still calm and unruffled. “I’d rather not get blood on my jacket.”

Dex covered his mouth with his hand to keep from laughing.

Good to know she kept that attitude with her at all times.

“You have no idea who you’re messing with.” The wolf picked himself up from the ground and shook the rubble and dust off of him. Dex could see him bulking up with the strength of his wolf and so could Nova.

She saw it the moment he did – the point of no return.

Nova threw her knife and it thudded into the closest wolf’s heart. She turned but was too slow.

The one she’d blasted with magic gripped her by the throat and slammed her into the wall, the brick cracking at the point of impact.

Dex leapt from the roof and slammed into the ground.

“What the fuck?”

He stood and took in the scent of fear before he gripped the male’s neck, yanking him off of Nova. The sound of her coughing and choking registered somewhere far away.

She was still breathing at least.

Dex focused on the wolf. “What should I do with you, hm?”

“Hey, look, please don’t hurt me. I didn’t realize she was one of yours.”

He tossed the male into the wall, putting his body between Nova and the wolf.

“Please,” the shifter begged. “I didn’t know.”

The scent of fear spiked when Dex stalked forward.

His control slipped, and he could feel the hellfire roiling through his veins, pushing him to make the most violent and bloody choice. It mixed with the righteous rage that demanded justice at any cost and Dex tasted wrath.

“I didn’t know!” the wolf shouted, trying to scramble away.

Dex grinned and reached for the shifter. “That sounds like a you problem.”

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Chapter 7

Nova

Nova didn't recognize the voice that came out of Dex. She barely recognized him at all since he wasn't completely covered in shadow. But she remembered those boots, those gloves, and the smell of the bar clinging to him.

Her hand was on her throat, easing the strain as she watched Dex with a strange mix of fear and awe.

Whatever he was, he was stronger than a shifter. The way he grabbed the wolf and pinned him to the wall...the snarl that escaped him wasn't anything she'd ever heard before. It wrapped around her body like a vise and her knees gave out.

Nova shivered when she hit the hard cement but forced herself to witness what was about to occur.

Who the fuck was this guy?

The squelch as Dex's fist went into the wolf's chest made her entire body seize up, and when he ripped out the still beating heart, she jerked as if it had been her heart in his hand instead.

Nova didn't move, realizing very quickly that whatever Dex was, she was no match for him. Sure, taking out these two wolves would have been easy enough. Nova had tried to spare them, and that had been a mistake.

But Dex? Dex was far more dangerous than a shifter or a vampire.

“Are you okay?”

She looked up and there he was, standing right in front of her.

When had he moved?

Before she could respond, Dex dropped to a crouch and narrowed his eyes. He reached out and Nova was proud of herself for not flinching. The clean hand took her wrist gently and pulled it away from her throat.

There were two dead shifters in this sketchy-ass alley with her and whatever Dex was, but still all Nova could do was stare at the man in front of her.

How the fuck was he so beautiful?

“Can you speak?” he asked, inspecting the bruising she could feel.

She reached out and brushed a drop of blood from his flawless skin, just under his eye.

The way Dex froze, she would have thought the man couldn't be shocked, but apparently, she was wrong.

He just...stared at her.

If only she could get her mouth to form words, Nova would have told him she was fine, that she hadn't needed his help, and that it was actually kind of creepy that he'd been following her. But she couldn't stop looking at his face.

Was that why he hid in shadows? Because he didn't want people noticing how fucking gorgeous he was?

"Nova?" That deep, soothing voice was back to normal once more.

"I'll be okay," she murmured.

Dex stood and offered her his hand, coat flapping around his ankles like some kind of dark hero.

Nova considered that gloved hand, and then the one still covered in blood. She hesitated for a moment, but then gave him her right hand – not her left. Dex yanked her up hard, and she slammed into him.

He stared down at her, arm around her back, and Nova couldn't fucking breathe as she stared into those golden-brown eyes with a hint of something behind them.

Dex reached out with his bloody hand and brushed back her hair, never once actually touching her face.

Her heart was pounding as she looked into his eyes, knowing what he saw – knowing what he would ask her. Nova couldn't calm her breathing; she couldn't do anything trapped as she was. Her hands gripped his very muscular arms and she gritted her teeth.

She should have run instead of waiting to see what he would do. There were a million things her training had taught her to do, but here in this dark alley with him, all that training had disappeared.

"I know it's ugly," she finally said. "But it's rude to stare."

Dex jerked as though she'd slapped him, eyes widening. Then he released her, blinking like he hadn't even realized what he was doing.

Nova didn't waste the opportunity. She went toward the shifter she'd killed and yanked her knife out of his chest.

Her first kill as a Council employee.

Her father and grandfather had spent years training her, teaching her how to efficiently kill in the most painless way possible and then to strip and dispose of the body. Something the University of Morgana hadn't taught her.

Kneeling, she studied the wolf and then wiped the bloody knife off on his clothes.

This was the last thing she needed on her first night.

Nova stripped his pockets, any identifying jewelry, and pocketed all of it.

Looked like she was in for a long night.

"I'll take care of it," Dex growled. "Just go."

"No offense, but I don't trust you enough to take care of a dead body for me." Nova gripped the wolf and heaved, tossing him over her shoulders in a fireman carry. Then she stood slowly, getting used to the weight. "I'll handle it myself."

She glanced back at him, terrified to look at his face again. Nova had no idea why she reacted to him like she did, but Dex did things to her common sense that should be illegal. "Seems you have shit to take care of too."

Dex didn't look back at the body, or the heart lying next to it. He just stared at her

and her purple eye, but his face was carefully blank.

It felt weird to walk off without another word.

Where was she even going to take the body?

“Come with me then,” he finally said, looking up at the wolf across her shoulders, and then back down at her. “I have access to an incinerator.”

Nova hesitated, but then nodded. What other choice did she have?

Dex walked by the body he’d mutilated as if he didn’t care if he got caught, but she didn’t think that was it exactly.

Nova followed him farther down the alley, questioning her life choices once again. This was probably the stupidest thing she’d done all night.

But if the Council had to clean up one of her messes on day one, she’d get pulled on her first mission. Nova refused to let that happen.

Dex stopped at a door to a building that had no sign or designation. He shoved the door open and then took the body from her like it weighed nothing, slinging it over his shoulder. “You can come with me or stay out here.”

Again, she hesitated.

If she went into that building, she didn’t know all the entrances and exits. He could easily kill her, but if she didn’t see him dispose of the body properly, he could use it to fuck with her.

Nova studied the sharp lines of his face, the slanted upturned eyes, and his full lips as

if they would give her the answers she needed.

If he wanted to kill her, he would have done it already, or he would have let the wolves try to kill her.

“I’ll come with you.”

Dex smirked at her and it was the first time she could see his whole face when he did it.

Nova couldn’t breathe.

He stepped into the building and she gasped when he disappeared into the darkness.

What exactly was it about him that shocked her brain into shutting down?

Paranormals were beautiful, generally speaking. Shifters were physical perfection, and so were hunters. Witches were ethereal and terrifying in the way they could just smite you out of existence – commanding nature like the old goddesses.

Nova had never seen an ugly paranormal.

Except her.

She brushed her hair over her face, and realized her cap was gone.

“Wait!” She ran back outside and checked the alley, making sure nothing else of hers was left behind.

It was a risk not to clean the area, but she’d take care of the body first. Then Nova would figure out what to do next.

She ran back inside and froze.

Where did he go?

Twisting her left hand, she wrapped the shadows around herself, falling deep into the darkness until she was nothing.

“How do you do that?” he asked – from directly behind her.

Nova nearly jumped out of her skin, the shadows fleeing from her like scared little kittens.

“It’s called darkness manipulation.” Why did she tell him that? She didn’t owe Dex an explanation when he hadn’t bothered to tell her what he was.

But he had killed someone for her.

She expected him to ask her another question, but he oozed out of the shadows and passed right by her.

The darkness loved him. It hung on his shoulders, trailing down like wings. The shadows clung to his hair as if they wanted to hide those blond locks from any prying eyes—worshipping him from head to toe.

Fuck, she was in trouble.

Nova followed after him, unable to look away from the sheer size of his shoulders. The guy was bigger than any shifter or hunter she’d ever seen. And he was so tall.

So tall.

Despite the dark, she could see clearly, her purple eye doing most of the work as it sifted through various enchantments and illusions. Interestingly, Dex didn't carry a single spell.

It was all him under that coat.

Maybe he was a witch shifter? Or a vampire witch?

"Here." Dex pressed his hand to another door and it slid open. He disappeared and then lights flickered on.

Nova stopped just inside the doorway, shielding her eyes from the bright lights.

This was a mortuary.

Dex stopped when he realized she wasn't following. "Are you coming?"

Fuck this. What the hell was she doing here with this guy? Nova took a step back and shook her head.

Suddenly the body was gone, and he was standing right in front of her, blocking most of the harsh light.

Nova sighed in relief.

It wasn't that she was afraid of the light exactly, or the sun. But it was just so...unforgiving.

"Why not?"

Nova didn't say anything, not sure what to even tell him that wouldn't sound psycho.

“Look at me,” he growled.

It was a tone she knew not to argue with.

She took a step closer so his massive frame would block even more of the light. She was less afraid of him than she was of the fluorescents that rattled the air around them. His shadow wrapped around her, shielding her from the pain and her shoulders slumped in relief.

Then she looked up at him.

Dex’s eyes were wide as he looked down at her. Clearly, he hadn’t expected her to get so close. Nova barely even breathed to make sure she didn’t accidentally touch him.

“I’ll come,” she whispered, dropping her eyes. His face was difficult to look at even in the shadows now that she knew what they were hiding. “If you could turn off the lights?”

Again, he silently studied her, but didn’t ask her a million questions like normal people did.

A second later he moved, and the lights clicked off.

The harsh buzz of the fluorescents disappeared, and the darkness wrapped around her again like a blanket – comforting and soothing.

Nova let her eyes adjust and then followed him through the back room of the mortuary and to some kind of basement. This time she didn’t hesitate. She followed him down the dark stairs and watched as he tossed the body into the incinerator.

A moment later it got hotter than hell and he crossed his arms over his chest, the light of the flames framing his body as he watched the wolf burn to ash. “Wanna grab some pizza?”

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Chapter 8

Nova

They sat in the booth of the dimly lit pizzeria together, silently eating pizza with all the toppings.

Nova grabbed her beer and downed as much of it as she could in one go. The food was good here and so was the beer. It was definitely going on her list of approved eateries.

Dex grabbed another piece of pizza and she watched as he tipped his head back to let the cheese fall into his mouth. Time seemed to slow down and she froze mid swallow. Why did everything he do look like a striptease?

Then he shoved almost the entire piece of pizza in his mouth and she nearly choked.

“Damn, boy.”

He stopped like she’d caught him doing something naughty and looked at her in shock.

Nova smirked. “Save some for the rest of us.” She grabbed the last slice of pizza and took a bite, making sure to keep her eyes down.

Dex was dangerous, and not just because of what he might be.

Yes, whatever and whoever he was, was very dangerous.

Nova hadn't realized he'd killed two other shifters on her trail. When he came back to the mortuary with all three bodies, her jaw had hit the floor. He'd said he'd go back and clean the alley, and this time, she'd believed him.

But he was also dangerous because she couldn't stop fucking gawking every time he moved.

At least there was no one else in the pizzeria this late at night, and she liked the feel of the candlelight with a few choice electric bulbs. They were the old, yellow kind – not LEDs which made the light softer and gentler.

Even still, Dex had picked the darkest corner of the pizzeria. Though she wasn't sure if it was for her or for him.

Her baseball cap was on the booth bench beside her with her jacket. Nova didn't see the point in wearing it anymore, not when he'd already seen, but it was habit to let her hair fall in front of her face. She'd only been doing it nearly her whole fucking life.

Nova ripped her pizza into pieces, thinking about the way Dex had gone straight into the bathroom when they'd arrived. His gloves were clean now, but he was still eating with them on.

Like a weirdo.

She placed a pepper on her tongue and wondered if he'd tell her what he was if she asked.

Even now, there was a strain between them despite how relaxed he seemed to be. She

knew he had a million questions for her, and was no doubt wondering why she didn't seem bothered by death and the disposal of bodies.

Telling him she was also a hunter before she knew who and what he was...

It was too much of a risk, and if the paranormals in town knew a hunter had arrived, that would only make her job harder.

Nova dared a look up and was relieved when she saw him staring out the window instead of at her. She placed a small scrap of pizza in her mouth and considered him as she chewed.

What if he was one of the ones she'd been sent to report on?

So far, there was nothing she could put in her report about him specifically. Nova didn't know what kind of paranormal he was, and she wasn't ready to have this become part of her job. Not when he'd saved her life.

Well, it was the thought that counted anyway. Nova would have been fine, even against four.

Without turning his head, his gaze slid to hers and she instantly looked down.

But she could still see his grin.

Her heart pounded, and Nova swallowed hard.

"So, what's up with the eye?"

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Chapter 9

Dex

He'd caught her looking at him and the blush on her cheeks made her freckles stand out even more. His sharp grin at her reaction surprised even him.

That's what she got for nearly making him choke on his own pizza.

Dex wanted to ask her a million questions. Like why the hell she was so afraid of the light that she'd get into his space like that.

At first, he'd been pissed. Dex had assumed she was afraid of him. Challenging her would have proved what he couldn't smell. But she'd wrapped the darkness around them like they were wings as soon as his shadow had touched her.

It had been surprisingly intimate.

That wasn't something he was ready to ask her about, so he'd settled on the obvious.

"My eye?" Her hand went to her hair, checking to make sure it still covered the left side of her face.

Instantly, he regretted the question.

The way her voice had nearly broke when she'd told him it was ugly had made his stomach drop.

It wasn't a feeling he was used to and here she was, making him experience it multiple times in one night.

"My mother is a witch," she whispered, but the words sounded lifeless and rote even if they were true.

There was something else she didn't want him to know, but Dex didn't press. A scar like that on a paranormal with access to magic was rare. Whatever had happened, it had been brutal.

Seeing that eye for the first time...it had stolen the breath from his fucking lungs.

The sharp contrast of the purple next to her blue one reminded him of every fucking time he'd looked in the mirror and seen the dichotomy of what he was – some freak whose father couldn't even stand what he'd created.

And here was that same rare trait in a female witch with very little magic. Maybe that was why she could fight? Weaker paranormals were always in danger since they couldn't pass as human.

Except she could, thanks to whatever she had on her that was fucking with his senses.

She stared down at her plate, and he didn't know how to fix this.

I know it's ugly.

Dex reached out and brushed the thick curls away from her face. Every time he saw that vibrant purple, his heart stopped.

It was bad just how much he wanted to trace that scar with his bare fingers. Dex pulled away slowly, surprised she didn't try to shy away from him. Nova let him look

at the vertical mark on her face that bisected her left eye, making the vibrant purple even more fascinating.

Whatever had scratched her face from her eyebrow down to her cheek had done something strange, because she didn't have that milky film that he'd seen on others who'd lost their eyesight. No, it looked like her magic had settled there instead, protecting her.

Despite the way the scar marred her perfect skin, it didn't make her any less beautiful.

"I like it," he finally told her. "I think it suits you."

"Hooray, I'm cured." Nova rolled her eyes and put another piece of mutilated pizza in her mouth. "A lifetime of looking in the mirror suddenly wiped away as if it didn't exist, thanks to a boy."

Dex gritted his teeth and grabbed his beer just for an excuse to look away from her.

He'd felt the truth of that statement like a slap to the face.

How many times had he stared in the mirror and thought how fucking monstrous he looked? How many times had he punched the glass just so he didn't have to see the reflection of what he truly was?

"Well, regardless of what you think, it's still beautiful." Dex didn't look at her when he said it.

How many times had he wished for someone to see what he truly was and say those words to him?

Nova dropped the pizza onto the plate and drained the rest of her beer. "I have to go."

She was up and out of the booth before he'd even set his drink down.

Fuck, she was fast.

But Dex was faster.

He dropped money on the table and then followed her outside.

Why?

He knew what she was now. There was no reason to keep talking to her.

And yet, he couldn't stop himself even if he tried.

"Please don't follow me. It's creepy." She pulled the black cap over her hair and walked across the street without stopping to look both ways. The jacket went on next and she pulled up the collar, so it covered the bottom half of her face once more.

He jogged to catch up with her. "Why are you running away from me?"

"Because you're a stalker."

Dex chuckled. "Maybe a little, but we were having a meal and then you bounced without even a goodbye."

"It's getting late," she told him, heading toward the pier. "I should get some sleep."

Dex stopped then, realizing she was right. It was well past midnight and he hadn't made it back to the bar yet.

He needed to get there before it closed.

Fuck.

Hopefully, nothing had happened, but his absence would no doubt be reported by someone who couldn't mind their fucking business.

Nova stopped in the middle of the empty street to look back at him. She quirked her right eyebrow up. "Really? That's what worked?"

He grinned at her and slid his hands into his pockets. "We don't know each other well enough for me to keep you up all night."

That blush across her cheeks would ruin him one day, he just knew it.

Nova considered him, the darkness tightening around her. Dex enjoyed the way it slid across her clothes like water.

She really was beautiful.

"Okay then," she finally said.

He watched her turn and go, knowing this was what had to be done.

Complicating his life was the last thing he needed, and she would no doubt do exactly that.

Nova was a witch and that was it. There was no threat to the Corp, and if she got picked up by one of the covens then that was her business.

Dex gritted his teeth as her retreating form started to disappear into the thickening

shadows the further away she got.

What if someone came after her again?

He was moving before he could second-guess himself.

Dex was by her side a second later, using the speed he usually kept hidden. “Give me your phone.”

“No.”

It was impressive that she didn’t even hesitate. For whatever reason, Nova wasn’t afraid of him.

He smirked. “Come on, it’s just for emergencies.”

Nova stopped walking and turned toward him. Her eyes stayed on his collar, refusing to look directly at him. He’d noticed she avoided his gaze every chance she got, ever since she’d seen his face.

Dex couldn’t help himself. He tipped her chin up with the tip of his finger, so she was forced to look into his eyes. “Am I really that hideous?”

“No.” The word was breathless, and it sent a shiver down his spine.

Immediately, he let go and took a step back.

Fuck.

His palms started to sweat.

The magic that kept her scent hidden was fucking with his senses and she was wearing something to silence her footsteps, but this close he could hear her heart was pounding.

Dex cleared his throat and tried to regain his bearings. “Then why can’t you stand to look at my face?”

He really shouldn’t have asked her that question. Not after hearing the whispered no that told him too much – that gave him ideas and thoughts he couldn’t afford to have.

This witch was going to get him killed if he wasn’t careful.

Nova gave him a look that practically demanded to know if he really wanted her to respond.

“Well?” Looked like he was ready to die then.

Nova held his gaze like it was her fucking job and for the first time in his life, he felt like the one who should back away.

“You’re too pretty to be real,” she finally said. “I’ve never seen anything or anyone quite as beautiful as you and it’s...difficult—to look at.”

His heart fucking stopped right then and there.

What. The. Fuck.

What had he just gotten himself into?

He hesitated for just a second.

Then Dex held out his hand and waited, wondering if she would give in this time.

Relief suffused his body when she set her phone in his hand.

Shit, she was intense for a witch.

His fingers tapped in his number, and then he texted himself from her phone before setting up the camera. Dex posed for the picture. When the click told him it was done, he didn't even bother looking at it before handing it back to her.

"I'd rather not find your body mangled in the streets," he told her. "If you need anything, just reach out."

The way she took the phone from him...her fingers were careful not to touch him – not even his gloves. She was afraid of something, but he couldn't figure out what it was, not when she said and did the shit she did.

"If you need someone to bail your ass out of jail, don't call me." Nova slipped her phone in her pocket and gave him a little half-smile that shouldn't have been as hot as it was. "Enjoy the rest of your night, Dex."

This time he let her disappear into the shadows before heading back to the bar.

For both their sakes, he hoped he never saw her again.

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Chapter 10

Nova

Nova sat on her bed after a hot shower, hand resting on her mouth as she dropped her phone so it bounced against her thigh and spun back up into her hand, over and over.

The space heater made the room comfortable enough she could wear shorts and a tank top, but she preferred to sleep naked. It was her first night in a new city though, and after everything that had happened that night, she wasn't comfortable with it.

Bounce.

Spin.

Bounce.

Spin.

Just look at the fucking picture already.

Nova glanced down at her phone as it spun end over end for the thousandth time.

She couldn't decide what was more embarrassing: the way Dex made her feel or the way she sounded around him.

When was the last time she'd felt anything for anyone other than her family? She

couldn't think of one.

Stupid boy.

Bounce.

Spin.

It wasn't like she'd never seen a hot guy before. Fucking hell, every hunter at the university had been walking around with eight-pack abs, broad shoulders, and nice arms that made every girl's knees weak.

She'd seen them all naked at some point since the hunters all lived in the same dorm. Sharing a house like that had really opened up every sexual opportunity for her and after a lifetime of homeschool...

Well, Nova wasn't a good little girl anymore.

But all guys were the same whether they were human, hunter, witch, or shifter. After a while, she got bored and moved on. Their good looks and muscles were nothing more than a pleasing aesthetic.

Dex though...

He was something else.

She rubbed her hand over her mouth and sighed, tossing her phone onto the bed.

A rough workout hadn't helped distract her either, but at least the gym was decent. The Council had provided a secure apartment complex with all the amenities.

And now she needed to text her mom, but Nova was terrified to open her phone and see his picture in there.

Would it be the same as looking at him?

After getting a general idea of the city, she'd picked out the paranormal hotspots. It had been easy enough. Not many had access to magic except witches and it was unusual for people to hide their scent like she did without knowing the right people.

Dex didn't smell like anything she'd ever come across before. Most of what she got was the leather from his coat, the shampoo he used in his hair, and the sharp tang of vodka. There was something underneath all of that, but it was...

It was a siren call and she knew it would pull her down so deep there was no chance she'd ever be able to breathe again.

Why she wanted that was a whole other problem. Her instincts should be screaming at her to run away, take him out – something. But none of that was on her mind when she looked at him, even when his hands were covered in blood.

Nova pulled out her laptop and ignored her phone. She typed up her report, mentioning her plans for the next night and then hesitated.

Her orders hadn't said anything about what to do if she had to kill or not. Would the Council even care? It wasn't like murdering other paranormals was illegal. Only if she got caught by humans would the Council mind.

Nova hit send.

It was almost sunrise based on the grey light in the room. She closed the blackout curtains and picked up her phone again.

Should she look at it?

Climbing into bed, she tapped the passcode and wrapped the down blankets around her, adjusting the pillows so she could snuggle against them. Two seconds to let her mom know she was alive and well.

Then her thumb hovered over her contacts.

Just fucking look at it already.

She hit the app before she could second-guess herself.

His info popped up with the picture and she selected it.

Dex was grinning into the camera, showing off his canines. One hand was up in a finger gun pose, framing his sharp jawline and gorgeous smile that promised so much trouble. She inspected those golden-brown eyes and his floppy blond hair that had a tendency to fall in his face.

Nova tossed her phone on the nightstand and buried her head under the pillow.

She was in so much trouble.

Chapter 11

Dex

“ I have a job for you.”

Dex didn't say anything as he stood in the boss's office, wondering what it would be this time.

“The politician we paid off to get us the contract is dragging his heels.” The demon gave Dex a sharp grin. “I need you to speed it up. We have too much business to take care of for this bullshit.”

“Congratulations on the expansion,” Dex drawled. “I take it you want me to take care of this now?” He gave Agmos a sharp grin that promised the violence his own demons thrived on.

“No better time than the present.” Agmos came around his desk and slapped Dex on the shoulder hard enough it stung.

But by now, he was used to it. Agmos was the only parent Dex knew after all.

“I'll get it done.” He tilted his head to one side, and then the other. The cracks and pops relaxed him as he considered how he was going to approach this. “Anything I should be aware of?”

“I'd rather you didn't kill him.” Agmos shrugged. “But human politicians are easy to

buy. So, if there's no other way, do whatever you have to."

"Should be a good time." Dex clicked his tongue and gave Agmos one of his infamous finger guns.

"That's my boy." Agmos went to the small bar and Dex waited, sensing there was something else. "How are you doing?"

He twisted his tongue in his mouth, tapping the piercing against his teeth as he considered how to answer that question.

Dex had made sure every sign of those four wolves had disappeared from the universe—like they'd never existed.

Nova seemed to have disappeared as well.

There was no scent for him to follow to hunt her down, and he hadn't seen hide nor hair of her for days. It was as if she'd been nothing more than a fever dream, except her number was in his phone.

She hadn't called or texted, and neither had he.

Dex knew it was safer for her if he left her alone. The last thing she needed was someone like him in her life.

He just couldn't stop thinking about her though and it was starting to piss him off.

"I'm fine, just doing the usual." Dex shrugged like it was no big deal, but sometimes his life was boring as hell. "Businesses are running smoothly. There haven't been any issues along the borders."

“Good.” The demon poured a small glass of scotch and swirled it around. “Keep an eye on our newly acquired territory for the next few weeks. We want to be careful about our movements. Anything too drastic will start to garner the wrong kind of attention.”

“No worries, boss. I got you.” Dex smirked again and slid his hands in his pockets. “You got the address?”

“It’ll be in your email before you leave the building.” Agmos took a sip and smiled at him over the glass, eyes blazing with hellfire. “Make me proud, son.”

Dex nodded and left his office, already feeling his fingers twitching for the violence he craved every second of every day.

He didn’t know what was worse – knowing it came from his angel side, or that it amplified his impulse control issues and cravings for chaos on his demon side. Dex had problems with controlling the rage and wrath that were constantly at war within him.

Taking the stairs, he went on autopilot. He had everything he needed to make this job happen. It would be simple enough, and then he could chill along the border and people-watch.

Maybe he would see her again.

Fucking fuck .

Dex slammed the door open and it nearly busted off its hinges. He stopped, breathing hard as he tried to cool down the wrath. Closing his eyes, he focused on his heartbeat and counted backward from a hundred.

His shoulders ached and he stretched his neck again. It had been too long since the last time. He'd have to release them soon.

Sounds started to filter in again and Dex took a deep breath, cooling the fury that lived in his veins. When he was sure the hellfire and wrath were gone from his eyes, he opened them to see the security guard staring at him.

“Boo.”

The guard jumped and Dex rolled his eyes.

It was so fucking boring how terrified everyone was of him.

Everyone except her.

Fuck .

Dex went through the front doors of the office building and headed for his motorcycle. It was parked illegally but no one ever dared tell him off about it. He grabbed his helmet and slapped it on.

He needed to get her out of his damn head.

It didn't help that every time he closed his eyes, all he could see were her lips and eyes framed by those soft curls.

Swinging his leg over the bike, he checked his guns to make sure they were secure. With everything in place, he kickstarted the bike and let the roar settle into his bones. He pulled out his phone and studied the name and face that went along with the address.

A list of family and friends was under the main photo, and Dex sneered at the human. They were so easy to be bought. Agmos rarely needed him for this shit anymore. Thanks to his reputation, he was used more as a terrifying guard dog these days than anything.

Dex turned the bike, letting the tire squeal before taking off.

The office of Chad Williams was only a few blocks over. He could have walked but the borders were far enough away it would just be easier to ride.

K-pop music filtered through his helmet and he nodded his head in time with the beat, weaving in and out of cars as he sang along to Blackpink. He stopped at a light, busting out the moves. Why was this shit so catchy?

The nape of his neck prickled with awareness and he noticed the car next to him full of teens.

One of them pulled the same move he did and the other grinned, reaching over to blast their radio until Blackpink was blaring loud enough for everyone on the block to hear. Dex grinned, enjoying the anonymity his helmet gave him.

They danced together to the song, hitting the choreography hard until the light turned green and he pointed two fingers at his eyes and then at the teens, making them all shout and yell. He grinned and blasted off.

Dex took those moments every chance he could.

It was the only time he ever felt like a part of something—when no one could see what he was or what he wasn't.

Dex pulled up behind the parking structure and climbed off his bike.

He took a deep breath and tipped his head back, letting the weight of the helmet pull his head all the way back. Closing his eyes, he filed that memory away for when he needed to remember he wasn't always a monster.

Then he stood and walked into the building with his helmet on. It was easier than pulling all the security footage of him after it was done.

No one tried to stop him, but he sensed the flurry of activity as he took the stairs two at a time to the right floor. The door was locked when he got there and Dex grinned, feeling all his violent delights sit up and take notice.

Okay, so this was going to be a game then.

He kicked the door and it blasted off the hinges. Dex walked in to see an empty office. Expected after hours, but there were a few people still in the building, up above him. Mostly security and janitors.

It took a second to refocus his wrath, so it didn't lash out at anyone he didn't want it to. The angel side of him didn't always care who it hurt. Emotions were human problems and humanity was a disgrace.

"Daddy's home," Dex crooned, stalking toward the politician's office. The stench of fear nearly drove him wild and Dex stopped just outside the door, breathing hard as he held it all in. "You gonna let me in, sweetheart?"

The secretary trembled, but she didn't try to run, thank fuck. She just nodded and buzzed the door open.

Dex focused on the man he could sense inside and calmly opened the door. He stepped through and let it close behind him. Locking it, he pulled off his helmet and let the politician see exactly what he was.

“Look, I’m trying,” Chad told him, hands up as if that would stop Dex. “I’m going as fast as I can.”

“Not fast enough,” Dex growled.

He rolled his shoulders back and let his coat fall to the floor, revealing the leather holster that wrapped across his chest and down his waist. The number of guns on his person was unnecessary, but Dex knew humans were terrified of them.

“I’ll see what I can do.” Chad’s voice trembled with each word. “I promise.”

“Promises, promises.” He stalked forward and enjoyed the way the man cowered before him. “You said it would be done by Friday. It’s well past Friday.”

Chad slid off his chair to his knees and begged. “Tomorrow! I promise it will be done.”

Dex fisted his hands, trying to hold back despite how badly he wanted to smell blood. “I suppose I could be fine with that.”

The way the human slumped in relief left a bad taste in his mouth.

Dex was across the room so fast Chad didn’t even have time to flinch. He gripped Chad’s hair and yanked back, exposing the man’s throat. “I have to leave a reminder, you know, in case you forget again.”

“Please,” he begged, tears escaping him. “Please don’t hurt me.”

“I like the way it sounds when you beg,” Dex growled in his ear, feeling the urge for messy violence, but that wasn’t what this situation needed. “Be a good boy and do as you’re told.”

He yanked a knife from its sheath and flipped it before drawing it across the man's throat with lightning speed.

Chad's scream sent a shiver of pleasure down his spine and Dex dropped the man.

The smell of blood was delicious. Dex licked it from his blade as he watched Chad grip his throat, trying to understand how he was still alive. The line across the human's neck was so thin, so fine, there were only a few drops of blood.

It would be scabbed over in a few hours and on its way to healing, even for a human.

"If it's not done by tomorrow night, I'll do it for real." Dex chuckled and patted the politician's head. "You're cute when you beg."

"It'll be done," Chad promised, his entire body quivering.

"Good, because if it's not, you're not the only one I'll be hunting." He winked and spun the knife before slipping it back in its sheath.

Dex grabbed his coat and his helmet, yanking them both on before leaving the office. He gave the secretary a two-finger salute as he left, grinning at the shocked look on her face.

Some days, he loved his job.

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 2:33 am

Chapter 12

Nova

Nova studied her notes and sighed.

Seattle wasn't as cut and dry as she'd thought it would be.

There were the normal paranormals who grouped up together. Seattle's Pacific Coven was sanctioned by the Council with the normal high-society witches and those who had the power or money to get a membership.

Then she'd found the smaller, unsanctioned covens of witches who were often overlooked.

Nova always felt bad for them. If she didn't have her father's family, she would have ended up just like them, begging for scraps of knowledge where she could, just to keep her magic from killing her.

Her mother had received extensive training, thankfully, and had gotten a scholarship to the University of Morgana young and was able to teach Nova before things got out of control. The only reason she was alive at all was because of a Seer and her warning.

Nova tapped her knife on the table and considered the other paranormals in the city.

For such a large metropolis, it wasn't part of an official pack or pride which was

strange. Usually a city was shared by one of those and a coven. All the other paranormals answered to those two, paying membership fees to keep the area safe for the humans and the weakest of them.

But there wasn't an official shifter pack in this city.

The Cascade Mountain Pack was too far east and the Blue Mountain Pack too far south. There was a fox pack no one was supposed to know about, but their territory didn't extend to Seattle. They came into the city when they needed supplies and that was it.

From her father's contacts, there was an assassins' keep somewhere close, but it was hidden from reality, thanks to their deals with the old goddesses. The raven shifters didn't claim territory in the same way the land shifters did, so she wasn't really worried about them.

Most in the paranormal world were terrified of the ravens and their glowing red eyes, thanks to all the rumors and fear surrounding their profession. They said the only time you would ever see a raven was if they were there to kill you.

Her dad knew too many ravens for Nova to actually be afraid of them. Wary? For sure. But not afraid.

There was only one thing she was really afraid of.

Nova knew how to kill a demon, but they were from the hell realm and far more powerful than anything on earth.

She would never forget the fear she'd felt as he'd tried to take her, scratching her face with unnatural claws, her sister doing everything in her power to keep him from teleporting with Nova in his arms.

Whatever had happened when the demon damaged her eye, her magic had lashed out to protect her. The demon had died for what he'd done, but it had also changed her in a way that wasn't natural.

Nova tossed her knife on the table and considered the vampires again, but there was no issue with drained bodies being dumped. They'd been following the rules, thanks to their strict queen.

She picked up the intel the Council had received, resulting in her mission.

"I haven't seen any out-of-control magic," Nova muttered, setting down her tablet. She tapped her fingers on the table and considered what her next step would be.

If she was hunting a feral wolf, what would she be looking for?

A mess.

Missing humans, strange occurrences, dead bodies, territory fights, and strange animal attacks.

So far, the only dead bodies she knew about were the wolves she and Dex had killed. They weren't part of any pack she knew of since they were in the city. There were a few clubs she'd noticed a lot of paranormals at, and she'd checked out all the shops with the logo in the windows or on their websites.

It was easy to pass as a human, or a witch when she needed to. As a hunter, it was best to remain incognito until she made her necessary arrests or kills.

Hunters made everyone nervous.

At this point, the only thing she could do was to start putting herself in places that

would give her access to information, and access to the paranormal community outside the coven.

She stared at her list of paranormal hotspots.

Most of them were bars and clubs and restaurants. The rest were normal daytime shit like construction companies, accounting, and law firms. Nova had no intention of being outside during the day if she didn't have to, but if it was absolutely necessary, she would.

Growing up in a family with generations of top-notch hunters meant that she'd been trained and trained hard. There were nights Nova lay awake and wondered how the hunters at Morgana were going to survive their first year.

One summer, her father had dropped her into a grey zone where no particular pack or pride lived. It was where most of the loners and feral shifters tended to group up.

He'd armed her with a single knife and a water bottle. Then told her to find her way back home.

That wasn't even the worst thing she'd had to endure, but it had taught her how to function during the brightest part of the day.

Nova stared at the bar with the arcade and decided she wouldn't go there tonight. She didn't want to risk seeing Dex again.

It had been a week since she'd first met him, and there wasn't a fucking moment that went by she wasn't thinking about him.

Honestly, it was fucking annoying.

All Nova wanted was the peace and assurance she'd had the day of her graduation.

Cleaning up the table, she encrypted everything, locked the devices, and tucked them inside the mattress. Then she pulled her second suitcase out from under her bed and flipped the top open.

Every gun, knife, bow, and magical weapon she possessed was in there – ready to go when she was. She picked up the mask everyone in her family wore when they went hunting and traced the outline of the jawbone that would lay over hers when she wore it.

Hunters from her family weren't well known, but the monstrous teeth that would cover her own mouth was a warning they'd given for centuries.

Sometimes it took monsters to hunt monsters.

Nova tossed it on top of her gear. Tonight, she wouldn't be hunting as a monster.

Instead, she picked up the delicate chain her father had made for her when she was sixteen. It was shiny titanium and enchanted, versatile and gorgeous. Nova liked to wear it as body jewelry, knowing it could behead even a bear shifter.

Wrapped around a witch's wrists, it would bind their power, and it was long enough she could use it as a whip.

Nova tied it in an intricate pattern around her right forearm, a contrast to the dark runic lines on her left forearm.

Tonight, she would be nothing more than a pretty distraction.

Grabbing the rest of her jewelry, she put the charms in her ears and slipped her

mother's necklace over her head. Nova grabbed two boot knives and sheathed them before sliding the trunk back under the bed.

Her leather pants were tight enough to be sexy, but stretchy enough she could still fight if she had to. Her wedge, knee-high boots made her even taller and were comfortable enough to run in.

She considered her tops and grabbed the slinky black metal. It was a risqué halter top that stopped right above her belly button.

The V-neck was so low she wouldn't be able to wear a bra. It would be annoying if she had to make a run for it, but the last thing she wanted to do tonight was get into a fight. Nova had to let them all think she was nothing more than a witch for as long as possible.

Thick black eyeliner with wings sharp enough to cut and deep purple lipstick completed her look. Nova grinned at her own reflection, eyeing the runes on her chest. At least she would fit right in.

Maybe she'd even have time to dance.

Nova grabbed her helmet and leather jacket, ready for some fun.

Buckling her jacket as she walked, she ignored the looks she got. She threw her leg over her bike and kickstarted it in one smooth motion. Despite the cold, it wasn't raining, and she fully planned to take advantage of it.

Securing her helmet, she considered what she had on her.

Phone and knives in her boot, magic on her rings and ears – Nova wasn't worried about anyone recognizing her as a witch. It would actually help her get more

information since witches were supposed to be neutral.

She snorted and kicked the stand up and out of the way. If that wasn't the biggest lie in the paranormal world, she didn't know what was.

Carefully, she eased out of the parking lot and headed toward the club.

It wasn't really her style, but she preferred it over a strip club or a bar where she'd have to make small talk. The gambling dens would be hard to infiltrate so she needed to find the right people to make friends with.

Nova rode in silence, enjoying the night as she made her way toward the busier streets. She could have walked, but she'd been careful to ride after what had happened with Dex. Cleaning and stripping bodies wasn't something she wanted to do without her gear on.

And she definitely didn't want an excuse to call him.

Plus, if she asked to use his incinerator again, he'd probably want to know what the fuck was going on.

Nova found a parking spot and took off her helmet, whispering a simple spell under her breath to smooth the curls out until they fell just right. She locked the helmet to the bike and did the same with her jacket.

Ignoring the line, she went right up to the bouncer and smiled at him. The bear shifter grinned and unhooked the barricade so she could pass.

Sometimes it was good to be a woman.

No one asked for the ID she didn't have on her. Nova didn't want anyone to see her

full human name. A bit of magic and she could turn a simple business card into whatever they wanted to see.

Her magic was limited, but there were a few things her father had forced her to learn for her own survival.

The music slammed into her as she crossed the threshold and Nova weaved through the crowd, heading to the bar to get her favorite drink.

Again, neon lights lit everything but kept it dark enough she didn't feel the need to pull the shadows around her. The beat pulsed and she let her hips sway as she catalogued everything she could sense.

Shifters, a few vampires, and witches.

She'd decided against the vamp clubs because she really wasn't worried about them. They were extremely careful not to get noticed.

But this club was new, and she was curious why so many paranormals seemed to be interested in it. Maybe they had a secret menu of enchanted drinks, or maybe it was just a good place to make business deals. After all, witches needed the physical protection of shifters, and shifters needed the witches' magic.

Nova took the drink and paid in cash, thanking the bartender. Then she turned to inspect the crowd.

Humans danced among them, obvious with their imperfections. They danced just like the paranormals though, as if they had nothing to lose. Nova grinned and downed her drink.

At the very least she could take some time to dance, and ease some of her stress while

making her way around the dance floor to see what might be hiding in the shadows.

The music was eerie and yet still pulsed with a dance beat that made her shake her hips. The songs mixed with it made her grin and she tipped her head back, dancing by herself and not giving a shit about anyone else.

After a week of recon, she needed some time to get out of her head and just enjoy burning off her extra energy.

“Did you hear? They’re looking to hire more security.”

Her senses zeroed in on that voice, sifting through the thousands of other scents to recognize the two paranormals as bear shifters.

“I’m not interested in grunt work, dude.”

“They pay well though, and they’re specifically looking for shifters.”

Nova drifted toward them, wondering who ‘they’ were and what kind of security they were interested in.

“The guy they say interviews them all is supposed to be here tonight.”

“Is that why you dragged my ass out here? Man, we could be watching the game.”

“Stop being a little bitch.”

Nova reached out and wrapped her arms around the nearest person, adjusting her moves to theirs as she tried to figure out where this interviewer might be. No doubt there would be areas that might be difficult for her to get into.

“He’s over there.”

Her purple eye zeroed in, and she could see through her hair at the second floor, where the shifter was pointing.

“I’m going to the bathroom,” she told her partner, grinning at their disappointed look.

Nova took a different route than the bears, using the second staircase to come around from the opposite direction.

Waitresses with tubes of drinks tried to offer her tasty treats but she declined, eyes on the tables set into the darkness and all the different paranormals.

Holy shit, this was where they all were.

It wasn’t just shifters, but witches doing shots of enchanted drinks, vampires kissing necks and Nova even sensed what she thought might be a banshee, but it was gone before she could locate it.

The two shifters went to a table in the farthest corner, on the opposite side of the restroom.

She leaned against the railing and stared down at the pulsing crowd. Anyone at the interviewer’s booth could see her and if they had any brains, they’d know what her tattoos meant.

Nova smiled when she sensed a bear making his way toward her.

Finally, she’d get some action.

“I haven’t seen you here before,” the bear told her.

“This is my first time,” she said, grinning up at him. “It’s a little overwhelming.” Then she dropped her eyes, playing with her necklace like she was nervous.

The bear leaned down to whisper in her ear. “You haven’t slipped me a love potion, have you? Because I feel like I’m falling for you.”

It was so cheesy and stupid, she almost rolled her eyes, but Nova forced herself to laugh instead. “No, but if you want, that could be arranged.”

He stood up straight and grinned down at her like he’d just won a prize. “I’m sitting over there. Would you like to join me and my friends?”

Nova’s heart leapt at the offer. “That sounds like fun.”

The bear slipped his arm around her waist and led her toward the table. She took note of who watched them and who avoided looking.

Something was going on here, but she wasn’t sure what.

The bear tightened his grip on her, and she knew he was wondering if she was his mate, but thanks to her scent charm he’d never find out.

“Who did you find?” a wolf asked, laughing when the bear gently helped her into the booth.

The other two shifters were starting to make their way to the table, and Nova tucked her hair behind her ear, letting herself look at the people in the booth.

“I didn’t catch your name, sweetie.”

She laughed. “I didn’t give it.”

“Hey, I heard there might be interviews today?” Ah, there was the brave shifter and his reluctant friend.

“Yeah, but the boss isn’t here yet,” her bear friend told them, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. “Oh, wait, he’s right over there.”

Nova looked at the same time everyone else did.

When she saw him, the breath in her lungs disappeared.

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 2:33 am

Chapter 13

Dex

Dex ran his hand through his hair, wishing he could be anywhere else tonight, but they needed more guys to guard the borders. Agmos had pretty much insisted he bulk up the ranks or else .

He didn't want to think about why, or what would happen if he didn't manage it to the demon's liking.

Grabbing one of the shots from a waitress, he downed it and set the empty tube on another's tray as he headed toward his usual table. The beat pulsed in his head and there was so much noise, so many moving bodies, it was easy to disconnect from reality.

There were two shifters standing at his table with George the bear and Larry the wolf. Those two shifters were some of his favorite goons, and it looked like George had found a girl for the night. Good for him.

"What can I do for you boys?" Dex asked, slamming a hand down on each shifter's shoulder.

Then he grinned at George and finally got a good look at the girl next to him.

Dex felt the grin freeze on his face as Nova stared right back at him.

That blue eye haunted his dreams almost every night.

He felt them notice who he was looking at, and Dex knew he needed to say something— anything , but he couldn't stop staring at her Jessica Rabbit hairstyle or the brutal runes across her chest like she was some kind of warrior.

What the fuck was she doing here, sitting at his table?

“Who's this?” Dex purred, narrowing his eyes.

Nova didn't react, she didn't even blush. She acted like she'd never seen him before in her life.

Fuck, that purple lipstick looked wet and...

Dex put a stop to that thought immediately.

The bear turned to her and she smiled up at the shifter like he was the only thing in this world.

The sound of pain filtered through his senses and he instantly released the two shifters. He hadn't even realized he'd hurt them.

“I'm Nova,” she said, leaning back against the booth like she had no idea what she'd gotten herself into.

Maybe she didn't. Maybe she was just here because of George.

Dex hooked his thumbs in his suspenders and smirked. “I didn't realize you had a girl, George.”

“We just met,” she admitted, laughing slightly.

George buried his face in her hair and Dex felt his teeth grind together as he watched.

He didn’t own her. She wasn’t his. Nova could do whatever the fuck she wanted with her free time.

But here she was, sitting in his booth with one of his guys, and throwing it in his fucking face.

“Is she your mate?” Dex asked.

Fuck. What if they were mates?

Larry was the first one who picked up on the fact that something was wrong. “Uh, it’s up to the lady to find out.”

Dex gripped the two new shifters before they could edge away and shoved them into the booth. He grabbed one of the chairs and spun it around, straddling it. He folded his arms over the back and turned his gaze on Nova.

“Well?”

She had the fucking audacity to arch an eyebrow at him with enough sass he wanted to get her on her knees. “I don’t take my scent charm off for anyone, sorry.”

Ah, so that’s what it was.

Dex’s grin widened. “You should leave then. I can’t have my guys fighting over you.”

Nova looked at George and then Larry, but neither of them would meet her eyes.

“Fair enough.” She made to move, and George was out of his seat so fast she blinked in surprise.

The bear wouldn’t even help her out and Dex enjoyed watching her scoot her way to the edge.

Nova stood and he finally got a good look at her.

Dex gripped the chair so hard he felt it splinter. “I apologize for the inconvenience, Nova, but you know how shifters can be about potential mates.”

“I do.”

He turned to face the four shifters in his booth, dismissing her completely. “If you’d like to stay for a bit, put anything you want on my tab.”

“The name?” she asked.

Dex felt his impulse control slip and he wanted to commit chaos at the implication she didn’t even know who he was. “Dex.”

He saw her adjust her low-cut leather pants in his peripheral, and Dex had to close his eyes before he gave in to the urge to mark that flawless skin.

“Thank you, Dex.”

His answering snarl only made her smile and he waved his hand, hoping it would piss her off enough she’d leave.

The sound of her walking away didn't help either.

"What do you want?" he snapped at the two newcomers, ignoring the look Larry and George shared.

"Uh."

"Look, if you think he's too scary to work for, then you shouldn't even be here," Larry told them. "Dex is the one we answer to."

Both shifters squared their shoulders. One of them didn't really want to be there.

He tried to focus, but all he could think about was the sound of her boots and how distinct they were. Dex could hear the chains rattling on her body, charms tinkling in her ears, and he couldn't stop listening.

His attention followed her all the way to the bar on this level where he heard the shirt she wore slide across the wood. "A purple haze, please."

Nova didn't put it on his tab though.

How the fuck had she even ended up at his table?

"Dex?"

"George, Larry, figure out if you want to deal with these assholes every day." He stood and made a beeline for the bar.

Waitresses and patrons moved out of his way.

Nova, on the other hand, took her drink and started walking toward the stairs.

Her entire back was bare except for a single strap holding the two sides together. Dex let his eyes take in the tattoo down her spine and the way it matched the one on her forearm, shoulder, and chest. Why the ink made her ten times hotter, he didn't know. It's not like she wasn't already fucking gorgeous.

She drained the drink, set the glass on a table, and grabbed onto the nearest guy, putting his hands on her waist as she started to dance.

Dex bit back the growl he felt rising in his throat and wrapped his hand around her arm.

"Hey, man, don't touch her like that."

He turned and let his inner monster show through his eyes.

The guy ran off and Dex dragged Nova with him, making sure she only saw his white fire. She didn't pull away and he was honestly shocked when she let him shove her against a wall in the darkest corner he could find.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" he asked, mouth against her ear to make sure she could hear the growl in his voice that he could no longer hide.

"I wanted to dance," she whispered, wrapping her arms around his neck.

Immediately, he released her, not trusting himself.

Nova gave him a smirk that only pissed him off more, but she hadn't lied to him.

"Are you going to scare off every man I try to spend time with?" she asked, giving him that sass again. "'Cause if you are, just tell me and I'll leave, you big baby."

He slammed his hands against the wall, trapping her beneath him. “What did you call me?”

This fucking witch was going to get herself killed with that attitude.

“I called you a baby,” she told him, enunciating every word. Then she pushed him hard enough he stepped back. “Come on, don’t be a coward. Ask me what you really want to know.”

His hands turned into fists and Dex breathed hard as he tried to keep his eyes normal and keep his shit under control. He couldn’t afford to slip up here where humans could see him.

“Are you sure about that?” Dex was torn between killing her or kissing her.

If Nova wanted to play these games, then she’d better be very fucking sure about what she was getting herself into.

There it was, a flicker of doubt.

He stalked forward, driving her back into the shadows she loved so much until all he could see was the brightness of her blue eye and the dark purple lipstick against her white skin. When her back hit the wall, he grabbed her waist and yanked her forward until he could feel her body against his.

“I asked if you were sure.” Dex couldn’t stop staring at those lips.

Her chin came up then. “I’m sure.”

Dex grinned at that. “Oh, good.” He leaned down and smelled her hair. Thanks to the scent charm, he picked up nothing, but it was soft as silk and it took everything he

had not to bury his hands in it.

“Have you been thinking about me as much as I’ve been thinking about you?” he asked, making sure his lips brushed against her cheek.

The way she shivered nearly had him feral and desperate – something he’d never felt for anyone before. Dex didn’t know how to pull back with her this close. He couldn’t think straight and all he could see was her.

Nova’s hands came up and she gripped his suspenders. “Yes.” The way she tilted her head to give him better access to her neck made him lose it.

Dex raked his sharp teeth against that delicate skin, resisting the urge to mark her. He tightened his grip on her waist and she gasped, pressing into him.

Fuck, this was a bad idea.

He shoved her back into the wall and shifted his grip, so his hand was around her throat. “What are you doing here?” he demanded.

There was a flash of shock and hurt in her eyes that cut him far deeper than he expected it to. Then her eyes narrowed, and she looked absolutely furious. “It’s none of your fucking business.”

His grip tightened and suddenly he felt a knife pressed to his dick. Dex had to close his eyes before he took her right then and there.

“Keep better track of your knives,” she spat. The pointy end of the blade dug into his skin and he had to bite his lip to keep from groaning. “Now let me go.”

He thrust into that knife, making sure she felt how hard he was. It was fine, he’d heal.

Dex pressed his lips to her neck and then her cheek. “Make me.”

If she had the balls to go through with it, he’d fucking get down on his knees and beg her to marry him.

Dex wanted her to prove to him that she could take care of herself. In a place like this, a witch with as little power as she had would end up used and abused. He needed her to prove to him she could fight back.

The last thing he wanted was to find her in an alley, brutalized by outside shifters or vampires.

They stood like that for a long time, her breathing erratic and shaky as she held that knife to him. He could feel her indecision, but her hand was steady. Dex shifted so he held her chin instead. Pulling back, he eyed those full lips slick with purple like some kind of poisoned treat he couldn’t convince himself not to eat.

“Come on, do something about it,” he teased. “Or I might have to take advantage of this position.”

The knife disappeared and she shoved it back in his sheath, turning him on even more. “Ask me to dance or let me go.”

Dex couldn’t hide his surprise. “An ultimatum? Hm, I like this change in tactics.”

There was that blush he couldn’t get enough of.

“Dance with me, Nova.”

She crossed her arms over her chest and quirked that sassy eyebrow at him. “I said ask.”

Dex grabbed her hips and growled, letting his gloved fingers span her lower back to force her even closer. “I like when you tell me what to do.”

Nova’s hands rested on his shoulders and he could feel her shiver again. He wished he could figure out what she was thinking when that happened. Without the ability to scent her emotions, he felt completely blind.

“Will you dance with me?”

“No.” Then she ducked under his arm and he was so shocked he let her go.

Technically, there was no specification she had to agree to the question.

Dex grinned and followed after her, grabbing her arm gently this time. “Hey, before you go, can I show you something?”

She stopped and looked up at him, the uncertainty clear in her eyes. “If you promise me one thing.”

He gritted his teeth, not liking this new game. “I guess that depends on what it is.”

Nova nodded like she’d expected that answer. “You have to answer one question with the truth.”

Dex didn’t like the sound of that. What answer did she consider that valuable?

But as he inspected her from head to toe, he supposed she wasn’t the only one with questions.

“Okay, one question.”

Chapter 14

Nova

Nova let him lead her through a locked door and down a hall with various rooms that could be for storage, stock, or offices. At the end of the hall was another set of stairs that led up. She used the time to consider which question she wanted to ask.

She'd known when the wolf shifter had begged him, when he'd said 'I didn't know she was one of yours' that Dex wasn't just some random paranormal. She'd marked him as the potential owner of the barcade with ties to a mortuary – not that unusual for someone powerful and dangerous.

But since she hadn't seen him again all week, she figured he was pretty low-key.

What Nova hadn't expected was to run into him at the new club where he was supposedly the interviewer for security. So, what, he owned or ran the barcade and the club? It wasn't that unusual, and they were two different venues. She could see how one might acquire both to appeal to more than one audience.

Dex didn't interrupt her thoughts as he led her up the stairs onto the roof.

Her eyes had a life of their own, scanning his broad shoulders and back, the leather suspenders he wore that made her mouth water, and the white button-down shirt with black slacks. The bad-boy combat boots completed the picture and Nova honestly didn't know how to fucking deal with him.

The silver piercings in his ears, the one in his tongue...it made her wonder if he had any others. And that was something she couldn't afford to be thinking about, no matter how much she'd liked his reaction to her.

Dex was possessive and jealous and she didn't think he even realized he was doing it.

And she'd seen the strange glow in his eye before he'd hidden it away. Nova had never seen eyes glow silvery white like that before.

What the fuck was he?

So, did she want him to tell her what he was, or did she want to ask him what he was doing interviewing for security?

He pushed the door open and the freezing wind whipped around them. Nova wrapped her arms around her body and shivered as she took in the rooftop patio.

It looked private and swanky with nice couches, fire pits, heaters, and a bar of its own. She could see the Space Needle and the Sound among the sparkling backdrop of the city. Nova liked the potted palms and the music from downstairs that played through Bluetooth speakers at a quieter volume.

Dex let go of her without a word. He turned on the heaters and the fire pit before heading over to the bar.

He was still wearing gloves, but these were slightly different than the ones he'd been wearing when they first met. They were shorter and ended before they reached his wrist, tight and black in sharp contrast to his skin and the rolled-up sleeves.

Fuck, he was hotter than fire and she knew without a doubt he was going to burn her.

Nova went to the banister and rested her hands on it, arms spread wide as she considered the city.

Asking what he was wouldn't tell her anything, really. If she asked about his business, he'd want to know why she needed the info and that would make him suspicious.

He already didn't trust her.

No doubt he was wondering about the shifter she'd killed and now this? Nova must seem like a stupid girl who just couldn't stay out of trouble.

That could work to her benefit here though.

How could she word her question so that she would get the maximum information, and not set off any more warning bells in his head?

"Here."

She looked over her shoulder and saw her favorite drink in one hand and a bottle of vodka in the other.

Whatever he was, he had an extremely high metabolism and had somehow picked up on what she liked to drink after only seeing her twice.

Nova took the glass from him and edged closer to the heater as she stabbed the ice with her straw. If she drank this, she'd have to wait another half-hour to ride.

He leaned against the banister and took a swig of the vodka, waiting patiently.

It was stupid, but she didn't hate the idea of spending the next thirty minutes with

him.

Nova shoved the straw aside with her finger and tipped her head back, wondering just how bad he had it.

She set the empty glass on the railing between them and leaned back against it to stare up at the moon. “You made it just the way I like it.”

Dex grinned and took another swig, radiating pride. “Unlike you, I can smell what’s in your drink.”

Nova studied him with her purple eye, somehow knowing he didn’t allow any spiked drinks in his places of business.

Dex turned so he stood with his back to the railing just like she did and poured more vodka in his mouth, drinking the damn thing like it was water. The way he leaned backward stretched the buttons of his shirt tight against his chest.

Holy fucking shit. He had nipple piercings.

She had to sit down.

Nova took the seat closest to the heater and ignored the freezing cold just like her father had taught her. It was uncomfortable, but she could withstand much worse. Closing her eyes, she tried to get the image of those piercings out of her head, but it only made her wonder what he would do if she undid the buttons.

This was a terrible fucking idea.

Everything about this was the opposite of a good time. Nova wanted him more than she’d ever wanted anything in her goddamn life, but she couldn’t afford to get sucked

into whatever this was.

She had a job to do.

“Are you okay?” Dex was sitting next to her, and Nova didn’t like how difficult it had been to track his speed.

He reached out and she scooted farther away, not trusting herself. “Please don’t touch me.”

All the care and need she’d seen in his eyes simply...died.

Nova wanted to explain, but that would only make her situation worse, not better.

“So, what did you want to ask me?” His voice sounded different—completely emotionless and dead as though he wouldn’t give a flying fuck if she stripped right in front of him or jumped off the roof.

Nova refused to feel guilty about it. This was for the best.

“Why are you angry that I’m here?”

It was the safest version of her question and might give her a clue as to what had set him off in the first place.

Why was he so angry?

She’d never been slammed into a wall like that. Nova had never been so turned on that a man wanted her to stab him either.

Dex drained the rest of the vodka and placed the empty bottle on the table. “You’re

not a very powerful witch, and you've put yourself in dangerous places twice now."

Nova winced. Wow, he was really going for the jugular, thanks to her rejection. "Why would a bar or a club be dangerous?"

"I'm not sure if you're aware but Seattle is unclaimed territory. There's no one to protect you here."

She tucked her hair behind her ear, not bothering to hide her scarred eye with him anymore. "I don't really get why you care."

There, she could scent his rage. That was better than nothing at all.

"When you're in my places of business, you're in my territory. If something happened to you, it would be on me."

That was a pretty logical reason actually.

Nova shrugged anyways. "Why would a club be dangerous? It's not like I can't scare off a shifter if I want to. Unless you let that kind of shit happen here."

Dex growled and she closed her eyes, hating how much she liked the way it made her bones tremble. "Of course not, but that doesn't mean they can't follow you home."

So, it wasn't just in his territory then.

Nova set her arm on the back of the couch and turned to face him, resting her chin on her hand, and tucking her legs under her. She let herself inspect him from head to toe. It was imperative he see her do it too.

Christ, he was gorgeous.

A muscle flexed in his jaw like he could see every thought in her damn head.

“I guarantee they wouldn’t be able to follow me.”

He mirrored her, leaning in with those narrowed eyes. They were golden-brown and not that silvery white fire. “Is that a threat, or a promise?”

She couldn’t help her grin. “Why can’t it be both?”

“And how exactly would you manage that?”

Nova shivered, partially from the cold and partially from the flash of something in his eyes.

She wanted him to be the one hunting her.

Running her fingers through her hair, she considered him. “In twenty-five minutes, I’ll show you.”

There was that snarky smile she couldn’t stop staring at every time she opened her stupid fucking phone. “Another game?”

“Maybe.” Nova stretched out her legs and then did the same with her arms, taking inventory of her sobriety. It might be less than twenty-five minutes, but she didn’t want him to be right.

When she looked at him again, his eyes were fixated on her chest tattoo.

“Well, since you came here to dance, would you like to dance with me?” he asked, quirking an eyebrow at her.

Fuck yes, she did.

Nova shook her head and stood, heading toward the bar. She went around to see what they had. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Why is that?” Dex asked, leaning on the bar like he’d teleported there. He moved even faster than a shifter did.

She grabbed a bottle of water and uncapped it. Nova studied his face as she drank half of it. “I just don’t.”

“Because I’m not a bear shifter?”

Turning around, she rummaged around for snacks so he couldn’t see her grin. Dex was definitely jealous, and that shouldn’t please her as much as it did. “No.”

Suddenly, his hands were on her hips and they slid forward to span across her stomach. His touch was gentle and gave her the space and time to step away if she wanted to, but Nova couldn’t do it.

Slowly, he pressed her into him, and her heart started pounding. She leaned into him, tilting her head back to rest on his chest. The feel of his arms around her, the gentle way he held her, the heat from his body...

Her eyes fluttered when his lips tickled her ear, and Nova knew she was in so much trouble.

“Afraid you’ll like it too much?” he asked, flexing his hands to force her body to sway with the beat.

“Yes,” she breathed.

The water in her hand was shaking.

Nova turned her head so she could see his face, and she was mesmerized again by just how tall he was. She was not a short girl by any means. At 5'10" she always felt her height around guys, but not Dex. He made her look up .

She searched his eyes for something that would help her push him away. Nova couldn't afford to have a guy in her life right now, especially one who might end up a job.

He held her gaze as one of his hands slid up her chest until that glove was holding her neck so softly, she wondered if he was afraid he'd hurt her earlier.

"I've never seen anyone as beautiful as you," he told her, rubbing a thumb across her lips like he'd wanted to do that all night.

Nova closed her eyes and dug down deep for the strength she knew was there. This shouldn't be so fucking hard. He was just a guy. A very good-looking guy who turned her on in ways she'd never experienced before, but still. He wasn't worth fucking up her first mission.

And Nova couldn't get herself to use him for information.

Seducing him for intel was the easiest option, but she just couldn't do it. Not to him.

Zapping him with a tiny bit of power, she stepped out of his embrace when he cursed, ignoring just how wet he'd made her.

Fuck twenty-five minutes. She wasn't going to make it.

Draining the rest of the water, she headed toward the door, hoping he wouldn't follow

her.

But deep down she wished he would.

The door was locked.

Nova glared at him, feeling the euphoria disappear as she instantly went into survival mode. “Open it.”

Dex stared at his thumb and the purple lipstick on it. “I didn’t lock it.”

“Well, it’s fucking locked.”

He looked at her then and she actually took a step backward at the rage she saw in his eyes. “You think I would trap you up here?”

Nova hesitated and that made him even angrier. “I don’t know what to think,” she said honestly. “You’re hot and then cold. One minute you want my attention, the next you want me to leave and tell me it’s not safe in a place you own. Where am I supposed to go then, Dex? Am I supposed to stay home like a good little girl?”

His eyes flashed.

Oh, shit. He was pissed .

Chapter 15

Dex

He wanted to argue with her, but she was right and that only made him angrier.

It triggered his chaos cravings and Dex was giving her a sharp grin before he'd picked up on the shift. "As much as I'd like to call you a good girl, I don't think you'd like it very much."

Another blush, but he'd ticked her off.

Good.

All the questions in the world, and she chose to ask why he was angry. This witch was so fucking confusing and she had the fucking gall to say he was hot and cold?

"What would you do in this situation?" he asked her, licking the lipstick off his finger. It tasted like blackberries. "What if you were up here with someone else and not me? Tell me what you'd do."

Something in her changed, and it made him practically purr in appreciation.

"What's the game, Dex, I get away and you leave me alone?"

He slipped his hands in his pockets and took a deep breath. If he wasn't careful, his demon side would trigger his angel side and the result of that was never pretty. "What

prize do you want?"

Conflicted emotions flickered in her eyes, and he understood completely.

Dex should never have put his fucking hands on her. Nova was an addiction he couldn't afford to have, but every time she moved, all he could see was the flawless skin over her abs, unmarked and untouched.

The girl worked out hard, and he wanted to see what she could do. On top of him, under him – whatever she'd agree to.

But considering his position in the syndicate...

There was a reason he kept a distance from everybody and everything except Agmos.

"Could we be friends?" she asked.

That was the very last thing he'd thought she'd ask for. Dex felt all his rage stutter and he'd never felt it do that. It never stopped until he found release, one way or another – blood, cum, it was all the same to his demon.

"If you manage to escape me and disappear into the night while I'm hunting you, you want us to be friends?" he asked for clarification.

Her pupils dilated at the word 'hunt' and he nearly pounced on her right then and there.

"Yeah, we can text, hang out, whatever. I just moved here." Nova shrugged. "I don't have any friends."

He wanted to ask why nothing else, but honestly, Dex didn't care. He didn't have

friends either.

Could he do this? Could he hang out with her and just be friends? “Don’t fall in love with me, you just might get obsessed,” he teased.

Dex tried not to think about the fact that he’d be the one falling for her – the one who couldn’t get her out of his head.

Nova nodded once in agreement. “I’ll agree if you promise to keep anything physical between us platonic.”

Oh, this was going to fucking kill him.

Considering the woman before him, he knew though that having her as a friend was better than nothing. “We’re going to just pretend there’s no attraction between us at all then?”

“Yes.”

This was going to be torture, but he didn’t exactly hate pain. “I’ll be your friend, if you win. If I catch you, I’ll still be your friend, but you text me every time you go out at night so I can make sure you’re safe.”

The irritation in her eyes softened and she gave him that quirky half-smile he couldn’t get enough of. It made him want to play, to push her boundaries until she was forced to submit to him or put him in his fucking place.

Preferably with her stepping on his throat.

“All right,” Nova agreed. “Promise me you didn’t lock the door.”

“I promise.” Dex would watch the footage later, but he was pretty sure it was just jammed.

“Okay, you’re a lovely bear shifter who led me up here to woo me into a good fuck.”

Dex had to close his eyes when she said that word. It was dirty and delicious and if he wasn’t careful, she’d see exactly what he was.

“I decided I wasn’t interested in going all the way, so I got up to leave,” Nova told him, setting the scene. “And now the door is locked. I’m afraid.”

Her heart was actually pounding, and he felt it trigger his desire to hunt her even though he couldn’t smell fear. Fuck . What was she trying to do to him? Did she want him to slam her to the ground right then and there?

“Come and get me, Dex.”

Holy shit, she sounded excited.

A tiny pulse of power and the doorknob was blasted off the door. She ripped it open and ran.

He looked up at the moon and grinned.

Dex had no plans to give her a head start, but she’d specifically said a bear shifter, so he’d tailor his hunt to that speed and strength instead of his true potential. He ran after her and immediately growled in frustration.

There wasn’t a single scent.

But he could hear her boots even if he couldn’t see her.

Nova was already on the main floor, running for the back. Smart girl.

Dex was careful not to use his true speed, and careful not to let any of the humans see him. It slowed him down, and he focused on her boots.

The sound of her disabling the fire alarm from the emergency exit in record time had him picking up the pace. Nova pushed through and he burst out of the club just as she turned a corner.

Dex followed her and he stopped dead when he saw her hop on a motorcycle. The roar of the engine actually had him even more hot and bothered which he hadn't thought possible.

She didn't put on the helmet or her jacket, which meant if she got into an accident, she'd end up fucked.

Witches didn't have shifter healing.

It took all his control not to fly after her. Bear shifters could run fast, but he'd likely be seen.

Dex ran to his bike and slammed his helmet on as he zeroed in on the sound of her bike. It would be difficult for her to hide the sound of that unless she used her magic. But he had to admit, he was already impressed.

The girl could ride, and she'd barely used her magic which meant she still had some if there was a showdown. He knew those tats weren't just for the aesthetic.

Following after her, he broke about twenty laws to catch up to her. He grinned when he saw her glance over her shoulder and spot him. Nova saluted him before making a sharp right.

They raced down the streets together and Dex honestly couldn't remember the last time he'd had this much fun. The last thing he'd expected was to actually have shit in common with the super-hot witch.

She made another turn and suddenly he realized they were at the edge of the city and the street was dark.

Unnaturally dark.

And he couldn't hear her engine.

Before he knew what was going on, she stepped out of the inky darkness with purple fire in her left hand. She mouthed one word and he instantly braced himself.

Sorry .

The purple fire blasted at his front tire, not him.

Dex had never been in an accident before, but he knew how to control his body. The bike flew end over end and his back hit the pavement. He rolled up to his feet, ignoring the road rash on his back.

He was more pissed about his shirt than he was about the pain.

Standing in the dark street, he listened but heard nothing. She'd disappeared again and must have silenced the bike with magic.

For a witch without much power, she was fucking resourceful.

That one blast had been most of her magic if he was right, but whatever she had that allowed her to manipulate darkness was something else completely.

Dex lifted his hand and focused on the streetlights, forcing them to drown out her unnatural darkness.

There was no trace of her anywhere. She and the bike were gone.

Without her scent, he couldn't hunt her, and he had no idea where she lived. As a normal-ass bear shifter, he couldn't follow her. He wasn't sure if a locator spell would work on her. And even if it did, he didn't have a single thing of hers to use as a focus.

Touché, little witch.

Dex pulled out his phone, selected her contact info, and started a new message.

Congrats on your victory

He hit send and considered how the fuck he was supposed to be friends with someone.

When was the last time he'd just hung out with another person who didn't also work with or for him?

Dex had promised to be her friend, but even that was something he was hesitant about. Yes, he wanted to fuck her brains out until she begged him to stop, but a one-night stand, or a few of them was one thing.

A relationship of any kind could put a target on her back, even if it was just friendship, not to mention Agmos if he ever found out.

But she seemed bound and determined to put a target there herself.

What was something friends even did?

Want to come watch the new season of Attack on Titan with me tomorrow?

He chewed on his lip and wondered if he was barking up the wrong tree. Fuck, Dex had no idea what she was even into.

He'd suggest a ride, but his bike was fucked, and he needed to get a new one.

Screw it.

Dex hit send.

Then he went and grabbed his bike, picking it up and carrying it over to the sidewalk. He'd deal with it later. Dex needed to fly after tonight. There was nothing to fuck and nothing to kill and he really didn't want to create more problems for himself.

He was due for a release anyway.

The lights went dark again with a wave of his hand and he let his wings burst from his back like a dog from the pound. The weight of them eased something deep inside and Dex felt like he could finally breathe without worrying he'd hurt someone.

Peace settled over him and he fully extended them. The black feathers blended into the night and he cracked his neck, ignoring the red feathers at the bottom. The reminder of his mother wouldn't help him relax.

His phone chimed and he looked to see Nova had actually replied.

I don't really watch TV, but if you're willing to watch it from the beginning, I'd be glad to. Your place?

Dex grinned. He'd never been able to introduce anyone to anime before and he was actually kind of excited to corrupt her. He typed the time and place and then tucked his phone into his pocket.

Maybe this would be fine. Maybe they'd be better friends than lovers.

Fuck if he knew, honestly.

It wasn't like he had anything to compare it to. Agmos hadn't let him have real friends or a significant other growing up.

Dex launched into the sky, wrapping an illusion around him so no one would be able to see him, and settled in for a long flight. He was pretty sure it would take all night to get the feel of her against him out of his head.

If ever.

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Chapter 16

Nova

Nova checked the time. She was supposed to meet Dex in a few hours, but she needed to get some work done and there were only so many hours in the night.

She'd done some digging into the paranormal businesses around Seattle and had found some interesting info.

Most of them were owned by an organization that went by the name Grim Corp.

There was a list of others, but after marking them on the map, she'd noticed a pattern. A lot like a pack, there'd been distinct borders. She'd noticed there was only a bit of the docks claimed, but the majority were in the club district. Bars, clubs, and restaurants.

Some of them were in the business district, but it was the others that marked the territory.

Nova checked her gear one last time. Underneath it all, she wore moisture-wicking leggings and a shirt with her tits strapped down as tight as possible so they wouldn't get in the way. Over that was her body armor that could stop armor-piercing rounds.

Unfortunately, as hunters they'd had to make it with flexibility and speed in mind. It only covered her most vital areas, including her thighs and chest. Over the armor were her black pants loose enough to hide the lines of the plates, and the sheaths on

her ankles and shins.

The black tactical boots were androgynous and comfortable as fuck. They were the best money could buy and enchanted to keep her steps silent. Nova's family altered them to include silver alloy knives in the heel.

Over her chest plate, she had a long-sleeve turtleneck with a hood that cast her face in shadow. The harness was the last thing she put on and held enough weapons she could kill anything that tried to fuck with her.

Nova grabbed the face mask. She slid it over her head and made sure her bun was tight. Pulling it over her mouth, she felt the moment that switch flipped.

Every time she went hunting, she turned herself into this monster and always felt the exact moment she changed.

All extraneous thoughts ceased, and Nova only cared about the hunt. She cared about becoming the monster that monsters were afraid of.

She tipped her head back and closed her eyes, loosening the tightness in her neck. Flexing her fingers, then turning her hands into fists, she stretched the armored fingerless gloves across her knuckles.

The weight of the gear settled into her, familiar and welcome.

Nova studied her reflection and pulled up the hood. A single thought and the shadows settled over her eyes, hiding any distinguishing features, including her scarred eye. With her height and the gear, Nova knew she didn't look like a woman.

That was the whole point.

Becoming this monster who hunted monsters allowed her to live a normal life. The two sides were separate, and no one came after her or her family for revenge.

Her mission was sanctioned. There was nothing in this city she couldn't do.

She left through the window, using the gutter to climb to the roof as quickly as possible. Nova ran and jumped from roof to roof, using the hunter speed and strength she'd been born with.

It wasn't easy to keep it hidden. Acting like a witch all the time was harder than she'd thought it would be. Nova didn't have to hide who she was growing up. She'd never had to pretend. She'd only ever hunted as this creature.

No one cared what she looked like under these clothes and it was the most freeing experience.

People didn't want to protect her. They didn't think she needed someone else to keep her safe. No one came hunting her. Not like those wolves had.

Nova made her way across the city. It would have been easier to use her bike, but Dex had seen her ride it so that was no longer an option. She'd need to get a backup. Something a dude might ride.

Crouching on the edge of a roof, she wrapped the darkness around her and took a minute to listen. No one was screaming, and there was energy pulsing in time to her heartbeat.

Everything seemed normal for a Saturday night.

There was no doubt shit was happening behind closed doors she couldn't pick out among everything else, but Nova had no intention of walking by if someone needed

help. There were too many disgusting predators walking the streets, and a lot of them were human.

Nova went for the accounting firm first. That would tell her where the money was going.

Her orders hadn't changed, but she was tired of waiting around to see what would happen. Reports of out-of-control magic were difficult to track unless it was happening all the time, and there was the chance someone was making false reports to be an asshole.

But Nova refused to leave Seattle without making sure it was safe and no one was going to expose them to the humans. The Council didn't care about the first as much as they cared about the second and, not for the first time, she wondered why she'd insisted on getting a Council contract.

Sliding down the wall, she kept to the natural shadows, darkening them to make sure no one and nothing could see her, not even the best security cameras.

She had to be careful about that too, since Dex knew she could do it. It was easier to stick to places with as little light as possible.

Nova was careful not to use her magic as a hunter unless she had to, but now she had to be doubly careful since she was walking around as a witch.

It took no time at all to disable the alarm and pick the lock. The Council gave them all a set of lock picks, but Nova didn't want them tracking what she did with it, so she used her personal one. Coming from a large family of hunters, she had access to a lot of toys and weapons most didn't have.

Something about that made her sad for the other hunters, but it had been difficult

connecting to them. Nova had been raised differently and with the death of her sister hanging over her, she'd had something to prove to her family.

And herself.

Gianna's death had to be worth something, or what was the point? If Nova wasn't the best hunter out there, her sister died for nothing.

Silently, she closed the door behind her and locked it. Then she kept to the walls, eyeing the security guard in the front of the building. Taking the stairs was the best option, but there was no way to go about this without letting the cameras catch her.

Not if she didn't want to use her gift.

Creeping up behind him, she kept her ears perked for sounds of the other guards she knew were somewhere.

Nova wrapped her arms around his neck from behind, covering his mouth with her hand. It only took a few seconds to put the wolf shifter out. Then she arranged his body, so it looked like he was napping, not unconscious.

Checking the cameras, she located the other guards and then made a run for the stairs.

The less time she spent trapped in a building, the better. Getting into a fight could make her late.

She couldn't believe Dex watched anime.

Actually, she could. He definitely gave off that kind of vibe for some reason. Maybe it was the way he dressed.

Her footsteps were silent as she went up and up and up. The various different escape routes were in the forefront of her mind while she catalogued scents and sounds without even thinking about it. Twenty years of training and most of what she did was automatic.

That was what kept her alive.

Nova went for the IT department and headed straight for the director's office. If she wanted intel, she had to get it from the most protected source.

Two seconds and she had the door unlocked. Nova slipped her flash drive in the port and ran the password program. Once she was in, she set up the download. Now all she had to do was wait. She slid to the darkest corner of the room while it ran the programs.

If a guard came in, she'd be behind the door and it would be too easy to take him down.

Being a hunter had its advantages, but it was also one of those things.

Witches didn't have the physical strength and speed of hunters. They didn't have the innate sight and hearing. Hunters were immune to enchantments and illusions, but a fireball to the face still burned.

Somehow over the generations, hunters became a tool to be used. The witches used them to keep shifters in line. The Council used them to arrest powerful witches, and honestly, it was all a fucking mess.

But Nova liked to think that she did good work. If there was a paranormal out there hurting others, hurting humans – she and the others like her were called in. She made sure the power in the universe wasn't twisted and violated.

No shifter would go on a murdering spree and get away with it. No vampire would drain bodies left and right anymore. Witches had agreed to be neutral – as much as possible. That was all thanks to the Council.

There was a wary peace among all the various species because of the Council of Paranormals. Any rivalry was kept quiet and the damage minimal because no one wanted a hunter on their doorstep.

That was why she'd ultimately decided to work for the Council instead of freelance.

Her father still wasn't sure he liked it though. Going to the university had been against his wishes, and Nova finally understood the gravity of why. It wasn't because he wanted to keep her isolated and touch starved.

It was because her name was now in their system. She'd caught the attention of the Council and her professors. Nova had graduated at the top of her class.

For a family who preferred to work on their own terms – who preferred not to be used by witches or shifters – they'd been slightly disappointed at her path.

Her name was in the system, and Nova had stupidly given Dex her real name. If he felt like looking her up, he could probably find her. Her first name wasn't that common.

There were so many problems when it came to him. Nova hadn't expected to be in Seattle long enough for it to matter, but she also hadn't expected to fall on her ass the moment she saw his face.

Who was she kidding? Even when all she'd seen were his boots and hands, she'd been drooling over him.

A small sound indicated the download was done.

Nova grabbed the flash drive and headed for the stairs.

Looked like she would have time to change before heading over to the address Dex had given her. How he'd gotten a Saturday night off, she didn't know, but she supposed as the owner, he could kind of do whatever he wanted.

She heard footsteps and grabbed the railing of the stairs, launched herself over, and dropped three stories. Her knees bent and she rolled soundlessly under the stairwell just as the door opened.

Silence.

Nova kept her breathing even as she waited.

The door closed and she heard the footsteps move up instead of down, thank fuck.

She remained completely still until the guard opened the door again. The moment it closed, she sprinted to the back exit. No more dawdling. Eventually the security guard at the desk would wake up, and she had no intention of being here when that happened.

Nova locked the back door behind her and fixed the alarm. Then she sprinted to the next patch of shadow. She jumped and caught the fire escape, hauling herself up. In moments she was back on the roof, taking a roundabout way home.

Even if there was no one following her, she refused to let anyone figure out where she was staying.

Nova considered Dex and wondered if she would be able to keep him out of her

apartment or if she should get a second one.

This was starting to get complicated.

She needed to call her dad.

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Chapter 17

Dex

Dex stood in his loft and studied it as if he were a stranger. The maid had come and gone so it was clean. He'd grabbed a few takeout menus since he had no idea what Nova liked other than pizza.

He didn't have alcohol out except for beer. It wasn't like he was trying to seduce her.

Running his hand through his hair, he let out a massive sigh.

Fuck, this was hard.

Dex slumped on the couch. How did one go about watching TV with someone else? Was he supposed to look at them or not? He'd only ever watched sports with the others in the Corp and that was usually at the bar.

Everyone sat and stared at the TV. For some reason, he felt like the stools made a difference.

Dex pulled up the anime and then tossed the remote on the table.

This was stupid.

It wasn't like he could forget what she looked like—what she felt like. Dex still didn't know what the fuck he was going to do about that, but at least this way, he

could still take care of her.

As a friend.

If she wasn't a part of his organization or the coven, she was going to have a rough time and Dex didn't like the idea of that. Even if she'd managed to give him the slip.

Would she be able to hide from him if he was really hunting her?

He actually wasn't sure, and Dex liked that.

But there were a lot of things that could happen when he wasn't watching. Shit happened all the time and it wasn't like he could insist she only go where he could watch her.

Dex couldn't even put people on her without putting her in more danger.

There was a loud knock on the door, and he kicked himself for not paying attention.

Fucking witches and their charms. It's not like the ones she used were cheap either, or easy to make. Which meant she had money or knew someone willing to make them for her.

Maybe her mother?

Dex stood and crossed the room in the blink of an eye, opening the door to see her standing there in jeans and a big puffy jacket.

It shouldn't have been as sexy as it was.

"Sorry I'm a little early," she said, shifting her weight from one foot to another in

what looked like combat boots.

“Hey, no worries.” Dex stepped aside to let her in, resisting the urge to take her coat from her. Friends didn’t normally do that, at least not unless they were crushing, and he’d learned that from TV.

Nova didn’t take her jacket off and Dex froze as he tried to figure out if his loft was too cold. As a demon-angel, he honestly didn’t get bothered by either extreme, his body just adjusted.

“Are you cold?”

She shrugged. “A little, but I’m fine.”

Dex went to adjust the thermostat, trying to ignore how fucking awkward this was. “So, you really don’t mind watching anime?”

“I don’t watch TV, so it honestly doesn’t really matter to me.”

“Not at all?” He found that hard to believe.

“I don’t have the time.” Nova inspected his place with a strangely blank look on her face. Her usual sass and attitude seemed to be missing.

Dex grabbed one of the beers and popped the top off before handing it to her, just like he would for one of his guys. “You okay?”

She tipped her head back and downed the whole thing. “I’m fine.”

Clearly, she wasn’t fine, but he wasn’t going to push her about it. “Are you hungry?”

“Starving.” Nova didn’t take the second beer from him. “You got anything stronger than that?”

He felt his eyebrows nearly disappear into his hairline. Something was definitely going on. Dex went for his stash of vodka and grabbed some pineapple juice. He mixed her a quick drink and handed it to her.

Nova took the bottle from him instead.

Okay, so it was going to be like that.

She sat on his couch carefully, slipping her boots off and tucking them underneath. Leaning her head back, she rolled it to watch him standing in the kitchen like an idiot, practically daring him to drink the pineapple bullshit.

Dex didn’t waste alcohol so he downed it, ice and all. “What do you want to eat?”

There was a flash of fire in her eyes and he could practically hear the you out loud.

He had to bite his fucking tongue so hard it bled. Not even five minutes into this and it already wasn’t going well.

“Whatever, I don’t care.” Nova drank more vodka and Dex decided he needed to get food here ASAP at the rate she was drinking. “I’m ready to see this cartoon.”

“It’s not a cartoon,” he snapped, typing out a message to the place across the street.

“I know.”

He looked up and saw her smirk. Nova was purposefully fucking with him. Something tight in his chest eased and he grabbed a few bottles of water, setting them

on the table in hopes she'd drink them.

But Dex wasn't her fucking babysitter. She was an adult and could manage her own fucking life. If she was too drunk to drive at the end of the night, he'd just sleep on the couch. Maybe she'd talk to him about whatever it was, and in the morning everything would be fine.

That settled, he sat next to her on the couch, a healthy distance apart to make sure there was no way he could accidentally touch her. If he did, there was very little he could do to keep his impulse issues in check once they'd been set off.

And somehow Nova managed to do it effortlessly.

"Food's on the way. You can talk about whatever is bothering you, or we can watch a ton of people get slaughtered." Dex studied her in the corner of his eye, wondering why she would take off her boots but not her coat.

Nova took another sip with a straight face and he held out his hand. She passed him the bottle without question, and he drank some, watching as she pulled her hair up into some kind of weird bun.

He had to look away when he realized how cute it was.

"I'd like to see some slaughter." She held out her hand for the bottle and Dex hesitated.

Even if she wasn't anything but his friend, he still didn't want to see her drink herself to death. On the other hand, if she got drunk, she might tell him what was wrong.

He handed her the alcohol and started the show, deciding that he would just keep an eye on her and her water intake. Some food and some water...she'd be fine.

They sat in silence, watching the show, and he couldn't help but be aware of the way she curled up on the couch, using her coat as a blanket almost. Her eyes almost never blinked, and she seemed pretty content, if depressed.

Dex realized he didn't know shit about her.

He had no idea why she'd be upset, and he didn't know what she liked to do or eat or read, fuck, all he knew was her first name and that she was a witch with a death wish.

"Why are we watching the English version?" she asked out of nowhere, nursing the vodka.

He paused the show and switched over to the subtitles. "Some people don't like to read."

"I can speak Japanese." Nova drank more and he snagged the bottle from her just for an excuse to stare at her.

"Aren't we special." He drank half the bottle just to make sure she couldn't.

"You only speak English?" she asked, turning to arch an eyebrow at him like she was disappointed.

"I speak Korean, Russian, and Japanese as well as English." He grinned at her and handed over the bottle. "Food's here."

He didn't bother to pause the show and opened the door just enough the delivery guy couldn't see her. "Thanks for the speed."

"Of course, Dex. Another night alone? I keep telling you to get a girlfriend, a boyfriend, anything. Just stop being lonely." The old Italian gave him one of those

ridiculous winks and took the cash from him with a nod of thanks.

“I’m not lonely,” Dex called after him, but the old man just waved his hand in dismissal.

Nosy-ass old people.

When he closed the door, he saw Nova focusing on the show with her arms crossed over her chest. Dex knew she wasn’t shy now, yet her body language screamed so many contradictory things at him.

The first night he’d met her, he’d been sure she was insecure or shy or something . But after seeing her at the club wearing that outfit, he knew that wasn’t the case. There were just times she didn’t want anyone looking at her – times she didn’t feel safe.

He gritted his teeth and shoved down the irritation that she didn’t feel safe with him. “I got Italian.”

She tossed two twenties on the table without looking at him.

“Look, it’s not a big deal. You can get me back next time,” he told her, sitting on the edge of the couch to go through the food.

“We’re friends and I can take care of myself.” If he didn’t know better, he’d say she was pissed at him.

Dex grabbed one of the twenties and threw it in her face. “It wasn’t that expensive. Take whatever you want.”

Rage flickered in her eyes when she shoved the cash back in her pocket, but she

unfolded from the couch to see what he'd chosen.

He leaned back to watch her without looking like that was what he was doing. Dex sipped the vodka and kept his eyes on the TV, but he was aware of every move she made. Nova grabbed a fork and the closest thing without even checking what it was.

Something was very wrong.

It made his chest tight and Dex hated the conflict of emotions inside. All he wanted to do was ask what was bothering her so he could fucking fix it, but she didn't trust him. And why should she?

They were still trying to figure out how to just be friends.

Nova ate the pasta with her eyes glued to the screen and Dex grabbed what was left over. Things were weird between them, but it could honestly be worse. She could have chosen not to come because she was upset, and instead she'd stuck it out.

To some degree, she felt safe around him. Maybe safe enough to hang, but not talk.

"So, obviously everyone is going to die," she said. Nova settled back into the couch like that comforted her.

What a fucking weirdo.

"I'm not spoiling anything." Dex finished the chicken parmesan and went for the spaghetti next. "You can watch it and find out. I have all night."

"I was surprised you weren't working on a Saturday," she told him, finishing the alfredo.

Dex didn't know what to say to that either. His work wasn't something he talked about with anyone. Either they knew what he did, or they didn't. That was that.

"I can pick my own schedule." Dex figured that was the safest explanation. "What's yours?"

She gave him a look that clearly said it was none of his business.

"So, what do you do?" he asked as innocently as he could.

"I'm in between work right now." Nova shushed him and held out her hand for the vodka. "Now be quiet so I can fucking watch this."

Damn, she was a pain in the ass.

They passed the bottle between them, and he could see her getting sleepier, but she watched the entire episode without even flinching or reacting. Dex couldn't tell if he was impressed or worried.

He finished the bottle and silently handed her some water. Nova took it without looking and Dex just sighed. This was not easy, and it didn't help that she still looked cute as fuck.

The episode ended and he paused, turning to face her fully. "Before we start episode two, you have to tell me one thing I don't know about you. I'll do the same."

Nova gave him a sideways look that promised pain and he wondered if she could actually follow up on that threat.

"My dad wants me to come home."

For some reason that statement hit him in the gut. The thought of her leaving actually put him on the edge of rage, and he couldn't figure out why. She was hot, sure, but they barely knew each other.

His life would be easier if she left.

“Why?” Dex tried to keep his voice normal. He tried to make it look and sound like he didn't care. He leaned forward to grab another water and drank it while he waited for her to respond, focusing on keeping his heart rate normal before it set off his demon.

Nova was quiet for a long time and he could practically see her sink farther into her jacket. “He doesn't think it's safe for me here. He told me I was being reckless.”

The real pain in her words made him want to hunt the man down and force him to apologize.

Dex rolled his shoulders back and then grabbed more food – anything to distract himself.

Really, it wasn't all that different from what he had told her. “I'm sure you'll find a job and things will be fine.”

Nova sighed and turned back to the TV. “Your turn.”

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Chapter 18

Nova

D ex was far more perceptive than she'd given him credit for. Even though he was trying really hard not to hover, she could feel his attention on her like a brand. For the first time since she'd met him, it didn't feel sexual.

He was worried.

Talking to her dad had been the right choice no matter how she felt about what he had to say.

The moment you're compromised, you have to get out of there.

At first, she hadn't told him what was really bothering her. Talking about boys with her dad was fucking weird, but he wasn't an idiot. He'd yanked it out of her with a few carefully chosen questions.

Admitting that she had very strong...feelings—for a powerful paranormal who might just end up on her arrest orders hadn't been easy. But her dad had made the whole thing really simple.

If you get the orders, could you arrest him—kill him if that's what they told you to do?

At that point nothing else mattered except her ability to do what was needed. But

could she do it?

Nova didn't think Dex was doing something she couldn't live with. She really didn't think he was abducting innocents or causing problems that would make the Council want to take him down.

She'd hesitated too long on the phone though and her dad had demanded she abort mission and head back. It was no longer safe for her, not when she would hesitate if Dex ever came face to face with her monster.

What would she do if he was the one she ended up hunting?

Nova closed her eyes, hating herself.

Her first mission and she'd already fucked it up. Gianna would be so pissed at her.

"I never met my real dad," Dex said, breaking into her thoughts. "My uncle raised me."

That just made her feel even worse.

Nova bit her lip so the tears welling in her eyes didn't spill down her cheeks. "Can we watch the next episode now?"

"Sure." But he didn't sound sure.

Thank fuck for scent charms.

The show started playing and she forced herself to focus on it so she could get her shit together. It was a good show and the concept was fascinating. But the space between her and Dex felt like a canyon. She was cold and she couldn't figure out

what she was going to fucking do.

Her dad was right, she should leave.

But she should also be a professional and ignore how she felt personally. That was the right choice. She couldn't quit every mission she got when she wanted to fuck someone.

Stupid fucking boy in his stupid fucking loose tank top. He was practically taunting her to look at his nipple piercings and she didn't think he even realized it.

The heater was on though and she was finally warming up.

Nova stood and peeled off her coat, tossing it on the couch as she headed for the kitchen. She needed some more alcohol. If nothing else, it would help her forget how miserably she'd already failed.

"Tell me what's wrong." The growl in his voice told her he wasn't going to let her push him away this time.

Nova ignored him and grabbed another bottle of vodka, yanking the cork off without even trying.

The buzz was just starting to hit her. She was a hunter, which meant her metabolism was much, much faster than a witch's, but still nothing compared to whatever Dex was.

She threw back the bottle and snarled when he yanked it out of her hand. The alcohol spilled all over her. Nova whirled around and suddenly found herself pinned against the counter.

He wasn't touching her anywhere, but his arms caged her as he gripped the marble and he was pissed . "Tell me."

"Thanks for that, asshole." She flicked his nipple piercing.

Dex froze and she ducked under his arm, yanking off her stupid shirt. She held it in her hand, not sure what to do with it now. Was there a washer somewhere?

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Dex snatched the shirt from her hand and went into what she assumed was the guest bathroom. She could hear him throw it in the washer and start it before coming back out.

He threw another shirt at her hard enough she actually stumbled backward when it caught her in the face. "I could ask you the same question," she muttered.

"What's wrong with me?" The way he stressed the word, Nova knew she'd managed to piss him off even more.

"Yeah, you." Nova yanked his shirt on and tried to ignore the way it smelled.

Reaching under it to take off her soaking wet bra was probably a bad idea, but she didn't want to be cold anymore. She pulled it out with a little maneuver and enjoyed the way his eyes widened. Nova walked around him and tossed it into the washer too before heading back to the couch.

He didn't grab her like she expected him to.

"Maybe I'm pissed that my friend is upset and using unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with it."

Touché.

“I’m not the only one with unhealthy coping mechanisms.” Nova gave him a pointed look. She’d seen how many bottles he’d had in there.

“It doesn’t affect me the same way it affects you.”

Right, he didn’t know she was more than a witch.

Nova sighed, staring at the food on the table and the water he’d put there as surreptitiously as possible. Dex had really tried and she’d managed to fuck this up too.

“What can I do to help?”

Nova didn’t know how to respond to that. Normally, she’d train with her dad until her body was in so much pain, or so numb, she’d fall into bed and sleep like the dead. But she couldn’t do that here, not without giving away what she was.

Sometimes she’d play her first-person shooter games. Starting up some Call of Duty and wrecking the shit out of all the boys sounded amazing, but she didn’t have a gaming setup here.

“I hate feeling like a failure,” she admitted, adjusting his shirt slightly. There was so much more she could say, but Nova didn’t trust herself. She should be telling him nothing.

“Why do you feel like a failure?” Dex finally sat on the couch next to her and she avoided looking when he rubbed the nipple she’d flicked.

“My family has a lot of expectations.” Nova suddenly wanted to tell him everything.

Being friends was somehow worse because now she had to constantly avoid direct

questions.

She should have never replied to his text message.

Dex was silent as he watched her. “Is physically comforting a friend okay?”

How the fuck was she supposed to respond to that? “In what way?”

Without wasting any time, he grabbed her leg and yanked her toward him. Nova slammed into his side and he wrapped his arms around her. Dex didn’t look down at her though, his eyes were fixated on the TV. “Friends are allowed to platonically hug friends, right?”

“Would you hold a man like this?”

He grinned down at her then and winked. “Yes.”

Oh.

Well then.

“As a boyfriend or a friend?”

“Both.” Dex tapped the remote and let the show play. “Not all of us are afraid of nonsexual intimacy Nova.”

Fucking hell, this wasn’t making anything easier.

But it was warm, and relaxing. She watched the show and rested her head on his shoulder. Her mother had held her like this on rough nights when the nightmares wouldn’t stop.

It could really be this simple.

“I like this show,” she told him. “Thank you for inviting me over.”

“Mhm.”

Dex squeezed her once and she relaxed into him.

Her father was definitely right.

She needed to leave.

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Chapter 19

Dex

D ex opened his eyes and blinked as the sun nearly blinded him. Shit, he must have fallen asleep. When had he ever fallen asleep with the TV on?

There was an unfamiliar weight on his chest, and he went completely still as he remembered.

Sometime after about the fifth episode, he'd dozed off, and Dex checked the TV, seeing she'd watched the entire first season...

Letting him sleep.

Nova had her coat over her, snuggled into him like this was natural.

Dex couldn't move.

One of his arms was over her which meant he'd done it in his sleep, and she'd let him.

Fuck, this was bad. This shouldn't have happened.

All he could think about was how she felt against him, how safe she must feel to sleep with him.

How safe he'd felt to fall asleep before her.

Dex knew he was a touch-starved bastard. Every time he fucked someone, it was all he could do to keep his hands off of them. He just wanted to feel their skin against his, but that had always just been fucking. Dex had never wanted to...cuddle.

He was torn between staying exactly where he was until she woke up or extricating himself so she wouldn't wake up on top of a guy she barely knew.

Nova's dark purple hair shimmered in a beam of sunlight and he couldn't stop looking at it or the scar that marred her perfect skin. Dex smiled when he saw the freckles dusted across her cheeks. It had been too dark to really see them before.

Her hair was all ruffled and messed up, and she was still the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

The urge to touch her was overwhelming.

Dex wasn't confident he wouldn't violate her trust. She'd asked for a friend, not a lover.

Very carefully, he slid out from under her, rolling so she'd be lying on her stomach just like she'd been on him. It put him in a weird position and Dex reached down, placing his hand on the floor.

There.

Nova sighed when he slid all the way off the couch to the floor, blindly reaching out for him.

But the moment she moved, her face fell into the patch of sunlight.

Her eyes snapped open and the purple burned with a fire that honestly scared the living shit out of him. That soft hand suddenly gripped his throat hard enough to actually hurt. Dex stared into her eyes, her pupils dilated to pinpoints.

She didn't recognize him yet – if she was even actually awake.

The grip on his throat started to burn as her magic lit up the runes on her forearm. If he wasn't quick, she'd blow his fucking head off.

"It's me, Dex," he told her, extremely careful not to move a single muscle. Wherever she was mentally had put her on the defensive.

Fucking hell, she was terrifying.

"You're in my apartment, safe."

Her grip tightened and he could see fear flicker in her eyes. "Safe?"

"Safe in Dex's apartment."

"Okay." Nova released him and went right the fuck back to sleep.

Holy shit.

Dex was up and across the apartment in a split second. He went to the windows in his living room as quickly as he could.

She'd been fine until the sun was on her face.

He closed every set of blinds and the blackout curtains until it was dark as hell. Then he grabbed a spare blanket and tucked it around her, making sure there was no light

near her face at all.

Staring down at her, he realized in that moment that she was not just a normal witch. The power he could feel was one thing. It wasn't all that impressive and there was no real flavor to it that told him her specialty.

But whatever had happened to her when she'd gotten that scar...

She leveled up the moment she felt threatened.

It wasn't normal power at all .

Dex had no idea what exactly it was, but he would bet it had something to do with her ability to manipulate darkness and whatever made her react to light the way she did.

He'd forgotten until her hand was around his throat, just how she'd been in the mortuary.

At first, he'd thought she was rightfully scared he'd murder her there, but she'd stepped closer to him once his shadow had blocked the light. She'd practically begged him to turn the lights off.

Dex had chalked it up to the mortuary, not the actual light.

Was she afraid of it, or did it physically hurt her?

Either way, he went through his entire loft, making sure it was as dark as possible. She could explain when she woke up.

Running his hand through his messed-up hair, he considered Nova's sleeping form.

Dex was in so much trouble when it came to her.

She was complicated and mysterious, independent and aggressive. She was also tall, and he loved it considering how he always felt like a freakish giant at 6'7". Then she had this weird side of her that was honestly adorable.

His phone went off silently and he stared at the number for a long time before going into the bedroom. Dex closed the door behind him. "What is it?"

"I've got footage of someone breaking into the accounting firm," George told him. "Director of IT said they accessed her computer but can't figure out what they were looking for."

Dex sighed. This was the last thing he needed right now. "Send me the footage. Who else knows about this?"

"Just the guys on security in the building, and the director." George was silent for a moment. "Are we keeping this quiet?"

"For now." Dex would rather just deal with the problem. Agmos wouldn't like being bothered with something this mundane. "Have the director do whatever she can to figure out what they wanted and tell security I'll take care of it."

"Got it, Dex. Anything else?" George still sounded wary of him, and after what had happened at the club, Dex didn't blame him.

She wasn't his, but here she was, sleeping on his damn couch, and a flash of possessive rage went through him.

"No one touches the witch," he said, a growl escaping his throat before he could lock it down. "Nova is off limits."

He could say it was because of her scent charm, but Dex knew the shifters weren't stupid. Lying to their faces would just be an insult.

"I'll spread the word."

Dex hung up and tossed the phone on his bed. For a split second, he considered going back to sleep, but after having a moment where he thought he might actually die, it would be impossible.

Killed by a witch.

He snorted and went into his attached bathroom. The all-powerful demon-angel snuffed out by a witch with an attitude problem. If that wasn't karmic justice, he didn't know what was.

And she was going to be so mad if she ever found out he'd told the entire Corp to stay away from her.

He yanked his shirt off and threw it into the hamper a bit more aggressively than was strictly necessary.

Dex didn't know how to deal with this.

He had no problem keeping things as just friends between them. But if anyone else fucking touched her, he'd kill them.

Gripping the counter, he took a deep breath, trying to keep his cool.

Looking up, he studied his Korean-like features in the mirror, trying to see what she saw.

He took after his mother in looks, but the size was all his dad. Not for the first time, he wondered if his mom was still alive.

Dex turned on the shower and considered what the fuck he was going to do about Nova.

Why didn't she want him as more than a friend when she was obviously attracted to him?

She'd said it out loud or he would just chalk it up to harmless flirtation. The way she'd leaned back against him on the rooftop made his brain short-circuit every time he thought about it.

Turning the water as hot as it would go, he let the bathroom fill with steam as he stripped.

Did she think he was a player?

Who the fuck was he kidding? Dex had no interest in anyone really. Most of the time, he was checked out until his bloodlust rose to the surface. Every once in a while, he'd go to another city to find someone to fuck, but that was it.

Dex was the farthest thing from a player no matter how much he liked to mess with people. George probably thought he was losing his mind since Dex gave zero fucks about anyone ever and now here he was telling everyone a witch was off limits out of nowhere.

Letting the water scald his skin, Dex tried not to think about how she'd looked sleeping on his chest.

Nova felt safe with him.

He quickly washed and got out, grabbing a towel on his way to the closet. It was only mid-afternoon and now he had to deal with whatever this new problem was.

Ever since the other syndicate had arrived in Seattle, things had been going sideways.

Dex yanked on his sweatpants and scrubbed his hair with the towel. What had they been looking for?

A scream pierced the apartment like a knife and his heart literally stopped before he used every bit of speed he possessed to find her.

It was unnaturally pitch black in the living room. He couldn't even see her outline. Dex slammed into the table and stumbled before reaching the couch.

She wasn't there anymore.

What the fuck was going on?

The growl that came out of his throat warned him he was right on the edge of losing control. His teeth and shoulders ached and Dex felt the urge to rip apart everything and everyone.

"Dex?"

He whipped around and grabbed her, backing up until they were against the wall. Putting his body between her and the rest of the loft, he cocked his head and listened. There were no other heartbeats except the ones in the other apartments.

A quick scan of the building with his magic and he found nothing out of the ordinary.

"What happened?" he demanded, keeping a hand on her shoulder so he didn't lose

track of her in the dark with those fucking charms on. “I can’t see a fucking thing.”

He couldn’t see .

“I—I had a nightmare,” she whispered, voice shaky.

Fucking hell.

Dex released her and stepped away, breathing hard.

The urge to yell at her nearly overwhelmed him, but it wasn’t her fault he was right on the edge of burning the fucking world to the ground. He snarled and closed his eyes, knowing they were glowing.

“Could you please ease up on the darkness?” It took everything he had to ask nicely.

The last thing he needed was to scare her even more.

This girl had some serious trauma if her sleeping patterns were any indication.

“Sorry.” A second later it was back to a normal darkness and he could see again.

Dex turned slightly, making sure she could only see his white fire. She stared at nothing though, eyes unfocused and with her entire body trembling.

Without another word, he picked her up and carried her into the bedroom.

Dex flicked his fingers, using magic to make sure the curtains and blinds were closed as tightly as possible before settling her in his bed. He wrapped the blankets around her and then lay on top of them. His arms went around her next and he held her close.

This was definitely inappropriate but there was no other way to calm down his demon at the moment when she was the source of his irritation and anxiety.

“I’m sorry,” she said, the words tickling his bare chest.

“Why are you sorry?” His voice still wasn’t normal and Dex gritted his teeth, tightening his grip on her.

“I scared you.”

Dex sighed then, feeling bad she was trying to comfort him in this situation. “You did.” He tried not to think about how peacefully she’d slept until he’d left. “Are you okay?”

Nova didn’t bother trying to lie to him.

“What was the nightmare?”

Her arm snaked across his middle and she pressed into him like she couldn’t get close enough. Dex held her as tightly as he dared, understanding the need for some kind of anchor after a dream like that.

“It was the same dream I’ve had ever since it happened,” she told him. “I watch the demon rake his hand over my face with his claws.” Nova reached up and mimicked the motion on his own face, middle finger right over his eye.

A demon did that to her?

“And then my sister got him off of me. I was five years old when it happened, and she was only ten. Ten years old and she still got him off.”

Dex had no idea how a ten-year-old witch could manage that.

“She was a hunter,” Nova whispered like she could hear his thoughts. “Taking after our dad.”

Well, fuck.

“The things he did to her.” Nova shuddered and Dex actually felt sick. “I was the one with magic. Why couldn’t I help her until it was too late?”

Dex didn’t move as he listened to her. He knew some demons refused to temper their chaos cravings, but kids? That was pretty rare. Why had a demon come after a kid in the first place?

“My magic...lashed out at him when he gutted her,” Nova whispered. “He was burned to ash, but it was too late. It took her so long to die, Dex.”

There was nothing he could say to make it better. There was nothing in the world that could erase what had happened to her.

No wonder she thought the scar was ugly when every time she looked at it, that was what she remembered.

“She died a true hunter’s death, protecting those she loved.” Dex knew it wasn’t that reassuring, but it was better than saying nothing at all.

Nova was up so fast it actually made him blink in surprise. “She did.” Wiping her cheeks, she walked back to the living room and Dex rolled over onto his stomach so she couldn’t see his eyes.

Holding her had helped, but adrenaline was still coursing through his veins and now

he wanted to hunt down a demon that wasn't even alive anymore.

“Fuck!” she yelled.

He growled into the pillow, feeling his demon practically cackle in anticipation.

This girl was going to fucking kill him.

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Chapter 20

Nova

This couldn't be right.

How the fuck was it already the day?

Nova shoved the broken coffee table aside and grabbed her boots from under the couch. Where was her jacket?

"Anything I can help with?" Dex asked.

She looked up to see him watching her with narrowed eyes, arms crossed over his bare chest. Those sweatpants should be illegal.

"It's three o'clock." Where was her phone?

The panic she felt made her heart race and she used every trick she'd been taught to keep it at bay, but she'd fucked up bad.

"And?"

"It's the middle of the day!"

She shouldn't have stayed up to watch the entire season, but Dex had looked so cute asleep on the couch. Nova couldn't just leave while he was sleeping. That had felt

rude after all he'd gone through to try to make this friend shit work.

"I thought you don't have work."

"That's not the point!" She threw a boot at him and he caught it without even looking. "I shouldn't still be here."

At some point, she'd fallen asleep with him. Nova vividly remembered because of the way he smelled. She should have woken him up instead, but she hadn't because she was weak.

"This is all your fault," she hissed, pointing a finger at him. "If you hadn't..." Nova cut herself off, deciding that was not the route to go down if they were going to stay friends.

His eyes flashed and suddenly he was standing right in front of her, fucking furious. "If I hadn't what?"

She shouldn't have pushed him. Nova was so mentally fucked up right now, she had pushed him when she knew he was still on edge after the way he'd reacted.

"Nova, I swear to all the fucking gods that I'm going to shake the shit out of you." His hands wrapped around her biceps and she didn't know what to do, because she absolutely deserved this. "If I hadn't what?"

"I should never have let myself fall asleep," she whispered, knowing she owed him an answer, at the very least. "It's daylight outside and now I'm somewhere that's not my own apartment like a fucking idiot. Like I don't know any better."

She wanted to shove him away, but something told her if she did, he might actually kill her, and her sense of self-preservation was kicking in.

“I don’t understand,” he growled. The words vibrated in the room with a sound she’d never heard from a shifter.

Nova owed him as much of the truth as she could give him after all she’d put him through. “I’m demon-touched. Whatever happened when my magic settled in my eye...I think—somehow, I took some of his powers. I have no control over it.”

Dex went so still she wasn’t even sure he was breathing.

“There was so much blood I thought I would never see out of this eye again, but I vividly remember the flash of sunlight as I fell. It was so bright.” Nova pushed his arms gently and they fell to his sides. “If I’m not prepared, midday sun triggers my fight-or-flight reflexes.”

Some weird understanding flickered across his face. “Well, that explains why you tried to kill me in your sleep.”

Oh, great. As if she wasn’t already a hot mess, that had happened too.

“I still don’t understand the problem,” he said, running his hand through his hair.

Every single muscle in his chest and arm flexed.

“This isn’t my house. What am I going to do until the sun sets?”

He gave her a look like she was being fucking weird. “Watch anime? I don’t know. What’s the big deal?”

“This is your place and I need a shower.” Nova didn’t understand what was going on either. Were they having two separate conversations?

“Then fucking shower! Damn, dude. Why do you make everything so hard?”

There was that flash of that weird, white fire again.

“What are you?”

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Chapter 21

Nova

Nova clapped her hand over her mouth the second she'd said it.

She'd promised herself never to ask, but her fucking head was all over the place thanks to her dad, Dex, and waking up somewhere she hadn't planned to.

All the anger left him, and he just studied her, no doubt wondering if he could trust her. "My father was seraphim. Now go shower. I'll make something to eat."

Seraphim?

Nova's eyes widened when she realized what that meant.

Dex's father was an angel, but not just any angel. He was an elite class of warrior angel. Which meant Dex wasn't just a powerful, dangerous paranormal. He was one of the most powerful and dangerous paranormals if he had even half of what his father possessed.

"Do you have wings?" she asked, unable to help herself.

Angels and half-angels were so rare her family had never met one in all the generations since they'd started hunting.

He arched one perfect eyebrow and crossed his arms over his chest, definitely still

irritated with her. “Yes, now go shower.”

Nova wanted to stick her tongue out at him for telling her what to do, but she was going to try to temper as much of her brattiness as possible until she could leave. Dex was a good guy who didn’t deserve her psychotic tendencies.

Looking down at the mess in his loft that was all thanks to her, she felt guilty again.

This was one of the many reasons why she only fucked and didn’t date. Nova could barely live with herself, let alone someone else.

Why was he so nice to her?

The sounds of cupboards opening and closing filtered in and she blinked, realizing she was staring at nothing again.

There was her phone.

Nova picked it up and crossed the room to pick up the boot Dex had dropped. Without another word, she went into his bedroom and closed the door.

This felt so weirdly intimate. This was why being here overnight was a fucking problem. He let her in here without a second thought, into his most private place. Nova could look in all his drawers and he didn’t give a fuck.

Well, she’d have to find something clean to wear.

She winced, trying not to think about what that might look like to him. Did angels get weird about shit like that the same way shifters did?

Nova stripped and went into the bathroom, annoyed she couldn’t brush her teeth.

See, this was why this was an issue. Was he really that much of a dumb boy he didn't get it?

She turned on the water and then went through his medicine cabinet and the cupboard under the sink. Nova grabbed a brand-new toothbrush and inspected it, trying to decide if this was a good thing or not.

On one hand, he could just have a stash of them, or on the other, he could have regular overnight visitors.

Nova rolled her eyes and rummaged around for the toothpaste. Like it mattered if he had people sleep over? Dex was a big boy. His personal life was none of her business. They were not dating, and she had no plans to in the future.

After tonight, she needed to think about what she was going to tell the Council.

Brushing her teeth made her feel a little better. Then she stared at her own reflection, eyeing the dark circles under her eyes and the way her scar seemed more pronounced today. Usually, the silver was very faint, but she felt like it was stark under the bathroom light.

Or she was just ridiculously pale after the nightmare that was her own personal hell. As if experiencing it hadn't been enough, she had to relive it every time she had a bad night.

What was she going to do?

Nova knew she should leave Seattle, but she didn't want to. She wanted to stay here because...

Because of a stupid fucking boy.

Stepping into the shower helped her refocus and calm down. The hot water eased the tightness in her muscles, and she searched his shit to see he actually owned various different products. No two-in-one here.

It wasn't her usual unscented, but it had a nice mild fragrance and Nova scrubbed while she considered what her actual options were.

Okay, so what if she liked a boy enough to want to stick around? There were other problems. Was he one of the ones the Council had sent her to watch? Would he be the one she would have to arrest?

What if he wasn't, and she just left?

The Council would send in another hunter and Nova had no idea what would happen then. She'd have no control over the situation, and if Dex was not actually causing problems, he could end up hurt or killed if someone found out what he was.

As a hunter who swore to protect those who needed it – would she be able to leave knowing that might happen?

And if he was actually the one causing problems? Nova needed to be able to have the professional decency to get over her feelings, no matter how rare they were, and arrest someone who could possibly expose them to the humans and put the entire paranormal community in danger.

The only way this was going to work though was if she could figure out which it was, and quick.

She washed her hair and breathed in the steam, feeling antsy despite her exhaustion.

Spying on him felt gross, but she had to know.

Tonight.

Nova would gear up and stalk him until she had her answer. Every night until she knew for sure. Until then, she'd have to make excuses to avoid seeing him. It would be easy to pretend she was looking for a job.

That settled, she turned off the shower, wondering if the usual weapons to kill angels would work on him. She'd have to look into it.

Just in case.

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Chapter 22

Dex

Dex cut the fruit up as he subconsciously listened to the shower running. Nova seemed to have settled down. He could hear her when she wasn't wearing her boots, but he figured the scent charm was somewhere more permanent.

Was she really that annoyed about spending more time with him, or was it something else? He couldn't figure her out.

Smiling, he placed the fruit on both plates. Dex kind of liked that about her.

The girl was definitely not easy to deal with. But the situation was something he understood. Neither of them should have let this happen, but being 'just friends' was clearly a struggle for both of them.

It was hard to resist the comfort Nova gave him or resist his feelings for her, especially when he knew that he provided her comfort as well.

Dex spun his knife, staring at nothing in particular. Had he ever had someone feel comforted by him before? He didn't think so.

The shower shut off and he poured the eggs in the hot pan.

Everything she'd been through – it didn't scare him off like he knew it should. Dex actually felt more invested now if that were even possible. If he could ease some of

that pain...

Who the fuck was he kidding?

His angel was an emotionless sociopath who was designed to exact wrath upon the universe without giving a single fuck about the consequences. Then there was his demon with cravings for chaos and impulse control issues which made such a wonderful recipe for disaster, it really shouldn't be funny.

But sometimes the only way he could get out of bed was to laugh at the shit he had to deal with.

Ironically, Dex wasn't worried about his demon. Agmos had trained him how to focus the cravings for chaos into productive outlets. It was the excitement he felt when he was ready to fight, ready to make someone beg. His demon wanted sex and violence and really any kind of stimulation he could get his hands on.

Dex relished in his demon side.

But if he let something actually bother him, that rage he felt that came from the fires of hell triggered the wrath in his angel, and the switch from a guy just having a good time to a serial killer who'd murder everyone for a Snickers bar was something he couldn't afford.

He used the strength and the wings. Dex loved the speed his angel gave him and the power that amplified his demon magic, but that cold unfeeling side disgusted him.

And Nova had been hurt by a demon – her sister murdered by one, which made things awkward.

Demon-touched.

It didn't sound real. Dex had never heard of something like that before, but magic was unpredictable. It wasn't out of the realm of possibility.

The real question though, was why a demon would go after a witch child. What was the motivation for that?

A demon had murdered her sister right in front of her. Telling Nova he was part demon didn't seem like a good idea.

He tossed in some ingredients for the omelets and rolled his shoulders back to ease the ache of holding back his wings.

Lying to her didn't seem like a good idea either, even by omission. Maybe when they knew each other better, he could tell her. When he felt like she wouldn't kill him for something he had no control over.

Flipping the eggs, he considered everything he knew about her.

Nova wouldn't actually kill him for being part demon, but she might just decide to have nothing to do with him anymore and Dex hated the idea of that more than anything.

And then her sister had been a hunter.

Gently, he eased the omelets onto the plates and wondered what that must have been like. It definitely explained why she seemed too rash when it came to the situations she put herself in. Nova wasn't afraid of shifters because her dad had trained her.

As a witch, she couldn't match a real hunter, but knowing how to physically fight was something no one expected from a witch. After her sister died, he had no doubt her dad had trained the shit out of her.

It's what he would have done.

Dex shoved that thought down deep and pretended like it had never existed. Kids weren't in the cards for him.

Sprinkling some cheese on the eggs, he tapped his phone to turn up the music just a little. He could still hear her over it, but she was getting dressed and Dex couldn't afford to listen to that.

Bacon was next and he let it pop and sizzle as he brewed coffee. She might not like coffee, so he started the kettle too. Whatever her preferences were, he was prepared. Both of them needed to eat, considering their general attitudes.

Being hangry on top of everything was like playing with fire in a room full of dynamite.

His door opened and he focused on the bacon, tracking her movements with sound alone. Her heart rate was back to normal, but he couldn't scent her, just the fragrant steam from the shower.

She'd used his soap.

Was that why she was so ticked about a fucking shower? Dex rolled his eyes. Nova probably thought he used dish soap for face wash too.

"Here," he said, sliding the plate across the counter. "Coffee's on. There's hot water and bacon coming up."

"You can cook."

He was not going to be offended at the shock in her voice. Dex had to remember most

human men were fucking garbage.

Dex nodded, and flipped the bacon, eyes tracking her on instinct as she went for the coffee. Then he refocused on the bacon, clenching his teeth. He definitely shouldn't have looked.

Nova opened a cupboard and grabbed a coffee cup, setting it on the counter with a tired sigh. Dex was aware of every tiny movement she made.

She was wearing his clothes.

Now he really understood.

This was what she was so pissed about.

Because the second he saw her wearing his sweats and one of his loose tank tops with her chest tat, clearly not wearing a bra...

Dex wanted to tear that shirt off her with his teeth and lick her nipples until she screamed.

"The bacon is burning."

He growled in irritation, grabbing what he could with the tongs and tossing it on her plate. Dex put the burnt ones on his and tried not to look at her again.

"Thank you," she murmured. "For everything."

"Mhm. Need me to wash your clothes?"

He could feel her attention zero in on him as she took a bite of bacon. "Is there

something wrong with what I'm wearing?"

"Nope, just offering." Fucking hell, why was she so perceptive?

He poured his own coffee and then sat next to her at the counter on one of the bar stools, shoveling food in his mouth before he could say anything else stupid.

"So, I don't think I can sit around and watch TV," she said, still studying him.

"What do you normally do during the day?" This wasn't something he'd ever had to deal with before. Dex had no idea how she managed. What kind of work did she even do?

"Exercise, and then anything I need to do to get ready to look for work." Nova shrugged and popped a piece of fruit in her mouth. "Usually when the sun starts dropping, I can manage if I need to go out. I just have to be prepared for it."

What a weird thing, but Dex figured it wasn't all that different from his own schedule. His was simply by choice. "Does it hurt?"

"The sun?" Nova sipped her black coffee.

He wrinkled his nose at the idea of tasting nothing but bitter beans. "Yeah, does it physically hurt?"

"My left eye is very light sensitive to the point of pain, but otherwise, no. I just...don't like it." Her shoulders hunched like she felt stupid.

Dex never realized how much he relied on scent before meeting her. He'd never been so blind to someone's emotions and it was super fucking frustrating to constantly be guessing.

But he wasn't going to ask her to take off her scent charm. There was no reason she should other than to make his life easier, and her discomfort wasn't worth that.

"So, what work are you looking for then?" Dex finished off his omelet and realized his mistake when the plate was nearly empty. If he wasn't eating, he had no excuse not to look at her.

"Bartending. What are we listening to?" Nova tapped her finger on the counter in time with the beat and he couldn't resist anymore.

Fuck, she wasn't just beautiful but hot as hell too.

The stark black tats were begging to be traced with his tongue, and her wet hair was hanging around her shoulders and down her back. Dex didn't dare look down where he knew the curve of her breast was peeking out.

He was only so strong.

"K-pop. I didn't know you could bartend."

She turned and grinned at him. It was breathtaking. "Well, you never asked."

"I have a bar." Dex raised an eyebrow at her. "Why didn't you ask me?"

Nova's smile dropped and she took their empty plates to the sink, washing them off and drying them. Dex let his eyes travel down, and then back up. She had actual muscles, proof she worked out.

"I don't need your charity," she finally said. "I can take care of myself."

Yeah, she could, but he'd rather she didn't go get a job at a rival business. There were

tons the Corp owned that she could work at, but knowing her, she'd get hired at one he could never go to.

"I wasn't implying you couldn't." Dex sighed and drained his coffee. "I was just asking a simple question. There's a gym in my building if you want to go there."

"No thanks, I don't have any gym clothes and I'm not working out in this."

Oh, right. Fuck. He was definitely not thinking when she was around, messing with his head.

"Okay, fine. Go get your bra on, I have an idea." Dex got up and went to the living room, shoving aside the mess from earlier. He found the remote and turned on the TV, accessing the internet.

"What's your idea?"

He just gave her a look and Nova threw up her hands in frustration before disappearing into the guest bathroom.

Selecting the choreography video, he turned off the music with a grin. Dex was definitely going to turn her into a K-pop stan after this.

Nova came back and crossed her arms over her chest with a glare. "Okay, now what?"

"You like to dance, right?"

The way her eyes narrowed made him laugh. "Yes, what about it?"

"Well, since I'm not allowed to dance with you as more than a friend, I'm going to

teach you K-pop choreography.”

Her eyes widened in surprise at the same time her arms dropped. “Seriously?”

“Got any better ideas?”

Nova studied him again before putting up one finger. “Hold on.” She disappeared into his room and then came back a second later, throwing a shirt at him. “I have to wear a bra, so you have to wear this.”

Dex caught it on instinct and studied the short-sleeved shirt – not a tank top. He grinned then, liking the confirmation she was just as distracted by his body as he was hers.

“What, you don’t like my nipple piercings?”

Her eyes dilated until they were nearly black and Dex bit his tongue, instantly regretting the question.

“They suit you,” she said, voice huskier than before. Nova cleared her throat and stretched her arms. “Exactly how many do you have?”

He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Then he slipped the shirt on before either of them tried to test the boundaries even more than they already had.

“Enough,” he finally said, making sure she saw the one in his tongue. “Ready?”

“Don’t laugh at me.”

“I can’t promise that, but I can promise that by sunset, you’ll know how to do this dance.”

Nova grinned then, reaching down to touch her toes. “Okay, I think I can live with that.”

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Chapter 23

Nova

Damn, she was actually sweating.

Nova grabbed a bottle of water and tossed it to Dex before grabbing one for herself. She used the bottom of her shirt to wipe the sweat from her face, feeling good after burning off some of the adrenaline-induced energy she'd had.

It wasn't as good as fighting for her life, but it was fucking close.

"How do you feel?" Dex asked. His eyes dropped to her abs and then back up like he thought she wouldn't notice the quick inspection.

"Tired. So why do they all have that eyebrow cut?" Nova dropped her shirt and drank the water.

"Cause it's hot?" Dex gave her a look that basically asked what planet she was living on. "I've been thinking about doing it, but I don't trust myself with a razor near my eyes."

She leaned against the counter and considered his eyebrows. "It would fit your face. With all the earrings in your ears, I'm surprised you don't have a pierced eyebrow too."

Dex grinned at her. "Facial piercings can get ripped out in a fight. My face is too

pretty to risk that.”

He wasn’t wrong.

“I could do it,” she offered, pulling her hair back. Nova needed another shower after three hours of that shit, but she had to admit she’d loved every second of it.

Dex was the kind of guy who somehow knew exactly what she needed when she herself didn’t even know what it was. It was kind of weird, but she also loved it.

“I don’t know if I trust you with a razor blade near my eyes either.”

She tossed the empty water bottle into the recycling, irritated he was right. Nova had tried to kill him in her sleep, threatened him with a knife, and he’d seen her kill a guy. There was no reason for him to trust her.

Dex must have picked up on her emotions somehow despite her scent charm because he shrugged. “It’s just hair. It’ll grow back if you mess up.”

Nova froze, staring at him in disbelief. “Do you have a death wish?”

His grin made her heart flutter. “Yes.”

Well.

“All right.” She went to her boots and snatched her smallest knife. “Sit on the couch.”

Dex actually hesitated when he saw the blade.

“You can change your mind.” Nova smiled, testing the edge. Still sharp enough to fillet flesh before they’d even realized it had happened.

“Hey, I’m not a quitter.” Dex sat down, still looking wary. “I just don’t know why I have to sit.”

Nova walked up to him, and gestured. “You’re tall as shit. How else am I supposed to do this? Now scoot your butt down and rest your head on the back of the couch.”

His eyes flashed. Did Dex like when she told him what to do? Nova bit the inside of her cheek as she tried to ignore how much that turned her on. She’d never been more grateful for scent charms in her life.

Now, how was she going to do this?

Dex was massive, and she needed to get really close to his face to make sure she didn’t fuck it up. Nova would feel like a total asshole if she accidentally shaved off an entire eyebrow.

She climbed up onto the couch and considered the angle. Nope, this wasn’t going to work.

“Okay, just...sit on your hands.”

Dex glared at her. “There’s no fucking way.”

Nova chewed on her lip, trying to figure out if this was even going to work. “Fine, put them flat on the couch and don’t move unless I hurt you.”

The desire that flickered in his eyes nearly made her forget to breathe. But then it was gone, and Nova wondered if she was imagining things or just projecting.

He followed her instructions and she quickly straddled him just like she would anyone when sparring. The position made her taller than him and she studied his

eyebrows with a critical eye, trying to decide which one would look better.

Instinctually, she twirled the knife in her hand while she thought and then flipped it before going for his left one.

“You really know how to use that thing,” he muttered, but Dex didn’t move a single muscle.

Nova honestly didn’t even think he was breathing.

“Shut up or I might slip.” Using the sharp edge as gently as she could, she did the outline first. Then Nova cleaned up the center, keeping the line thin so it didn’t look stupid. “I’m going to do two.”

He looked up at her, and Nova couldn’t help her smile. Something about the way he was watching her, trusting her – it was making her melt.

But they were supposed to be just friends.

“Don’t make it gay,” she told him, cleaning up the second line so it was just as pretty and thin as the second.

“This is honestly the farthest from gay I’ve ever been.” His voice was deeper than before and she could feel the subsonic growl in his chest against her own.

Nova closed her eyes as she tried to keep things from getting more heated. Once she had her shit under control, she opened her eyes and gently blew the hair off his face. She studied his eyebrow, smoothing the hair down with her thumb. “It’s done.”

“How does it look?” Dex asked, arching it at her like he was modeling the new look.

Nova froze when she realized what she'd done.

"Does it really look that bad?" He sounded almost worried she'd made him ugly, as if that would ever be possible.

"No, it's not that." Nova couldn't help it, she rubbed her thumb over the two lines again, knowing this had been a huge mistake.

Her other hand touched the scar on her own eyebrow, where it was cut naturally.

What was wrong with her?

"Hey, we match," Dex chuckled.

"I'm sorry, I wasn't even thinking. I shouldn't have?—"

Dex grabbed her wrists before she could start freaking out. "Look at me."

Nova dropped her gaze from his eyebrow to his eyes and she felt her heart start pounding.

Fuck, he was so hard to resist.

"It's okay. I don't mind," he told her. "Now, if you could please get off of me so I can see it, I would appreciate that."

Nova couldn't believe this kind of person even existed. "Why are you so patient with me, so understanding? I'm—fuck, I'm literally crazy."

Dex released her wrists and settled his hands on her hips. "You are definitely weird, but I think crazy is a stretch. We all have our issues, and I spent my entire life having

to learn how to control mine. I like you, so I'm willing to be patient with you."

"I like you too, Dex." Nova sighed and started to get off of him. She needed to get ready to go soon too.

But his hands tightened on her hips, and Nova couldn't move.

"Do you?" he asked, studying her face like he might find a different answer there.

"I just said I did."

"And are you attracted to me?" He yanked her forward against him so she could feel his hard dick and Nova gasped.

That single sound seemed to unleash everything Dex had been holding back. He moved, flipping her over so fast it took a second to figure out she was on her back now with him above her.

"Are you attracted to me?" he asked again, pressing his hips into hers, studying her eyes as if he could see the truth there.

Nova couldn't lie anymore. "Yes."

Dex glared down at her. Somehow her answer had only irritated him. "Then why do we have to be just friends? Can't we be friends who also do something about their attraction for each other?"

Really, after everything that had happened, he was still interested in her? Was he some kind of masochist?

Definitely shouldn't have climbed on top of him.

“I don’t date,” she said, losing herself in those golden-brown eyes, in the curve of his lips, and the sharp cheekbones. “So, there’d be no point.”

“Friends with benefits doesn’t require dating.” Dex leaned down and dragged his lips against her neck, licking the sweat from her skin.

Nova couldn’t breathe. All she could think about was how he was above her – between her legs. It had been too long since anyone had touched her like this, and never anyone who actually seemed to care about her. “Dex, I can’t.”

His growl made her shiver, and Nova felt her control slipping. She was going to lose her mind if she didn’t get him off of her soon.

“Why not? I just want to understand.”

Nova forced herself to look at him, to see what was going through his head. Something in his gaze softened and she reached up to hold his face.

His skin was so soft and smooth.

She rubbed her thumbs against his cheeks and the way he closed his eyes to lean into her touch made her fucking heart break.

“I can’t act like I don’t have feelings for you,” she whispered, feeling the tears burn as the truth of that kicked her in the gut. “Pretending we could be friends with benefits is almost as stupid as pretending we could just be friends.”

Dex leaned down and softly kissed her forehead. “Would dating me really be so bad?”

No.

The confidence in that thought was terrifying.

Dex was Nephilim which meant she should be fucking scared of him just for that. The power he had could kill her in an instant, and yet he'd done nothing to scare her ever since the first moment she'd laid eyes on him.

He'd killed for her.

At every turn, he'd protected her, and Nova didn't think it was just because he thought she was attractive.

"I might have to leave," she told him, not sure what else to say. There was no other reason that even made sense in this situation. "I can't make serious life choices based on a guy I really like, and I don't think I could leave you if we started dating."

Finally, the truth

Nova closed her eyes, hating herself for having to fucking be like this.

"I can respect that." Dex shifted, pulling her into a sitting position beside him. He ran his hand through his hair with a sigh and then adjusted his sweats.

Nova immediately got up and grabbed her boots, yanking them on.

She wanted to cry, but not in front of him. She was done breaking down in front of Dex.

Grabbing her coat and keys, she checked the time. Sun was already down, and she hadn't even noticed.

"For what it's worth, I'm sorry," she told him, zipping up her coat. "But I'm a

fucking mess, and there's no reason you should have to deal with that."

He arched that slit eyebrow at her. "I'm the only one who gets to decide what I will and will not deal with."

Nova couldn't stop staring at him.

Fuck, he needed to stop saying things like that.

On a whim, she crossed the room and kissed his cheek. Nova didn't trust herself to do more than that and still be able to leave. "I've never had anyone treat me the way you do." She hugged him then, trying not to fixate on the fact he didn't hug her back. "I need some time to figure things out."

Nova left before she did anything else stupid, yanking her hood up so no one could see her eye. She traced the scar on her eyebrow. For some reason, knowing Dex had a matching mark made her hate it less.

Her hand dropped and she shook her head.

There was work to do, and she needed to figure out exactly who Dex was before she fell head over heels for him.

If it wasn't already too late.

Chapter 24

Dex

Dex watched the footage for the thousandth time, hand resting on his mouth as he tried to figure out something from the video.

Whoever had broken into the building was a pro.

They'd disabled the alarms and picked the lock in record time, and Dex thought the general attitude of the hunter was probably the most extraordinary thing about him. He was pretty average height for a human male, but that wasn't what made him intimidating.

It was the way he walked – leading through the hips with the rest of his body following suit, shoulders swaying, slightly crouched to make a smaller faster target. His confidence though...he walked straight toward the guard on duty like he owned the place and wrapped his arms around the security's neck with a controlled aggression Dex honestly thought was incredibly impressive.

Just enough force to knock out the guard without doing severe permanent damage but every movement told anyone with half a brain not to underestimate this hunter. The way he adjusted the body to make it look like the guard was sleeping was almost gentle in stark comparison to his attacks.

Dex watched again as the hunter didn't even bother messing with the cameras. He just leisurely walked toward the stairs, stopping for a split second to listen. The

footage then cut to the stairwell and Dex followed him up into the IT department.

Another smart move.

Most people would have gone for the CEO's office or someone else they thought was in power. Sure, they did hold the highest positions in the company, but it was the computer geeks who held the keys to the kingdom. The people in power would be fucked if the IT director ever locked them out of their own servers.

The director's office door swung open and Dex watched again as he set up the download and then went to stand behind the door like he had all the time in the world. With such a deep hood, all Dex could see was the monstrous skeletal face mask that went up and over his nose. The shadows covered any defining feature and the gear he wore covered everything else.

Strapped to the nines like he planned to go to war.

The hunter didn't move a single muscle until the download finished. Dex watched as he went back down the stairs. His second favorite part was about to happen.

A security guard entered the same stairwell.

Without hesitating, he gripped the railing and launched himself over, dropping three stories and landing with a silent roll before ducking under a stairwell, waiting until the guard left to move again.

The skill and confidence the hunter possessed was rare – not just for hunters, but for anyone. It had been impossible to track him down once he left the building.

They'd pulled footage from every business they could, but once he'd reached the rooftops, they'd lost him, and Dex had no idea where he'd come from or where he'd

gone.

The only thing he could maybe use to identify the hunter was the face mask, but a quick search brought up a million similar masks you could get from just about anywhere.

In and out with minimal fuss, including minimal damage to people and things. He'd even repaired the alarm system before leaving. It had been so clean, so professional, Dex was finding it difficult to actually be mad about this.

But what was the motive?

Financial records could easily lead the hunter to a million different things he might be interested in, but Dex needed to figure out if this hunter had been hired by a rival or the Council of Paranormals.

Neither was a good option, but at least with the Council, he wouldn't have to worry too much. Dex wasn't breaking any rules and he was very careful about his human interaction. A quick warning to the entire Grim Corp to make sure they were all on their best behavior had already gone out just to be safe.

Dex needed to figure out what this hunter was trying to accomplish.

Another fun problem on top of everything else: he was being followed.

He could sense them even if he could never quite figure out where they were. But every night for the past four nights, he'd been followed. Joke was on them though because all he did was sit and watch everyone and everything at whatever place of business he was visiting that night.

Boring as hell, and Dex relished in the fact that whoever it was, was suffering just as

much as he was. He had a strong suspicion it was the hunter though. The timing was just too coincidental for it to be anyone else.

The night after the financials were stolen, he started getting followed? Highly unlikely it was anyone else.

Which made him wonder if they were working for the new syndicate that had started throwing their weight around the last few months.

Seattle was technically unclaimed territory, which meant anyone with the strength to hold it claimed it. For the last two decades that had been Agmos and the Grim Corp. They'd been slowly expanding their territory to make sure that they could protect what they claimed.

If the syndicate didn't own the businesses, they fell under the Grim Corp umbrella and paid fees for the protection the Corp offered. It wasn't all that much different than if a pack or pride ruled the city.

The only issue was Grim Corp wasn't a recognized pack or pride. It was an organization, a business essentially, but a family all the same – just like a wolf pack. The difference was any paranormal could join and there was no Alpha, only the boss.

Agmos.

Dex being his adopted son meant he had more power than anyone else but the demon himself. Ruling wasn't in his future though. He liked his current position too much for that. Dex was a problem solver, but he didn't have the self-control to rule like Agmos did.

Being both angel and demon made that impossible.

Starting the video over, he sighed as the music pulsed through him. Dex spun his knife on the table and wished he could figure out who the fuck this was. Maybe he could buy him a fucking beer or something.

Or kill him.

If the hunter was working for the Black Lotus, he'd have two options – turn him, or kill him.

Dex was honestly considering offering him a fucking job. Hunters were immune to a lot of magic and just as strong as shifters.

And this one was trained like a damn assassin.

Fuck the Black Lotus.

All they did was cause problems. Rivals had come and gone over the years, but Grim Corp had never had issues until the Black Lotus had started strong-arming for more territory.

He rolled his eyes and flipped his knife up, letting it spin in the air before catching it instinctually. It helped him focus on the way the hunter moved and what kind of training he might have.

If the Black Lotus had hired a freelance hunter, they were planning to make a move soon and Dex refused to be taken by surprise. They'd made promises to protect those in their territory, and the Lotus tended to use too much magic.

It caused more problems than it was worth with the humans.

The Lotus had more than a few witches on their payroll and Dex didn't like their

blatant use of power to cow those in their territory, but Agmos had insisted he leave it alone until it encroached on their territory.

The hunter was here tonight too, somewhere.

Dex could feel him watching from the shadows even if he didn't know exactly where. What he should do about him though...he hadn't decided yet.

A trap was set, but what Dex would do once his quarry was caught was a different problem. Once he'd figured out who the fuck was dogging his heels and what they wanted to know – and for whom – then he'd figure it out.

The music shifted to one of his favorite K-pop songs, and Dex went from flipping the knife to spinning it between his fingers in time to the beat, nodding his head as he mouthed the words. He skipped back to watch the way the hunter choked out the security guard again, grinning when he gently set the man's head back so he wouldn't suffocate before he could wake up.

It was just so pretty to watch, and the aggression in every movement promised the fight between them would be a good fucking time.

Dex couldn't wait.

He needed to release some of his own aggression after what had happened with Nova.

Four days and she still hadn't reached out to him. Dex had no idea what was going on with her, but he was giving her a week. Then he'd make sure she was alive at the very least.

It was his fault too, he knew that. Dex shouldn't have pushed her. He should have just left it alone, because now things were even worse. Now he knew how she felt—knew

that she wanted him and had feelings for him.

But she might have to leave.

His hand froze as he remembered the way she'd held his face like she actually cared about him. The look in her eyes had confirmed it, and Dex didn't understand how he'd been so blind.

Nova had tried to put distance between them from day one because of how she felt about him.

It made no sense.

Not that she already had feelings for him, but that he felt the same way.

Dex minimized the video on his phone and texted fifteen of his best fighters, giving them the go ahead to move out. This little game would be over soon, and he was done waiting around.

All fifteen of them responded in the group text, confirming.

Without wasting another minute, he got up and headed for the back exit, sensing the hunter's attention perking up. No doubt he was wondering if Dex would finally do something interesting.

Well, the hunter was definitely going to get something interesting.

Dex had been sure to specify that whoever was following him was taken alive. It was a risk. The hunter could just murder every single one of Dex's fighters, but there was something in the gentle way he'd set the guard down that told Dex this hunter wouldn't kill unless he had no other choice.

Every shifter knew they had to stay downwind, and they were aware of the danger. If they couldn't take the hunter hostage without ending up dead, it was up to Dex.

The real reason he was bringing his men into it instead of just dealing with it himself was because he wanted to see what this guy was truly capable of. If he could take out fifteen of the Corps' best fighters and still fight Dex longer than a minute...

His grin widened and he slipped his hands in his pockets as he went around the building to the street, heading away from the club district. No one could witness what was about to happen, not if Dex wanted this to work out the way he hoped it would.

Loosening some of his control on his demon, he let the giddy elation fill him at the thought of a good fight. Even though this guy was just a hunter, Dex had a feeling he'd make him sweat and honestly, he needed it.

Even flying hadn't helped lately.

Dex needed to destroy something, but a fight was the next best choice.

Killing two birds with one stone, he'd also find out what the fuck this hunter was after.

The streets got quieter and darker. Dex could sense the hunter on the rooftops, footsteps silent, but there was something his angel must be picking up on, a soul maybe? It was hard to tell sometimes.

His shifters were close, ready to pounce.

Bringing the hunter to the ground was a priority. Too many might see a fight on a roof, and Dex didn't want to risk it with the moon being as bright as it was. Bringing a witch hadn't seemed like a good idea since hunters usually had something to nullify

magic on them.

So, shifters it was.

And one demon-angel as the cherry on the top.

Dex went down an alley he knew led to a weird back area that four buildings shared for dumpsters and loading supplies, that kind of thing. More importantly the buildings provided cover from prying eyes and were owned by the Corp. Nothing caught on camera tonight would get into the wrong hands.

He stopped and looked up, grinning as he felt everything inside him unfold. The hunter paused somewhere to his left, still impossible to see. But that wasn't what Dex was trying to do. He didn't need to see the hunter to flush him out of hiding.

The sound of snarls on the rooftops echoed, and five came from the east, five from the west, and another five from the north, forcing the hunter to choose, and quick, before he got caught.

A flash of shadow and Dex spotted him, narrowing his eyes to make sure it was who he thought it was.

Yup, that run was smooth as water, arms and legs the only part of him moving as he flew across the roof. The rest of his body was completely still which meant the hunter's core strength was ridiculous.

Something to think about.

There, the third wave, forcing him toward Dex. His gaze followed as the hunter leapt from the edge of the roof, over Dex, to grab the lip of the opposite roof. A wolf swiped at him, and the hunter let go.

He slid down the side of the wall and grabbed the railing of a fire escape, using the momentum to flip, landing in a crouch right in front of Dex.

Slowly, the hunter stood, hood still over his head somehow. He wasn't breathing hard, and no part of him moved as he considered the situation.

Dex's grin widened, and he tilted his head slightly, wondering if the hunter would try to run, or attack.

But he did nothing. He stood there, waiting.

A whistle and the shifters jumped down, surrounding the hunter but not too close they were within striking distance. Dex took a step back, giving them room.

Still, the hunter only looked at Dex.

"Take him alive," Dex stressed.

Two wolves charged the hunter, and Dex felt a jolt go through him when the hunter ran straight for him, not the wolves. He jumped right as the first one lunged, knee slamming into the other wolf.

It took him to the ground, and he slid across the pavement on his knees, rolling at the last minute to avoid another strike. Suddenly, he was standing, hand wrapped around a bear's throat and Dex watched in disbelief as he used his momentum and a kick to lift the bear up and slam him onto his back, the cement cracking at the force.

Another bear went to punch him, and he spun, avoiding it so smoothly Dex whistled his admiration. Fuck, this guy moved so pretty. He didn't go for his guns, but he used everyone else as a weapon.

The hunter punched a tiger in the gut, rolling over him when he buckled, and grabbed another's fist, forcing the strike to hit one of his own men. A knife thudded into the hunter's shoulder, and he moved with it, yanking it out and tossing it back before the wolf even dropped his hand.

"I said alive," Dex growled. His bloodlust was spiking, and the only thing holding him back was the hunter hadn't tried to hurt anyone permanently. All he was doing was defending and Dex wanted to keep it that way.

The hunter wrapped his arm around another bear and swung himself up, kicking two other bears hard enough they dropped like stones.

Every kick and punch were full of anger and aggression, every dodge smooth and fluid, one motion sliding into another like this was nothing more than a choreographed dance. Dex had never seen anyone fight quite like this guy, and it only made him want to hire him even more.

Suddenly, the fighting stopped, and the hunter was the last one standing, breathing hard as he stared at the bodies around him. Then he looked up at Dex, and still he couldn't see the man's face.

"My turn." Dex grinned and the hunter hesitated.

Why was he hesitating? What was keeping him from coming after Dex? It made no sense, and Dex felt his irritation spike. What was this guy trying to accomplish exactly?

Maybe he just didn't want anyone to find out who he was.

Dex moved and the hunter took a step back when he was suddenly right there. But somehow, he dodged the strike, landing one of his own. Dex grabbed him by the

throat and lifted him up.

The hunter was having none of it. He gripped Dex's arm and swung up until his legs were wrapped around his neck, squeezing so tight Dex couldn't breathe.

He dropped, slamming them both into the ground hard enough even he felt dazed. The hunter released him, and Dex laughed, his voice shifting as the rage taunted the wrath. One quick movement and he yanked the hood back.

One wide purple eye, and one blue stared back at him.

Chapter 25

Nova

Nova couldn't breathe.

Dex had knocked the air from her lungs so hard, it hurt like nothing she'd ever experienced before. Her shoulder was throbbing, and the blood loss was starting to get to her after he'd knocked her head into the ground.

She slammed her fist into his elbow, forcing him to release her throat. Nova brought up her knee at the same time, slamming it into his side and she heard a rib crack. Gasping for air, she kicked forward as hard as she could, pushing him off of her.

Then she made a run for it.

It was stupid and she wasn't thinking, but Nova didn't know what else to do. How was she supposed to explain this to him after everything?

Nova should have been more careful. She should have known an angel would somehow pick up on her presence, but he'd played her so well she'd thought he had no idea he was being followed.

Dex suddenly appeared in front of her, and Nova reacted without thinking, dropping to her knees and sliding between his legs, punching upward right in the sweet spot. His scream of rage was the most terrifying thing she'd ever heard in her life.

Nova wrapped the darkness around her. No use in hiding that anymore and she knew he couldn't see in it.

She couldn't run forever, and he was so much stronger than her—than a shifter. It would be suicide to try to fight him fair.

“Nova!” The pain in his voice made her gasp, and his hand wrapped around her arm before she realized her mistake.

His eyes were glowing, and she froze.

One was bright silver fire, and the other...

The other burned with the fires of hell.

Demon .

Dex was...a demon?

She studied the eyes that mirrored her own in a warped way. The silvery white was still there, she hadn't imagined it. He'd said his father was an angel – he hadn't lied to her about that. But his mother...

He slammed her into the brick wall, and she reacted on instinct, snarling as she pulled a knife from his thigh, sinking it into his side. Dex barely even reacted. He pressed into her, and she did everything in her power to get free.

But he wouldn't let her go.

Nova gritted her teeth and twisted the knife.

Wings burst from his shoulders, and she let her entire body go lax.

Closing her eyes to concentrate, she let her left hand curl into a fist.

“Why?” Dex demanded, squeezing hard enough everything in her throat ground together.

Her eyes flew open as her power spiraled down her arm and into her hand. Nova put her hand to his chest and took a deep breath. “Let me go, I don’t want to hurt you.”

“Why are you hunting me?” he practically roared, wings spreading so wide they were all she could see.

Nova released every drop of magic she could, letting it slam into him.

Dex was thrown back so far, she actually hesitated. Had she done more damage to him than she’d thought?

He wasn’t moving and Nova took a step toward him, but there was no way to repair this. His heart was still beating which meant he was alive at least. She needed to leave before it was too late.

Nova was a Council hunter. After what she’d learned, he would torture her for information and then kill her to cover his tracks.

No one could know what he was, especially the Council.

Nova turned and wrapped the darkness around her like a cloak, regretting every life choice she’d made that had brought her to this point. She jumped and gripped the gutter. Her right arm screamed in protest, and she lost her grip.

Breathing harsh, she fought through the pain and hauled herself up so she could grip the gutter with her legs.

This is why her father had always told her never to get emotionally attached. Dex had set a trap for her, and she'd fallen right into it like a rookie.

Nova used her leg strength to do most of the work and just used her good arm to stabilize her body. Every movement hurt and she couldn't help the scream of frustration and pain as she hauled herself on top of the roof.

What was she going to do now?

Nova took her time crossing the roof, knowing it would be a while before any of the shifters woke up, and Dex...she had no idea how long it would take him, but she'd used enough magic to take out literally anything but a demon until they regenerated.

Dex wasn't just a demon though; he was an angel too.

A rare Nephilim who could smite her out of existence with half a thought if he wanted.

Nova studied the edge of the roof and considered her fucked-up shoulder.

This was going to be rough.

She backed up a few steps and then sprinted toward the edge, launching herself into the air. Her body she trusted, but everything else seemed to be failing her.

Including her heart.

Her feet hit the edge of the roof and she pushed forward, flipping instead of rolling so

she didn't have to use her shoulder. Blood was dripping and if she didn't hurry the fuck up and do something about it, they'd be able to track her down.

Jogging across the roof, she sped up – ready to jump again. Nothing but air, and then gravity pulled her down. Nova curled her body, prepared for the roll this time.

Then something slammed into her back, and she crashed into the roof, sliding instead of rolling. The growl warned her, but she was in too much pain to properly defend herself again and she had no more magic.

“You're bleeding,” Dex hissed, kicking her over and onto her back. “I can smell it even if I can't see you.”

Nova tried to get up, but her arm gave out. She looked up and saw him standing over her, wings so massive and wide they blocked out the night sky and all she could see was him.

Dex looked absolutely fucking furious with those blazing eyes staring down at her.

She pulled out the scent charm from her ear and threw it at him.

He flinched when her scent hit him, and Nova used the distraction to grab one of her own blades. Without hesitation, she set it to her throat and dragged it across deep.

“No!”

Nova felt the knife slip from her hand and her head hit the roof.

Suddenly, his face was all she could see.

On instinct she reached up with a small smile, tasting blood. “Dex.” His name wasn't

even a whisper thanks to her ruined vocal cords.

His hand pressed to her throat and Nova stared up at him, rubbing her thumb over the eye full of hellfire. “I’m sorry,” she mouthed as the darkness finally welcomed her home.

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 2:33 am

Chapter 26

Dex

Dex stared at her, chewing on his thumbnail as he watched her sleep. He couldn't bring himself to leave, not after...

Nova had tried to kill herself rather than face him.

Thankfully, Agmos had found someone who had taught him how to heal. He could do it with demon magic, but the angel magic was more reliable when it came to healing wounds that big. He'd healed everything, but he didn't know how to replace the blood she'd lost.

Time would have to do that.

He dropped his head into his hands and tried to figure out where he'd fucked up.

This wasn't just a small one either.

A fuck-up of this size and magnitude meant everything after this would change. Everything he knew would be different – one way or another.

How the fuck was she the hunter?

Dex felt like a fucking idiot, assuming it was a guy. But the person he'd seen on that footage wasn't the same person he'd met at the barcade. That much was obvious.

Until he'd seen her eyes, he'd had no idea even when they were fighting. Dex was still having a hard time wrapping his head around what he'd seen.

Had she been hunting him this whole time?

Looking down at his shaking hands, he stared at the stains.

He was covered in her blood.

Dex had managed to patch her throat and he'd flown her to his place as quickly as he could to properly heal her. No one had seen her face except him, and he had no idea what was going to happen when she woke up.

She'd slit her own fucking throat.

Up until that moment, he'd been so enraged Dex would have killed her himself after getting the information he needed.

The way she'd looked up at him while bleeding out though...the same emotions he'd seen when she'd confessed how she really felt were there. At the very least, she wasn't lying about that.

He couldn't decide if that made it worse, or better.

The chains rattled and he looked up to see her gasping, hand to her throat. Those gorgeous eyes were wide, and she stared at nothing while her chest heaved. Burying the urge to comfort her down as far as he could, Dex watched.

His room was so dark even a shifter would have trouble seeing, but she wasn't a shifter.

Nova was a different breed altogether.

Dex watched as her eyes slowly refocused. Keeping her soul in her fucking body had been harder than he'd expected it to be, but he'd managed without slipping completely into his angel side.

Her hand dropped and she jolted when she heard the chains clink together. Nova stared down at the hell-forged, iron manacles and frowned. He'd give anything to know what was going through her head, but he could finally scent her and that was the next best thing.

Confusion rippled through her as she stared at the manacles—at the blood covering her hands. He'd taken off her gloves and stripped her of every weapon he could find including the various charms she wore.

There was nothing he could do about her tattoos, but Nova had used all her magic for that blast. Dex could still taste the ozone on the back of his tongue, thanks to her.

She looked up at the ceiling, then over her shoulder. The chains were mounted into the wall. Dex knew it would be impossible for a shifter to get out of hell-forged iron though.

But her?

He had no idea what she could do.

Nova had taken down fifteen of his best fighters like it was nothing – without killing them. And then she'd managed to get away from him. She had taken her own life without a split second of hesitation rather than be captured.

No doubt she was capable of more surprises.

Interestingly, she didn't try to get free of the chains. Her hands went for her throat again, and then her shoulder. That one had been bad too. Dex couldn't believe she'd

climbed to a rooftop with only one working arm.

He was pretty sure her sheer will and determination were the most terrifying things about her. That and whatever magic she possessed that lay dormant. He could feel it simmering in her blood, waiting.

Dex had seen her use every ounce of her own magic, but there was something else she hadn't tapped into yet – something stolen from a demon. He doubted she knew how to use it, or she would have already.

Regardless, the hell-forged iron would ensure she couldn't access it.

“Am I in hell?” she whispered, staring down at the manacles again.

His heart wrenched at that, and Dex hated everything about this.

“You're very much alive,” he told her, voice still vibrating with his rage.

It was impossible to temper his demon right now. All he could do was release it instead of letting it fester to trigger his angel.

“I'm alive?” Nova ran her fingertips over her throat gently. The scent of her disappointment broke his heart.

Then she moved.

Nova rolled off the bed, using all her weight to yank down on the chains, pulling hard. The anchors flew out of the wall and Dex just stared at her in wonder and awe. He should be fucking pissed, but she was just...

Beautiful.

Then she was sprinting...right toward his window.

Dex felt his stomach drop when he realized she knew how high up they were and didn't care. Even for her, a fall from this height would kill her.

Using every bit of speed he'd been born with, Dex grabbed the chains and pulled back, clenching his teeth as the scent of fresh blood filled the room. The manacles tore the skin at her wrists, but she flew back, landing on the bed.

He pinned her before she could make another run for it.

This time he wasn't wearing any weapons either. Nova was too good for him to risk it.

She stared into his eyes, and for a second, he thought she was going to fight him. Then her entire body relaxed, but he wasn't going to fall for that again. Dex's hands tightened on her wrists – the skin slick with blood.

"So, now what?" she asked.

Dex could smell her, and he closed his eyes as he tried to sift through her emotions. There were so many of them, and he was still getting used to being able to smell her at all.

"Tell me the truth," he whispered into her ear. "All I want is the truth."

"What happens after that?"

Fear. Not of him, but of what he would do to her.

Nova thought he was going to kill her.

“Depends,” he said. “I’ll take these off if you promise me you won’t hurt yourself again.”

“What do you care?” she snapped.

Dex snarled, grip tightening on her. Her fear started to fade, and he smelled...resignation.

“Stop trying to provoke me into killing you.” He let her go and then ripped the manacles off of her without even bothering to unlock them. They were useless now, but at least it would prove his point.

He gently wrapped his hands around her wrists and healed the new wounds.

What he was even trying to accomplish, he didn’t know. Dex had no idea what to do with her. Discovering someone he had feelings for was also the one hunting him certainly wasn’t something he’d ever had to deal with before.

When he released her, Nova studied her perfect skin for a long time and then finally met his gaze.

They were two sides of the same coin. She was a witch and a hunter. He could smell it on her. Her eyes mirrored his and Dex knew that if twin flames really existed...

Nova was it.

“You’re a demon,” she stated.

“And you’re a hunter.”

“Yes.” Nova sighed.

Dex felt that sigh deep in his soul.

Same, baby girl, same.

“After I tell you whatever you want to know, what happens to me?”

“I don’t know.”

Her head whipped to the side and the purple eye glowed in the darkness. “Why not?”

“No one else saw your face but me.” Dex didn’t know why he was telling her this, but he didn’t know what else to do. “I want to know the truth. Then I’ll decide what to do with you.”

Tears filled her eyes then and he gritted his teeth, fighting the urge to comfort her.

Dex couldn’t afford to let her see his conflict. That would be dangerous for the both of them until he knew which path to take.

“Well, my mother is really a witch, and my sister was a hunter,” she whispered, staring down at her bloody hands. “And as you’ve probably guessed, my father is also a hunter who comes from a very long line of them.”

Without her charms, he could hear her heart clear as day. He could scent every emotion. Nova was telling him the truth.

“I’m what they call a convergence,” she said, still refusing to look at him. “It’s what happens when two or more bloodlines manifest in the same person. I’m not a very powerful witch. I have enough magic to do what I need, but I am physically stronger than even my father. I was the only one. My sister wasn’t born with magic.”

Dex didn’t hear or scent a single lie, and something in his chest eased ever so slightly.

Everything she'd told him as a friend so far had been true.

"We found out after it happened that there was a prophecy about a convergence who was both hunter and witch. It wasn't me, but the demons hunting her came after all of us who showed powers from more than one bloodline. I don't know what happened to her, but it cost my sister her life."

A fucking prophecy?

Had they lived the same goddamn life?

"What are you doing here?" Dex asked, steering her back to the actual problem.

"I signed a ninety-day trial contract with the Council of Paranormals." Nova shrugged and Dex could smell her fear again, but there was also grief.

Why did that make her sad?

"My orders were to recon the area thanks to reports of magic in front of humans. I had no plans to engage. I just needed to find out who was breaking the law and then report it and wait for further orders." Nova finally looked at him. "When I met you, it was my first night here. I didn't plan..."

Dex closed his eyes when she trailed off. He knew exactly what she meant. He hadn't planned for any of this either.

Nova took a deep breath and continued. "I kept pushing you away because I didn't know if the person I had to arrest, or kill, would be you. I didn't want to get too attached if that was the case, but you were persistent and I...it was impossible to resist you."

More truth.

“I told my father,” she whispered, a tear rolling down her cheek. “I didn’t know who else to turn to. When I told him, he only asked me one thing. He asked if I could kill you if they ordered me to.” More tears fell as she stared at him. “I hesitated.”

Dex curled his hands into fists, needing to hear all of it no matter what she was making him feel. He couldn’t afford to make another mistake. If he was going to risk everything for her – he had to know the whole truth.

“My father told me that staying was reckless and dangerous, and I should cancel my contract. Leaving was the smart choice, but I didn’t want them to send another hunter in my place.” Nova shrugged again as if it was no big deal, but Dex knew it wasn’t that simple.

If he was fucking up, she would have turned him in just to make sure she had control over the situation. The pain of not knowing would be worse than dealing with it herself.

“It’s why I was so upset that night.” Nova took a deep, quivering breath. “After...after you asked if we could try being more than friends, I?—”

Her voice broke and Dex almost broke with it.

“I had to know if it was you. So, I was planning to follow you until I had confirmation or not. After that, I would have tried to kill you myself. I would have deserved it for being dumb enough to fall for someone who was endangering us all. If it wasn’t you...I was going to tell you who I really was.”

“And what did you find out?” he asked, keeping his voice as cold and emotionless as he could.

“You manage the businesses well,” she admitted. “It’s better than I’ve seen with most packs. The coven isn’t allied with you, but they don’t actively avoid you either. The

only issues I've seen are the fights that break out along the borders. I haven't been able to figure out which side they're provoked by, but those shifters who came after me the first night weren't yours."

Dex leaned back, impressed. She'd figured all that out on her own? Nova must have been out all night every night to be so sure.

"I haven't been able to really determine the cause of the fights though since I've only been following you the last four nights."

"You broke into one of my buildings," Dex stated. He needed the confirmation. If it wasn't her, but someone dressed like her—he had to know for sure.

"Yes." Not even a hint of guilt. "It was the safest and fastest way to figure out the potential hotspots and territory borders. I came to your place right after to watch anime with you."

Truth.

Dex didn't even know what to say. He was furious and impressed all at the same time, plus he was still very attracted to her.

Even more so than before, if he were honest with himself.

"You broke into my building, and then had the balls to come here and act like my friend?"

"I wasn't acting," she snapped, purple eye flashing. "I was doing my job. My personal life had nothing to do with it until I could no longer separate the two."

Dex narrowed his eyes and studied her. "Before I found out who you were, I was going to offer the hunter a job."

Nova froze, disbelief all over her face and in her scent. “Why?”

He shrugged and gave her a lazy smile. “A hunter is a valuable asset, but one with that kind of skill is priceless. You took down fifteen shifters without even trying. I couldn’t even imagine what would have happened if you hadn’t been holding back.”

“I don’t kill people who don’t deserve it,” she hissed. “And I’m not a tool to be used and then thrown away.”

The scent of her fury was honestly the most delicious thing he’d ever smelled, and Dex felt it trigger his feral side. He ran his tongue over his canines, the metal in his tongue clinking against his teeth.

“I never said you were a tool. I said your skills are extremely valuable.”

“And if I refuse?”

Dex slid off the bed and rolled his shoulders back, enjoying the weight of his wings and the fact that he no longer had to hide them with her. “Then you’re free to go.”

Nova stood, staring at him like she didn’t quite believe him. “I don’t understand.”

He whirled around and yanked her forward, so she was pressed against him. Dex purred his satisfaction at the feel of her. “You’re not a threat to me or my organization since I know for a fact we aren’t breaking the Council’s precious law. So, I’m letting you go. But don’t assume for a second that I’m not going to hunt you.”

She shivered and a flicker of fear went through her. “If you’re going to hunt me, then just kill me now.”

Dex chuckled and took her face in his hands. “Oh, I have no intention of killing you.” He leaned down then and kissed her.

Nova gripped his arms hard enough it hurt, but the way she practically melted into him, opening her mouth to give him access...

Dex lost it.

He grabbed her thighs and picked her up, her legs wrapping around his waist, her arms going around his neck. The way her fingertips brushed his wings had him losing his mind and Dex kissed her hard, sliding his tongue into her mouth to give her a taste, teasing as he held her.

Nova kissed him back like she'd been wanting to do this since the very beginning. The scent of her arousal wrapped around him, and Dex's grip tightened on her.

Before he completely lost control, he put her down. "The choice is yours, Nova."

Dex turned and left before he took her right then and there.

Now that he knew who she was, he had no intention of letting her go. It didn't matter how long it took either.

Nova was going to be his .

Continue Dex and Nova's story in Demon Touched