

Praise for Sugar and Sin

Fallon and Astrid, along with all their friends left me feeling like I'd spent time watching a movie I couldn't help but watch, and I know that when I came to the last page I was hanging for the next installment of this series. As authors Stella and Audra Price have written a fabulous beginning to their Eververse series. Their characters tempt, tease and enthrall, and if that doesn't work they'll just kidnap you and take you along for the ride anyway. I can't wait for to read what else will happen in the rest of this series because you know it will only get better and better.

**4.5 stars Reviewer: Sheryl, E-cata
Sensual**

Stella and Audra Price have been a bright new light in dark fantasy throughout the last year. Their Eververse series is new and imaginative, and Sugar and Sin doesn't disappoint! It's hot and sexy, dark and dangerous. Stella and Audra never fail to create exciting characters who will stay in the readers' head long after the book is done and the story resolved.

Ash Arceneaux, Imagozine

All the characters whether main or secondary are interesting and leave you wanting to know what makes them tick. I think the authors did this

to pique our interest and keep us reading.

4 Lyra, Suzette, RoRR Reviews

...one gets the feeling they're peeking inside the private lives of some incredibly interesting people, a sort of fantasy voyeurism that is quite literally addictive.

Kelly, Aorrag Reviews

I was captured by this new world almost immediately by all the characters and how they intertwined together. While Astrid and Fallon have not quite yet achieved their eternal happy ever after, they are well on their way and I bet by the end they will overcome and grab it. I found that the various types of creatures/characters that appeared in the Eververse all grabbed my attention and made the plotline even that much more intriguing. I will freely admit that I am rapidly becoming an Eververse junkie and will be watching for the next book in the series.

Jo, Joyfully Reviewed

Watch out people, `cause this brand new story will have you at the edge of your seat. It will have you addicted from the very first chapter. Be warned you will not want to put this book down once you start. Sugar and Sin will draw you in and have you desperately craving the next one in this series.

Anya, Enchanting Reviews

SUGAR AND SIN

A tale of the Eververse

Stella and Audra Price



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Sugar and Sin: A Tale of the Eververse

A Tease Publishing Book/E book

Copyright© 2007 Stella & Audra Price

ISBN: 987-1-934678-11-4

Cover Artist: Stella Price

Interior text design: Stacey Sierra

Excerpt from Fire in His Eyes by Stella and Audra Price

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Out October 2007 in Trade Paperback

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Swansboro, North Carolina 28584-0234

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So many people have helped us along the way and without them this book wouldn't be published. To our families, without your continued support in our dreams we wouldn't be where we are now, and we love you all for putting up with us.

To our wonderful better halves, thanks for all the understanding and the support. We love you so much, there are no words.

Our executive committee, who has been with us from the beginning, Lucien, Anita, Sarah, and Suzette, thanks for lending an ear, a voice, and a laugh when we needed it. You guys rock.

Jenny and Nadia, our awesome friends and moderators at Shadow Heights. Thanks for being you and for keeping the homefires burning while we made Eververse a literary reality. We love you so much.

Susan, our fantastic editor. Your expertise has helped us mold this and we learned so much from you it's scary. Thank you forever.

And to Tabitha and Tonya, who have helped us take that next step with this series. Ladies, we adore you and love that you brought us to our new home.

Even when we were nothing, you believed in us and in him, enraptured and seduced by his darkness. Suzette, this one is for you.

Prologue

It was late as Alec Mallory ran down the dark street. A bag of stolen silverware and trinkets was slung over his shoulder, almost forgotten, if not for the clanking sound that it made as it bounced off his shoulder. It was making too much noise— going to get him caught. He briefly toyed with the idea of ditching it and coming back for it in the morning. The stuff was slim pickings anyway.

He quickly quelled the thought. Mallory was many things, but he wasn't one to give up the loot. There was nobody behind him. If he ditched his load, and there was nobody there, he'd have to explain to Cinder why there were no shiny things for her to play with. Then he'd have one angry fire demon on his hands, and nobody wanted that.

This made perfect sense to him as he slowed his pace to a fast walk, trying to calm his body. It wasn't as if anyone should be after him anyway. He'd always kept his nose clean, and the estate he'd hit tonight had been unoccupied for weeks. However, his senses were never wrong, and his body was stuck in panic-flight mode. He kept catching a whiff of a scent that he couldn't quite decipher. Well, he could've, given long enough, but it disappeared too quickly.

Whatever it was, it was good, and it was hiding from him. Maybe it was scared of him. Mallory grinned viciously at the thought before quickly dismissing it. He was a werewolf, and he was good enough to know when he was being stalked.

He changed direction, veering left onto a busy road. Normally, after a job, he tried to stay as far away from people as he could. Tonight, however, was different. He needed to mingle, to mix his scents with the humans. None of this would help him if a demon was after him, though. Demons, in any shape or form, were always bad. Sure, they looked human enough, and the bargained ones had all been humans once. But for the most part, they were just evil. The full-blooded ones collected souls to keep their sanity, and that was just wrong in Mallory's book. He may turn furry during a full moon, but at least he had a soul.

Not that all demons were twisted. His Cinder, back at his house, was a prime example. She was the weakest level of fire demon. Poor girl didn't even know she *was* a demon until he'd pointed it out to her in a bar. Someone in her family must have bargained his or her own soul and those of all their descendents to some demon, then fucked off with the power, leaving all their descendents powerless and soulless.

To think that someone could do such a thing, or ever be in such a situation where they could sell their soul for power, disgusted the were. *Eh, that's the problem with humanity. If the world were a wolf pack, people would be better off. It kept things simple.*

At least coming across a demon of any kind in Scotland was rare. Scotland and Britain, as a whole, were left to the wolves. He stopped by a shop window and checked out his reflection, trying to gather if there was anything that looked out of place. To his dismay, the street was almost empty. All of the sober people and shopkeepers had closed up for the evening and left for the night, gone to their loving partners and honest homes.

All that was left were the drunks staggering out of the various pubs. Mallory wasn't a bad man, really. He stole things from the more fortunate. He made some cash from people's stupidity and recklessness. But he wasn't evil, not by a long shot, and he certainly wouldn't have been caught dead selling his soul to any demon. A cold shiver ran up his spine, and he shook his head to clear it as he tried to turn his thoughts away from demons.

He was about to turn away when he spotted a man sitting on the wall across the street, talking to a pair of inebriated girls. Mallory knew they were drunk because he could smell the alcohol on them from across the street. His eyes narrowed as he took in the other man's lean frame. Most of the man's jaw-length hair was tied back, and he had one of those annoying moustache-beard things. *Fucker looks like a fucking musketeer with that shit on his face. D'Artagnan*, he thought, mentally naming him after one of the musketeers of legend, and chuckled. The man's jaw was effeminate, and his cheekbones were high. Mallory snorted, a growl escaping his lips before he could stop it. *Guy looks like a bloody poofter, yet the girls are still pawing*

after him.

Suddenly, “D’Artagnan” looked up and winked straight at him. It took all of Mallory’s control not to jump back in surprise. D’Artagnan stood and grinned evilly, tipped an imaginary hat, and slid out of existence. Mallory’s blood ran cold. *Shit! A teleport demon.*

Shit, shit, shit. Mallory half-jogged to the nearest phone box, threw himself in, and shoved a shiny pound coin in the slot. He dialed his home number, praying that Cinder was sober enough to reach the phone. She picked up on the second ring, her dulcet tones coming through the line loud and clear.

“Hello?”

“Cinder, it’s me.”

“Ooh, Alec, how did it go? Look, I was thinking about what you said last night and you’re—”

“Cinder, this really isn’t a good time.” He cut her off impatiently, keeping all of his senses open, trying to pick up any hint of danger.

There was a long pause; then she sighed. “It’s never going to be a good time for you, is it?”

“We’ll discuss it later, Cinder, honest.”

“Well, I won’t want to discuss it—”

“Ashlyn, please!” he begged. The use of her first name stopped her rant; he never used her first name. Since the day he’d met her family, she’d been dubbed Cinderella, and the name stuck.

“What’s happened?”

“I don’t know. Probably nothing, but I think I’m being followed,” Mallory told her, hoping he was wrong. “Listen to me, Ash. I want you to get

the money from the safe, along with our passports. Get out and meet me at the hotel we talked about, and I'll be there before you finish your first Jack and ice." *If I make it.*

He could hear her rummaging around. "Um, okay, baby. I'll meet you there."

"You bet you will, Cinder. It's probably nothing. I just like to be careful."

"Yeah, you'd better. Don't go and get yourself killed just to get out of our conversation."

He laughed. "Just get out the house, and we'll talk when I see you."

"Sure thing, hon. I'll see you there."

She hung up, and he was left listening to the buzzing sound of the dial tone. He replaced the handset and walked back out to the street, leaving the bag of stuff in the cubical. If an honest person found it, they might even hand it in. He growled at the thought of his stolen goods being returned to the owners.

He needed water. He didn't know much about teleport demons, only that the bargained ones couldn't cross water, where, as a wolf, he would have the upper hand. He knew that his Cinder would be safe, so now was the time to get even with the demon for making him lose his goods. The wolf followed his nose to water, picking up speed.

He could hear somebody running behind him and turned to confront his pursuer. The man was wiry and shorter than Mallory, who automatically dismissed the unobtrusive guy. The guy smiled and held out the bag of loot Mallory had left behind.

"Hey, mate, you left this," he said, his

Londoner accent coming through thick. He shook the bag lightly, causing it to rattle and clink. "It sounds valuable." The guy laughed.

Mallory grinned. *Stupid prick*. He shook his head. "Yeah, thanks, man."

He was moving to grab the bag when he heard a noise coming from behind him just before he felt cool steel pressed to his throat. He froze as he was, pulled tightly against a hard body behind him.

"Fallon, this one ain't no great shakes at keeping on the move, is he? Stupid puppy."

The wiry one laughed. "Fuck, Feyd, he's dumb all right. Kind of insulting this needed our attention, to be honest..."

Mallory partially shifted into his wolf form while in the grip of the one holding him, ignoring the blade at his throat. He turned to attack D'Artagnan, knocking the knife out of his hand before going for his throat. He managed to rake his claws down his captor's neck and shoulder just before the butt of the wiry man's gun was brought down on the back of his neck, and he fell to the floor. The world went black.

The voice he heard as he slipped out of consciousness held a hint of amusement and a lot of venom. "Sleep well, pup. We're gonna have a real fun time with you before we're done."

Chapter One

Seconds after he plugged in his VAIO, Feyd heard the genteel tone of his Instant Messenger program ringing in a new message. He shook his head, walked past the hotel room mirror, and blanched as he saw himself. Fourteen hours of traveling was not weighing too well on him, but he still looked pretty damn good. He reached up and ran a hand over his goatee and moustache and realized he did need a trim. As one of the lucky individuals that had sparse facial hair, he could never grow a full beard, but women seemed to like the way he looked. Brown hair cropped neatly and brown eyes his mother constantly remarked on as being the perfect shade of chocolate. Medium skin, a body just muscular enough that it was sexy but not overbearing and great style. Women did indeed enjoy him a lot. He turned from his reflection to the computer and the waiting message.

Fallon485: *Hey.*

It was Fallon. *Who else would it be? Georgie?* Feyd thought to himself. He started typing his response.

Feydondemand: *Hey yourself! I swear, not ten minutes in the room and already we are talking. Now I know why George separated us.*

Fallon485: *We better get this job over with quickly. You think you can manage that, Nightly?*

Feyd sat back in his desk chair, knowing his condescending prick of a partner would go on a writing tangent. Two seconds later, another message popped up.

Fallon485: *Man, I really have to kill something worthy of my skills. Girls are too fucking easy. It pisses me off that we have to trail halfway around the fucking world just because she's decided to be awkward. It's inconsiderate is what it is. I have time coming up. I have things that I want to do. Our marks never stop to consider us, or how their running affects me. If she did, I think she'd be a little more sympathetic and just hand herself over. Hey, you up for a game of poker?*

Hmm, poker. That could work. Feyd thought, smiling. His fingers flew over the keyboard.

Feydondemand: *Always up for poker, just don't tell George. You know how he gets, about us screwing around on the company's dime. You didn't mention the other night at the club, did you? Lord, I seriously thought we were caught when that chick you brought back refused to leave. How*

did you take care of that, anyway?

His question was one he knew Fallon wouldn't want to answer. No matter how close they were, there were certain things one just didn't admit to. He laughed to himself anyway as he typed, wondering what Fallon would type back.

Fallon485: You don't want to know. So, we on for tonight? It's kind of sad how you always lose your money; you'd almost think that you enjoyed it. As for screwing around, is it just me, or does George really need to get his rocks off?

Feyd smirked at Fallon's not so subtle subject change but took the bait anyway.

Feydondemand: As usual you are quite the conversationalist. George needs to really get his ticket punched, but dude, I'd hate to be the chick with that job. Lord, I heard that the last chick he hung out with is like seriously deranged. I wouldn't wish George on anyone. So, yeah, speaking of getting rocks off, think we should disregard the old fucker and hit up that club downstairs?

Fallon485: He really does get creepy. I heard about this one time with this whore, real pretty-like, he fucked up her face so she couldn't make a living anymore...he likes to hurt them, and man that's just sick. Sick and unnecessarily cruel. So, I vote let the bastard get his own. I'm not going to

clean up his fucking mess. He's a fucking psychopath...and that's coming from me.

Feyd paused before typing his response. It was dangerous territory, and with George, one never knew if he was watching or not. Still, it had to be said.

Feydondemand: Honestly, I think we might have to get rid of George. He's really a detriment to our whole team. I mean, what's a little play time with some fine ass girlies? So, do we at least know where the hell this "Cinder" girl is, anyway? George did mutter something last night about New York, but do you even think he knows where the hell we are going? I hope that Fallwell's contact has some info for us, or we are totally SOL. I don't think I mind the states as much although the ladies here really make you work for it. So, I think we need to keep Georgie-porgy away from the mark. I have a feeling that with him involved in the extraction, nothing good can follow.

Nope, Fallon will not be happy about New York, Feyd thought as he finished typing and hit the send button.

Fallon485: New York? Fuck that! It's been too fucking long. I want to go home. We're doing this fast, never mind keeping George away from the target. We're just pussy-footing around. Why don't we just give him the job and go to Hawaii? No one will ever know.

Feyd cringed; he had been expecting this.

Fallon485: No way man, this needs to be done fast. I agree he's a little prick, and if he insists one more time that I call him sir, I'll kick him so far up the ass that he'll think Rockport makes hats...wait, they do make hats....

Feyd pictured that and started laughing. He began reading Fallon's response, and even over the Instant Messenger, he could feel the anger held in check.

Fallon485: I'll just have to give him a real hard slap. But we can't kill him. He's one of us...just a lot creepier and a total control freak. We unfortunately need him. He'll live while he's still useful to us. When we get another clairvoyant, we arrange an accident.

Feyd smiled at the screen. There was a reason he really liked Fallon and had since they'd met four years before. They had been forced to work together for the good of the organization after Fallon had gone through a number of partners, both male and female. Feyd was Fallwell's last able-bodied operative that didn't flat out refuse to work with the powder keg that was Fallon Ipwhisk.

He chuckled to himself, remembering the day he'd met Fallon. They'd gone drinking in a bar then hit up a strip club not more than two hours later. They had bonded successfully over a few rounds,

some titty-shaking, and a very risqué bet.

Feyd was a few years older than Fallon, but compared to all the shit Fallon had seen, Feyd wasn't even close to being worldly. He had gotten into the business on a lark, because of a woman, while Fallon had honed his skills and cut his teeth, so to speak, out of necessity. Feyd was beyond respectful of Fallon's privacy, and even though some tidbits about Fallon's past had come out here and there during drunken tirades, his partner's past remained an enigma.

In the past four years, the two men had become as close as two people in their positions could get, working and playing together. Their adventures were nothing like Feyd had ever had before getting paired up with Fallon, and he was damn sure that had he never met the teleport demon, his life would've been just as dull as it had been working with their other associate, George Bateman.

Their team was well-rounded, even if they all didn't get along. Feyd's demonic vision powers, Fallon's teleport abilities, and George's attention to detail made them Roman Fallwell's premiere team for pretty much any job, and they were always ready for anything.

While Feyd preferred the routine breaking-and-entering jobs, Fallon enjoyed the more malicious things they had to do: the torture, the interrogation, and the killing. No matter what they did, they were like a modern-day James Bond duo in that no matter where they were, women flocked to them.

Their adventures, some good and some bad,

had given them plenty of *Letters to Penthouse* type scenarios, from breaking into a sorority house by mistake, to getting on a plane inhabited by twenty gorgeous women headed to a *Hawaiian Tropics* swimsuit competition. They were indeed lucky. Except for the major *faux pas* of ending up at a transvestite convention, they pretty much had no regrets. And Feyd, since being paired up with Fallon, had no regrets at all.

He chuckled and typed his response. George would have to be take care of, accident or no.

Feydondemand: *Yeah, Hawaii sounds good. Shit, the hell if I can't and won't kill him! Hell, I'm the first one to get a crack at his overly pompous ass.*

As he started typing, his cell phone began to ring, and the air was filled with the tinny tones of *Super Freak*.

"Feyd."

As he answered, he heard the unmistakable breathing of George Bateman, the team leader. "It's George."

Duh, Feyd thought as he rolled his eyes.

"Looks like we are heading out to Shadow Heights, by way of San Francisco and Vegas."

"Right. You call Fal yet?"

"No, you first. As always. Get your filthy ass outta bed and take a shower. Clean all the whore off you, and tell Fallon. I'm not calling his smug ass. You got fifteen minutes." George's command came in clear across the line, and it had enough bite to

make Feyd seethe.

“Ok, but riddle me this, Batman. Exactly how the hell are we going to find this chick?” Feyd snapped back.

“Let me worry about that. Just get your ass outta bed, get in the shower, and get down to the car. Pronto!”

Feyd held the phone away from his ear as George raged. “Yes, sir!” He hung up the phone and began to type again.

Feydondemand: Excellent. I'm glad we are on the same page. Georgie just called and said we are heading to Shadow Heights, and I quote: "Get your filthy asses out of bed, clean all the whore off you, and get in the car. Fifteen minutes." Fucking jerk. I swear I don't have the faintest clue where the hell Shadow Heights is, but she better be there, or I'm all for the plan to Hawaii. George, on the other hand, will just have to fucking relax.

Fallon485: Shit, it better not be cold there. I hate the cold. I thought you left the whore at the club...your dick better not get us in trouble. He really does need to get laid. Maybe we should get him one for his birthday again. The look on his face the last time...Shit, that's my phone ringing. He better not piss me off, or I'll slit his fucking gullet, the fag.

Feyd couldn't have agreed more.

Feydondemand: *Yeah, the bird left a while*

ago, as if I keep them around for more than what's needed, not that she had any talent. I need a girl that will put me in the hospital. Okay, I'm out to clean my ass. See you downstairs in a few.

Fallon485: Cool. I'm going for a shower, Tell G to cool his ass 'bout it. Oh, and I'd pay to see you get put in hospital by a girl.

Feyd chuckled. That was something he'd like to see as well.

Feydondemand: Karma and all that jazz. See you in a bit, he typed, and he signed off.

George checked his watch. It was well past time that they checked out of the rooms, and he was majorly pissed at Feyd and Fallon for being what he liked to term "Boy Scouts."

"Jackasses, both of them." It had been four years since he'd been paired with the two half-demons, and he was regretting it. They were young and wet behind the ears, and he couldn't stand their attitudes or their blatant disregard for the rules. They had yet to follow an order coming from his mouth without bitching about it.

His latest brainstorm had been to separate them in different rooms on different floors when they got to a new city to search for their mark. He mentally kicked himself repeatedly because he'd failed to see them sitting in their rooms chatting on their laptops. The past four nights since they had

gotten to the States, they had either sat alone and chatted in their rooms or found some girls to pass the time. Still, George couldn't get them to do anything to help out the investigation. It was he, *he* who met with the contacts, he who called Fallwell, and he who made all the plans. They were being what they were paid to be: hired muscle, and he hated it.

So, now he was standing here, in the lobby of the Fairmount Los Angeles Hotel, waiting for them to finally appear.

Feyd and Fallon sauntered up, looking rather pleased with themselves. George nodded at them as they fell in line walking toward the door.

George cast them a sidelong look. "You guys get rid of the girls? I don't want another fiasco like the Berlin incident."

"Come on, Batman, can I help it if chicks just can't get enough of this?" Feyd asked as he grabbed lewdly at his crotch.

"Never mind. Listen, we are on our way to San Fran. Apparently Fallwell's contact at the Ridgewood saw our little nightingale not three weeks ago. That's the best I got. What about you guys?" George sneered at them behind his glasses.

Feyd shimmied his glasses down his nose. "Not much, unless you need to know the trim of that chick's bikini line."

George felt his searing anger rise, causing his face to flush. It was obvious from the gleeful look on Feyd and Fallon's faces that they enjoyed pissing him off.

"Exactly my point. You guys should really start

pulling your weight,” he snapped, trying to calm himself.

“Hey, don’t you worry, Georgie. We know what we have to do, and as soon as we acquire the mark, we’ll do it. Savvy?”

The tone in Fallon's voice sealed the matter. George was crazy, but not stupid, and there was no way he was starting shit with them here and now. *When the time’s right, I’ll dump my charges and take off. Say it was an accident. Hey, it wouldn’t be the first time.*

“Okay, kiddies, let’s just get in the truck and hightail it to San Fran. We have a meeting at eleven p.m.”

Feyd and Fallon slipped into the car. Fallon drove, with Feyd sitting shotgun. Fallon looked back at George in the rearview mirror. “So, they got hot chicks in San Fran?”

George sneered. This time he had them. “If you like your ladies with extra appendages. San Fran is quite widely known for its transvestites.”

The two men in the front seat were dumbfounded, their jaws hanging open. Fallon started the car and started out, driving in silence.

Ba-zing! George thought. *Finally shot down those two chuckleheads. Now I know how to keep them quiet.* George sat back in the seat and smiled as downtown Los Angeles began to fade from view.

Having just arrived in San Francisco, they were sitting at the hotel bar. George was checking them

into the hotel while Feyd was checking out the receptionist, and so naturally missed what Fallon had said, causing Fallon to repeat himself.

“I said, fuck it. How do you ever get anything done? Man, I love you like a brother, but sometimes you’re like one giant shaft. She’s not even a seven.” He sat back in his chair and took a swig of beer, waiting for Feyd’s response.

Feyd blinked and turned from his bird watching. “Huh? Fal, did you just say that you loved me?”

That he picked up on? *Typical*. Fallon sighed and shook his head, a small smile gracing his features. “I was asking if you wanted to...grab something to eat.”

A lewd grin spread across Feyd’s face as he began to get the hint. “I don’t know, Fal. We really should stay put like good little boys. Then again, I’m really hungry. Should we pick up something for Batman over there?” He gestured over to where George was.

Fallon shook his head. “No, let the bastard get his own. Maybe one of those lady-boys he was so hot about in the car.”

Feyd choked on his beer as he was taking a drink. “Mental image of Georgie wearing a dress and heels? God, that would be one ugly chick. So, you think he’ll let us out to play?” he asked with another glance toward the reception desk.

“We’re not grounded. He doesn’t really have a choice. As long as we keep our noses clean, there’s nothing he can do but moan.”

Feyd nodded in agreement and finished his

drink, signaling to the girl behind the bar for another. The girl, whose nametag read *Alice*, came over and cleared the empties from the table. As she walked away, she took Fallon's attention with her.

Now there's a seven if ever I saw one. His gaze slid up and down the girl, a small, thoughtful smile on his face. Alice glanced over at the boys, making eye contact with Fallon, whose smile deepened seductively before he once again trailed his gaze down her body and back up to her eyes. She blushed and turned most of her attention back to getting beers. Fallon looked back at Feyd, who was staring pointedly at him.

"What?"

Feyd nodded his head toward Alice. "And you say I'm bad? We've been here a quarter of an hour, and already you're having eye sex with Little Miss-Brings-Beer." He sighed dramatically, wiping an imaginary tear from his eye and sniffing. "My little boy's grown up so fast. Seems like only yesterday I had to explain what end goes in."

Fallon glared at him from his side of the table. "Watch it," he practically growled.

Feyd, eyes widening, held up his hands in defeat. "Don't mean anything by it, mate."

Fallon nodded, his mood lightening. "Besides, what's wrong with a little fishing?" His shit-eating grin was back, firmly on his face as he glanced back at Alice, who looked up and shyly smiled back.

"Nothing's wrong with fishing, but I'm not gonna watch you reel one in when I could be landing me a big one."

Typical Feyd, never one to watch.

“It’s because my tackle’s bigger isn’t it?” Fallon deadpanned.

Feyd opened his mouth to reply but was interrupted when Alice returned with the beers. She set them down and pulled out a pen and pad from somewhere.

“Hi, I’m Alice, and I’ll be working on the bar all night. Would you like something to eat before the main kitchen closes for the night? We do room service after eight, but that can get expensive,” she informed them with a smile, which was mostly for Fallon.

“My friend and I were just about to go out for dinner.”

Taking that as his cue to check on George, Feyd took his beer and left to flirt with the receptionist.

“Oh...okay, then.” Her voice held a hint of disappointment.

As she turned to leave, Fallon gently caught her hand and looked up into her eyes. “And what does ‘room service’ entail, exactly?” Fallon narrowed his eyes slightly, letting Alice know exactly what kind of service he wanted.

“Well, you call down to the bar and let me know exactly what you want, and I’ll come right up with it.” She broke eye contact, looking at the floor.

“Exactly what I want?” he purred, as she lifted her head slightly. His gaze caught hers again.

She had to swallow a few times before answering. “Anything.”

Fallon smiled. *Bingo.*

He was about to ask the times of aforementioned room service when George

stormed in with Feyd hot on his heels. Before George got the chance to say anything, Fallon turned to Alice. "I'd better go. Mother does get very cross when her little boys are out having fun." He nodded toward an irate George, and with an eye roll and a wink, he took his beer and left her to join them.

As he walked toward them, Fallon noticed two things. The first was the look of sheer rage on George's face, and the second was the smug, amused way Feyd was holding himself. *What's he done now? Three minutes; that's all he had. This has to be a record, even for him.* As he reached them, George practically threw two room cards at him.

"Those are your room cards. Get that out of my sight." He pointed at Feyd, who smiled sheepishly and gave a little wave. "We leave at dawn, and I'm not waking the two of you up. I'll leave without you," was George's parting shot as he raged off down the hall, muttering under his breath.

"So, did you stick your hook in her?" Feyd broke the silence.

Fallon shook his head. "Not enough time. Maybe later. What did you do to George?"

"Nothing much. I just told Claire, the receptionist, that George was a drag queen by the name of Madame Tongue, and that he needed his room urgently so that he could get access to the dresses that he plans on wearing for his live sex show in an hour. You think I went too far?"

Once Fallon had gained control of his laughter, he asked, "Did you offer her free tickets?"

“Obviously,” he said, after another roar of laughter.

Fallon stifled a laugh as well. “Yeah, you did the right thing. I don’t think you could dangle a piece of meat like George over a woman and not offer tickets. We better go before he comes back down and we have to kill him.”

"Oh, my God, you're English, ain't you?"

Feyd, who was in the middle of regaling Fallon with stories of his youth, burst out in fits of laughter. Fallon turned around to the woman who asked the question. "No, actually I'm from a small island just south of North Korea."

He glared at the young, red-headed woman in front of him, who just blinked at him in stupidity. After a few seconds she got the joke.

"Ha, you're funny. But you are English...right?"

After it became apparent that Fallon wasn't going to answer, Feyd stepped in, licking his lips suggestively.

"I'm English, baby. You like my accent?"

The red-head smiled at him and batted her eyelashes. "Yeah, I like it a lot."

Feyd stepped up to her, snaking his arm around her waist. "Why don't I buy you a drink, and we can talk about England?"

Fallon shook his head. "You don't really like them with brains, do you?" he asked, loud enough for half the bar to hear.

Feyd grinned and shrugged. It was a

conversation they'd had before. All Feyd would've said was that he wasn't after their brains. The girl, for some reason, was insulted. She lifted her hand to slap Fallon, but she must have misjudged the space. When her hand reached the space where his face should have been, all she slapped was empty air, and he was standing a few inches back. She raised her hand again, but Feyd caught it and started to lead her toward the bar.

"Don't be long. Georgie isn't waking us up tomorrow."

"When am I ever long?" Feyd shouted over his shoulder. Fallon rolled his eyes and walked to the nearest table, glaring at its current occupants, who quickly left. The crowded nightclub was a bit too claustrophobic for Fallon's taste, but Feyd had insisted that it was the perfect place for some late night fishing. Fallon sighed at the thought of what his partner was up to, beginning to feel that he was getting too old for the game. *I just don't have the energy for this shit anymore. That mutt nearly got me. Nearly...but not quite.*

In truth, it had been Feyd who had grabbed Mallory before he'd done any further damage, but Fallon was still left with the scar—a reminder of what happened when you took your eyes off the ball. His mind began to wander, as it always did when he was alone. Back to happier times, not his childhood. Some people had happy childhood memories. Not Fallon, though.

Feyd's childhood had been happy. Even now he could go to his mother's for a hot bowl of homemade soup. He'd tell her stories while she

gave him disapproving glances and shook her head accordingly, as most people did at Feyd's stories. When he was finished, she'd always shake her head and smile at him and make some comment like, "My boy."

Sometimes, on the really bad days, when the memories and pain were still fresh and raw, Fallon hated him for that. Hated him for the simple fact that he'd been loved and looked after and still was. Feyd's mother was a fine woman, and Fallon himself would've done anything to protect her. She'd taken Fallon in and listened to his stories, too, with the same amount of kindness and concern. She'd tried to heal his old wounds with all the love and care he'd never had. It was too late, though; all the damage had already been done. He had no need for a mommy now.

Tonight, thankfully, wasn't one of those nights, so his mind went to the happy points in his life as he thought about another damn fine lady in his life. A certain French witch who was all curves and attitude. She had the power to back herself up, too, even if she was tiny. Pocket-sized, as he'd called her once, and ended up, much to his dismay, flat on his back after being thrown through a wall. The dismay ended just after she joined him in the rubble for one of the best and most satisfying tumbles Fallon had ever experienced.

She was the only female who'd ever been able to boss him around, and what was worse, he'd enjoyed it. Their brief but extremely pleasurable time together had been the best time in Fal's life. Nothing before it, or after it, had ever come close.

Every night and day they had spent together had been ecstasy, on both their parts.

He took another drink and sat farther back in his chair, letting the memories of that day wash over him. He closed his eyes, trying to remember her smell, like fresh apples with a hint of something he could never quite identify. As he sat there, he didn't notice a slightly flushed but very sated-looking Feyd sneaking up on him.

"You falling asleep on me, Fal?"

Slowly, Fallon pulled himself out of his memories and smiled at his friend. "Do I even have you dignify that with an answer? You finished?" He nodded his head toward the direction he'd seen Feyd taking the woman.

"Yeah, I finished. I'm here, ain't I? So, what were you thinking about so intensely?"

"Your mother."

Feyd opened his mouth to retort, but Fal cut him off, changing the subject before they could get into a fight.

"So, was she really a red-head?"

Feyd grinned in answer. Fallon could actually hear him going over the story in his head to get things right before he told it. They didn't call him "The Storyteller" for nothing. Fallon finished his drink and stood before Feyd could sit down. They had to be up early in the morning, and if they didn't go back the hotel now, there was a good chance that they never would.

Fallon listened halfheartedly to Feyd's story as the two walked back, his mind constantly wandering to that day in Paris with the beautiful

French girl...Astrid.

George looked over his handiwork once more, proofreading before he sent it. *I have outdone myself this time*, he thought with a smile on his face. *Fallwell needs Fallon for a job? Perfect. Now I just have to deal with little old Feyd...cake, simply cake.*

He read the message once more to himself.

Fallon:

Fallwell just called me, needs you to go back to London. He's got a job that requires your expertise, something about the Maltese Falcon. I didn't ask specifics, not that he'd give me any, and you know how he is. Anyway, you have a 7:55 flight out of here to Heathrow. Someone will meet you there. Feyd and I can handle the Intel, we will be going to NYC for a pick up for Fallwell, and then I think to Vegas.

Call me when you're done with the mission.

Bateman.

"That will have to do," he said to the air as he hit send. He closed his laptop, sat back in his chair, and closed his eyes. *Sweet bliss. One down, one to go.*

Fallon looked at the message and shook his head. *George really doesn't like me. Poor Feyd.* He started to type his own reply.

Georgie:

Fine, I'm out, but you better take care of Feyd. You know how he can get. Make sure he sticks around 'til I get back. If he's not still with you...let's just say that I'll hold you accountable for anything that happens in my absence. I'm out. Have fun, Georgie, and don't do anything I wouldn't do.
Fal.

He looked over the message to make sure his point to George was clear. *I think that just about covers it.* He sent the message, grabbed his bag, and headed down to the bar to tell Feyd where he was going.

Chapter Two

Ashlyn spared a glance at her reflection as she passed through the airport doors. *Oh, my God, I look disgusting. Well, not too bad, considering I've been running for my life the past forty-eight hours. But I still look bad.*

She adjusted her bag, took out her passport, and went to pick up her tickets at the reception desk. After much annoyance and some glaring from the heavily made up clerk, she finally got checked in.

First class, Astrid. Typical. Can't complain, though, she really came through. Hate to think where I'd be right now without her.

She had first met Astrid when she was shopping. They'd argued over the last pair of boots that were on sale, which would have been perfect on Ash. Astrid had to have them and offered to buy Ashlyn any other pair. They spent the rest of the day shopping for boots and soon became fast friends. When Astrid turned out to be a good contact for Alec, it had been a bonus and a reason to keep up their friendship.

Ashlyn went to the sky bar and used the spiffy card to open the door. *God, who designs these things? Looks like a brothel, so furry and shiny. I*

hope the toilets aren't as bad. Maybe they have a shower. I need a shower.

She walked to the bathroom and stood in front of the mirror, studying her reflection. She looked tired and emaciated. Her hair, normally styled to perfection, now lay flat, matted, and greasy. What little makeup she wore was now long gone or smeared beyond recognition. She opened her bag and set about fixing herself or at least making her reflection a bit more presentable. After all, this was first class.

When she emerged fifteen minutes later, she felt a little bit more like herself again. Her hair was wet and slicked back, and her makeup back to normal. Luckily, she had a change of clothes; she'd grabbed a small black dress before she left the house, which she now had on under her leather jacket. She'd even managed to pick up travel-sized deodorant at the drugstore and had brushed her teeth. Added all together with her best black boots, she didn't look too bad. The boots were comfy, too. Silver tipped, ridiculously expensive, and courtesy of that first shopping trip with Astrid. She stretched slightly as she walked to the bar and sat down.

"Four fingers of Jack, please, with ice," she ordered, sparing a smile for the bartender.

"Certainly. What mixer would you like with that?"

She cocked her head to one side, looking at him dumfounded. "Mixer? I already said ice, didn't I?" The bartender nodded. "Then, no, why would I pollute it with cola? Just gimme the drink."

She was just about to pay when a man sat down

next to her and handed the bartender money. "I'll pay for that."

She glared at him. "I can pay for my own drinks, thank you."

The handsome stranger just smiled infuriatingly. "Then I'm sure you can pay for the next round, and you're more than welcome."

His smile never faltered. He had a very nice shape to him, strong shoulders and arms, and an honest expression. *If he keeps smiling like that I'm gonna have to...move seats. I hate being me.*

"Your ice cubes are melting. Are you okay? You look a bit upset."

She looked up at him, into his dark blue eyes. He was nice looking—well balanced. Probably had a great ass. Most men did. It wasn't fair. Then she looked down at the drink she held clasped in her hands. The ice was melting. *Damn power.* "I'm fine, thanks. I do need more ice, though."

His face light up, as if it were a task he was born to do. He reached into a tanker that was on the bar and came out with a scoop of ice. "There you are. Ice, extra cold."

He looked so happy and proud of himself. All he'd done was get ice. His expression was so childlike and innocent she burst out laughing.

"See, that's better. A face as lovely as yours should always have a smile on it."

Cheesy line, but effective. *I kinda like this guy. Plus, he's hot.* "I'm sure you've seen a lot of pretty faces in your time."

He ducked his head and nodded, the smile still on his face. "A few, yes, but not one has ever turned

down a free drink."

She looked up at him and held his gaze. "I pay my own way when I can."

He nodded again; this time the smile was gone. "I respect that. So, what has you so upset? It wasn't your boyfriend, was it?"

Ash turned back to her drink and took a long gulp before turning back to him.

"My boyfriend's dead. Well, he wasn't really my boyfriend. He could have been. We...he's dead."

The man's eyebrows shot up in surprise, and his face took on a thoughtful expression that Ash wasn't quite sure she liked. "That is...interesting. Now you're here, all alone. Poor little lost bunny in the rain, hiding from the wolves. Hell, I respect that, too. You're quite the woman, Ashlyn Co'shott."

He slammed his empty bottle down, and Ash jumped out of her seat and glared suspiciously at him.

"It's on your ticket." He pointed to the ticket sitting on the bar. She nodded at the ticket.

This guy just flipped on me. He's gone all "redrum." Out loud, she said, "Oh."

There was an announcement over the speakers, one of those ones that nobody can decipher and everyone strains to hear. The man stood, keeping a careful distance from Ash while he gathered his things.

"Saved by the bell. That's my flight. It has been a pleasure spending time with you. I'll have to get that drink some other time, perhaps? I'm sure if you're still up and about in a few years time, our

paths will cross, one way or the other. My name's Cash."

"Yeah, maybe. Bye, Cash."

He smiled warmly then left. She stood for a while then eventually sat down and went back to her drink.

Paris International was, as usual, crawling with people. Astrid gave a quiet thanks to the goddess that there were so many people around as Linus, walking beside her on a leash, was damn near invisible to those milling about her. He panted and he growled, but most people paid no mind to the overly-large English bulldog strapped into a blue harness.

She made her way over to the schedule board to check on her flight. So far, it was on time. She turned to head for the check in counter and bent down to scoop Linus up into her arms. "Linus, you really are getting heavy." To that, the dog just snorted. She spotted a clerk with no line beckoning her over.

"Good afternoon, and what can I help you with today?" the clerk asked, eyeing Linus with a faint smile.

"Yes, I have two first class seats booked on flight 973 to New York."

"Just a minute," the clerk said as she took Astrid's tickets for confirmation.

"Astrid Buchamps, seat 21-A, Linus Buchamps, 21-B." The clerk looked up. "Where is Linus

Buchamps? He must be here to check in.”

Astrid motioned to the dog in her arms. “Right here.”

The clerk, clearly used to strange stuff, simply nodded and said, “Okay, then. You have two layovers, one in Japan, the other Las Vegas, Nevada, before arriving in New York. If you don’t mind my asking, why are you taking such a long flight?”

Astrid smiled and scratched Linus behind his ear. “Business. I personally have to pick up an acquisition for my store in both places.” *Yeah, and if you believe that, I’ve got a bridge I can sell you.* Wasn’t that how the old American adage went?

The clerk smiled and finished checking them in. “Okay, Ms. Buchamps. All set.”

“Thanks. That was relatively painless. What’s next?”

“As one of our first-class passengers, you have the use of the Sky Bar. Here’s a card key.”

Astrid thanked the girl and began to make her way to the bar, her heart set on a drink before takeoff.

The bar was posh and drenched in velvet. *Christ, Liberace could have had his bedroom in here,* Astrid thought as she made her way over to the bar and a chick sitting by herself with what looked like a warm beer in her hand.

Linus went right for the girl. He scrambled up her leg, and she freaked out. “Linus! You turd! Where’s your bitch of a mother?”

“Tut, tut, tut. That’s ‘witch’ with a ‘w,’ Ash. When are you going to get it right?”

The two women hugged and sat back down at the bar. Astrid waved over the bartender. "Another round, and a bottle of water for Mr. Buchamps, here."

Ash gasped, obviously appalled. "Mr. Buchamps? Astrid, if you weren't so rich, you couldn't get away with being so goddamn insane."

"I'm not insane, I'm eccentric. It's the privilege of having money."

"So, where are we going there, chief? Why all the layovers and shit?"

"To keep whoever is after you off our tail. Drink up. Boarding is in less than twenty-five minutes."

Ashlyn was exhausted. The bottles of champagne on the plane hadn't helped much. Here they were, though, in Las Vegas. She had seen the strip from the plane as it landed, all lit up like a fire in the distance. Astrid had asked her if she wanted to stay in Vegas for a while, but she'd declined at the time. Even now, with the picture of the lights still fresh in her head, she was sure that she'd made the right choice. All she wanted to do was hide and maybe sleep.

Why was life so hard? And what made it worse was that she had to go to a special room to smoke. The terminal they were waiting in to get their connecting flight was a public one and didn't have all the amenities the private club rooms they had had the good luck of using up until now had. Astrid had suggested on the plane that they keep a lower

profile, in case someone was tipped off to their travel habits. God hated her, she was sure of it. She turned to Astrid, who was sleeping off her share of the champagne, and shook her a little.

"Ast, I'm gonna go for a cigarette."

The smaller woman, disturbed from her sleep, turned around in her seat and laid her head on the dog in the seat next to her.

"Jeez, Astrid, you really don't want to put your head so close to Linus. He really smells. Come on, Ast, I'm going, and if you wake up while I'm not here, you're gonna get upset and shit."

The dog lifted his head and glared at her before sighing deeply and putting his head back down. Ashlyn, ignoring Linus, grabbed Astrid's arm and really shook her.

"Astrid. Astrid. Astrid! My God, what are you, dead? Fine, if I pour water on you, you'll kill me. If I just leave, you'll kill me. What do you want from me, a note?" The dog sighed again, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. Ash frowned at him.

"I didn't ask for your advice," Ash told him. She fished in her bag until she found a pen and a receipt that she could write on.

Ast, gone to get a smoke. Tried to wake you, but you're out cold. It's kinda freakish.

She read aloud as she wrote the note. When she was finished, she looked at Linus. "How did that sound? Okay?" The dog glared at her and closed his eyes. "Yeah, sure, like you don't know what I'm saying. I know your game." Ash licked the note and stuck it to Astrid's head, then left for the smoking

area, laughing to herself.

Damn, I don't have a lighter on me. That bastard at the security check took it off me. As if I'm going to set the plane on fire while it's in flight. She sat down in the "Designated Smoking Area" and turned to the young woman next to her.

"Hi, could I, by any chance, borrow a lighter?"

The lady turned in her seat to face Ash while digging in her purse. "Of course you can, dear," she said in a low, baritone voice, causing Ashlyn to look up at her face.

Oh God, it's a man. She smiled politely, took the lighter, and used it to light the cigarette that was clasped in her lips. She handed back the lighter, taking in a few draws of nicotine. *Ah, I feel almost sane again.*

"So, are you passing through, or are you here for the men?"

Not wanting to be rude, but not wanting to start a conversation either, Ashlyn answered. "I'm just passing through, thanks." The man's expression didn't change. Clearly he expected to be asked in return. *Damn.* "You?"

She really didn't want to know if he was here for men. *Please don't say men...please don't say men. I couldn't keep my face straight.*

"Oh, I live here, dear. Picking up a friend in about twenty minutes inbound from abroad. But you...look at you. Do you live in Scotland?"

Go away, you strange man. "Yeah, sometimes...you know how life can be."

He cut her off, obviously not really caring about what she had to say. "Oh, I do. I used to have a

boyfriend from Scotland. He could keep it up all night if you know what I mean. Really hot."

Oh, God. That's just not right...at all. Crushing out her half-smoked cigarette, Ashlyn stood and gathered her bag. *I've never been so happy to deny myself a full visit to flavor country in my life.* "It was really nice meeting you and all. Thanks for the light."

She turned and walked back to where she had left Astrid and decided to skip getting something to eat.

It was toward the end of the flight from Las Vegas to New York, and Astrid was in deep thought as she stared straight ahead at the two seats in front of her. *It's almost been a year. I wonder if he remembers me. I'm probably just a nameless face in his bed. I'm reading too much into this. I'm sure he doesn't even remember me.* She nervously fingered a small medallion she was wearing around her neck. Ashlyn took notice.

"Ast, what's wrong? That's the sixth time you've started playing with that necklace. You're not scared to fly, are you?"

"Huh? Oh, no, sorry. I'm a bit preoccupied."

"So it seems. Going to tell me what's wrong?"

"Well, it's just...his birthday is coming soon, and—"

"Whoa, *his*? Astrid, in the time I have known you, not once have you ever mentioned a man, so spill it! Boyfriend? Lover? I have never known you

to even look twice at a guy. What gives?”

Astrid grabbed at the medallion once more and fidgeted. “Um, not my boyfriend. I’m sure he doesn’t consider himself that, but about a year ago, I met this guy and spent a month with him; then he was gone. He was perfect, and I miss him.” She shrugged. “And I’m trying to figure out if I should email him and say happy birthday. He probably doesn’t even remember me, but...I remember him.” She was still touching the medallion. “What should I do? I don’t want to look like an obsessed lunatic.”

“Email him! The worst that can happen is that he doesn’t remember you, right? Send him a little something to jog his memory. I know! Those art pictures you had taken!”

Her mood brightened. “That’s not a bad idea, Ash! Thanks. Now, what the hell do I say in the email?”

She dug her laptop from her bag and began composing. Ten minutes and much bottom lip-biting later, she declared to Ash that she was done. Linus, who was sleeping next to her, was on her lap in a second, licking her face, clearly as excited as she was.

“Linus! Oh! Out of my lap! Back to your seat, smelly!” He jumped back in his seat and promptly went back to sleep.

“Well, read it.”

*Fallon,
Hey. Remember me? Just wanted to say
happy birthday, hon. What’s attached is what
your present would have been if you were here. I*

miss you, cookie.
Astrid.

Ash looked at her, eyes wide. Astrid started to worry her bottom lip again. “How was that?”

“Cookie? You call him cookie?”

“Yeah, I did. He’s...um...he’s sweet, kinda smells like sugar cookies when you get up close and personal. Don’t look at me like that. If you knew him, you’d know he’s really not the ‘cookie’ kind of guy.”

“I’ll bet. Trust you not to fall for a normal guy. What is he, a hit man?”

“Um, no. Jewel thief. He and his counterpart, Feyd, are the very best.”

Ash laughed. “Figures. You going to send that?”

“Yeah, once we get on the ground.”

“Where we headed once we hit the ground?”

“Some little town upstate called Shadow Heights. I bought an old mansion there. It will be perfect for Crypt. And you can get paid to ‘not work’ all over again. It’ll be fun, and it’s inconspicuous. A good place to just blend in and disappear.”

At that moment, the *Fasten Seatbelt* sign went on, and the loudspeaker said they were on final descent to JFK. After thirty-six hours, they were finally here.

Chapter Three

Feyd wasn't talking to George, and that suited George just fine. *The less of his antics I have to deal with, the better.* They were in the rental car, heading toward their hotel. The meeting had gone as planned, a pick-up at a novelty bar called Barcode in Times Square. A package, small and wrapped in brown paper, for an envelope filled with money. The usual. George didn't want to know what was in the package, and thankfully he didn't have to. It would stay wrapped up until it made it to Fallwell's hands.

During the exchange, Feyd had kept quiet, looked menacing, and hadn't left George's side. George thought on this a bit and decided that he should try to keep the dynamic duo apart for as long as possible. *Yeah, maybe then I'll get some work done.*

He sat in the passenger seat and held what he used to refer to as the "Oh, shit! bar" in his youth—the roof side handle—as Feyd drove at suicidal speeds through the streets. "Feyd! Slow the fuck down! I don't wanna make it to the hotel dead!" He shook his head. *What is it about Nightly that makes me curse like a sailor?*

Feyd didn't even bother looking at him. "Aye

aye, Cap'n!" He slowed down a bit as he hit Fifth Avenue and skidded to a halt just in front of the hotel. Feyd finally looked at him and grinned. "We're here, and see? As much as I tried, you're still alive."

"Cute, Nightly," George said as he got out of the Hummer and walked into the building, knowing Feyd would be trailing him once he gave the keys to the parking attendant.

Check-in was virtually painless, as it always was here, and that was the reason why George always preferred to stay at the Plaza when in New York. Feyd marched up minutes after check-in was complete, and George handed him his room key. "Here, Nightly. Room 1116."

Feyd took his key and nodded, sneering at George. "I'm going out."

"The hell you are, Nightly," George said in an even and clipped tone.

Feyd glared at him. "Let me put it this way, Batman," he said in a low and menacing voice, his accent even thicker than usual. "We can do this one of two ways. One, you let me go, quit acting like my father and deal with it. I mean, how much trouble can I get in alone, right? Or two, I can knock you out, or drug you, and go anyway. So, Georgie? What's it going to be? The easy way? Or my favorite way?"

George looked at the grim determination on his associate's face and swallowed hard. *Shit, he's got that look in his eye. I'm fucked either way. At least if I let him go, I won't be incapacitated. Fallwell would be pissed if anything happened to the*

jackass. “Fine, Feyd. Have fun. We have a flight out tomorrow afternoon. Be downstairs by two. I don’t give a rat’s ass what you do till then.”

The black Porsche screeched to a halt, announcing Fallon’s arrival to whomever the fuck lived in the impressive house. He took his sunglasses off and squinted against the bright light. *Since when did we get sunshine in England? Here it goes. Let's see what freak Fallwell's paired me off with now.*

He climbed out of the car and headed to the front door, pausing to admire the giant ice sculpture in the front yard. It looked like an oak tree, with branches and tiny leaves that sparkled in the sunlight. As he approached the door, it was thrown open by a young-looking man. He scowled at Fallon, who raised an eyebrow in return, completely unfazed. *As if that look's going to scare me off.*

“What do you want?”

“Fallwell sent me.” Fallon paused then clarified. “I’m not selling anything.”

The man looked thoughtful for a second then grinned at him. “Well, in that case, you’re right on time, Fallon. Come on in.” The man stepped aside to let Fallon enter the huge country manor.

The first thing Fallon noticed was another huge ice sculpture in the center of the large room. This one was of a horse running through water, the splashes coming up over its body. The light from

the various windows reflected through it, casting rainbows onto the pale walls. Fallon walked over to it and held his hand out to touch it before thinking better of it and pulling back.

"It's okay to touch her. She's cold but safe. What do you think of her?" Fallon's host asked, a hint of curiosity in his voice.

Fallon touched the sculpture, running his hand along the horse's flank, marveling at the detail. He walked around the ice, his gaze taking in every minute detail. He stopped at the horse's head, cradling her face in his hands. Her eyes showed such life, emotion. The expression she wore was a familiar one—one he often saw in the mirror.

"She's sad." Fallon's voice startled the other man, who had been lost in his own thoughts.

"What? Yeah, she is sad. She's alone. Horses are pack animals. They need the company. They should never be alone. Maybe she's searching for her mate, the one soul she's meant to be with. Or maybe she's found him. Maybe he left her, and she's chasing after him."

"I think we all know how she feels, but maybe it's not his fault." Fallon sighed wistfully. "What do you call her?"

"Star. Do you like her?"

"She's magnificent. Who made her?"

"I did. I'm glad you like her. I get so few visitors who have an opinion on her, and even fewer that are willing to share it."

Fallon patted Star's muzzle a few more times. *He'll come back to you some day. He loves you, and he knows his place is at your side.* He turned

to the stranger, his arms dropping to his sides.

"How did you manage it? There's such life in her features, behind her eyes."

His host beamed, pleased at the compliment to his work. "My name's Cassiel. You can call me Cash. For a good few centuries, that," he pointed to the horse and shrugged, "was all I did. So you could say I've had a lot of practice."

Cassiel? Shit, I'm standing next to one of the most powerful—and most likely unhinged—royal demons around, talking about ice sculptures. No wonder Feyd was kept away from this. Out loud, he said, "Fair enough. So, you have a job for me?"

"Straight to business. I like that. I knew you wouldn't ask any annoying questions; it's why I asked for you. You know how to deal with our kind. You have no idea how many of Fallwell's people I had to kill to get him to give me you."

Fallon had no idea what to say. On one hand, he was flattered. This was Cassiel, exiled from the Afterverse after attempting to trap Fuerety in the Eververse. Some said that he was still favored to gain the throne. On the other hand, the demon was talking about killing his peers. Fal hoped it wasn't anyone he liked.

"A few?"

"Yeah, something like that. Fallwell really didn't want to give you up. You have any idea why?"

Fishing? If I knew why the job I was on was so damn important, I wouldn't tell you.

"No clue. I am the best...maybe he doesn't want to lose me."

"I wouldn't kill you, Fallon. Unlike the others, you're more useful alive. You're powerful and ruthless. There are full blown Effusios out there that I wouldn't trust with this."

Fallon blinked in surprise at the mention of the Effusio, his next words harsh in tone and meaning. "Yeah, well, Effusios can't be trusted; they would probably just run back and tell their bitch queen Ammit everything they've done. She has them all well-trained."

"Not as well-trained as she'd like. If you kept in the loop, you'd find that most of them answer to Shabriri now. Slowly, one by one, she's losing them all."

"Good. You have a job for me? Or are we just going to talk about demons all day? Forgive me for being so abrupt, but I'm staying at a friend's, and I'd like to get back for dinner." *And If I hear any more about the Effusios, I'm going to have to kill something.*

"Of course. I would hate to keep you. The whole thing should only take a few hours. I just want to run over the layout of the building and the things you'll need to know. It's nothing too complicated. You might find that it's the easiest job you've done in a while."

"Then why me? If it's so easy, why will you need me?" he queried suspiciously.

"Because you're the best, and I only deal with the best. Anything less I'd see as an insult."

"Fallwell gave you others before me...how many?"

Cash chose not to answer his question directly.

"That's a conversation that I'll have with Roman...soon. Count yourself lucky that I'm not going to have it with you."

"You know something, Cash?" The demon prince shook his head. "I do consider myself very lucky."

"Good. Now, come on, and I'll let you look over what I've got. I understand that you'll want to look over things yourself, just to make sure that I'm not setting you up. I've got a few things to take care of, so I can leave you to it."

Fallon couldn't disagree with the demon. He didn't trust him, and he wanted to look over everything before he went in. To do anything less would be sloppy, and Fallon wasn't sloppy.

Cash left Fallon to look over the layouts and plans and returned to his original task. He passed the horse and made his way to the master bedroom. *I need a smaller house*, he thought to himself as he climbed the second set of stairs. He was met by a stunning-looking demon queen standing at the top, leaning against the staircase.

"Was that him?" The Acer queen, Shabriri, asked snidely as she smoked her cherry flavored cigar.

"You know it was. You've been standing at the top of the stairs. Hear anything of interest?"

"Not really. I thought you named the horse Champion," she said in the same tone.

"Yeah, I did. But calling it Star had a better

effect on him. I don't need him happy. I needed him desperate and not in control."

"So, the name means something. Who is she?"

She is a very interesting witch, with more brains and talent than you. He smiled at her and walked up the rest of the stairs. "Well now, my sweet, that would be telling. Our deal still stands. You get the Falcon, and I get your allegiance and support."

She laughed, her voice high and musical.

"Cassiel, you should know by now that nobody has my allegiance but my people. If I could do it myself, I would have killed Furerety centuries ago. Get me the Falcon, and I won't side with Furerety. But I won't openly side with you. You're a powerful demon, but I don't really think you can defeat him. Your father could have. He used to be a great king. Pity. You need allies if you're going to win...dare I suggest Amos?"

Cash held his tongue. He hated Shabriri. She always knew too many things, and she couldn't easily be manipulated. He stepped close to her, wrapping his arms around her waist. He'd found something she wanted, though, and was taking full advantage of it.

"Great. I'm going to have to work on getting your Falcon. I'll have it for tomorrow night. When would you like to pick it up?" He spoke into her ear and began to kiss her neck. She groaned slightly and leaned into him.

"I'm busy tomorrow night. Day after? That would be Thursday." Her voice was slightly breathy.

"Thursday?" Cash paused from her neck and pretended to think about it. "Yeah, I should be around then. Will you be staying longer...the night, maybe?" He bit down gently on the soft flesh between her shoulder blade and spine, forcing a gasp from her.

"Mmm, I might just."

"Good. Could you get a hold of Ammit for me?"

"Does she have his soul?" She nodded to the direction of the study.

"Yes, she does. Tell her I want to meet her. She owes me. I want his soul. He could come in handy."

Shabriri pulled away from him and turned, curiosity seeping from her. It was typical, she was never one to be kept in that dark. "What are you planning, Cassiel?" She tried to make her voice sound playful and attractive. She failed.

"What I always plan for—the throne, believe it or not. I will have that throne."

"Is all this really worth it? Darling, you never showed any interest in his throne before Faris got herself pregnant. She's a whore, Cash. The brat probably wasn't yours. It's better off dead."

Cash held his tongue, ignoring her words, although it took effort that he didn't know he had. He needed her support, and if he killed her now, all his hard work would have been for nothing. She was jealous and with good reason. Faris was better than her. *Most likely still is, but that child was mine.*

"That's not really my reason. I just thought that it was time I took my rightful place. I thought we all wanted Furerety dead. Maybe I was the only one

with the balls to do it."

"You're a bad liar."

"I'm an excellent liar." *Better than you, my sweet.*

"You can't fuck your way to the throne, Cash. That's really all that you're good for. You'll never be your father."

"Thank the gods for that. I'll see you on Thursday. Get Ammit to contact me," he said in a clipped tone as he held in his anger.

Exercising his control, he turned his back on her and walked calmly down the stairs. Only once he was sure she was gone did he allow himself to vent.

The plan looked sound. Fallon had to give it to Cash. He was thorough, and everything checked out. His only question was *what the hell was he supposed to be grabbing?*

"So, did everything check out all right?" Cash asked from the doorway.

Fallon looked up at the demon. He looked as if he'd been in a fight with himself. Fallon considered asking about it but decided that he really didn't want to know.

"Yeah, everything looks good. You get your guy to disable the alarms on the outside, and I'll shimmer in and grab it. I've just got two questions."

"Shoot."

"What and when?"

"If you're ready, I'd like to do it tomorrow. Our

window is four 'til six. I want it done then. Is there any problem with that?"

Fallon shook his head. "No. I think Fallwell wants me back as soon as possible, so I don't have a problem with that. What are we going after?"

Cash walked into the room and over to a cupboard, which he opened. He brought out two glasses along with a bottle of whisky. He sat down opposite Fallon and filled the two glasses, frosting them both up and nudging one over to Fallon. He then picked up his own and downed it in one gulp. Fallon took his and sipped at it. He was driving back and didn't want to be too far over the limit.

"It won't get me drunk, but it does make me feel better." Cash sighed and refilled his glass. "Have you ever heard of the Maltese Falcon?"

Fallon nearly choked on his drink. "The what? You're kidding me. It's real?"

Cash nodded as Fallon picked up his glass and polished off the whiskey then slammed the empty glass on the table. "Fuck me. You're right. It does make you feel better."

Cash moved to refill Fallon's glass, but Fallon held his hand over it and shook his head.

"I'd better not. I like my license. The cops don't take too kindly to drinking then driving. So, we're getting the Falcon?"

Cash nodded and took a drink from his own glass. "Yeah, tomorrow. Meet me here at three. We'll go over everything then hit it. It's only about a twenty minute drive from here. I'll see you then."

"Okay, tomorrow then."

Fallon left the study and made his way to the

car. *Next stop, Lorna's. I wonder what she made for dinner.* He got back in his car and drove to Feyd's mum's, all the while speculating about dinner.

Feyd stepped out of the hummer outside the Copa Cabana and smiled. *Manilow says it's the hottest spot north of Havana. Let's see if he's right.* He was quickly ushered through the door—after greasing the palm of the doorman—and greeted by extremely loud music. *Fallon would have loved this,* he thought to himself as he surveyed the gyrating bodies on the dance floor. *Pity he's not here. It looks like I get my pick tonight.* He sauntered up to the bar and ordered a drink.

The night went on in its usual fashion, and about an hour and a half after arriving, he was on his fifth shot, his fourth beer, still talking to the same girl, and feeling no pain. *Shit, New York girls really ain't easy. Either that, or it's just my luck to get the one prude in the joint.*

The perky brunette he was talking to suddenly proved his thoughts wrong. She jumped into his lap and rubbed suggestively against him, eliciting a groan from Feyd. “Talk shit to me in that sexy accent while you fuck me right here,” she whispered in his ear as she nibbled on the lobe. He grabbed her and kissed her, his hands on her tight ass as she slid her forward. She wrapped her legs around his waist. The next thing he knew, the girl was being ripped off his lap, and he was arrested

for public indecency.

“What the hell?” he asked as his hands were being cuffed behind his back. “It’s not like I had the bird naked! Since when is kissing a woman in public a bloody crime?”

The bartender answered him. “When you’re making out with the manager’s squeeze, mate. You’re lucky the cops are hauling you in.” He winked, and Feyd was sure the bartender had just saved his ass from some over-the-top altercation. If Fallon had been around, it wouldn’t have mattered. No matter what, they could have taken what was thrown at them. On his own, he wasn’t that sure.

He looked at the cop. “Hold it. At least pay the guy for me. Back left side pocket.” The officer took out a hundred dollar bill and looked at Feyd. He’d noticed that when the cop had been digging in his pocket, her hand had lingered a bit too long. He nodded. *Shit, yeah. Looks like I’m getting off light tonight.* The officer put the money on the table and escorted him out to the squad car. *First night out in New York, and I get picked up. Unbelievable.*

Things got even weirder at the eerily vacant police station. Feyd felt as if he were stepping into the twilight zone. No police station in a major city was ever this devoid of people, especially one near Greenwich Village. The arresting officer, the one who had felt him up and identified herself as Officer Hernandez, was smirking at him. She noticed his confusion. “This is a midway precinct, basically a jump-off station. It’s more a tag and bag, book and ship facility.” She shrugged. “The Village is light tonight. Aside from Officer Hendrix, there,

it's just us."

Feyd smiled. "Ah, I see. So, what now? Police brutality?" *If I'm going to get brutalized by anyone, please let it be that luscious ass standing before me.*

Officer Hernandez smiled. "Hardly. I did old Jasper a favor," she said. Feyd could only guess she meant the bartender. "Nancy, the tart on your lap? She has a tendency to have fun with the tourists at the expense of the tourists' own hide. Seems you made an impression on the old guy. Probably was the accent." She looked him up and down.

"So, I'm free to go?"

"Wish it was that simple, precious. I'm going to have to book you. You'll stay overnight in the holding cell and then be released—per procedure."

"Brilliant. Do I get my one phone call? Look, Officer Hernandez..." He let her name roll off his tongue like a dirty word. "I can't stay here all night."

She smiled at him, and he realized that she had led him down to the holding cell, one flight down and through a pair of steel doors. That was when he noticed that they were alone on the floor, a female cop and a prisoner. The scenario was not police procedure. He turned his head and looked at her as she undid the cuffs behind his back and stepped aside.

"Okay, I've been arrested enough times to know that this isn't procedure. What gives?" He looked at her as she undid the top two buttons of her uniform shirt and smiled.

"Now Mr. Nightly, what else have you been

arrested for? Anything like this? Indecent public exposure?” She moved closer. Her hands were busy on the rest of her buttons, making their way down to her belt buckle and pants.

Shit! I'm being seduced in a bloody holding cell in some forgotten precinct by the chick that arrested me. This is the shit 'Letters to Penthouse' are fucking made of! He watched her stalk toward him, half naked. Her shirt was open, and the front clasp of her bra popped easily as he watched. *Good Lord! Bird's got a set of Teflon titties that are worthy of Ripley's!* He swallowed hard as she finished undressing. “Officer Hernandez, you’re really set.”

“Call me Mandy. You’ll be screaming it in about ten minutes.” She was closer to him now; a pair of handcuffs swinging on her index finger. “Now, cuff me to the bars.” He got closer to her, and she looked him up and down once again. “And keep the clothes on.”

Feyd smirked. “Oh?”

“Yeah. It’s a fantasy. Indulge me. I can make the next few hours go by very quickly.”

Yeah, I have no doubt about that. “If you’re looking for a fantasy, I happen to have Mr. Fantasy himself’s phone—” He never finished the thought as Mandy took the opportunity to jump on him.

“Always wanted to fuck a guy with an accent,” she said as she wrapped her legs around his waist. He turned her to the bars. He threaded her arms behind her and cuffed her wrists together with the bars in between them. He pushed her up against the bars, and she hissed. He figured the bars were

rather cold in the dampness of the room. Her legs were still wrapped around his waist, and she let her hold loosen a little bit. He quickly got out of his pants and deep inside her heat. She moaned as he entered her swiftly.

“So wet, so bloody tight,” he murmured as he thrust into her, pushing hard, slamming her back into the bars. He rode her hard, nipping and biting at her neck. She was not shy at all about whispering to him lewd and tawdry suggestions that would have possibly made a porn star blush. When she came for him the first time, she bit at his shoulder and stifled a scream, and he chuckled. “That’s it, Mandy, that’s it. Think you can do it again for me, kitten?”

They went on for a few hours like that. All the while, the woman was cuffed to the bars, and in the end, Officer Mandy Hernandez was a very satisfied lady. They got dressed, made out a bit, and then she locked him in the cell and gave him the phone. “Call whoever you want, sugar. Tell them to be here in twenty minutes.”

Feyd realized, after he was finally alone in the cell that by himself, that he could easily get into massive amounts of trouble. He thought back on the night and still, not everything added up. *Wow, okay, so there are gaps in what I actually remember, but for the most part, the night was interesting. It’s not the first time I finished the night in a lonely cell in the bowels of some city,* he thought as three cops came down the stairs and through the doors. None of them was Officer Hernandez. He looked at the three male cops and

sighed. *Pity Mandy didn't come back. I could go again.* He smirked to himself as the largest cop opened the cell.

“Nightly, you made bail.”

Feyd was walking through the open steel doors when the larger cop stopped him. *Bloody hell, here comes the police brutality.*

“Do yourself a favor. Hernandez told us what happened last night at the Copa. Stay outta New York, unless you wanna be on Benny’s hit list. He’s gunning for you.”

Feyd nodded. “Understood. I never knew you blokes were so nice.” *Yeah, and I have a feeling me and Fallon will be back sooner than you think. Take care of the pathetic git and the bird right quick. The least I can do, getting trash off the street, especially trash that wants me dead.*

The cop angled his head toward the door. “Get the hell outta here.”

Feyd made it upstairs without so much as a look from the early morning shift. No sign of Mandy. It seemed that his lady friend was off duty. He’d have to try and look her up some other time. She could take what he dished out, and not many could.

He went through the exit process painlessly and met George at the station doors. George’s face was a very bright pink, and Feyd could tell he was trying to keep his thoughts to himself, as they were in a police station. It just wouldn’t do to blow their mission when they were hours from leaving. Feyd smiled at him. *Shit, if he only knew what actually went on last night, he’d be even more pissed.* They

walked out into the cold morning air and got into a cab. It was then that George blew up.

“You see? I can’t trust you for shit! Where’s the fucking Hummer, Nightly? I let you out of my sight for a few measly hours, and you get arrested! I was told you were banned from New York City for life! Just what the fuck did you do, you asshole? Fuck the mayor’s wife?”

Feyd scoffed. “As if. You ever see Bloomberg’s wife? Hell, I’m sure he’s not even fucking her.”

At this statement, the cabdriver laughed and nodded. “Yeah, she isn’t the best looking woman, that’s for damn sure,” he said with a laugh.

George sat up and sneered at the cabdriver. “When I want your opinion, I’ll torture it out of you, you fuck.”

Feyd, sitting back, tried to keep the smile off his face. He attempted to look bored, but even that was a trial. “Look, Batman, it doesn’t matter, does it? We are out of here this afternoon anyway, aren’t we? Off to Vegas?”

George grumbled. “Yeah, and Nightly, you’re grounded. You *and* Ipwhisk, once we get to Vegas.”

Feyd perked up. “Fal’s coming back? When?”

“Two days. He’ll be flying in.”

“What do you mean, grounded?”

“No play time for either of you! If you alone can manage to get banned from the city that never fucking sleeps, what the fuck are the two of you going to get into in Vegas? So, you’re grounded, confined to your rooms.”

We’ll see about that, Feyd thought. George continued his tirade, his words falling on deaf ears

as Feyd worked up a plan.

Fallon was drunk. The job had gone well. Cash had taken him out after and shown him a really good time. Anyone could say what they liked about Royal demons, but they really knew how to have a good time. Cash had even known it was his birthday and had taken him to a few clubs. Once they had the Falcon locked up in Cash's vault, the demon's attitude had changed completely. So, his birthday hadn't been a complete waste of a day. Lorna had made a small cake, and Cash had hooked him up with a few Succubae. That thought brought a grin to his face. Succubae were always very talented. It's a pity they weren't quite Fallon's thing. Sure, they were good for a few hours once in a while, but Fallon liked to be the only predator in the bedroom.

Still grinning, he used his teleportation powers and shimmered into his room at Lorna's. He had a key but didn't trust himself to not wake her up. He switched on his laptop and checked his email, hoping to get at least one from Feyd. Sure enough, when he logged on, there was a message from Feyd.

Happy Birthday, you fucking asshole. No doubt you're knee deep in whores right now...Wish I could be there with you. Not with you, freak, but at least partaking in the whores...savvy? Anyway, George says to enjoy your vacation 'cause you're in deep shit once you come back. Oh, and to wish

you a happy birthday. Wow, see? Georgie isn't just piss and vinegar; he's fluffy like teddy bear innards, too. Whoops, he just saw that. Anyway, it's not any fun tormenting him by my lonesome. When are you coming back?

Feyd

Fallon shook his head and laughed. He had been knee deep in whores but wasn't at the moment. He began to type back.

George can spin on it if he thinks this is a vacation. I've been working for Cash. He's okay, I suppose, but he's not right, and when he gets angry, all the heat just gets sucked from the room. Cassiel...you know the exiled prince? Put it this way, I'd rather be somewhere nice and hot with you drinking and whoring, like the old days. Tell George that at least he's moved up from transvestite showgirl, and when I get back, it's him that's going to catch hell. Next year I'll be 30. How fucked up will that be? I'll almost be as old as you.

I should be coming back tomorrow. Ask Georgie for flight details, you know how I'm always the last to know. Can't wait, you owe me a drink. Your mother says "Hi."

Fallon laughed. *Feyd is gonna shit himself when he hears I'm staying at Lorna's.* He sat back in the seat and tried to clear his blurred vision, taking a drink of water.

He received a message in his inbox. Already?

Nope, it's not from Feyd. Frowning, he opened it.

*Fallon,
Hey. Remember me? Just wanted to say
happy birthday, hon. What's attached is what
your present would have been if you were here.
You should call me sometime. I miss you, cookie.
Astrid*

Shit! He clicked on the attachment and dropped the cigarette he'd been smoking, almost setting fire to himself. Astrid had outdone herself. She was just as he remembered her...but hotter, if she could be. *My little vixen, stunning as ever.* The pictures were artfully done but didn't leave much to his imagination. That girl always did it for him, flat out, and he loved her for it. He saved the pictures for later and pulled his phone out his pocket, deciding to forgo the standard male message response time. He didn't think he could wait that long.

He dialed her number from memory and waited for her to pick up. He briefly wondered if he would have had the courage to call her if he'd been sober. He quickly dismissed the idea as she picked up.

He heard her giggle, and his heart sped up. "Umm, that was fast, cookie."

He smiled, trying hard to mask the reaction that her melodious voice was having on him. "Fast, vixen? When am I ever fast?" he asked her smoothly, proud of himself for sounding so calm.

She giggled again. "Never, that I know of. I take

it you got your present. Happy Birthday."

"I loved the present. Thank you. I didn't think it was possible, but you are indeed even sexier than I remember," Fallon said.

"It is possible. You'll just have to come and see in person," she purred into the phone. "I wish I was where you are to celebrate with you. Umm...pity I'm not."

He sighed inaudibly. *Hell yeah, vixen. Then we really would have some fun.* "Tell me about it. Hell, I'd even welcome Feyd's company right now..." He trailed off. "But it's a real shame you aren't here. That would just make my day."

"Of that, I have no doubt. I love that you still call me vixen."

He could practically see her smile while she twirled her hair around her finger. "Vixen, eh? You'll always be my vixen, love. Hopefully I'll always be your cookie. Although I'll never admit to it, I do kind of miss being called that. Though, it most likely has more to do with the way it passes those lips of yours, love." *I'd answer to any name as long as it comes from your lips,* he thought as he leaned back in his seat and took a drink of water.

"I know it's not the manliest of names, but you're sweet..." She sighed. "So, how have things been? Things here are good. I still have Crypt, and I have a new roommate, too. She's really nice." She sighed again. "When are you coming to visit me?"

A flat mate? *Maybe she could take Feyd off our hands, give us some private time,* he thought with a smirk. *I can't wait to see you again.*

"Tough call. I have some work to do with Feyd,

but I should have some vacation coming up. How about Feyd and I join you and your flat mate?" He silently prayed. *Please, say yes, vixen. Let me see you.*

She answered quickly. "Ash? She's great. Beautiful. Legs that go on forever, and she can drink Feyd under the table. I think she and Feyd will get along great. Of course, I'll have you. I'll have you any way you'll let me have you. The floor, the bed, the table...anything, cookie. Just come home to me. I...I miss you very much."

"I'll come home to you, vixen. And then I'll take you every way you want, and a few ways of my own. So, you really think she'll keep Feyd...occupied for long enough, so we can play?" he inquired.

A message from Feyd blinked up on his laptop's screen, but he ignored it.

"Ash? Oh, yeah. I think the two of them will compliment each other very well and give us time to get reacquainted. You owe me a lot of time, Mr. Ipwhisk. It's been so long for me, Fallon, so damn long..."

"Oh, don't worry about it. It's been a long time for both of us, baby. I fully intend to pay you back for the past year, in full," he promised, his mind instantly filling with lots of wicked ways to fulfill that promise.

She giggled. "I know you haven't been Mr. Celibacy at all. It's just not in you.

He choked on his water. "Huh? Not at all? As in for the past eleven months?" He could barely believe it. "Celibacy? Shit, vix...you haven't...since the last time we...? Oh, God. I'm gonna have to get

to you soon, then.”

Her voice lowered. "Yeah, cookie. You mad? I hope not. It's just that...it just wasn't going to be fun without you. I knew that, and...I waited, and hoped you'd come back to me."

He sighed, his brain panicking. *Why would I be mad with that? You're mine now. You waited...unlike me. God, I'm so sorry.*

"God, no. That's so sexy. I was the last person there...you'll be so warm and tight...." He groaned. "Oh, God, I miss you, vixen. I miss you so very much."

He readjusted himself as he opened his mail from Feyd, taking care to tuck his phone safely between his shoulder and ear. She spoke of unimportant things as he read Feyd's message, her voice a comforting sound.

Yeah, Fal, you're right. Georgie says that your flight is tomorrow sometime then muttered about sending you the details later. So, we got vacation coming up. What do you wanna do? I was thinking 'bout going to see Lorna for a while or coming back to Vegas...it's really cool here, from what I can see.

An exiled prince? Shit, you're moving up in the world, bud. Let me know, I'm just sitting here not doing a damn thing.

Fallon smirked to himself and typed his return message.

Sorry, mate, we've already got plans. Why

aren't you doing anything? It's Vegas. I was thinking about going to Paris to see Astrid. She wants you to meet her new flat mate. Told me a bit about her...she sounds fit. Plus, I don't think Ast has any unfit friends. If you don't want to, it's cool, but I think that it's where I'm headed. Has George grounded you? Why? What did you get up to in NYC?

"...anyway, I miss you, too, cookie, every minute of every day. So, when can I see you?" Astrid's soft accented voice came through the phone.

He smiled and shook his head. "I'll be there as soon as I can, vix...in two weeks?"

Her heavy sigh came through the phone. "Two weeks? I could manage that. I'll have to get the mansion in order, and the renovations should be done by then, too."

"Or as soon as I can, without breaking contract," he added.

She giggled again. "Since when have you ever cared about breaking a contract?"

"Since George started breathing down our necks." He shuddered, the mention of George's name sending shivers down his spine.

"I really can't wait to see you. When I do, I'm gonna jump on you and hold you. Then I'm gonna drag you to the bedroom."

"You're gonna drag me to the bedroom, are you? Will I get a special birthday treat?" he asked hopefully.

She giggled yet again, and he could tell she was

smiling wickedly. "I'm sure I can figure something out. Maybe something involving candles and massage oil? Or maybe I'll just get on my knees and beg you to take me. Either way, we get the same outcome, and that's you waking up with me in our bed after a full night of fucking."

Our bed. He grinned at the thought. "I can't wait. I always did enjoy our mornings together. Just the two of us, bathed in the afternoon sun."

"The operative word is afternoon." She chuckled and sighed. "Damn, cookie, I haven't felt this good in a long time. I'm really glad you called." She covered the phone again, murmured something and then came back to him. "Sorry, Linus was trying to get up on the bed. I had to help his fat ass up."

He laughed with her. "I'm just glad one of us had the good sense to contact the other. So, how is the pup? He miss me?"

"I didn't think you wanted to talk to me. You left so abruptly, I thought I had done something wrong." She sighed. "And yes, the smelly thing misses you. He's fat now, and when I say, 'Where's Daddy?' he goes crazy 'cause he's looking for you."

"Christ, I'm his daddy...just don't tell Feyd. He'll never let me live it down." He swallowed hard and licked his lips. "And I never wanted to stop...I shouldn't have left," he finished quietly.

He tried not to wince too hard and carefully positioned the phone again as he opened Feyd's email.

Paris? Astrid? Fal, man, you got it bad. Hell, I

didn't know you kept up with her. So, what's with you? Women come and go with us. They never actually come back into our lives. So, tell me...what the fuck gives with this one? You know what? I don't really want to know, man. So, what's this flat mate like? You got her number or something? If I'm going to be fucking her, it might be a good idea to...

Fallon skipped past the rest. Most of it was just Feyd being Feyd. He didn't want to waste much time on him tonight.

"It's okay. I wasn't going to force you to stay, Fal. I have missed you, but at least I have our pictures," she said wistfully after a while.

"Yeah? You kept all of them?" he asked, trying to lighten the mood that he'd ruined.

"Yeah. You're on the walls in the bedroom. My favorite one is the one of your back and shoulder. I love taking pictures of you."

Her admission made him even happier. *Shit, she's got me on her bedroom wall. Classic.* "Me, on the wall? Am I next to the Monet?" He laughed, continuing before she could answer. "Tell you what, vixen, when I get there, I'll pose myself around the house for you." He grabbed a smoke, lit it, and set it down in the ashtray. *Yeah, naked...See how you like that. I'm going to grab you and never let you go, my love.*

"That sounds amazing, Fallon. I can't wait. Give Feyd Ash's email address. She said she wants to talk to him." She giggled. "And she's very curious."

"Great. That'll get rid of Feyd for me. Then I can give you my full attention. So, she's curious? Why do I get the feeling that little ol' Feyd won't know what hit him?" He chuckled. "It serves him right."

He switched back to Feyd, telling him to send this Ash girl a message. He sent the address that Astrid had given him and told him he'd phone him in the morning, hoping that would be the last he heard from him tonight.

"Ash is beyond what Feyd would consider 'first rate.' Honestly, he doesn't deserve a girl like her, but I'm willing to make some sacrifices as long as we are left alone." She giggled.

Fallon smiled. "It will be worth it, vixen. I promise."

"It's always worth it with you. By the way, I wanted to ask, do you by any chance have those photo booth pictures we took on the beach?"

He smirked "Yeah, in my wallet. I only kept the naked ones, though," he teased.

"Fallon!" she shrieked. "I'm still surprised you got me to disrobe in there. You don't show anyone, do you? Good Lord, Feyd hasn't seen them, has he?"

"Oh, hell, no. Those are for my eyes and my eyes only. I promise you that. Just like the one I took of you in the morning with your hair adorably sticking up at every angle."

She gasped. "You kept that, too? Oh, Lord. I thought we wouldn't talk about that anymore."

He chuckled. "And we won't. I just thought it was worth mentioning."

"You're a tease, Mr. Ipwhisk. Do you know that?"

"You know, I don't think I did. You must be the first person to ever say that to me," he lied jokingly.

"You know, there's something I have been dying to tell you, but I'm not sure it's the time."

"Time for what? Anything fun? You're not a guy are you? Because you could have fooled me."

She took a deep breath and let it out. "I love you, cookie."

He was silent for a few seconds as all humor drained out of him. "You love me? Are...are you sure?" He swallowed hard. He quietly smacked himself in the head with his hand. *Really smooth, Fallon, you idiot. Oh, are you sure? Fuck's sake. Get a grip.*

"Of course, I'm sure, Fallon. I don't throw those words around. You're everything to me, and I love you."

Say it, you fool. Say it back. Tell her what you've always known. "I love you, too, vixen. I have, for a long while." He slapped himself again. *Gee, way to sound sincere, Casanova.*

She was quiet for a few minutes. "It's okay. You don't have to say it back. I would rather you not say things you don't mean. No lies between us."

"Then it's a damn good thing I wasn't lying. I do mean it, with all my heart. I love you, always have. From the moment our eyes first met in the park. Please believe me."

"Yet you left. I'm sorry, cookie, I'm just having a bit of a problem with having all I hoped for come true after all this time, so you'll excuse me being

skeptical."

Please don't make me go there. "Vixen, I'm sorry I ran. I got scared...scared of us, and I really can't get into the specifics right now. But I'm coming back, and I'm going to show you how much I love you. I'll prove your doubts wrong," he answered, praying, *believe me. I need you.*

He sat back in the chair and waited for her response, letting his thoughts wander back over their time together. Astrid was the only woman with whom he'd ever spent more than a few hours of fun. He'd spent just over a month with her and her puppy. She had even kept Feyd happy with her various friends. She was perfect, his angel. Their time together had been great, almost better than he deserved.

Then, one day, he'd had a small relapse. Some people died—not good people—and it was nothing he hid from her. The questions started. She didn't pry, and she never would have. It was he who had started it, wondering if he could tell her. It had all been in his head, as it always was. He'd known it was, but that didn't stop him from running. He ran, and he ran fast.

He jumped slightly as her voice came back over the phone. "I...I hope so, Fallon. To lose you again, after I found you and know you want me around, would kill me."

He shook his head. *It'll kill us both. I'm not letting you go again. I'm not that stupid.* "We can't have that, then, can we? I'll just have to stay with you."

He jumped again as his cell phone alerted him

to another call coming in. *I'm really on edge tonight. Must have been the succubae.* He moved it from his ear and checked it. George. *Shit!* He rejected the call, feeling a little satisfaction at the thought of old Batman pitching a fit on the other side of the ocean.

"You promise?"

"With all my heart. I promise. No more wandering. Never again. I'll stay with you 'til they come and take away my soul."

"God, Fallon, come home to me."

"As soon as I can, Astrid. As soon as I can."

"I love hearing my name come from your mouth. The next two weeks are going to feel like the past eleven months all over again."

He nodded in agreement before realizing that she couldn't see him. "I know, but at the end of it all I can hold you in my arms and call you mine."

"I have always been yours, Fallon," she said with finality.

He nodded. "Good. You have no idea how happy that makes me feel. Vixen, I've got to call George about my flight details, knowing his twisted sense of...well, you couldn't call it humor, but there's a damn good chance my flight leaves in half an hour. I'll call you back in about twenty minutes. If you'll still be there, that is."

"Umm...yeah, I'll either be here on the bed or in the tub. Get a hold of that lunatic, then call me back, and talk dirty to me." She giggled.

He laughed. "Oh, I shall. Speak to you soon, vixen. I love you."

"Love you, too, cookie." She made a kiss noise

on her end of the line then hung up.

Happy with himself and the whole situation, Fallon grabbed his diary out of his bag and sat down on the bed to phone George and get his flight details.

Feyd turned on his computer, took a deep breath, and opened his mail server. He looked over at the address that Fallon had given him, and he was actually nervous to write to this unknown girl that he'd be spending at least a month with.

Relax, Feyd. Astrid doesn't have any ugly friends, nor any behemoths in her corral. Since when are you so weird about a piece of ass? He, of course, knew the answer to that question. It was because he'd never spent that much time with any one woman that wasn't attached to someone else. The last time he'd spent time with Fallon and Astrid, her friends pretty much came and went. This time, there was a live in companion for him, and he was really scared they wouldn't get along. Then he saw the pictures of Ashlyn. *Just remember those pics, Feyd old boy. That girl is your dream girl.*

He opened his browser and hit compose. "Let's see, what should I write?" He labored for a few minutes, trying not to look like too much of a leech, and came up with something between leech and cursory. He looked over his work.

Hey Ashlyn...those pics you sent were

extremely hot. Damn, that maid outfit. Lord girl, what I could do to you. Question...Fallon mentioned that you're a firebug. Care to tell me what kind? And by the way, I'm looking forward to meeting you. Astrid's friends have always been hot, but...damn, girl, you take the cake.

Feyd

“Yeah, that seems okay. Hopefully she’ll respond, and I won’t feel like such an ass.” He hit the send button and waited. Apparently Ashlyn was waiting for his email because minutes later he got a response.

Hey Feyd,

I've heard a lot about you. Some of it's even good. I heard you were a little bit of a sweetie pie. What YOU could do for me? Might be the other way 'round, boy. You like the outfit? I like dressing up...maybe I could wear it for you one day. Would you like that? I've got a nurse one, too.

Firebug? There's no real fire, but my body temp can rise.

Ash.

Feyd’s grin was rather large. “Shit, this girl is almost as bad as me. Here I am trying to compliment her, and she’s talking about doing naughty stuff. This could get good. Let’s raise the bar a bit, shall we?” He began typing and looked over his work once more.

Nurse outfit? Lord I'm there...please wear

them for me all the time. Your temp rises? Shit, girl, I can do that for you, too...but still, I'm sure it proves to be a wild ride. So, what are you into? Stuff like Astrid?

“Not bad. Now, let's see what she says to that.” He hit send and waited. His answer came almost on the heels of the one he had just sent out.

You could at least buy me a drink first. We're being set up. I'm not easy. But...I'd like to see you try to raise my body temp. Stuff like Astrid? Why, whatever do you mean? I like cheese...the good kind. And shiny things.

He chuckled and started to type back to her.

What do you drink? I hear you can drink my ass under the table. I'd like to see if that's true. And baby, trust me, I can and will raise your body temp. You French, too? In my experience, the French girls we have met are wild.

I was asking if you were wild like Astrid is wild...the whole public sex thing and whatnot...or don't tell me, and let me find out. I'm creative.

“Yeah, let's see what kind of smartass answer I'll get for that one. Heh.” He didn't have to wait long.

Jack and Johnny are my two favorite boys. I could drink anyone under the table, but if you like, I could join you once you're down there. French?

No, darling, I'm not French. Although Astrid is hot. I'm from the UK. Creative can be good. Let's just say I'm up for anything that I would...enjoy.

“Score!” Feyd smiled and began whistling to himself, something he did when he knew he was going to get what he wanted. *Damn, this girl is hot. She can flirt with the best of them, that's for sure. I wonder if she's all talk, though.* He typed back his response.

U.K. eh? I'm from London, same as Fallon. So, you got that sexy accent, then. Want to join me under the table? Hell, I'd rather you sit in the seat with a short skirt on...damn, you're hot and dirty. You could be my dream girl...and you're up for anything that you'd enjoy? Is there anything you don't enjoy?

He hit send and waited a minute and began worrying that she had had enough of his crap.

Londoner, eh? That's cool. I can't wait to hear you say something to me. Mine is more of a rough, broguish accent. Short skirt? You want me to sit in front of you and cross and uncross my legs?

Dreams? We'll see. You might not be sleeping enough to dream. I am hot. I shower regularly, so I'm really quite clean, but I like to get dirty. What I don't I like...public transport. Anything too painful, though I must say I like a bit of pain, just a little. When people try to kill me.

He whooped with laughter. “Kill her? She’s got a sense of humor, and she’s hot as hell and dirty. Damn, I think I have found my dream girl. ”

Yeah, I’ll talk all night for you, baby. Well, I was thinking with the short skirt you wouldn’t be wearing knickers, and since I was under the table, I thought it could progress from there. A broguish accent? Lord, will you talk shit to me all night?

Damn, I haven’t even met this girl, and I’m getting hot over her. I swear she’s a fucking angel. My angel. I’ll have to thank Astrid when I see her.
The message came back so fast he didn’t even realize he sent the first one.

Wow, that would be fantastic...will it be dirty talk? That’s a much better idea...you always have such good ideas, baby? I’ll talk to you if you talk to me.

“I swear I’m in love. I’ve got to thank Fallon.”

Chapter Four

Feyd waited until the coast was clear and slipped out of room 506 at the Stardust. Quietly shutting the door, and rather disgusted with himself for having to sneak, he went for the elevator.

Georgie is asleep. It took those Dramamine long enough. Maybe he won't realize I'm gone till morning, he thought as the elevator door opened, and he stepped in alone.

He inhaled sharply and noticed the lingering scent of perfume, a hell of a lot of perfume. He chuckled and thought, *Now, if Fal were here, he'd be following that scent to see if it belonged to something young, tight, and sexy.*

He laughed out loud this time and said to the air, "Yeah, and find some withered old bitch playing slots." The thought gave him a hearty laugh.

As he stepped out of the elevator, he scanned for two things: the craps tables and a sexy waitress to get him a shot of Jack. Unfortunately, he found the former rather quickly, the latter being more elusive.

Sighing, he made his way to the craps table and settled in to wait. If Fallon were true to form, he

wouldn't be late. *And if he's not late, we can get some gaming and partying in before Georgie shortens our leashes.*

He looked over, saw a passably cute waitress and waved her over. *Eh, she'll do as a server. Maybe Fallon won't mind taking one for the team, but she's not my taste one bit.*

"Hey, love, could you get me two shots of Jack?" He put a fifty down on her tray. "And keep them coming," he said and patted her ass as he walked away.

Shit, Fallon thought to himself as he walked out of the airport. That was one of the best flight delays ever. When they ask if there's anything they can do, they really mean it. He glanced at his watch and checked the time. *Man, Feyd's gonna be pissed. I'd better hurry.* As he walked toward the baggage area, a scruffy man with a wolfish appearance approached him.

"Do you want to save your soul, friend? Come with me, and we'll talk about eternal damnation, and how to prepare yourself..."

Fallon kept his eyes straight ahead and ignored him. The unwashed man jumped in his way and thrust a leaflet into his hands. Fallon glared at the wacko, who, to give him credit, held his ground. *For a cult nut job, this guy obviously has no sense of self-preservation. Which kinda makes sense, I suppose. If I kill someone without Feyd, he'll pout and whine.* Fallon smiled viciously as the stranger

broke eye contact and checked around him to see if they were being watched.

"Look, you ain't my friend. He's at a bar right now, losing all his money and getting tossed with whores. And my soul—" Fallon shimmered out of sight and appeared right behind the frightened man, leaning in close to the man's grubby ear so he could whisper his next line, "is already spoken for. Now, run along like a nice little boy, and don't bother any more people here today. Traveling is hard enough on people."

The man walked away from Fallon, slowly at first, then his pace became faster until he broke out in a flat out run. Fallon chuckled to himself as he watched the man disappear out of sight. He looked around to see if anyone had noticed their little exchange, but everyone was too interested in collecting their bags from the carousel to notice a little teleporting.

He picked up his bag and made his way to the car rental where George had told him a car would be waiting. He walked to the desk clerk and smiled his best business smile.

"Hi, I'm supposed to pick a car up here. My name's Fallon Ipwhisk. The name on the card should be George Bateman."

The clerk checked his list and nodded. "Yes, it's the—"

"I don't think the car Mr. Bateman picked out suits our needs any more. He's instructed me to collect a different car. The red Lamborghini outside should do. Here is my UK driver's license and all the other necessary documents, plus an extra fifty

dollars, for your inconvenience and a fast change of cars. Thank you."

The clerk pocketed the fifty dollars, and after a small amount of paper shuffling, handed Fallon a map and the keys. He put his bag in the car and looked at the map to get his bearings.

Should be there in about half an hour. Poor George is gonna freak when he sees this car. Hopefully Feyd will still be up and relatively sober.

He started the car's engine, pulled out of the lot, and headed toward where he would find Feyd.

Shit, Fal is late. Feyd grabbed his dice once more and threw.

"Sevens," the barker said. The crowd cheered. *At least I'm on a roll.* He was up five thousand. *Not a bad haul,* he thought to himself as he was once again handed the dice. He took his shot, and once again he was up. *Luck, be a lady tonight.* He looked up and saw a familiar face, looking sated, and like the cat that got the cream, if that were even possible. *What's up with him?*

He passed his roll, and the barker screamed for the next shooter. He grabbed his winnings and left to intercept Fallon.

As he approached, the shit-eating grin on Fallon's face became apparent.

"Why the fuck are you so happy?" Feyd asked, stopping a mere foot from him.

"Pleasure to see you, too, Feyd. Miss me?"

"Uh-huh, like hemorrhoids. What did you do? Or should I ask who you did?"

"Right on both counts. To answer those questions, *who* was a flight attendant—can't remember her name—and *what* is I got us a better and newer car."

"Newer car? You mean you didn't get the H2?"

"Nope. Red Lamborghini. Should we take it for a spin?"

"Hell, why not? Let's jam to Stellar, this club down at the Balaggio. Savvy?"

"Yep. By the way, where the fuck is George?"

"Out fucking cold. Three Dramamine in his beer, and he went down."

They walked over to the desk, got Fallon checked in, and had his bag sent to his room.

"We'd better live it up. We've got seven hours of immortality ahead of us," Feyd said as they walked out the lobby doors. "So, tell me about this flight attendant..."

Fallon put the car in gear and roared down the street. He looked over at Feyd in the passenger seat, who was busy touching the knobs and dials in the car.

"So, you like the new car?"

"Yeah. It's red, shiny, and shaped like a dick. What's not to like?" Feyd shrugged briefly before continuing. "So, tell. Was she a great fuck?"

"If she was, I wouldn't be here now. I'd still be there, recovering. The flight was late, so when she

suggested that she'd make the flight more enjoyable, I took her up on the offer. You ever feel like you put more into it than you get out of it?"

Feyd nodded sympathetically and then frowned. "Not really, no. But you always wait around for them to come. So, how was home?"

"Cold and wet. Lorna says hi and to keep warm. That's about that."

"Did you get my mail?"

"What do I look like, the fucking postman? No, she said she'd forward it when you get a secure address. Anyway, what happened in NYC?"

Feyd smiled and sat back in the seat. "After we get a round of drinks in. We missed your birthday, and I'm up five grand. The Milky Bars are on me."

Fallon smiled at the thought of celebrating his birthday again. His actual celebration was fun, but you couldn't beat a Feyd party, though Cash tried, and almost succeeded. Plus, if Feyd said he was buying, his comment about the candy bars really meaning their time at that bar, then Fal wouldn't have to put his hand in his pocket all night. Not that he minded paying, but free drinks were never to be sniffed at.

"You know, if you had glasses, you'd look a little bit like the Milky Bar kid. It's an idea, for Halloween."

"Very fucking funny. You want a drink or what?"

"I'm driving at the moment, so, no. At least let me pull over first."

They drove for a while in silence, with Feyd giving directions and Fallon following them, before

they finally pulled over outside a club.

"George hates it when you drug him. I bet I get into trouble for it. So, did you get any other fun substances that I should be aware of? It is my honorary birthday."

Feyd grinned and winked. "All shall be revealed, my friend, in time"

Feyd nodded to the bouncers and headed through the door with Fallon hot on his heels.

"So, redhead at the left end?" Fallon asked before taking his shot. Feyd could tell that his friend was enjoying this little "misuse" of his powers.

Feyd looked over and concentrated, something he often had to do when inebriated. He sighed. "Black granny panties," he said as he squinted and pulled back from the bar, his face twisted in disgust. "And the hedge isn't trimmed, either. Christ, what is this, nineteen seventy-two?"

Fallon laughed so hard he almost choked. "Man, shit like that really wilts a man, you know?"

Feyd nodded, and Fallon sobered, his eyes scanning the room for their next x-ray victim. "Ah, the blonde across from us. Do the drapes match the carpet?"

Feyd loved sitting with Fallon and using his powers to his friend's lascivious ends. It was not only extremely entertaining, but also highly useful when weeding out the cream of the crop. He sipped his beer. "No clue. She didn't leave any evidence."

He smirked in his beer.

So, that's one we should keep our eye on, Feyd thought as he drained his mug. "Next victim, chuckle fuck. Who shall it be?" He glanced at Fallon and then turned his attention to the cute bartender that had stepped up to them. "Another shot for both of us and two more of these." He motioned to his empty glass. The raven-haired chicklet poured two more from the tap and then the shots. She winked at Feyd as he put a fifty on the bar. "Keep it," was all he said. He turned back to Fallon.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Don't tell me you didn't, 'cause I know you did. The bartender—she decent?"

"Oh, yeah. Class A-1. Flaming red lace bra and panties. We've found two, and—" He looked over to see the blonde and the brunette talking and motioned for Fallon to take a look. "They seem to know each other, so birthday rules apply, mate. You want the raven or the blonde?"

Fallon didn't hesitate. "Blonde."

"That's a change. Mind me asking why?"

"The raven reminds me of someone," Fallon said absently.

"Wait, what? Who the fuck are you talking about?" Feyd asked, confused.

Fallon frowned at him with an annoyed look on his face. "Your mom, you fuck. No, the really bad flight attendant. I've had enough disappointment for one night. She's all yours." He downed the rest of his beer and took the shot.

"Hey, works for me. I'm not picky," Feyd said as he downed his shot, the fiery liquid burning down his throat.

"That's an understatement."

"Quiet, you prick."

Fallon laughed and stood. "Might as well go and make nice if I'm gonna be sinking into that any time soon. I sure hope she's worth the time and aggravation." He looked around and noticed no one watching him, so he shimmered to a spot five feet from the blonde.

"Lazy fuck," Feyd said as his prey for the evening sauntered over. Her nametag read *Brenda*. He looked her up and down as she approached, and she seemed to like it.

"So, Brenda, what time do you get off?"

The chit looked into his eyes and answered, "Every time, and probably a minute or two before you do."

Yeah, she wants it. "Really? Brenda, are you hitting on me?" he said in his best coy voice. *Yeah, best to play dumb.*

He looked over at Fallon, who seemed to be getting along rather well, if the chit touching his chest often was any sign. He looked back over at his chicklet. She smiled and said, "I'd be stupid not to, wouldn't I?"

Ah, trying to work the ego, Angel. She's done this before. Eh, what the hell. He smiled to give the chit the impression that her flattery was working. "So, what time are you off work?"

"Fifteen minutes. Care to wait, or do you wanna meet up somewhere? Assuming that's why you're

asking."

"Yeah, I'm interested. Savvy?"

"Are you English? You have such a sexy accent and voice."

This time he knew he had the upper hand. The little player was going to get played and how. He leaned into her a little bit. "Uh huh. So, where..." He licked his lips. "Do you wanna meet?"

She passed him a key card. "Room four-nineteen. Fifteen minutes." She blew him a kiss and walked back to the other end of the bar. Fallon picked that minute to appear beside him.

"Well?" he asked as he took his seat.

They both produced key cards and, at the same time, said, "Room four-nineteen."

Fallon smirked. "Think they do this a lot?"

"About as often as we do." Feyd grinned. "Shall we teach them a thing or two?"

Fallon nodded, and they left the bar to search for the elevators that would carry them to their next round of amusing entertainment.

Fallon lay on the bed looking up at the ceiling as he caught his breath. The blonde was still in his arms, her head resting on his bare chest. She was absently playing with the small hair that ran from his belly button to down below. Occasionally, she ran her hand over his flat stomach, outlining all the well-toned muscles. It felt good to have someone so close. Close, but at a distance. *Pity she's not who I want.*

He felt a stab of something as he looked at the blonde; her long hair sprawled over his body like a shining silk sheet. He didn't even know her name. The feeling was a new one, but it closely resembled something he knew well: shame. He looked again at the nameless girl and thought back to all the things they'd just done. The feeling twisted through him again. Guilt? *Ah, fuck*. Guilt was never good.

She lifted her head up and looked him in the eye seductively. "You wanna go again?"

Fallon looked at the time. George should be waking up soon, and he did need to get the car.

"I better not, kitten. Got stuff to do."

She pouted as she positioned herself lower down on the bed. This put her mouth tantalizingly close to a certain part of his anatomy, which was becoming happy to be noticed.

"Your friend is. He must have more stamina. I could swear this guy wants more."

She moved her hand to his crotch and squeezed gently. *Low blow*. She really knew how to work a man. He listened to the room next door. Not that he had to listen hard; the wall was practically shaking. The girl sighed, and her breath misted over his manhood, which now ached to be touched again. Fallon soon found himself without any good reason to go, his brain lacking a lot of the blood it once had. "Kitten, if he can find the time, I'm sure I can as well."

The blonde grinned and set about showing him just how good his decision to stay was.

When he'd finally finished showing her what a good yet bad idea it had been to question his stamina, he left the bed and dressed quickly. He spared a glance at the girl on the bed. The words *quivering wreck* sprang to mind. Very few could keep up with him once he set his mind to it.

As Fallon left the bedroom and stepped into the living room of the suite, Feyd applauded, slowly clapping his hands. From Feyd's position on the couch and the empty miniature bottles laying next to him, it was clear he'd been at the mini bar.

"I'm impressed, really I am. I've been sitting here listening to the two of you for about twenty minutes."

Fal just stared at him. "Pervert. I always thought you fancied me. It's my ass, isn't it?"

"Her name is Astrid, too?"

Fal looked at him incredulously. "Yeah, I think it might have been. The coincidence is outstanding. How many Brendas have you fucked?"

"Hundreds. All satisfied customers."

Fal snorted. Knowing Feyd's self-confessed reputation for sticking it in, getting his jollies, then leaving, he doubted that. "Let's get the hell out of here. Georgie's gonna be pissed and wandering about."

For some reason, the thought of George wandering about the hotel half-drugged sent Feyd over the edge. Fallon looked at his giggling friend. *What else have you done to him?*

They walked back to their hotel, much to Fallon's distaste. Well, half-walked and half-carried

each other. *Damn walking. I hate walking. Then again, if I shimmer, and not in a straight line...so not good. I so do not want to end up in a wall.* As they entered the hotel lobby, they were met by quite a sight. Poor Georgie had indeed woken up and was now making a scene. Fal looked to Feyd to clear up the mess and fix George.

"Wow, Georgie looks furious!" Feyd said with a whoop of laughter. "He's gonna kill me!"

"Glad to see you're taking full responsibility, Feyd. Since when did you grow up?"

Feyd just looked at him innocently. "I know he won't kill me, mate. I got the 'antidote.'" He made the air-quotes sign at Fallon.

"You poisoned him?" Fallon was appalled.

"Not really, you fuck, but the note I left him says I did." Feyd started laughing once more.

"Wow, Feyd, you truly are insane."

"And don't you forget it." He straightened and saw Georgie glaring at them, his face covered in the permanent marker that Feyd had presumably drawn on him. "Hey, Georgie. What's shaking, mate? Besides you, that is."

Feyd watched George stalk toward them, his rage apparent. "Feyd, give me the antidote, or so help me I'll haunt you from the afterworld!"

"Shit, as if you could get rid of him so quickly, mate. You heard him. He's gonna haunt your ass," Fallon said, getting in the mood of toying with Georgie.

"Feyd, I'm serious." George's voice went to the cold pitch he used when he was interrogating. Feyd knew the joke had gone too far, especially since

George obviously hadn't seen the cartoon Jiggly Puff Feyd had drawn on his face.

"Relax, Georgie. You're not poisoned, unless three Dramamine and a beer can poison you."

George was, again, mightily furious. "You fucking prick! Here I am thinking I'm dying..."

Feyd smiled and shrugged it off. "Look, Batman, we had quite a night and are in need of rest and rejuvenation. Those bitches wore us out." Feyd and Fallon both smiled innocent smiles.

"Yeah, Georgie. I really need a shower. I reek of sex. Wanna smell?" Fallon stuck his hand out, almost under George's nose.

George freaked. "I don't care what the fuck you do with your whores. Lord knows why any woman would sleep with the likes of you," George muttered, and Fallon took the incentive.

"Why? Why do you think?" He grabbed at his crotch. "I could show you if you want."

George ignored the comment and composed himself. "Listen to me, you fucks. Go to your rooms, get showered, do whatever the fuck you're going to do, but stay in your fucking rooms!" His voice held a wealth of venom. "I'll be in touch with the both of you once I finish the breakfast meeting. I was almost late because of Nightly's shenanigans. Neither of you are in any shape to see Fallwell."

That stopped them dead. "Fallwell is here?" Feyd asked, a bit hushed.

"Don't you pricks ever listen? Yeah, he met with his informant and got the info. Said it was too delicate for us to handle. If he's taking special interest in this hunt, you know it's important."

"Right, George. We'll stay in the rooms," Feyd and Fallon said together.

George sneered at them both. "I'll make some excuse for you two. You know how he likes to see you guys. Creepy, if you ask me."

George turned to Fallon. "How was your flight?"

Fallon grinned, and Feyd knew this was going to be the *coup de gras* that put old Batman in his place.

"Great. Shagged the hell outta a flight attendant at 35,000 feet."

George's face turned beet red. "I swear I'm dealing with five-year-olds. Go take your showers. I'm already late." With that, he stormed off toward the restaurant.

"Rotten luck," Feyd said. "I'm starving!"

Fallon understood his meaning, and most of it had nothing to do with food. "You know what they say. There's always room service. Shit, I still gotta go get the car." Feyd stared blankly at his friend. "The Lamborghini? Remember?"

"Ah, shit yeah. Sorry, mate. Still a bit in my cups."

"No worries. I'll get it, savvy?"

Feyd nodded. Fallon went into a quiet corner and shimmered out of the hotel, presumably to the car.

If anybody had been watching, he or she would have seen him suddenly appear next to the car.

Thankfully, there wasn't anyone watching. There was, however, somebody listening to him as he emptied the contents of his stomach onto the floor of the parking garage. *This is the price I pay for drinking the same as Feyd. Should have learned by now. Body just can't hold that amount of alcohol.*

As Fallon leaned against the car, he heard someone creep up behind him. *A street thug*, he thought, *hoping to get lucky*. Odds were the boy had been out all night mugging people and selling drugs. He'd probably earned quite a lot of money and reckoned if he could end up with the Lamborghini, it would be the perfect end to a good night. It was exactly how Fallon had been at his age. Well, aside from the dealing.

The boy moved behind the car, pulled out his knife, and prepared to lunge. As he made his move, his target faded out of the way. The boy stopped mid-lunge, confused.

Fallon shimmered behind the boy, taking his own blade out and running it from ear to ear across the boy's neck. He turned the boy and stepped back to miss the arterial spray. Fallon wiped his knife on the boy's jacket and let the body drop to the floor. He walked over to the car, inspecting the shiny surface to make sure no blood had splattered on it. *None. Good. Stupid boy*. He shook his head in disgust as he looked at the boy he'd just killed. *Can't be any older than nineteen. This is all Feyd's fault*. He took the keys from his pocket and opened the car before turning to the boy again.

"Now what to do with you?"

Hide him or leave him? Hiding was messy and time-consuming. He was supposed to be in his room. *House arrest in Vegas? I've never heard of something so stupid.* The brat's probably got the cops after him, anyway. Shit, his head was spinning. He needed to go back to bed.

He got into the car and started the engine before thinking better of it and switching the car off again. He reached into the glove box, pulled out a map, and looked for a suitable dump site. Okay, a desert. He could do that. He locked the car and picked up the body, disgusted that the son of a bitch had the bad taste to bleed all over him.

"Kay, boy, we're gonna do this real quick. This is all Feyd's fault."

He shimmered out of sight.

Fallon staggered through the doors of the hotel. He was exhausted, hung-over, and covered with dust. This was all Feyd's fault. Next time, he'd just let the boy take the car. He needed a shower then bed. *Shit, what was my room number? Damn.* He was walking toward reception desk when a voice shouted his name.

"Fallon? Fallon, my boy, come here."

Shit, it's the boss. Argh. This was all Feyd's fault. He turned to see an older man waving at him from the reception lounge. He had no choice but to go to the boss. Roman Fallwell looked a lot like a European Nazi porn king. He had the tan, the white-blond hair, and the blue eyes. Once, he may

have been good looking.

When Fallon was a few meters away, the man smiled warmly. "Fallon, I was hoping to catch you. George said that you and Feyd weren't at your best today. The two of you up to your old tricks again?"

"Yeah, kind of. It was my birthday a few days ago. This was our first chance to celebrate. George neglected to tell us that we had a meeting. If we had known...I'm sorry, sir."

Fallwell shook his head. "Nonsense. No need to apologize. The two of you are my best, and I told you four years ago to call me Roman. If you keep calling me 'sir,' I'll take it as insolence. How is Feyd? I always do like to see him. Quite the character, don't you think?"

"Feyd? Yeah, he's really cool. We get along."

"And you thought you'd never get a partner to suit."

"Roman, I'm glad you changed my mind. Feyd and I go pretty much everywhere together."

"Yes, yes, of course. What I really wanted to ask you was how things went with Cash. Did everything go to plan? He behaved himself, I hope?"

"Cash? Everything ran smoothly. He's quite the maker of plans. It all went great. He was really, very good. I got the impression that he's not used to the company."

"And how did he look? Well, I hope. Was he eating enough?"

"He looked all right, and he ate when I was there."

"Good. I do worry about him sometimes. He's been through a lot."

“He seemed fine when I was there. Roman, I’m sorry. I’d love to talk to you all day, but I really must get back and get a shower. Can we arrange a meeting date for when Feyd and I get back home?”

For the first time, Fallwell seemed to take notice of Fallon’s state of dress. His eyes narrowed suspiciously. “Fallon? What have you been doing?”

Fal looked down at himself and tried to dust off a bit before giving up. “There was an incident. Nothing for you to worry about. I was in the desert.”

Roman nodded. “I’m sure it’s nothing to worry about. You are resourceful. Go. Get cleaned up, enjoy Vegas, and I’ll see you back home soon, I’m sure.”

“Thanks, Roman. Bye.” Fal took his leave, got his room number from the reception desk, and set off toward his room, wondering what it was that Feyd could have done to get himself banned from the city.

Feyd was checking his email when his cell phone rang. “Nightly.”

“It’s Bateman. The meeting went fine.”

Feyd waited for him to continue. When it was apparent he was waiting for Feyd to grant him a response, Feyd simply said, “Okay, and...?”

“Fallwell sends his regards. He missed you guys.” George snickered.

“Glad to see you’re laughing at our expense, Batman. What happened at the meeting?”

George got snippy. "Look, Nightly, I had to go see Fallwell with marker all over my fucking face, thanks to you. If I feel so inclined to rip on you and Ipwhisk 'cause Fallwell's got a thing for you, then so be it! And what the fuck did you draw on my face, anyway? I looked like a fucking cartoon!"

"Obviously you looked like a cartoon since I drew Jiggly Puff all over you. Rather amazing, if I do say so myself. You know, I think I should become an artist. I do have quite the eye."

George ignored Feyd ramblings. "What in the Sam Hill is a Jiggly Puff?"

"A Pokémon. Listen, it doesn't matter. Did the marker come off?"

"Yeah, it came off."

"Damn. So much for permanence. So, the meeting?"

George sighed. "Well, Fallwell's informant..."
George started to chuckle. "They saw the mark getting on a plane to New York. We missed them by a week."

"Them?"

"Yeah. Apparently she's with another female. I'm sure it's that safety in numbers kinda thing. Trust Mallory to find himself a skittish bitch, one that will get another woman killed just to feel safe."

"Great, so one for each of us. What are Fallwell's orders?"

"The usual. Extract the incantation, kill her. Leave no witnesses."

"Okay." Then Feyd decided to ask, "Why were you laughing when you mentioned Fallwell's informant?"

“Believe me, you don’t wanna know.”

“I’ll be the judge of that. Spill it.”

“Well, I met up with them, and he wasn’t alone. Some ruddy bitch named Sheila was at his side. So we talked, and she excused herself, and all the while I wasn’t getting the right sense off of her, you know? Then Fallwell says, ‘She’s a great shag,’ and I quote ‘loves back door action.’ I then realized that ‘Sheila’ had an Adam’s apple. So, now I’m thinking her name is more like Sheldon. So, yeah, Fallwell is fucking a guy.”

Feyd was awestruck. “What? Do you think he knows?”

“No clue, but I’m not gonna be the one to tell him. And neither are you or Ipwhisk. Pass the word on to him, would you?”

“Uh huh.”

Feyd listened as George told him that Fallwell had contacted his New York connection and found out that the mark was on her way to Shadow Heights, presumably to hide out. It was a safe bet that George’s previous informant was correct when he’d said the scroll was there. The three of them, Feyd, Fallon, and George, were booked on the next flight out to New York.

George hung up, and Feyd called Fallon, itching to get this news off his chest.

“What, Feyd? I haven’t even showered yet. Which, by the way, is entirely your fault!”

Feyd paid no mind to Fallon’s unwarranted accusations. He sighed. “Fal, get a grip. Fallwell smokes pole, can you believe it?”

“What the fuck are you talking about?”

They needed to find out more about the town. All Fallon had come up with was that the museum had a knitting exhibit. Fallon looked down his list of contacts, trying to figure out who to call next. None of his usual people were talking, which was weird because these people loved to talk. He sighed and flipped the pages to the back. *I'm just phoning the wrong people. The sooner I get my info, the sooner I can get to Astrid.* With that thought in mind, he picked up the phone and dialed the number of the one person guaranteed to know something about anything: Mr. Fantasy, himself. *555-6969. Damn him for getting that number.*

"Morrison."

"I need you to get some information. Think you could do that for me?"

There was silence on the other end of the line for a few moments. "Nice to hear from you, you fucking dick. It's been what, a year?"

Fallon laughed at Morrison's aggravated voice. "Has it been a year already? I'm looking for information on a place called..." He checked his notes. "Shadow Heights. Ever heard of it? Feyd and I are going there on business."

"Shadow Heights, eh? I've been there a number of times, my friend. One of my kin is the proprietor of Pinky's. The girls there are first class. There's a museum and stay at the Rosco. It's great. The Cherry Street district is to die for. Strip clubs everywhere, and a motel with hourly rates. Beware,

there's a vamp club called The End. Stay clear of that, unless you fancy getting your throat ripped out. Dry Ice is the town's big ass dance club. Just about everywhere you go, chicks will fuck the hell outta you on a table. Well, maybe that's just me. Business? You need any help? I'm bored as fuck."

"Help? No, not with the mark...but I might have another problem that needs your expertise. If you're up for it, that is. So, they'll just fuck you on the table? Sounds like my kind of town."

"Another problem? I'm game. As usual, my rates are fairly reasonable. If I enjoy it, I'll do it for free."

"It'll be free anyway. You owe me, remember? Besides when have I ever asked you to do something you wouldn't enjoy? Do you remember Georgie?"

"Don't remind me. That dude is creepy, even to me. Wait, George is your problem? I'll gladly do it. Yeah, yeah, I remember that I owe you. Say, Fal, how's about we barter? I'll give you a chick to play with while you're in town, and we'll call it even."

Fallon had to laugh at that. *I spent the night in the swamp, nearly getting eaten by a gator. I had to fight off spiders bigger than dinner plates, and you want to buy me off with some two-bit whore?*

"No deal. You owe me a really big favor. I'm still the only one who knows where that body is. You don't even want to know the things I went through that day. How about this? You do this for me, and we'll say that you're on your way to paying me back?"

The line was silent for a while as Morrison pondered his options. Fallon felt slightly bad for

hanging this over his head. Morrison didn't really owe him anything. He had liked Electra and would have helped kill the bastard anyway, but Fallon knew that leverage can be a good thing to have.

"You drive a hard bargain, don't you?"

"Yes, mate, I do. But those are my terms."

"Fine, agreed. Now what's the skinny?"

"Good to have you on board. We're in town on a hit, the usual. Nothing we can't handle, but Georgie-boy is another matter all together. He's finally snapped. He's gonna try and take us out, I just know it. I'm not sitting around waiting for him to try. He's sick, needs to be put out of his misery. Plus, he grounded us—in Vegas, of all places. He said he'd take us out on the town. He just wants to take us out. I don't know who he's in with on this, but I know he doesn't have the balls or the talent to do it himself. I need you to find out what he's got planned and who's helping. Seeing as how you know the town well, it won't be too hard for you."

"Okay, can do."

Fallon took a deep breath before warning his friend. "Now, you know I'm a suspicious man by nature so don't be too offended. But, if it's you that's helping him, and you fuck me over, there will no place in any of the 'verses or planes that will keep you safe from me, savvy? I will find you, and you will beg for death. My face will be the last thing you ever see. Don't fuck me around, Morrison. I like you."

"Fallon, you are truly a very scary man. I wouldn't dream of it, and hell, I hate the pretentious prick as much as you do. Why the hell

do you think I went out on my own? I'll be glad to take the fucker down. Where are you staying in town?"

"I don't know all the details. I'll call you back when I find out."

"Cool. I'll be at Pinky's. I better go, there's something here that needs my attention."

"You always were a lady-killer, Morrison. I'll call you." Fallon hung up the phone and lit a cigarette. He smoked it before going for a shower and packing his bag.

The flight from Vegas was cramped and tense. George sat in the back of the Hummer as they barreled down Interstate 87 toward their destination, Shadow Heights. *Freaking pissants. And Fallwell, with a guy? This is all too much for me. I will be really happy once this fucking job is over*, he thought to himself with an air of disgust.

"Hey, George, we're coming up to the exit. Where we going then?" Fallon asked as he drove. "What's the hotel name?"

"Rosco, I believe. It's in the entertainment district." George watched as they got off the exit, paid the toll, and got on the city inner highway. They took the exit for the entertainment district. He sighed, and Feyd turned around.

"Still freaked about Fallwell?"

George nodded. "That was really just creepy. So, here's the deal, boy scouts. We check in, and then we do some recon, all right? Let's get this done

quick. Fallon, I know you called some people. What did you find out?"

"Just that Morrison says they've got some classy joints in this town. That, and the entire Cherry Street district is run by the royal houses of Pleasure demons. We should have fun, then."

"Look, we aren't here for the two of you to fuck everything in sight. Let's just get the job done, okay? Then I don't give a shit what the two of you do."

"Aye aye, Cap'n!" Fallon pulled in to the hotel carport and got out, looking around.

Yeah, we finish the hit, and then I can get rid of these assholes, real quiet like. George got out of the backseat and walked over to Fallon. "Look, I was told to play background to you two here. Fallwell's orders. So, you two better get this shit done. I don't care how you do it, or who you call in, just get it done."

With a last look at them, standing there with their mouths open, George turned and walked toward the doors. *Bet they didn't think they'd be turned loose in a new city. It's what Fallwell wants. Who am I to say anything? As long as I leave this place soon, what the hell do I care?*

Chapter Five

The store, along with the rest of the house, was almost set up. Ash and Astrid had spent the previous week getting deliveries for both the house and the store and doing inventory. A few more days of grunt work, and the shop would be ready for visitors.

Astrid was presently cataloging and organizing the upstairs catwalk library bookshelves while Ash was finishing with the sitting room, a tiny parlor room on the first floor that would serve for a meeting place when they had to deal with others in the “trade.”

“You almost finished up there?” Ash asked from the sitting room doorway. “I need a drink.”

Astrid stood back and marveled at her organizational skills. She smiled. “Hell yeah, girl, I’m done. Get me a shot.” She turned and made her way down the old wrought iron spiral staircase to where Ash was already waiting next to the bar, two shot glasses in her hands. Astrid grabbed hers and tipped it back. The smooth liquid left a trail of heat down her throat. It reminded her of someone she knew.

“Thanks, love,” she said to Ash. “So, what’s left on the list?”

Astrid and Ash had devised the chores into a list of top priority first. Ash leaned on the counter and eyed the to-do list. "Well, until that box of Grimoires comes from Paris, we are done in here."

"Splendid. Now what about the rest of the house?" Astrid asked as she sat on one of the velvet, high-backed chairs that were situated throughout the room.

"We did the kitchen." Ash nodded as she went on. "And the pantry is stocked. The pool table came and was installed yesterday, the bar and its fixings were finished as well. Hope he likes the tap we installed." She laughed. "It doesn't matter if he likes the tap. Hell, I like the tap."

Astrid smiled and laughed. "I forgot it was your idea, after all." Ash took a bow. Astrid continued as Ash poured them another shot. "We aired out and refurnished the bedrooms and the linens and fixed the plumbing in the guest bathrooms."

"Though Lord knows why you did that. Like either of them are gonna use it."

"True, but it did need to be done."

Ash smirked. "True. So, you sure it's cool I'm here and all?"

Astrid looked stricken. "Ash, hon, you're like my sister. I love having you here. It gives me a reason to keep the kitchen and bar fully stocked." She winked at Ash.

"Right, but...well, you know, say the word, and I'm gone."

"Uh, I believe the American teenagers say it best when they say 'as if!'"

Astrid laughed and finished her third shot in

ten minutes. “So, Ash, you like your new bathroom?”

Astrid had had a contractor re-do the two master suites bathrooms to include a gas fireplace, a Jacuzzi tub, a seven-head shower stall, and half-ceiling skylights. The Jacuzzi in both bathrooms mimicked the Japanese hot springs, with the worn down rocks and hothouse plants. They even had working water cascades. Both bathrooms were only accessible through the bedroom, and both led out onto private balconies furnished with large, leafy trees and soft-cushioned rattan furniture. Only Astrid's suite had the wrought iron balcony, due to the fact that her suite was toward the front of the house. Astrid thought the bathroom was perfect for the future at hand, and just knew she and Fallon were gonna have a hell of a time breaking it in.

Ash grinned. “You’re kidding. I fucking love it. It’s like heaven in there. I could spend days. And that shower stall is fucking great.”

“Yeah, now just imagine having Feyd in there with you, using it on you.”

Ash giggled then blushed, and the ice in her new Jack melted in seconds. “Damn it! See what you did, Astrid?”

“What I did, love? You did that.” She laughed.

Ash shook off her thoughts of alcohol abuse and laughed as well. She raised her now-warm Jack Daniels and said, “To the bathroom!”

Both women drank to the new play area they had created. Ashlyn got back to the task at hand. “Okay, the backyard hot tub is finished as well, along with the fire pit. Astrid, why the hell did we

need a fire pit?”

“Ash, I’m a witch. A lot of my spells need fire,”
Astrid said matter-of-factly.

“Oh.”

“What time is it?” Ash asked as she stretched.

“Almost ten. Getting hungry?”

“Yeah. What do you think, steaks and salad?”

“Sounds good to me. Then I believe I’m going
to go upstairs and see if Mr. Nightly is on, savvy?”

Astrid knew all too well what Ash was getting
at. For two weeks since Fallon had called, she’d
been playing mail tag and doing web-cam shows
with Fallon. She was so ready to see him, but she
still had a week left.

Ashlyn went upstairs and turned on her laptop.
A message from Fallon blinked at her.

Vixen,

*I’m not around tonight. Looks like we are
finishing the project, and that I’ll see you in a little
under a week. I love you. Try not to sob without
me.*

Fallon

She took his news as a good thing, yet she
worried about what he was doing. She hoped he
wasn’t going to come home with another scar. She
didn’t write back, knowing that once he was done,
he’d be back at his hotel on his laptop, looking to
see if she was anywhere near her web cam.

*Hmm, well how about I send him a show while
I wait? Sort of a “wish you were here” thing? she
thought as she took off her clothes and sat on the*

midnight blue satin bedspread. She knew the colors of the bedding, midnight blue, sapphire, and cerulean, would frame her perfectly on screen. "Yeah," she said as she reached into her bedside drawer. "I'll give him a show he'll wish he was here to help me with."

A while later, she met Ash down at the kitchen. "Well, still want the steaks?" she asked Ash as she went over to the fridge. "Or do you want just some cheese and fruit? Maybe a salad? Something easy?"

Ash smiled a lazy smile. "I'm hungry. Salads and cheese sound great, nothing too heavy. I just need to recharge."

"Was he that much fun?"

"Feyd? Yeah. Let's just say I am looking forward to that visit."

They ate in relative silence with Linus coming through the doggie door a few times, back and forth. Ash looked quizzically at Astrid. "He's burying bones back by the rowan tree. He's been doing it for at least two days. Digging them up and re-burying them. Strange dog, I know. But, hey, at least he's not pissing in the hallway anymore."

Ash laughed "True. You bringing him up to be with you?"

"Nah, he can sleep in the family room. I'm bushed. I'm going to bed."

They both rinsed the plates, set them in the dishwasher. Ash turned out the lights and went

upstairs, knowing that the dreams she was going to experience that night weren't the G-rated kind.

This was possibly one of the stupidest things they'd ever done and the most dangerous. They were about to go into to a situation where they had no information to back them up, all because they'd let their dicks speak for them. They were not the type of people to fuck up a job because they got impatient. *Impatient* wasn't in Fallon's vocabulary. It was in Feyd's, but Fallon was the planner, the one who, more often than not, came up with the strategies.

Fallon never did anything half-assed. Never. This job reeked of failure. The worst thing was it wasn't Feyd's fault. He was just following Fallon. As Feyd climbed the wall, Fal silently weighed his options again. *We could leave now, come back tomorrow. Shit, I promised Astrid. I want that girl now, but tomorrow will do. I don't think I can wait any longer than that. All right, we take our time. Make sure it's not a trap. I should have waited for Morrison. Fuck. Well, we're here now, committed, as it were.*

When Feyd finally came up behind him, he tripped on something and fell into Fallon, who shimmered away to stand behind him. He bent down and picked up a bone that was half buried. *There's a dog.*

"Shit, Fal..."

Feyd's words sounded harsh against the quiet

night. Fallon hushed him with a signal. When he spoke again, his words were soft whispers. "Shit, Fal, what the fuck did you do that for? What the fuck was that, anyway?"

"You don't wanna know. Look, we need to be quiet. Go in, get the spell, kill the girl, and leave. Savvy?"

"What about the other?"

"We won't waste time on her if we don't have to. Now, look at the building and tell me what you see. Where are they?"

Feyd turned toward the house. "Okay, they are both on the top level but at opposite sides of the building. I don't see any security systems. There might be wards, but those charms your witch gave us should hold. Handy things, those. Shit, Fal, there's a dog. You know I don't like dogs."

"I know there's a dog. What do you think you tripped on? What kind is it?"

"How the hell should I know? It's a dog. A big fucking dog."

Fallon sighed and took a different approach. "Can it move freely around the house? What do you mean by big? How big? Like Doberman big? Pitbull big? Is it another Yorkshire terrier?"

"Don't laugh at me. Those things are evil. It's in between the last two. I think it's locked up in the room."

"Good, then it won't be an issue. I'm not laughing at you, but you can't freak out every time you come across one. It's just an animal."

"Fuck you, Mr. I'm-Not-Afraid-of-Things. I was only a kid, and this big, huge—"

"Bully for you and your childhood trauma, Feyd," Fallon snapped, cutting him off. "Trust me when I tell you that you really don't want to swap stories with me. We go in, we get out, then we go to France and get laid. Savvy?"

Feyd blinked and calmed down. Fallon never talked about his childhood and with good reason. Whenever he did, he always got really drunk and killed something...or just flat-out killed something. He knew Feyd so didn't want to go there. Fallon took his silence as an answer and walked toward the door.

"And put the silencer on the gun. Then we can use it," Fallon whispered. He half-shimmered, then, thinking better of it, he solidified and walked to Feyd, who was standing next to the door. Feyd winced as Fallon approached him.

"I am afraid of things, too, Feyd. Probably of more things than you are, but there's a time and a place for being scared. This isn't it. If you want, we'll come back tomorrow with something for the dog."

Feyd shook his head.

"Good, then I'll take care of the dog if it becomes a problem. You won't have to worry your pretty little head about it, but if I have to take care of all the dogs we come across, you get to kill all the spiders. It's only fair." Fallon winked and shimmered to the other side of the door to let Feyd in.

Once inside the house, Feyd directed them both to the girls' rooms. Of the two girls was a brunette, and one was blondish. Their mark,

according to Feyd, had blonde highlights. *Trust Feyd to pick up on that. I swear he's fucked them so much he has actually become a woman. Scary shit.*

As they entered the target's room, Fallon heard something but dismissed it quickly as the old house making noises. They crept in and positioned themselves so that Fallon was at the foot of her bed with his throwing knives, and Feyd was next to her headboard with the gun pointed at her.

The girl lay asleep on her bed. A water bed. He could see it waving slightly with every breath she took. Her laptop was to the side of her, still switched on. She had kicked off most of her covers, and what little clothing she had on had ridden up on her during her sleep. They weren't quite getting a free show, but if Fallon moved his head to the side and squinted a little, he could almost see...He had to admit, that bastard Mallory had very good taste. He looked at Feyd, who was frowning slightly. "Hey, Fal, does she look familiar to you?" He still had his gun pointed at her, but it was wavering slightly. The half light in the room coming from the soft glow of the far vanity lamp shadowed them all, but the woman on the bed was cloaked in it.

"She looks like a soon-to-be very dead woman. Hold that thing in a two-handed grip if it's too heavy for you."

Feyd looked up, saw a huge mirror above the bed, and swore. Just then the girl woke up.

Ashlyn woke up suddenly. There were people in her room.

"Shh! Make a noise and you'll die. Make a move and you'll die."

She glared at the man who spoke. He was standing at the foot of the bed, holding what looked like a throwing knife. "Can I at least cover myself up?"

The knife hit the headboard next to her head and stuck in. It was so close to her head that it had caught some of her hair. "Did I not mention what would happen if you made a noise? That was your last warning. Now, I ask the questions and you answer them. If you don't, let's just say that killing you isn't the worst thing we can do. I'd hate to bring your friend into this. No, you can't cover yourself up. My friend and I are enjoying the view. Now let's start, shall we?"

Her glare deepened. She knew it was a rhetorical question. She had no choice...for now. The other man was practically dancing from toe to toe and trying to glance at her laptop. *Oh God, if they read the messages...*

"Good, we understand each other. Mallory stole a spell from our employer. We wish to retrieve it. We tried to deal with him, but he was...uncooperative, and by the time he was ready to talk to us, he had minutes to live. So, he sent us to you. My first question is this: how does it feel knowing that everything you've gone through is because your lover didn't love you enough to give his life for you? He is dead, though."

Tears began to fill her eyes, and her jaw started to tremble. "Alec? We...he...didn't love me at all. We weren't together. I don't have any spells. I only took myself and ran."

The tears spilled out of her eyes. She couldn't even wipe them off her face. The other man, who had up until now remained silent, was looking through her laptop. *Oh, God, no!*

"Man, we need to talk. This ain't right." He looked pleadingly at the man with the knives, who frowned at him.

"What is it?"

The other man shook his head. "Outside."

"I'm not taking my eye off the target, unlike someone else I know."

"You will in a moment, mate."

*What the hell? Maybe I can use this to get to...*As she slid her hand toward the pillow, the second knife grazed her hand, piercing the bed. *Damn, it's sharp.*

"No, kitten. That wasn't an excuse. Don't fuck me around."

By now she was soaking, and the bed had started to leak onto the floor. The one that had read her laptop offered her his hand, and she took it. She needed an ally, preferably one that she could manipulate with sex.

"Always was a sucker for a wet one. What the fuck is this all about?"

Pulled from a dream, Astrid sat upright and

listened. The house was silent. She slipped out of the satin-covered bed as naked as when she went in and slipped on her blue peacock robe. *I'll go get some tea from the kitchen. It will help me sleep. I'll check on Linus, too.* She left her room and closed the door.

Listening closely, she heard soft noises, almost whispers, coming from Ash's bedroom. She smiled. Damn, she must really be getting on well with Feyd. The thought warmed her to her core. She was pleased to have her friends as happy as she was. *Fallon. Damn, baby, I miss you.* Her thoughts ran to Ash. *Maybe she wants some tea, too. Lord knows, she's probably dehydrated.* She chuckled to herself and set out toward Ash's room.

She wasn't prepared for the sight that greeted her when she opened the door. The one at the foot of the bed looked really angry and was holding a knife. She watched as Ashlyn squeezed the hand of the one closest to her as he pulled her close to him. She half hid behind him. Astrid looked at Ashlyn and the man, half cloaked in shadow, then looked at the knife-wielding man again.

Fallon? *Fallon, here?*

Her eyes lit up. "Cookie!"

Fallon turned around just in time to catch her as she leapt on to him, her legs sliding around his waist. He kissed her passionately, like a drowning man, and slammed her up against the wall. *Oh, Goddess, Fallon,* she thought as she ran her fingers through his hair and let them settle at the nape of his neck. Her legs pressed tighter to him, and he issued a grunt as he kissed her. Her body now

firmly pressed to his belt buckle, she wiggled, felt the bulge of his groin, and moaned into his mouth.

Astrid was so enraptured with Fallon, she didn't even notice when Ash kicked Feyd and ran for her life out of the room.

Feyd was so taken aback by Fallon's behavior that he never saw the assault by the girl who had his heart. After spying the email on her laptop from earlier, noticing it only from a choice phrase in bold on the screen, he knew that the shit had hit the fan. Ashlyn apparently was their mark; though he didn't expect Astrid to bound in and jump Fallon. It was just as well, though. Trying to explain to Fal why they had made a mistake wasn't going to happen now. Fallon was a smart guy, and once the witch was through giving her passionate greeting, well, Fallon would figure it all out.

She kicked him right in the stones, and he dropped to his knees, one hand holding his groin, the other reaching out for Ashlyn. The gun was long forgotten, kicked under the wooden lip of the bed, lost in shadow.

He tried to call out to her, but his voice was reduced to a squeak of her name. *Damn, that girl's got strong legs.* The thought sent blood racing to his abused appendage, and he was in a whole new kind of pain. *Christ, leave it to me to get all hot over a girl kicking me in the groin.* He tried to stand, but it proved too painful. He decided to crawl, doubled over, toward the door. It was then

that he noticed Fallon and Astrid still by the door, almost to the point of foaming.

What the fucking hell is going on here? He looked at the couple who were in their own little world, oblivious to his presence. *Shit, looks like I'm going to have to go after her myself. Fuck! How am I gonna explain this shit to her?* he thought as he stumbled through the doorway, following the wet footprints Ash left behind.

The footsteps went downstairs. Feyd was becoming lost in his own thoughts. *Cookie? The witch calls Fallon 'cookie'? Fallon? Lord, that's horrible! And just what the hell are they doing in Shadow Heights, anyway? Shit, I'm in so much t—*

He was so enwrapped in his own thoughts that he missed the third stair and went tumbling down two flights of stairs to the first floor. He opened his eyes and groaned. He lay on his back, a sharp pain in his chest as he tried to breathe. *Shit, I think I broke a rib. The witch better be able to fix that, 'cause—*

His thoughts were cut off when a dainty foot with red nail polish stood on his shoulder. His gaze followed the foot, up the curve of her leg, past a pair of impressive breasts, finally alighting on her face. "Ash?"

"Don't fucking move!" Ash had a shotgun trained on his head, cocked and loaded.

"Relax, Ash," he said looking up at her from the floor. His gaze lowered. *Christ, she's still not wearing any panties!* He tried to compose himself on the heels of that thought. "It's me, Feyd. You know the 'I'd-do-anything-for-you-as-long-as-you-

make-me-come' guy you have been cyber-fucking for the last week? Shit, baby, you're even better in person. Even with a shotgun pointed at my head."

Ash jammed the barrel into his temple, tears in her eyes. "You were sent to kill me?"

Ever the calm customer, Feyd figured he should tell her the truth. "Well, sort of. See, we were sent to kill Mallory's girlfriend. I swear, minx, I had no idea it was you."

"I wasn't Alec's fucking girlfriend!" she screamed hysterically. "And don't you dare call me minx! You don't have the right! You fucking tried to kill me!"

Ash's foot slipped off Feyd's shoulder, and he took the opportunity to get off the floor. His chest still hurt, albeit less. He looked into her eyes and immediately his chest tightened. He really didn't want to see this beautiful woman cry, and that was a new emotion for him, protectiveness. He shrugged it off and tried to play cool.

"Ah, technically I tried to save you from the big bad Fallon up there, but I think the honor of saving your life goes to that horny witch up there. Christ, they haven't breathed yet, I'm sure." She smiled a bit, and he knew he was on the right track. "Look, this really is a big misunderstanding. I swear we didn't know you were in Shadow Heights. We assumed you guys were at Astrid's place in Paris. I never would have hurt you. Ash, baby, please put down the gun." He stood there for untold minutes, and she sobbed, clearly wanting to believe him. She threw the gun to the ground and looked at him. Her eyes were still wet, but heat seared in them, and

Feyd was taken aback.

“You owe me a new bed.” She grabbed for him, and he snaked his arm around her waist. *Damn, she really is hot*, he thought as he lowered his lips to her trembling ones. The look on her face was pure lust. The kiss was electric. His body hardened the second she touched him. He broke from her mouth to kiss and nuzzle her ear. He inhaled her fresh scent and was floored. He groaned and lifted her up under her thighs, her legs wrapping around his waist, her hot, molten core pressing against his groin.

“You wet for me, baby?” he asked in a whisper in her ear, laying his accent on really thick.

Ash moaned and found his mouth again, this time kissing harder and assaulting him with her tongue. He shifted his hands under her shirt and slid them up her torso to her waiting breasts. Her nipples were tight little peaks.

Feyd could hardly wait. He turned, and still kissing her, spotted a hall lounger. He silently thanked any gods that might watch over Astrid and Ash and made his way to it. Ash was wiggling insistently on his groin. His cock started to protest its incarceration in his jeans. He knelt down on the lounger, and she unwrapped herself from him. She looked at him. Her shirt was open, and she was completely exposed. Feyd couldn't believe how lucky he really was. Ashlyn was perfect.

“So, what did you say you were gonna do to me when you saw me?” she asked, her eyes heavy and her lips glistening with the saliva she spread on them with her tongue as she talked to him.

Feyd knelt down next to the lounge, grabbed her by the hips, and pulled her body so that her legs were hanging off the edge. He grabbed her thighs and slung them over his shoulder, knowing that this treat was too good to pass up. He positioned his mouth inches from her wet slit and looked up at her. "Ash...you're perfect." She moaned as he set to showing her just how perfect she was. *She tastes amazing*, he thought as he tickled her clit with his tongue, her little cries and moans fueling him on. She was close...

As soon as Fallon heard his nickname come from Astrid's mouth, he lost all coherent thought. Everything else was forgotten; all that mattered was her. He caught her easily as she jumped into his arms and wrapped her legs securely around his hips. They kissed, their tongues wrestling furiously with a passion that only they shared. He pushed her against the wall, and she gave a little yelp of surprise as her back collided with the smooth hard surface. She positioned herself so that she was just above the bulge in his jeans, her wetness seeping through the rough fabric, causing him to throb with need. She moaned into his mouth and pushed herself harder onto the bulge, which was taking a lot of much needed blood from his brain.

He broke free of the kiss with a gasp, his knees threatening to give way if he didn't move them to something other than the wall soon. He buried his face in the small space just behind her ear and

inhaled deeply. *Hmm...apples and cinnamon.* He sucked gently on her ear lobe, reveling in the small noise she made when he nibbled gently on it.

She had started unbuttoning his shirt, but her hands were shaking, and he could tell she was becoming impatient when she ripped the last few buttons and pushed the shirt off his shoulders, trapping his arms. He knew she wanted smooth, bare flesh; she always told him how much she loved the feel of his skin. She started working on muscles of his shoulder and neck with her tongue, lips, and teeth. Fallon quickly scanned the room for all suitable platforms he could use. He wanted—no needed—to have his hands free. His eyes landed on an antique dresser. *Perfect.*

He moved them away from the wall and sat Astrid on the dresser. He took a step back and looked at her in appreciation. Her dressing gown was askew and not really covering anything anymore. *She's mine, so beautiful.* She was practically squirming with the need to be touched, to be held. She reached out for him, and he went to her, laying her down on the surface, peeling the dressing gown away so she lay naked in a pool of blue silk. He reached for her breasts, cupping one with his hand and kissing the other. He drew her nipple into his mouth, rolling it around with his tongue, flicking it slightly with the tip.

She moaned and ran her fingers through his hair, pulling on it and holding it tightly. He pulled back slightly from her nipple and blew on it, making it harder than it had been, and then took it, cold and rock hard, back into his warm mouth. He watched

her reactions. Her eyes rolled back in her head, and her hands clasped and un-clasped in his hair. Every so often she would moan, which would almost send him over the edge. The pressure in his jeans became unbearable now. *This is why I love her. I get off just watching her.*

"Cookie, please...I want you, need you. Now, please. It's been so long."

He quickly discarded his jeans and boxers, and then he was inside her, reveling in her warmth, her tightness. She really was tight. She moaned deeply in frustration and need as he took a few seconds to adjust himself. He didn't want to come just yet. He wanted it—no, needed it—to last. *Home. This is where I should always be.* He had to hold her hips still. She was trying to thrust into him, a small frown of concentration on her face. *I love that look on you, vixen. Damn, girl, you're impatient today.*

"What's your rush, vixen?"

All the answer he received was a few muttered French curse words. She tried to wiggle and gain any kind of friction, but he held her still, pinned to the dresser. Fallon smirked slightly. He loved teasing her, and he'd missed it. *I love her like this, so out of control, lost in herself...so beautiful.*

Once he was sure that her body had adjusted to his size and that he wouldn't lose himself, he started a strong, steady pace. Still holding her hips in place, he restricted her movement.

Ash came so suddenly that it surprised even

her. Her thighs clenched around Feyd's head. She lay there as the roaring orgasm subsided, her legs loose and now relaxed around his head. She was sopping wet; she could feel it. Feyd sat back on his heels, wincing slightly as he did, admiring his handiwork. His chin was covered in her wetness. He grinned at her and licked his lips. She smiled and held a hand out to him.

"Come here."

He did; they kissed. His face was rough. He obviously hadn't shaved since the morning. Ash could taste herself on his lips. This only turned her on even more. She grabbed at his belt and started to undo it, but she fumbled with it a few times before she gave up, grabbed him by the shirt, and pulled him in close. His scent was musky, and his aftershave was wonderful. He was what a man should smell like. Wild and wicked. She wrapped her legs around him, and he winced again. *That's not right. Did he hurt himself on the fall down the stairs? Maybe he doesn't want this...me? Jeez, Ash, paranoid much,* she chastised herself. *You really are fucked up in the head. He killed Alec...you remember him, don't you? And here you are opening your legs to him like some whore.* She pushed him away and sat up, frowning slightly, ignoring the voices in her head.

"What's wrong? Are you hurt?"

"Hurt? Me? No, everything's perfect."

He's lying. There's something wrong. He's not holding himself right. She reached out to him and gently jabbed him in the ribs. He doubled over in pain, cursing as he went.

"You are hurt. What's wrong?"

He screwed up his face in a way that Ash found too adorable to be manly. "You got me, minx. I might have broken a rib or two in that tumble down the stairs. 'S okay, though. I'm sure Astrid will be able to fix it later on. It's not bothering me."

She frowned at him, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth. "Later? Hell, no, she'll do it now. I want you fit and at your best. Poor, hurt little you," she cooed. "I might have to nurse you better." She stood up and started back up the stairs before she looked down at herself and her state of undress. "Could I borrow your coat? My dressing gown's in the room."

He nodded, shrugged it off, and handed it to her. "Minx, I wasn't worried about interrupting Astrid. If Fal's up there getting his groove on, it might be best to leave him to it. And don't look at the shotgun like that. Fallon's a good guy."

She looked at him in disbelief and snorted. "Sure, such a good guy. He owes me a new bed and a haircut. I have a huge chunk out of my hair. I was growing it long. He's not going to hurt me, is he?" She began to feel herself fall apart again, the tears welling up. *Of course, he's gonna hurt you; he's here to kill you. They both are.*

"No, I won't let him. Astrid won't let him. I won't ever let anyone hurt you, I promise. We'll go up together, and once I'm fixed, you can play nurse. Sound good?"

She nodded and started up the stairs with Feyd at her heels. "Watch you don't slip. It's kinda slippery down there, minx."

She smiled and couldn't help herself. "It's kinda slippery up here, too."

"Why is the floor wet?"

She was lying on top of him. At some point he had fallen backwards onto the wet floor. Now, they both lay catching their breath. Fallon hadn't quite regained the presence of mind to realize that he was, in fact, in the middle of a huge puddle of water, nor had he remembered why he was in the room.

"Huh? I suppose the floor would be wet. It is wet down there, vixen. I could always investigate further if you want me to."

"No, well, yeah. But...look around you, cookie. You're in a huge puddle of water. Did Ashlyn's bed burst? Is that why she and Feyd went somewhere else?"

Feyd...Shit! Fallon sat up so suddenly; Astrid nearly went tumbling to the floor. He caught her at the last moment and sat her on her feet. She really was tiny. He threw on his discarded jeans and went to the door. Astrid blocked his path.

"By that response, I take it there's a really good story behind my questions?" She crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow.

She's so sexy when she does that, it's like...shit, the target's her friend. They better both still be alive; though if she's dead, it wouldn't be all that bad. Feyd better be all right. He struggled to come up with a story, or an excuse, or hell, the truth

even. His mind drew a blank, so he shrugged. "I really have no answer to that question. Why don't we find the other two, hopefully alive? Then have a cup of hot chocolate, and discuss what we've learned."

"What do you mean, alive?"

Fallon grinned apologetically. Feyd wouldn't have killed the girl. He hoped.

Astrid let him pass, and he opened the door only to find two very alive people about to come in. Feyd was first with the girl behind him. He didn't look right. Fallon hadn't seen his posture like that since the time Feyd had jumped out of the moving car.

"What have you done?" He walked over to Ashlyn. "What did you do to him?"

The girl cringed away from him. She had been crying. Fallon remembered his last words to her and winced. *Shit! I can be such a dick sometimes.*

"Don't you dare talk to her like that! Like it's her fault he's hurt himself?" Astrid stepped around him, her blue gown firmly in place. She put an arm around Ashlyn and started to talk to her in hushed, soothing tones. *Should that be so hot? I'm a very bad man.* He turned his back on the girls and faced Feyd, raising an eyebrow. Feyd gave his trademark grin.

"I think I broke a few of my ribs on the stairs, cookie."

Fallon's look darkened. "If you ever call me that again, I'll rip your spleen out through your nose, savvy?"

Astrid heard the exchange between the two

men and laughed.

“Astrid, they were sent here to kill me! Why the fuck are you laughing?” Pulled back to the conversation with Ash, she finally realized what Ash was saying to her.

“Hold it. Fallon was sent to kill you? The *fuck*? This doesn’t make sense.” She hugged Ash close to her. “Don’t worry, hon. These two won’t hurt you, ever. If anything, you probably just gained two of the best bodyguards in the business.” Ash relaxed considerably against her.

Astrid looked back at Fallon, who was eyeing her and Ash with feral heat in his eyes. Ash noticed it, too. “Shit, Astrid, what’s that look for? Could you be wrong? Maybe he really is here to, uh—”

“Nonsense! I know that look, Ash. He’s running a fantasy through his head with you and me as the star attractions—*only* you and me.”

Ash looked at the other woman and giggled. Astrid saw Feyd standing there, half-supported by the doorframe, looking none too healthy, with the same heated gaze that Fallon had. “Looks like Feyd has the same idea. I always wondered if they shared the same brain. Now I know the truth,” she whispered close into Ash’s ear and slid her hand under Feyd’s coat that Ash was still wearing. Ash giggled again, knowing this was Astrid’s way of getting back at the boys for scaring her, hitting them where it hurt. She played along masterfully.

Taking her other hand, the one not wrapped around Astrid’s waist, she slipped it into Astrid’s robe, just under the sash. They looked at each other and then rolled their eyes back at the guys. Once

more they turned to each other, heads together, lips so close...

And that's when Fallon lost it. The groan that escaped his lips. In Astrid's eyes, that more than made up for scaring the shit out of Ash.

"Damn it, Fal, they were so close!" Feyd said as he punched at Fallon's arm. Fallon, still enraptured by the scene that almost played out in front of him, didn't see the blow coming and failed to shimmer. The punch had enough behind it to knock him against the other side of the doorframe. Both women giggled, and Feyd swore as he tried to laugh.

"Uh, Astrid? Ash?"

Ash whispered something to Astrid and then let her go. "Feyd, Ash asked me to fix you up good so that she could," she looked over at Ash, "incapacitate you." Ash nodded. "So, let's get to it."

The men laughed. Astrid started for the stairs and said over her shoulder, "We need to go down to the kitchen, though. Fal, babe, you can have that hot cocoa you were talking about while I fix up Feyd, here. Then you can tell me what the fuck is going on."

Fallon grabbed Feyd and started to help him down the stairs. "Come on, pecker head. How the hell did you do this?"

"Thanks. Cookie," Feyd answered.

Fallon let him go. He sunk and watched as Fallon shimmered out of sight.

"Showoff!" Feyd yelled down the stairs.

“That’s that,” Astrid said as she removed her hands from Feyd’s side. The bruising was gone. “Try not to do that again, ‘kay, hon? How does it feel?”

Astrid sat beside Feyd with Fallon at her back, his hand touching her the entire time. *He’s so good to me, making sure I don’t pass out.* That was, of course, something that wasn’t going to happen, as Feyd’s ribs weren’t broken, just cracked. Healing the actual break for Astrid was a lot more draining of her powers than fixing the bruise.

She watched as Feyd stood up and took a deep breath. “Shit, Ast, better than before. Thanks.”

“You are most welcome. Now, what’s this about you guys coming to kill Ash?”

Feyd didn’t even hear her. “Hold it. I’m okay now, right?”

“Yep. Why?”

Feyd turned around, grabbed Ash, and slung her over his shoulder. “Where’s the nearest bedroom?”

Fallon started to laugh. “Christ, Feyd. One-fucking-track mind!”

Feyd smiled. “Right, like you’re not thinking about it, too, what with Fallon The Great sitting right there? Ash?”

It wasn’t as if she had much of a choice. He smacked her bare ass and left the room, intent on making good on his promise. Ash, still slung over Feyd’s shoulder, her face now facing them, caught Fallon’s eye and simply said, “You owe me a water bed.”

Astrid started laughing and called after them.
“Have fun. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

“Right, like there’s anything you wouldn’t do,”
Feyd shouted, already deeper within the house.

“Sod off, Nightly!” Astrid looked at Fallon and
shivered. “Um...so you wanna see the rest of the
house? The pool room?”

Fallon smiled at her, heat returning to his eyes.
She was on edge, waiting for what he was going to
say next.

Feyd never made it to a bedroom. Ashlyn,
naked on his shoulder and under his jacket, was
just too much to resist. She wiggled a bit as his
hand slowly slid up her thigh. She was on his
shoulder, cave-man style. Her skin was soft as
velvet, not a trace of blemish anywhere on her. She
wiggled once more. It put Feyd’s hand even closer
to her soft heat, and he noticed she was still very
wet for him. His groin tightened in response.

“Ash,” he whispered. “Bedroom?”

“Upstairs,” she said to his back. His shirt was
riding up in the back, his exposed skin close to
where her mouth was, and she took advantage of it.
Her kisses sent searing heat down his spine, and
his knees buckled.

“Baby, I don’t think we are gonna make it to a
bedroom.”

Ash pulled her moist lips away from his
delicious skin to tell him, “Next door on your left.”

He kicked in the door to his left and found a

small room with a large pine table. *This will so do*, he thought as he closed the door behind them. He set her down in front of him, then picked her up again, and scooted her bare bottom onto the table. He leaned on it and declared it stable. *It better be, or we are both going to be on the floor.*

Ash looked at him, and he smiled. *God, she's so beautiful, and she's mine.* He kissed her hard, his hands going to her hips to position her better on the table. Her small hands worked on his belt, this time undoing the clasp in record-breaking time. Her movements were urgent. She wiggled closer to his groin, and he could feel the intense heat coming off her body, a fire he was so willing to quench. "Ash, baby, slow down."

She didn't say anything, just started mewling as he kissed her neck, and his fingers ran the length of her inner thighs. He was teasing her, he knew, and she was loving it. Her hands were still working on his pants, and he decided to give her some incentive to get her ass moving.

He slowly moved his fingers to her hot slit, his fingertips just grazing her clit, and she groaned. "Hmm...Like that?" he asked as he delved a little deeper into her secrets. He slid one finger softly inside her and worked her, one finger inside, his thumb playing circles on her clit. Her hips bucked wildly on his hand as she rode it. Minutes later, she was coming, shaking the table.

"That's my girl. You always come so hard, minx? Or is it just me? It must be me, 'cause while I was eating you before," he said viciously in her ear, "your body didn't want me to stop." He slid his

finger out of her and licked it. “And damn, you taste so fucking good. Wanna taste?” He slipped his entire finger into her mouth. She sucked it, moaning and wiggling once again. He pulled it out, slowly, as she was sucking hard. “Mmm, you suck good. You gonna suck me off just as good?” Ashlyn nodded, little helpless sobs coming from her mouth. “Something you want, baby? Tell me, and it’s yours.”

“You...Please Feyd, please. I need you. Please, please fuck me.”

“Fuck you, eh? How, baby? Right here?”

Ashlyn sobbed. His fingers were once again playing with her clit. “Here, Feyd. Right here, now. Fast, hard. Please, please...”

After a plea like that, he had to oblige. He quickly slid his pants down his hips. She had managed to undo them before he made her come. “Ash, take off the jacket...I want to see you while I fuck you.”

Ash looked down at the thick cock he had waiting for her. Her eyes widened, and she licked her lips. He smiled, knowing what he had for her was just what she wanted.

“Hurry, Feyd. Please hurry.” She squirmed to the edge of the table, and in one swift motion he was buried in her to the hilt. They moaned in unison as he started a driving rhythm.

“Ashlyn, you’re fucking amazing! God, you feel so good! Shit, baby, what the fuck... Come for me, baby. Come for me again.”

Ashlyn moaned into his shoulder, her legs wrapped around his thrusting hips.

"Please," she whispered. "Please come with me."
Feyd was happy to oblige her.

"The pool room?"

Fallon looked at her, letting the heat of what he wanted to do to her seep through into his eyes. He wanted to hold her, touch her, and taste her. He had other commitments as well; Morrison should have gotten back in touch with him by now. He needed to find out what George was up to and put a stop to it. *First, though, I'm going to enjoy myself. Then I'll worry about George. That dick's ruined enough of my fun.*

"Pool room, vixen? Why go that far? There's a perfectly sturdy table right here. I have something...special in mind for the pool room. Of course, if you want, we can go up. But if you're feeling too exhausted from healing Feyd, I suppose you could give me a short tour."

Her smile widened, and she walked toward him, stroking the belt of her robe. She teased her bottom lip, biting at it, drawing his attention to her mouth. "And if I were out of action for the rest of the night?" Her words were husky and breathy.

"I'd have to go and hurt Feyd. But I'm getting the impression that you're just fine. Am I right?"

Her blue eyes went wide and innocent. She pouted slightly, drawing his attention to her mouth again. "Why, whatever could you mean?"

She let the robe slide to the floor, and Fallon's mouth dried up. All he could do was watch her

slink toward him. He swallowed a few times and tried to remember what he had been saying. *Damn blood loss.*

Only she did this to him. Others had tried, but only she could make him hard with a look, a word. Drive him crazy with a desire so raw he had no choice but to slake it. She gave as good as she got, though. She wasn't the kind to lay back and take it, which is why he knew she wouldn't be completely satisfied with what she'd been given earlier. He cleared his throat, and still no smart comebacks came to him. Thankfully, he was saved from having to come up with one.

"Take your jeans off, cookie. I want to see all of you. It's only fair," she baited, blinking her big blue eyes.

He slowly pulled his jeans off, giving her as much of a show as he could with just a pair of jeans then sat back in the metal bar stool. "Better, vixen?"

She nodded and grinned, her face filling with glee as her eyes took him in. "Much. Now put your hands behind your back and no touching. I mean it."

Fallon nodded solemnly. *No touching? Yeah, right, like I could help myself.* She stood between his legs, pressing her naked body against his. She slowly licked a trail up his biceps to his neck, bit him, then laid a gentle kiss on the bite mark before sucking it. All the while, she kept as much of her body touching his as she could. The feel of her, and his need, were driving him wild. She dragged her tongue across his chest. His mouth swept down to

meet hers, but she was just out of his reach, a knowing smile gracing her lips.

His hands came out from behind the stool. He needed to touch her, to run his hands through her dark hair. She danced out of reach. "Ah-ah. What did I say? Will I have to tie you up?"

"Do you have any rope?" He watched as she bent down, giving him a good, clear view of exactly where he wanted to be, and picked up the silk belt. She held it up for him to see.

"Clever little vixen, aren't you?"

She once again stood between his legs and leaned in close to kiss him. The kiss between them was electric, and before he realized what had happened, his hands were bound to the back of the chair. *Clever. This has potential.* He tested the bindings gently. *Damn, vix. You have been working on your knots.*

"If you shimmer, you might as well make it to your hotel room for a cold shower," she threatened.

He knew it was an empty threat, but he stayed put. "Such a harsh mistress. And may I ask what it is that I've done to deserve such treatment?"

"You didn't give me what I wanted. I wanted you hard and fast. You went slowly. I liked feeling you fill me so well. Now I'm afraid you'll have to pay. Sorry, cookie. I don't make the rules."

He neglected to point out that she did, in fact, make the rules, but only because she distracted him. She closed his legs and hopped up onto his lap, hovering so his tip was almost in her. He swallowed hard. "So, do you want to go fast or slow? Well, it is my choice. How about both?"

She impaled herself on him, and he cried out. Having had very little time to adjust, he almost came on entry. *Oh, God, so tight and warm.* She kept up a break-neck speed, and his hips began to buck wildly into hers. His hands wrenched at the silk. He had to touch her, if only to kiss her.

"Vixen, if you don't slow—I'm so close...you wouldn't like that, would you?" His voice was strained as she rode him. Suddenly, she slammed herself as far down on him as she could and stayed there. Her eyes met his; the heat coming from them was almost as hot as her core. He moaned.

"Cookie, I thought we'd gotten over your control issue the last time."

"It's more a matter of lasting than control. But untie me, and we'll get over it. I'll show you just how much over it I am."

The intensity of his voice and gaze made her shiver. She pretended to think about it. "Hmm...no, I like it here." She tightened her inner muscles around him, making him cry out. She tightened and released them as she slowly slid up and down his length. Her eyes rolled back in her head, and her lids were half-closed. Fallon's breath was uneven, and his mouth was beyond dry. As she slid up and down him, he could feel her wetness trickling down his balls. The feeling was unbearable—great, but unbearable. He cleared his throat and tried again.

"Fast, vixen, hard and fast. Please, let me go. I'll play nice."

She grinned wickedly at him and put a finger over his mouth, still sliding and clenching,

although she was panting now, too, and very close. "Shh. Poor baby. Poor Cookie. Do you want me to let your hands go?"

Fallon took a deep breath and managed a small nod. Astrid smiled, her point having been made. Fallon shimmered his wrists free of the silk bond, grabbed her around the waist, and pulled them both onto the floor.

"Hard and fast? Is that what you want? You, my naughty little vixen." She moaned as he pushed himself into her deeper, deeper. He kissed her as he thrust in and out of her at a vicious pace. Her moans became louder and louder, and he began to feel her inner muscles cramp around him as she clawed at his back. He lost his control and began to pound her into the hardwood floor. She screamed his name as she came, the sound dying off into a harsh, whispering sob as she ran out of air. Her muscles contracted violently around him as his own orgasm took him, her body milking every last drop from him as he spilled himself into her. He lay on top of her, catching his breath for a few seconds before rolling them over, so she was on top of him.

"Better?"

In answer, she groaned and nuzzled his neck as he stared at the roof. *Welcome home, Fallon.*
Welcome home.

Astrid stirred as the bed moved and opened her eyes. Fallon was putting his clothes on, and her heart sank. She sat up and pouted. "You're

leaving?”

Fallon turned around while he zipped up his jeans and sat on the bed. “I have to. We can’t have Georgie knowing either of you are here, especially now that we know Ashlyn is the target.”

“Will you come back?”

He leaned over and kissed her on the lips.

“Later on today. I promise. Just gotta make it look convincing. Savvy?”

“Yeah. Your cell number is still the same? Is Feyd’s?”

He nodded. “I’m going to have to call in some re-enforcements for this one. Maybe Dante and Morrison.”

“Arcady?”

“You know him? What am I saying? Half the world’s population of women knows Mr. Fantasy.”

“Yeah. He picked me up in a bar. Before you, of course.” She smiled at him.

“As much as I’d love to have this conversation, vix, we will have it at a later date. I gotta be back before old Batman wakes up. Don’t worry. I’ll shimmer back for afternoon tea.” He winked at her, kissed her once more, and shimmered out of the room.

Astrid sighed and stretched. *Re-enforcements. Maybe I should email Cash. Yeah, I think I will. Shit, I’m gonna have to get this house in order. If I know Fallon, this house is going to be crawling with people in a matter of days.*

Feyd stood on the back patio, waiting for Fallon to shimmer down. The dog, Linus, was sniffing around him, and he bent down to pet him. Linus reared up on his hind legs, tackled the squatting Feyd to the flagstones, and jumped on him, giving him sloppy kisses all over his face.

“And to think just last night you were scared of him,” Fallon said as he shimmered next to the dog. When Linus saw him, he abandoned Feyd and went for Fallon, his stub of a tail wiggling furiously.

“Hey, pup, you’re fat. Miss me?” The dog whined, and Fallon squatted down and gathered the dog up in his lap. “Shit, Ast was right. You really are fat.”

“You done playing with the dog, Daddy? We need to get back, and I think we need to talk.”

“Feyd, you always work my last nerve. Yeah, let’s go.”

They walked through the yard to the back gate.

“We are gonna need help with this one, Fal,” Feyd said as they crossed the back alley to the hotel.

“Some major players. Savvy?”

“Morrison is in town. I told him we might need the help. Who else is here? Or should we import?”

“Dante is here, at least last I heard he was still living here. You remember St. Dante, right?”

“Yeah, I remember him. That’s not a bad idea. Dante is a quality guy. You still got his cell?”

“Yeah, I’ll give him a call once I take a shower. Meeting tonight at Pinky’s, then?”

“Yeah, you know the drill. As long as the two of the girls stay out of it, we should be fine. So, Ash? She fit?”

“You have no idea, mate. I’m surprised I can

walk this morning. She's still passed out, though.”
He snickered. “Astrid?”

“Amazing, as always. Let's get back. George should be up soon.” They entered through a service entrance in back of the hotel and quietly made it to their rooms.

Chapter Six

Feyd flipped his phone open and set to do the one thing he had forgotten to do: call Dante to set up the meeting at Pinky's XXX with them and Arcady Morrison. The phone rang twice before it was picked up.

"Who's this?"

"Nice, Dante. Since when do you answer your phone like that? Something happen that got you all worked up? Did I interrupt something?" Feyd laughed. "Right, like that would happen. Dante the Saint. What's up?"

"Feyd." He sighed. "What the hell do you what?"

"Oh. Great to hear your voice, too, Bubbles. How's business?"

"Can't complain." Dante sounded bored.

"I can complain, but Lord knows you don't wanna hear it. Why are you so nasty today? You're normally quite pleasant."

"Sorry, some annoying little girl spilled a latté on me at the coffee shop. It was not an accident."

Feyd was indeed interested at this development. "Ha! Was she hot? What the hell did you do to piss her off? Did you get her number?"

Come on, Dante. Details!"

Dante laughed. "Same old Feyd. Stop thinking with your dick for a second. What can I do for you?"

"I hate it when you elude the question. Same old Dante. It's been too long, really. Look, we're in town, and I think we're gonna need some help. You know, of the Dante kind. You in?"

"Hey, why not? I presume there's the potential for profit? I take it 'we' means Fallon is here as well?"

"Obviously. Since when have you known me to be in on anything sinister and not have him involved?"

"Good point. Where do you wanna meet up?"

"Pinky's. You know the place?"

"I'm a mortal man, Feyd. Of course, I know about Pinky's. When?"

"Eh, eight tonight? In the lounge?"

"Can do. Who's gonna be there?"

"Us and Morrison."

"Morrison? Shit, he's in town? You guys having a family reunion or something?"

"Yeah, but you know how we do, mate."

"Besides your 'sinister situation,' anything else I should know about?"

"Oh, yeah, you're going to laugh. Fallon is getting married," he told the saint, sniggering at the thought of Fallon's reaction.

"Shit, really? To whom?"

"Astrid Buchamps."

"No shit! His witch from Paris? The one that threw him through a wall...the one with the dog?"

Fallon knows how to pick them. Leave it to him to choose a woman that could probably take us all.”

“That’s the one, mate. What can I say? He’s smitten and has a death wish.”

“Shit, I’ll bet there’s a fucked up story, there.”

“Bet your ass, mate. I’ll tell you the whole sordid tale amid a few rounds and some titty-shaking. Deal?”

“Deal. See you then.”

The shower Feyd had taken was extremely relaxing, but it had two major flaws. One, he was back at the Rosco Hotel in his room, waiting on recon from Arcady Morrison on George’s covert actions since they’d arrived in Shadow Heights. And two, Ash wasn’t with him.

For her own safety—and for Astrid’s—they’d had the girls stay at the house and go about their usual routine as if the boys had never shown up.

He slipped on his jeans and was riffling through his duffle bag for a clean shirt when his cell phone rang.

“Nightly.”

“Umm. I know who it is, baby,” the sultry voice on the other end purred. “If I recall correctly, you are the same person that stole out of the house this morning like a thief in the night. Shame on you!” It was evident in her voice she was pouting.

Ashlyn. Feyd chuckled. “We had to get back before Bateman woke up,” he said softly. “I’m real sorry, baby.”

“I know that, tiger. But the least you could have done was woke me up and told me and given me a kiss goodbye. Astrid got a kiss goodbye,” she said softly.

He smiled despite himself. No woman in his life had ever called him asking for a goodbye kiss, and before Ashlyn he'd never noticed the absence of that intimacy in his life. He realized he wanted someone other than Lorna to miss him terribly, for someone to tell him they were lonely without him and to come home. Ashlyn was that person. “Minx, I'm sorry. I'm not used to having to say my goodbyes. But in my defense, you were passed out. I carried you to the big couch in the family room, and then I left. See? I saw to your comfort.”

“I know. Thanks for that. It did suck that I had to wake up without you, though.”

His heart jumped. She really did miss him. “How can I make it up to you?”

Ash cleared her throat. “Well, the new water bed was just installed. Think you could tear yourself away from all your pressing engagements to come home and break it in with me?”

Home, Feyd thought and smiled. In all his life, he had never heard a finer idea come out of anyone's mouth.

“I think I can manage to get away for a little while. Say, I'm going to do some recon or some shit. Can you wait about twenty minutes, minx? I just gotta tie up some shit here.”

“Mmm-hmm. I can wait twenty minutes, tiger. I'll be in the bedroom, on the bed, waiting for you. Hurry.”

The line went dead. *That woman is going to kill me slowly*, he thought, *and I can't wait for it.* He hit Fallon's speed dial on his cell.

"Fal? I gotta go see Ash. Think you can take care of shit here?"

Fallon was amused. Feyd could hear it in his voice. "Sure. You go fuck the hell outta your girlfriend, and I'll hold down the fort."

Girlfriend. Wow, haven't had one of those since Maude, if you could've called her a girlfriend. "Come on, mate, the new water bed was just installed. Cover for me, will you? It's your fault we couldn't shag on it in the first place."

Fallon sighed. "Okay, mate. Two hours. We gotta go see Morrison at Pinky's later this evening. I don't wanna be late."

Again the line went dead. Feyd shrugged into his jacket and smelled heaven. His coat would forever smell like his wonderful Ashlyn, all roses and vanilla. *Mmm, she does taste like vanilla*, he thought wickedly. He left the hotel and slinked around back through the alleys. He made it in less than three minutes and realized he was going to be ten minutes early. *Surprise, Ash!* he thought as he traversed the backyard and opened the backdoor with the key. He made his way as silently as he could to his and Ash's bedroom.

Ash was indeed waiting for him in their newly cleaned and water-free room. She sat in the center of the bed. The new silk sheets—red—were pooled around her and moved with the rocking of the waterbed, cradling the woman in a soft lull. Her eyes were closed as she drifted, lazy on the current

of her own making; a partially-filled wine glass was cradled in her left hand. She made no sign that she'd heard him enter the room. He watched her in her resplendent beauty, convinced that she was thinking about something pleasant.

"You're early," she murmured. She reclined into the red silk and crooked her finger at him. Her legs were half parted, and she smiled as she drained the glass of its contents and set it aside. "Yummy, but I think I really want the taste of Feyd right now."

He took the five steps it took to reach the bed, and she held out her arms to him, pulling him down on top of her. He kissed her. Her mouth tasted of desirable sins and red wine, a combination he happened to love. His hands began to explore her lush body, sliding over the silk, too, and he couldn't tell the difference between her skin and the bedclothes. She began undressing him, slowly sliding her hands over his taut stomach, and he inhaled sharply. She was making him insane. He had to be inside her. He reared up on his knees, which was hard considering the instability of the waterbed, but he managed to take the shirt off while she was undoing his pants. He lay back down. Her legs circled his waist, and her feet pushed the jeans off his hips and down his legs. He was naked as she was in a matter of seconds.

He laughed at her urgency, and she smiled. Her eyes met his eyes, her love blooming in them. He kissed her then and slid his hands down her body to the slick flesh at the junction of her thighs. "You're always so wet for me, Ashlyn. So ready," he

murmured into her mouth, and she moaned as he slid a finger inside her, working her tight body to a climax.

Her pussy was dripping wet as he finger-fucked her, her moans more like panting now as she was getting nearer to orgasm. "Mmm, Ash, that's right. Come for me, baby, and when you do I'm gonna go down on you and eat you till you beg me to stop," he said in her ear as she moaned in to his. He pulled back to watch the look on her face as she came. She licked her lips and then worried the bottom one, her body arching up to him. He lifted himself as she did and was quickly on his knees, gently swaying with the ripples of her orgasm.

She arched once more at the end of the orgasm. He caught her hips in midair, raised them up to mouth level, and watched her honeyed juices drip out of her swollen slit.

"Baby, you're too good to me," he said as he inserted another finger and swirled it around inside her. Both fingers came out thick with Ashlyn. He sucked them into his mouth as she watched and groaned as he did.

"Damn, you really taste good. You wanna taste, baby?"

She licked her lips. "Yeah, I do." She lifted her hips to him again.

He looked at her gorgeous body once more. "Damn, you've got the most beautiful pussy, Ash," he said as he sunk his tongue into her heat. She cried out, and he set to work on her, nibbling and sucking gently, flicking her swollen clit as she panted. He couldn't get enough of her taste, her

smell, and the way she was dancing in his mouth.

“Please...please,” she moaned as he kept going, driving her closer to another orgasm. He felt her hit her peak, and she screamed out in pleasure.

“Feyd! Oh, shit, Feyd!” She started panting, and Feyd stopped his assault on her swollen flesh and turned her over onto her stomach. He grabbed her hips and slid them up to him, so she was half-kneeling, half-lounging on the bed. He stuck a pillow under her stomach for support. He leaned over her back and rested his chin on her shoulder to speak quietly to her.

“Like that, minx? Was it good?”

She nodded and answered, “Tiger, please, please fuck me. I need you inside me.” Her hand found his hard cock and squeezed. He groaned. He knew he’d do anything she wanted. “Please baby...mmm...please.”

“Okay, minx. You get what you asked for.” He kissed his way down her back and positioned himself behind her. They were facing the dresser mirror. “Look up, Ash. I want you to watch while I fuck you.”

Her head snapped up, and as soon as he focused on the vision of them in the mirror, he watched as she felt him enter her. Her hot, wet pussy was yielding and slick, and he slowly slid inch by inch into her. She sighed and groaned, and he looked up at the vision in the mirror. The vision of Ash, her hair wild and her lips wet, greeted him as she pushed back against him. He groaned.

“Easy, minx. I want this to last.”

He slid out of her. She protested but stopped as

he slid home once more, this time with a hell of a lot of force. “Oh, fuck. You’re so...uh...Ash...damn girl, you’re tight.”

She rocked her hips back. He knew what she was looking for, and he went with it, the sound of their bodies pressing together urging him on. He got harder when she screamed, “Yes! Fuck me, baby! Harder! I can take it!”

He lost himself, his hips smacking against her ass. Her wetness was spilling out of her sopping pussy, and he knew by her muscle contractions that she was so close. “Tell me, Ash. Tell me. I want to come with you.”

She panted and looked up into the mirror, watching him fuck her from behind. It was too much. “Now, Feyd, now!”

He railed her harder—if there was such a thing—and as her climax hit, so did his. Her body milked his rock-hard cock until there was nothing left to give.

She collapsed onto her stomach, and he on top of her, still inside her. She wiggled a bit, and he groaned in her ear.

“Shit, Ash. One of these days you’re gonna kill me.” He kissed her lips as she turned her head to look at him. “Damn, baby. I love you.”

Ash snuggled closer to him, and he pulled out, his cock still rampant and glistening with their mixed juices. He sat back on his knees, and she sat up and looked at the cock that had given her every pleasure in the world.

“Hmm, looks like he needs some bathing,” she said as she leaned forward. She positioned her

mouth over his still-swollen cock and licked at the tip. "Mmm, baby. We taste good together." With that, she slid him down her hot, moist throat. He leaned back, completely in heaven. He groaned as she came back up and licked her lips.

"I love you, too, Feyd." She set to work again.

Her body ached. Feyd did know how to incapacitate a woman or at the least put her out of action for a while. She hobbled, naked, to the large, warm bathroom and turned on the shower. *He said he loved me. I said it back.*

"He loves me," she whispered to herself. "And I love him."

I hardly even know him. She stepped into the steaming shower and sighed with relief as the hot water hit her body. She stood for a few minutes, letting the water work on her stiff muscles. Her head rested against the cold tiles as the shower did its work.

He killed Alec. You remember him, don't you, Cinder? A particularly nasty voice in her head reminded her. Tears began to stream down her face, instantly mixing with the shower water.

"If Alec got himself killed, then it's because he wasn't careful. I didn't set that one up. No way. I would have remembered it. Easy, we did the easy ones. This is not easy. I didn't even know who Fallwell was until I heard he wanted me dead," she defended to herself.

She picked up the shampoo and began to work

it through her hair, still thinking about her dead friend. He was reckless but not stupid. Alec wasn't the type to endanger himself and Ashlyn. She had to admit, though, that Alec had changed over his last months and not for the better. He had been away a lot more and with her less and less. It hadn't bothered her much at the time. She had been used to Alec's comings and goings. He had officially lived with Ashlyn but rarely stayed with her. He was a lone wolf, after all.

Alec had spent most of his free time with Patricia "Not-Pat-Don't-Ever-Call-Me-Pat" Woods. Alec had hooked up with the other wolf about a year before his death and had been courting her pack for acceptance. Ashlyn had supported him in his choice.

Ash had never really gotten along with the other wolf, but she'd just put it down to the fact that she was living with Pat's boyfriend—mate, partner, or whatever the wolves called it. She was a devious little bitch. Ash made a note to ask Feyd if Alec had mentioned Pat. I bet the bastard didn't even mention her. Oh, if he wasn't dead...Ash cut off the train of thought before she started to cry again.

She rinsed the bubbles out of her hair and watched as they slid down her body and swirled down the drain before lathering the conditioner onto her hair and rinsing it.

She switched off the shower and stepped out of the stall. She grabbed a towel and wiped the steamed mirror to see her reflection. *God, I still look awful. It's a wonder that Feyd wants to be*

with me at all. Smiling at the thought of being in Feyd's arms, her stomach rumbled. *He really did wear me out. I wonder if Ast's got anything good to eat? Maybe cake or pie. She should at least have another bottle of wine lying around.*

Quickly, she dressed; leaving her hair wet and her face free of makeup, and went in search of Astrid and food.

Chapter Seven

The music in Pinky's main lounge fit the mood of the place perfectly. As Feyd and Fallon walked in and scanned the pit tables for Arcady, Depeche Mode's "Personal Jesus" filled the air.

"Member last time we heard this song, mate?" Feyd asked with a mischievous grin as he remembered the night at the gentleman's club in L.A. with Morrison and the hijinks that had ensued.

"Yeah, why is it that every time this song is on, we meet up with Morrison?" Fallon asked.

Feyd thought for a moment as they spotted Morrison at a corner crescent booth. He was tipping a beer to his mouth while some girl danced on his table. "Well, maybe it's his theme song, mate. He is Mr. Fantasy." He chuckled at the nickname some girl in the Pleasure Courts had given him when he was eighteen. Since the day he'd told the guys about it, the name had stuck.

They stopped talking as they made it to the booth and both slid in, one on each side of Morrison. They both looked up at the girl Arcady was watching intently. She was pretty. Her brown hair, thick with highlights, fell past her shoulders, and her skin was caramel-colored. She used her body as an instrument while she danced, and she

moved with languid grace and ultimate sex appeal. This girl knew how to use her body, the dancing just a teasing promise.

“Hey, Morrison? Gonna introduce us to your friend here?” Feyd asked, still transfixed on the gyrating woman on the table. The song stopped, much to the chagrin of the three men. The girl climbed down and smiled at the three of them.

Morrison made the introduction. “Feyd and Fallon, Cole Paidan.”

She smiled and shook hands with both men. Feyd spoke first. “Shit, girl, you can dance.”

“That’s not all I can do, sweetie. Wanna find out?”

Feyd was floored. He wasn’t used to having indecent proposals made at him. Usually he was the predator in the situation. With the tables turned, it was rather exciting.

Thankfully, Arcady saved him. “Cole, now, you know better than to tease my friends. I’m sure he’ll take you up on your offer sometime, but now we have business to discuss.”

She pouted and winked at Feyd. “Sorry, love. Arcady, Al said that if you need privacy, to use her office. Okay?”

Morrison winked back at her. “Thanks, love. We still on for tonight?”

“You bet, Incubus. Like I have ever been able to resist you.” She smiled and walked off through a door that read, *Employees Only*.

“That’s the demon’s Cole?” Fallon asked as he looked at Morrison. “Shit, and he wants her dead. Shame to waste a luscious piece of ass like that.”

“You ain’t just whistling Dixie, my friend,” Arcady said, and took a sip of his beer. “Hold on. If I’m not mistaken, aren’t you attached as of now, Ipwhisk?”

Feyd laughed and stole the beer from Morrison’s hand. Fallon grinned. “True, but Astrid is allowing me to play to my heart’s content. Something about not wanting to commit me before I’m ready. So I can, as long as she gets to do the same.”

“So,” Arcady said. “She get to play with girls, too, then?”

Fallon stared at Morrison while Feyd choked on the stolen beer, the bubbles coming not so gracefully out of his nose. Morrison took the opportunity to steal his beer back.

“What? Wait, Astrid?” Feyd asked once he’d regained some of his composure, his eyes wandering back to the door Cole had left through.

“Likes chicks, yeah. I thought you knew, Fallon. Shit, well, you guys have a bunch to talk about when you get back to Crypt don’t you? When’s the wedding again?”

The glint in Arcady’s eyes was priceless as Fallon ignored his questions. A waitress walked by, and Feyd tore his gaze away from the door long enough to order six shots and four beers. “And keep ‘em coming.” She walked away from them toward the bar.

“Feyd, Cole is hot, I’ll grant you, but she’s nothing compared to Alcyone. That’s one you’re gonna wanna attack.” Feyd looked at Arcady with a glint of possibility in his eye. Arcady turned to

Fallon.

“So, what’s the skinny? I believe we have our hands full with this new situation, don’t you? Lots of big-time players involved, not just Fallwell. But first, I’m thinking we need to take out George. True?”

Fallon nodded. “If we are going to keep Feyd’s ‘reason for living’ safe, then yeah, George has got to be put out of commission. I’m not worried about Astrid. He knows about my past with her, thinks she’s just my whore of the minute.”

“Not to mention Astrid would royally fuck his world up. Shit, she scares me,” Feyd said.

“Amen to that, Feyd. Astrid is one badass witch. Ipwhisk, you have your work cut out for you with that one.” He raised a shot that had just arrived, and the other two did the same. Two seconds later, the glasses were drained, and they were all reaching for another. “Are we missing anyone? Or can we get down to business?”

“Dante. Said he’d meet us at around eight. Looks like we got a half hour ‘til then. Shall we enjoy the sights? Pick out some girls to bring home to Astrid?” Feyd said, enjoying this too much.

“Sod off, Nightly,” Fallon said in a low, menacing voice. “You’re just jealous, mate.”

“Damn straight, Fal. Not everyday you find a girl as sexually uninhibited as Astrid.”

Fallon turned back to Morrison, taking a sip of his beer. “So, what have you managed to find out about George? What has the little fat prick been up to?”

"Bateman? Fucking jack-off has been quiet. A

bit too quiet, actually. Hasn't left the room since you guys got here."

"Georgie? You're kidding. Not at all? What about calls, he made any?"

"A few to Fallwell, I think. I mean, he was calling Denmark. Isn't that where that fucker is now?"

"Who knows? Most likely." Fallon paused, taking another drink. "What the fuck has he got planned?"

"Something about Athens after here. Didn't say anything about you guys being there with him. Odds are he's going to try and get rid of the two of you, and quietly, since he's keeping a low profile. Fuck, no one even knows he's here. That could work to our benefit."

"Yeah, it will."

They were silent for a while as a show was being played out on the stage. Two girls and a whip. It was soft core, but it got the point across. Arcady was looking thoughtful when he finally asked, "Now, who exactly is Feyd's reason for living?"

The club was empty except for the few employees that actually lived in Pinky's. Alcyone was enjoying the silence in her day office. She sat in her oversized leather chair behind her mahogany desk, wearing a black skirt suit with black spiked heels. She had her hair pulled back in two small pigtails that sat at the nape of her neck. She put her legs up, leaned her head back, and sighed. The

festivities for the night ahead were the usual. Only tonight, Camions, Queen of the Pleasure Courts, was coming to partake. Alcyone wasn't worried. Cam always enjoyed herself when she came to visit. It was the fact that a group of Japanese businessmen were coming for a private party that worried her. They tended to have grabby hands, and her girls didn't stand for that, not unless the money was up front. *Fuck, I'm so going to need more bouncers for this party tonight. And with Cam coming, she's going to need her own bodyguards. The woman exudes sex. Fuck, what am I going to do?*

"Relax! You're fucking projecting hard, Al. I heard you when I was getting out of the fucking car." Arcady Morrison walked into her office and stood in the doorway, clearly amused by her predicament.

Alcyone, or Al, as he called her, put her legs down and opened her eyes. "Arcady, what a surprise. To what do I owe this honor?" Her voice and manner were cold, but she genuinely liked Arcady. He was the only other member of the Pleasure Court she could stand who wasn't a full-blooded Pleasure demon. Arcady, like her, would ascend upon death to a title in the courts, just like his ancestors. He was in favor, just as she was. And he wasn't too bad in the sack, either.

"Ah, well, my dear, I was called in by Fallon and Feyd. They are in town and on a job. Something that needs my expertise."

"What the hell? They lost the ability to fuck, Arcady? What the hell do you do that the gruesome

twosome doesn't?"

"Eh, we are gonna take George out."

"Ah. So, they just figured you'd want in, eh?"

"Exactly. So, I'm crashing here. Cool?"

"Always, hon. We are family." She got up off her chair, walked over to him, and embraced him. He hugged her back, picked her up, and spun her around. When he put her down, she was slightly dizzy. "You're meeting them tonight?"

"Nope, tomorrow."

"Good. I got a job for you, Mr. Fantasy. Cam is coming tonight. Wanna play bouncer with some grab-ass Japanese?"

"Always happy to help, hon. Where should I drop my shit?"

"Cole's room. She was asking when you were coming back. You'll be a welcome addition when she comes back from tanning."

He smiled and kissed her on the lips, a sweet hello kiss, and Alcyone purred. "Arcady, now, we said we wouldn't, remember? It's just too weird."

"I know, but I couldn't help myself." He grabbed her face, looked in her eyes and smiled, then let go and walked away down the hall.

Alcyone had been reminiscing about the previous night when she'd seen Feyd and Fallon enter the club. *Wow*. Fallon had gotten hotter if that was possible. *Shame he's already spoken for. But his friend? Lord, he's cute, too. I'll just have to go and introduce myself*. She got up off the bar stool and walked behind the bar to grab a Coke as her bartender, Murph, was otherwise busy. Alcyone didn't drink, as most of the pleasure courts didn't.

When a member of the courts got drunk, they risked leaking power, and that was something that was frowned upon. Arcady, however...well, he was an aberration. She watched as the guys started talking to each other, and Cole was pulled down off the table. She walked away to start her actual shift. *Now's just as good a time as any to go and say hello.*

She walked up just as the next act was starting and looked down. "Hey, Fallon. Long time no see." They talked for a few minutes, and she was introduced to Feyd. She licked her lips. *He should be fun. I'll have to mention to Arcady that I want to have a little playtime with him.* She talked a few minutes more and took her leave, touching Feyd's shoulder as she did to indicate to Arcady that she was interested. He made the smallest nod, and she walked away, knowing that later that evening to the next morning, she and Arcady were going to have a talk.

Fallon watched the exchange between Alcyone and Feyd with amusement, frowning slightly when she touched his shoulder and Morrison nodded. She said her goodbyes and left through the same door Cole had. Feyd watched her go, his eyes drawn to the sway of her magnificent hips. Fal had never had the pleasure of Alcyone's company but had heard that it was quite the pleasure. A day ago, he would have jumped at the chance, but now he wasn't so sure. He had his Astrid waiting for him at

home, and that was all he needed. *What the fuck. If I get any worse, they'll revoke my tough guy license.*

He shook his head, tutting at Feyd.

"What would Ashlyn say? I know what she would say. I want to know what you would say."

Feyd's head jerked up, a guilty look on his face.

Shit, he's got it bad. Morrison chose this moment to re-ask his question, clearing his throat to get Feyd and Fallon's attention.

"Now, who exactly is Feyd's reason for living?"

Fallon turned to his friend, grinning. The possibility of tormenting Feyd was hard to pass up. It was always like this when the two met up with someone else. They got to tell old stories and wind each other up over the things that they'd done.

"The lovely and irreplaceable Miss Ashlyn Co'shott. The reason we are in this mess in the first place. Our lovely target. The person that Fallwell is so hot to see dead. He's fucking our mark, Morrison."

Morrison looked at him incredulously then turned to Feyd before turning to Fal again, as if he were watching a tennis match.

"You're kidding! You're not kidding, are you? Shit! Hey, is she hot?" The last was aimed at Feyd, but Fal answered.

"Very hot. Legs that go on forever." Fallon made the universal sign for killer legs, just to help his point. "Trust me when I say you'd fuck our mark, too, but that's not the point. There's a time and a place. We'd be better off killing her, it'd be less hassle. If we have to do this—"

"Astrid would kill you," Feyd jumped in, his tone clearly not amused. Fallon gestured for him to wait.

"Let me finish. If we do this, then we're going to—"

Morrison cut him off, confusion clear in his voice. "Wait, Astrid knows Ashlyn? I'm lost. You guys never start from the beginning."

"Let me finish. We're going to have to go to the—"

Laughing, Feyd cut in, passing each of them another shot and taking his own. "Yeah, mate. He didn't mention that Ashlyn is Astrid's flat mate. He'd get his arse spanked if he tried it. You'd be a bad little cookie."

Fallon slammed his empty shot glass on the table. "Hey, what did I say about calling me that? I was getting to the flat mate part, and yeah," he said, facing Morrison. "They know each other. So, as I was saying—"

"Cookie? She calls you cookie? Dude, that is so un-you. I always saw you more as a Slick or a Killer."

"Yeah, or a Muffin."

They both looked at each other and burst into hysterics. Fallon's face fell into his hands, and he rubbed his eyes, waiting for them to calm down. When it became apparent that they weren't going to stop, he sat up, cleared his throat, and spoke.

"Fallwell!" he shouted loudly.

That shut them up. Arcady even looked about, ducking down, and at the same time, reaching for one of his many guns. Smiling, Fallon continued.

"Thank you. If we do this, it has to be done properly. Fallwell has to die. He won't accept that we've left, and he won't stop until he has Ashlyn dead. He may look like a Nazi porn king, but he's not a fun man to cross. I don't know about you guys, but I'm not waiting around for him to send copious amounts of assassins after us, most of whom will be friends. I'm more of a proactive type guy. So, any thoughts?"

Everyone stayed silent for a while before Feyd spoke up. "By us, you mean me and you. Shit, Fal! We don't have a fucking choice. You're right."

"No, we don't. But you do, Morrison. There's no need for you to get shot with the crows."

"Hell, I'm not doing anything at this moment in time. I'd love a chance to get one up at that bastard. He should have killed me when I took out the office in L.A. Besides, I happen to like the crows." Morrison took another shot and sat the glass back down.

"He must have figured that you'd be more trouble dead. So, was he wrong?" Fallon asked.

Morrison shrugged and grinned savagely before taking a swig of beer and answering. "Probably not, but I'm with you guys. Nothing else to do."

"I thought we were waiting on Dante," Feyd said.

"I'm not planning on taking Dante to kill Fallwell. He'll be more useful here. It is his town and all. We are going to need some major players though."

He sat back, took a shot and swig of beer, and

watched the stage. A slow, seductive song that Fallon didn't recognize came on, and the whole of Pinky's went silent. He turned to Morrison, who just grinned and nodded to the stage.

"Cole's up."

Cole checked herself in the mirror one last time before she went out. Her makeup was tastefully done, and her hair was perfect. She sent a salute Alcyone's way before climbing the stairs and winked to the stage boy at the top. Jake or Jack, Cole could never remember his name. He blushed and ducked his head down. He was fairly new and hadn't quite gotten used to the girls' teasing yet. But Cole had always been nice to him, and they were roughly the same age. Every time she saw him she had to laugh. How could a boy that looked like he did have so little experience with the other sex? Especially working at Pinky's?

But Jack or Jake—it could be David—whatever it was, he wasn't on the cards for tonight. Out there were three of the most spectacular specimens of the male gender she had ever seen. It was strange, dancing for people she would actually fuck. It kinda freed her up to do anything she wanted. Thisbe tried to describe what it was like for her, dancing for Leviathan night after night.

The whole "one true person" crap was never really Colette's thing. She did as she pleased, and the men loved her for it, gave her money or tried to kill her. Not that Alcyone would let anything

happen to her, but it was still best to stay out of the way. But she did like dancing for the hot ones.

The lights dimmed, and the crowd went quiet. She strode out onto center stage, ruffling Jack's hair on the way past. The slow, steady beat came on, and she started her routine as the lights faded. She could do it with her eyes closed, and she often did. She loved to dance; it was her life now. The feel of the beat on her skin, bending her, like waves of the ocean. There were two things Cole knew how to do: dance and fuck, which was a good thing because they were the only things that she really enjoyed anymore.

She grabbed the chair and started to dance around it, looking over to the boys' table as she did. Arcady winked at her and held his bottle up. Fallon and Feyd were staring, jaws slightly open. She slowly ran her tongue over her bottom lip. *Maybe I should go over and say hi.* She hopped off the stage and stalked over to them. Feyd's eyes bugged as she straddled him on the seat and started to thrust and gyrate into him, never quite touching him, but giving him the full lap dance experience. She grasped his head with her hands and leaned in until her lips were practically touching his soft, fleshy ear. *Mmm, he smelled great.*

"If you're interested in a one-on-one lap dance, give me a call, darling. I'll be right backstage."

Feyd made a small noise at the back of his throat, which she took as a maybe. Leaving Feyd, she made to move onto Fallon. When she caught Arcady's amused smile, he nodded to a spot on the floor, and she followed his gaze. Alcyone was sitting

at the bar drinking a Coke, looking pissed off. *Ah, crap!*

Somebody's in trouble. She glared at Arcady as his teasing, singsong voice came into her head. He was such a child sometimes. She was in trouble, though. A few months before, a fight had broken out during one of the acts. Cole hadn't been on that night, but it did get nasty. Ever since then, Alcyone had forbidden them from leaving the stage during their acts. *Damn it!*

She winked at Fallon, who smiled and held his hands up, looking slightly cheated. *Pity. The things I've heard about you, mister. We could make each other very happy...for a while.* She walked back through the tables, dancing and flirting with different men. She hopped up on stage and finished her dance, avoiding eye contact with Al. The song was on a loop anyway, so it wasn't as if anyone missed anything. She was fairly certain that nobody would be foolish enough to start a fight with the boys, anyway.

Sure as fate, just as the thoughts passed her brain, a very hot, slightly angry-looking man walked up to them and stood, looking down at them. Cole paused, her heart pounding in her chest. *If I've started a fight, Al's going to kill me. Shit, why do they have to be so hot? I have nowhere else. I hate men. Why are they all so possessive?*

Relax, it's only Dante. We've been waiting on him. If you keep on like that love, you're going to give me a brain aneurism. Al wouldn't throw you out for a bar fight anyway. Now go on. Your song

stopped, and the lights went down. You're kinda just standing there. I'll see you later, Arcady assured her from his place at the table.

Feyd passed Dante a beer, and he sat down. Cole let out a sigh of relief and went backstage to find Al and face the music.

"Hey."

Feyd, Fallon, and Arcady sat huddled at a table, staring at the stage and totally oblivious to him. With a scowl, Dante sat at the table and grabbed the nearest bottle of beer before clearing his throat loudly. "You did say we had a meeting tonight. You know, where we discuss business, rather than wait for you guys to pick your tongues back up from the floor."

"You and your mouth, Dante. Can't you see we are enjoying the arts?" Feyd said this with a grin, barely bothering to turn his attention from the stage.

"Yeah. I'm sure the lights just went down on a real Picasso. Now, why am I here? And where the hell is the waitress? Is the plan to have me die of thirst so that you can mug me? Again?"

"Good to see you, Dante," Morrison said with a sneer. "I thought even you couldn't pass up a gander at the sweet little filly on the stage. Hey, you look a bit shaken, mate. Anything wrong?"

"I'm fine, just thirsty." Dante was desperate to get back to the matter at hand.

"No prob." Arcady motioned for the waitress,

and she brought over another round for each of them. Dante's had barely touched the table before he swooped it up and knocked it back.

"Now, now." Feyd turned to Fallon. "Dante got his ass handed to him today in the coffee shop, and won't share the story."

Dante tried to decide whether to burn Feyd alive or to strangle him slowly. "I didn't, just a little accident. Leave it, okay? And tell me about the impending matrimonial noose."

Fallon looked over at him amused and smiled. "So, what exactly was her name?"

"Who knows?" Dante threw in a nonchalant shrug for good measure. "What's wifeypoo's name?"

"Feyd, I'm going to murder you slowly tonight." Fallon's tone lacked enough menace to make it sound truly convincing, but Dante decided to offer a hand anyway.

"If you want help hiding the body..."

Feyd smiled back at Fallon as Arcady tisked. "Can't. Then Ast will hear it from Ash, and it will be such a big scene you'll never hear the end of it."

"*And* you, St. Dante." Feyd took a gleeful pleasure in drawling out his nickname.

"Ast and Ash? So, what? You're both whipped now? Damn, you guys must be getting old. Or slow." Dante struggled to manage a suitably somber expression to portray his sympathy at their impending doom.

"Funny, Dante. Trust me, I'm not old, nor am I slow."

Dante only just managed to suppress a snigger

at Fallon's indignant reply.

"Gentleman, can we get down to business? I do have a pressing engagement tonight, and I'm sure the rest of you have things to do as well." Arcady said this as he tipped back the last of his second beer

"Well, I'm sure your engagement will involve mattress-pressing. So, why did you drag me out to this end of town?" The fact that an uninterrupted trip would only take him thirty minutes on foot was irrelevant; Dante hated leaving his little territory.

Feyd was quick to respond. "Simple. We need help keeping an eye on George and his antics."

As usual, Fallon began to finish Feyd's sentence. *These guys really need to spend less time together.* "And finding a certain scroll spell. Apparently you're the guy to go to find shit, or so Feyd tells me."

"Depends on the spell. This gonna get any of the big nasties from Afterverse hunting me down? Or one of those sorcerers? You know how much they irritate me." Dante knew enough not to agree to help them blindly. Whatever they wanted was sure to lead to trouble.

"No, no, just Fallwell. He's jonesin' for this big-time. We were sent to kill Ash 'cause he thought she had it." Feyd was doing his best to seem sincere and harmless, which instantly put Dante on guard.

"And now Ash has which one of you by the balls?"

Fallon ignored his comment and forged on. "It's an old incantation, very rare. We don't even know the name of it."

“Ah, Ash has Feyd by the balls. Astrid has Fallon’s in her little purse.” Arcady explained the situation with a smirk at the other two.

“And now you girls want me to track this down. Any info, other than rare?”

“Nope. Fallwell hasn’t graced us with that info, but apparently it’s so rare there’s only one scroll. And I resent being called a girl. Hell, at least I haven’t gotten coffee spilled on my pants recently. Hot enough for you, Dante?”

Feyd’s obvious curiosity was starting to get on Dante’s nerves. “You’ll understand if I don’t discuss how hot my pants are with you. What does the incantation do?”

“Fuck if I know. We aren’t privy to anything important, you know. It’s mostly just ‘go here and steal that’ or ‘go there and kill this.’ But if Fallwell is looking for it and he’s so personally hot for it, it’s gotta be only one thing...”

At this point, Arcady and Fallon both helped him to finish his sentence. “Cheat Death.”

“Oh, well, easy. I’ll just check bloody e-Bay! There are sodding tons of these things that claim to cheat death!”

“No, I don’t think this one will be on e-Bay, Dante. If it was, fuck, he’d have it already.” Feyd smiled at his friend and looked over at Arcady. “So, what? We were thinking check out the auction houses and junk. You know that guy that runs it?”

“Look, if anyone can get their hands on it, it’s me. I’ll start looking around tomorrow. I’ll let you know if anything turns up.” Dante grabbed the rest of his beer and downed it.

Arcady looked over at the bar, motioned for another round, and winked at Alcyone. “So, we in agreement? Dante, if you get a lead, call one of us, right? And we’ll do the same. Everyone okay with that? Beauty. Now, I believe we need to retire to the back lounge. It looks like Al has set up a very amusing surprise for the three of you. I just get to tag along.”

They got up from the table at Morrison’s insistence and made their way to a door that said *Private Parties Only*. The room beyond the door was black and pink, pure Pinky’s colors, and the four girls standing in the center were smirking at them.

“Gentleman, choose your destiny,” Arcady said with a slight smirk.

“As much as it entices, this isn’t my scene. So, yeah I’ll keep in touch. Enjoy.” Dante smiled at the three of them, who looked none too shocked, and backed out the door, leaving his friends the odious task of choosing.

“Fuckin’ Dante, man,” Feyd said as he eyed Cole. “I swear, sometimes I don’t know about him.”

Cole walked over to Feyd as he finished talking, a sweet smile on her face. He swallowed hard and said, “So Cole, about that dance...”

Chapter Eight

Astrid and Ash were sitting in the kitchen. Astrid was cutting up cheese and fruit while Ash picked out a bottle of wine.

“So, Astrid, where did the guys go? And who are they going to meet?”

Astrid didn't even look up from her cutting. “Pinky's, that gentleman's club that's run by the succubus, on Cherry. They are meeting up with Arcady Morrison.”

“Arcady?” Ash asked as she started to open a bottle of Shiraz.

“I believe the guys call him Morrison. Something about straight men not being able to say his given name. But then, that does make sense.”

“Don't follow Ast, English?”

“Oh, Feyd didn't tell you? Arcady is an Incubus.”

“Incubus? As in...?”

Astrid usually forgot that even though Ash was a born demon, she had no clue when it came to the other supernatural races that were walking the earth. She had only learned that she was what was

considered a Cendere, the lowest power level for a fire demon, when Astrid told her. Since then, she had been schooling Ash little by little about demons and their power hierarchy.

At first, Ash was sure she wasn't a demon, until she read the one ancient text Astrid had in her possession: a study of demons and their culture. Then Ash had started to believe it. She had learned that Earth was only one of several planes of existence, one being the demon realm, the Afterverse. Demons could exist in both the Afterverse and Earth planes, normally looking like humans on both planes, so it was always difficult to tell a demon from other supernaturals or humans. Two things set them apart: their powers and the ability to 'Bleed to Demon.'

Bleeding to Demon was a term coined centuries before by the fey culture, to explain why demons changed their appearance in highly emotional situations. No matter what it was, a change as subtle as slight eye color change to growing ice horns, their skin color changing, or gaining a tail or other refinements, each true demon had a secret face.

Demons frequently bargained with humans and other supernaturals on Earth for powers in exchange for souls, so there were a lot of bargained demons running around the Earth. There were nine different races of demons operating in the Earth plane: Ice, Shadow, Fire, Time, Illusion, Shape Changer, Vision, Teleport, Succubae, and the Incubus. It must have been that one she'd forgotten.

“Male pleasure demon, Ash. And believe me, it is quite the pleasure.”

Ash turned to her friend and grinned. “When did you have the pleasure?”

“Ah, a few weeks before I met Fallon. He picked me and Spinner up at a bar. It was fun.”

“You, him, and Spinner?”

“Yep.” She smiled at Ash.

“Shit, Ast. I had no idea you were so kinky.” She brought her friend a glass of wine and placed it down on the counter within reach.

“Well, you never had Arcady. They call him Mr. Fantasy, you know. Shame, he’s got more notches on his belt than both Fallon and Feyd combined.”

“Really? Feyd told me Fallon is gonna be missed by the women of the world. Apparently he’s leaving a trail of bodies behind him.”

Astrid grinned. “Well...” She took a sip of her wine. “I told him he can do what he wants, but I’m hoping he’ll figure out that he doesn’t have to do it without me.”

Ash almost choked on her wine. “Astrid! Threesomes? Does he know that you...um...?”

“Have a tendency to play? No, not yet, although I have a feeling he’ll come home tonight wanting to talk. Odds are Arcady spilled the beans.” Astrid’s face looked as if she wanted just that to happen.

“Besides, you never thought of having a threesome with Feyd? Come on, girl, be honest.”

Ash giggled and smiled. “Yes, I have a tendency to play as well, as you so gallantly put it. Just don’t tell him. I’ll see if he figures it out.”

The two girls looked at each other, clinked

glasses, and then drained them. Ash grabbed the bottle, and Astrid grabbed the platter, and they left the kitchen with Linus on their heels.

“So, Astrid, about Arcady...”

“You want to try that out, don’t you? I don’t blame you. He’s scrumptious.”

“Well, you say he’s Mr. Fantasy, so, yeah I want to try that.”

“Talk to Feyd. I’m sure the two of you can come to an understanding.”

“You know, Ast, that’s not a half-bad idea.”

The sunroom was a glass enclosure with couches, divans, small tables, and pillows everywhere. Both Astrid and Ash enjoyed this room more than anyplace else in the house except their respective bedrooms. “So, Ast,” Ash said as she reached for another piece of cheese and lounged on the oversized divan. “How did you meet Fallon, anyway?”

“Well,” Astrid said. “Shall I tell you, my kinky sister?” It was apparent she was a little bit drunk. “I’m not a great storyteller like Feyd, but I’ll try to do it justice.” She refilled her glass, leaving it on the small table, and lounged back on the couch with a small candle in her hand. She passed her finger through the flame, clearly remembering something pleasant.

“It was a little more than a year ago,” she began, her eyes softening as she spoke. “I was sitting in the park by the great arch in Paris. Lord, girl. Linus was only three months old. We were sitting on the grass on a blanket.” She took a sip of her wine. “I was wearing this cute v-neck pink

sweater, which I think I still have, and a white and pink floral skirt. Ash, I did look cute. So anyways, I was there, playing with Linus and just enjoying the sunshine when I looked up and saw some people walking by.”

She popped a piece of cheese in her mouth, chewed, and continued. “So, then I see these two guys walking up from the road. One is wearing jeans and a black button-up shirt. It was Feyd. The other...well, let’s see...hmm, how do I explain Fallon? I know you really don’t want me to describe him, Ash, but too bad.” They both laughed, and Astrid took another sip of wine.

“His hair was longer then, almost to the middle of his ears, a few highlights, and he had a moustache. His sunglasses were mirrored, and he was wearing a pair of slacks—black—with a white button-up shirt. The top three buttons were undone. He was wearing this necklace.” She paused to lift the pewter cast of a circle, bisected by lines in each direction that hung around her neck. The present he’d given her the night he left her. To this day, she had never taken it off. It sat like a choker on her throat.

“I like it. What is it?” Ash asked as she popped a strawberry in her mouth.

“The planetary symbol for Earth. I don’t know what it means to him, but he made me promise never to take it off the night he left. I never have.”

“Ah,” Ash said. “You should ask him.” She drained her glass and reached for another bottle of wine to refill it. They were on their third bottle of wine.

“So, anyways, I was enraptured with him, and I couldn’t stop staring. He was just beautiful, you know? He caught me watching him as he walked by, his hands in his pockets. He reached up and slid his glasses down so that I saw his amazing eyes, and he smiled at me but kept walking. His friend said something to him, and he looked over at him then turned back and smiled at me again. But he kept walking past me, toward the other side of the park. I turned to watch him go, his butt hugged nicely in his dress slacks.”

“Yeah, Fallon does have a killer butt.” They clinked glasses and giggled. “So, what happened next?”

“Like I said, I watched him go, upset I didn’t get to at least say hi. I watched him ‘til he was out of sight, and I remember sighing and Linus crawling up into my lap. Then I heard someone clearing their throat next to me. I looked up, and it was Fallon. Of course, I didn’t know his name at the time.” Her eyes unfocused as she remembered the afternoon.

“Hi.”

“Um, hi. How did you get here? I watched you walk out of the park.”

“Oh, you watched me, did you? Liked what you saw?”

“I’d be lying if I said no. So? How did you get here so fast?”

The stranger knelt down as Linus woke up and stumbled over to him. She watched as he ruffled the puppy’s back, and Linus licked his hand. “Hey, pup.” He returned his attention to her.

“Hmm?”

He moved closer to her, his mouth very close to her ear. “Magic.” He breathed into her ear. Chills followed the exhale of his breath. She chuckled, and he moved back and inhaled, a grin on his face. Heat blazed in his eyes as he looked at her. “You smell good enough to eat,” he whispered before he moved farther from her.

Astrid smiled and slowly licked her lips, her body on fire from what this man had said, did. She had never, in all her life, felt this attracted to someone before. “Thanks. I normally don’t get offered sex until I at least know the guy’s name first.” She cocked her head at him, hoping he got the joke. His smile told her he did.

“Sex, huh?” he asked as he once again looked down into her cleavage. “My name’s Fallon. Yours, vixen?”

“Vixen, huh? That could work.”

“You don’t want to tell me your real name?” The look on his face was a mixture of amusement and defeat. She wanted to wipe that look off his face.

“Well, I’m gonna have to, aren’t I? Screaming ‘vixen’ all night long is hardly proper. It’s Astrid. This is Linus.” Fallon grabbed Astrid’s hand and kissed it, relaying something in French.

“You speak French?” She smiled at him.

“A little. Mostly dirty phrases and curses.” She laughed at him. “So, Astrid, about that sex you were talking about...”

She looked coyly at the delicious man kneeling next to her. Linus seemed to like him, so she

assumed he was a good person. "You offering, Fallon? It's not everyday I'm just randomly offered sex in the park."

"Hmm, sex in the park? That could work, down the line..." He grinned at her. "But sex with you? In general? Hell yeah, I'm offering. I'm thinking dinner first, then sex?" He was teasing her, she knew, but it wasn't all teasing. The glint in his eye held much promise in what he was offering.

"Sounds good. Pick me up at eight." She handed him her card. "But Fallon? We really don't need to have dinner, I'm a sure thing."

"Astrid! You didn't!" Ashlyn screeched, breaking her concentration.

"Damn right, I said it. He was too fine!"

"So, you guys went to dinner?"

"Yeah. I felt the need to, so I paid without telling him. The entire time we were just talking shit to each other, and when we finally left, he kissed me, and I almost fainted. It was like heaven, Ash. He told me to close my eyes, and seconds later we were in my foyer. The next thing I knew I was naked beneath him, screaming and sobbing his name well into the night. That morning I woke up cuddled around his naked body. I decided then and there that he was mine. He owned my heart the minute he breathed into my ear at the park."

Ash sighed. "Pretty story, Astrid. When did he tell you he was a demon?"

She took a sip of her wine. "Late morning. I was cuddled up to him, playing with his happy trail, and I asked him again about his magic tricks. He

told me he was an Escensio. That's teleport demon, Ash. He got real quiet afterward, and when I told him I was a witch, he relaxed again. I don't think he'd ever told any of his lovers what he really was, but he told me. That he trusted me enough speaks volumes. He stayed a month. He introduced me to Feyd, and it was the three of us."

"Then he left?"

"Yeah. I was crushed. But a year later, he's back home with me. And he's mine."

"Amen, sister!" Ash whooped and jumped off the divan. "I feel the need to go skinny dipping in the hot tub. You wanna?"

Astrid hadn't heard a better idea all day. "Why not? Maybe the guys will be home soon."

Chapter Nine

Fifteen minutes after they arrived in the private room, Fal was feeling pretty worked up. He had never been one for lap dances, but the girls at Pinky's knew just what to do, how to move. It was amazing, if he thought about it, all these girls in one place. A month ago, he would have been in heaven. Not so much now, though, since he had Astrid waiting at home. As tempting as the girls here were, they weren't her. Though, he always did find time to appreciate a fine piece of ass like the one currently contorting on his lap, which he had. He appreciated her for fifteen minutes. Now he wanted to find Astrid and fuck her raw against the first thing he could find.

Christ, I am whipped. Next I'll have the fucking pipe and slippers, or I'll be like Dante. He glanced over his shoulder to see Morrison watching him over the two girls he had ended up with. He snapped his head back in surprise, blinking a few times. Fucking prick. What is he, gay? *What are you, gay?* he sent to Morrison, knowing that he'd be listening.

Morrison's response was a deep, manly chuckle. *You are worse than Dante, my friend. You've changed, Fal, you've really changed. I'm*

proud of you. Most of us can't change, Arcady sent back.

Proud? What are you, my daddy? Everyone can change. Now, what have I told you about being in my head? Get the fuck out, you creepy bastard.

Morrison's laughter sounded in his head. Fallon turned his attention back to the girl on his lap just as his phone rang. *Thank fuck, saved by the bell.* He excused himself from the girl and walked to the corner for privacy. He checked the caller ID. It was Astrid.

"Vixen?"

Her voice giggled on the other end. "Hi, cookie. How's things?"

He grinned at the sound of her slightly drunken voice. "Things are good. You want us to come home?"

"Hmm...I want you to enjoy yourself."

"Ahh, so you do want me home, then. What are you doing?"

"Me and Ash are in the hot tub. We're naked, and we're very drunk."

Fallon could hear Ash giggling in the background as Astrid tried her best to sound sober.

"I think we're just about finished here. We'll be right round."

"M'kay, cookie. Love you."

"I love you, too, vix." He hung up the phone and walked stiffly over to Feyd and Morrison, grinning. "I think the girls are having a better party than we are. I suggest we go there." Feyd opened his mouth, but Fallon answered his question before

he got the chance to ask it. "Something to do with being drunk and naked in the hot tub."

"I fucking told you! Asty does girls, and they're drunk. Twenty bucks says that they're...in a compromising position," Morrison shouted as Feyd grabbed his jacket.

"You're on, Morrison. You know I never could resist a bet," Fallon answered as he went to retrieve his own coat.

Arcady walked out of the room with his two friends, both seemingly satisfied. He thought about the bet he made with Fallon, hoping that he actually won this one. Alcyone was positioned behind the bar, and she smiled as he walked by. *Now, Incubus, remember. I want Feyd. Do what you have to, but I want that,* she thought to him.

No sweat, Al. I'll talk to him about a switch in a few. Don't get your panties in a bunch.

You, Incubus, should know very well I don't wear them. She smiled at him as he laughed.

Fallon shot him a sideways glance.

"What?" He looked innocently at Fallon.

"Why the fuck you laughing?"

"Al. She...um...sent me a thought. Want me to send it to you?"

"No thanks, Morrison. Stay the fuck outta my head, okay?"

"No problem, mate. Let's get going. I got a bet to win." He moved closer to Feyd and smiled. "So, Feyd, this Ash girl. She fit?"

“You have no idea. Why?”

“I was thinking we could...well, set something up. Alcyone is interested, you know, and...well...Ash shouldn't get left out, don't you think?” Arcady smiled at his cohort, talking more to him as Fallon shook his head.

Al, I think it's a go, but I'll call you once I head back. Okay?

Okay. Have fun, love.

Arcady closed off his thoughts to his court mate and walked out the door, still talking to Feyd, hoping he was convincing him. Once they left the district, Feyd walked a bit in front of Arcady and Fallon, as per Fallon's request. “Okay, now what am I out of the loop for, fucker?”

“Cause you got the x-ray vision, mate. Astrid said that she was in the hot tub with Ash. She sounded shitfaced. So, maybe Morrison, here, is right, and they are naked in the hot tub. You are the only one that will be able to tell us if they are.”

Oh, okay.” Feyd reached the back gate and waited for the other two to catch up. “Took you two fuckers long enough. You two walk like you have a bag of shit in your pants.”

“Cute, Nightly. Crude as ever. So, you going to see if they are naked or not? Me and Ipwhisk have a bet going.”

Feyd turned and relaxed, concentrating on his objective. The gate and the walls of the hot tub fell from view, and he was looking dead-on at Ash lounging in the tub, nothing marring the straight line of her back. He grinned. “Oh, yeah, Fal. You owe Morrison big.”

"What the fuck! Feyd, you better be shitting me."

"I shit you not, mate. They are both very naked and very drunk." Feyd grinned and winked at Fallon, who looked over at Morrison.

"Oh, fuck! This I gotta see."

Fallon walked up to the gate and punched in the security code. The gate opened silently, and the three of them passed through. They could hear Ash and Astrid laughing about some poor hapless guy they had encountered at the liquor store, and Feyd looked over at Morrison and smiled. "Ash is a wildcat. You have been warned."

"And I know, hands off. You don't have to tell me twice." Arcady walked behind Feyd, who secretly thought that he might indeed have to tell the Incubus twice. At that moment, Fallon shimmered from his place at the front of the line and reappeared behind a lounging Astrid, half out of the water. Arcady smiled as Fallon reached down Astrid's chest and slid a finger through the water dripping there.

"Hey! Where's Feyd?" Ashlyn looked over to see Fallon mutter something to Astrid, and then bend down to capture her lips in a kiss. Not even looking up from the kiss, nor breaking it, he pointed to the two men walking over to the hot tub.

"Hey, minx," Feyd said as he caught a very wet and naked Ashlyn in his arms and set her back in the water.

"You bastard, Feyd. You really are a dick. I have an idea, though. Vixen, why don't you grab a towel? Or better yet..." Fallon grabbed Astrid, and

dripping wet, shimmered them out of the backyard.

“She has been waiting for him all night. They have a few things to discuss.” Ash looked over at the guy standing behind Feyd and smiled. “Who are you?”

“Ashlyn, love, may I present Morrison. Morrison, this is Ash.”

“Ah, so you’re the Mr. Fantasy that Astrid was talking about.”

Arcady’s face went pale. “Astrid said that, did she? Well, you, my dear, may call me Arcady.”

"Really? What if I like Mr. Fantasy?"

Feyd sat back as they bullshitted for a few minutes, watching his beautiful Ashlyn flirt and smile, but she always looked over to him and winked or licked her lips. He knew once Morrison left, she would be all his once again.

“My dear, as much as I’d love to sit and talk to you all night, I have a prior engagement waiting for me at Pinky’s, so I’ll say good night.”

Feyd thought back to the dancer that made his and Fallon’s jaws drop while on stage and grinned. “Have fun, Morrison. Don’t kill her. That’s too much to take from the world.” The two of them exchanged glances, and Morrison blew a kiss to Ash and left out the back gate.

"So, tiger, alone at last..." Ash said as she pushed off toward the other side of the hot tub, completely exposing herself to his normal vision. He quickly took his clothes off and stepped into the water. Reaching for her, he grabbed her and set her on his lap, sheathing himself in her heat. He groaned into her hair.

"Mmm, tiger, I've missed you so much," she said into his ear, and he moved her light frame, ever lighter in the water. He kissed her deeply, working his tongue inside her mouth in time with his thrusts. She made a few small noises in her throat and was clawing at his back in no time, gasping as she came. He was quick to join her, as he had wanted her all night. The lap dances he'd gotten hadn't helped.

She lay panting on his chest with him still nestled inside her, and he kissed her head. "Have fun with Astrid tonight, minx?" He stroked his hand down her wet back, trailing the water around in circles as he idly drew on her.

"Yeah, we had a blast. How was the titty shaking? You miss me?"

He chuckled and kissed her head again. "Yeah, I missed you. I think I'm going to have to prove it to you again, but not yet, and not here. I don't want you becoming a prune. Pinky's was a lot of fun, Ash. You'd like it. It's amusing. So, why were you and Astrid talking about Morrison?"

"I asked who you were meeting."

"Ah. That's it, Ash? That's all that was said?" Feyd was grilling her, but he wanted to know how much leniency he had to ask her about Alcyone.

"Hmm? Astrid was telling me about the infamous Mr. Fantasy. He sounds fun. Why?"

"Is that something you want to do, Ash? I mean, honestly? I'm not trying to be a dick, and you don't belong to me, but...well, are you thinking you want to do that?"

"I would do that, Feyd, but I want you."

Feyd's heart beat harder in his chest at the words coming from her mouth as he reveled in hearing that she had the choice but wanted him. It made him happy. "The reason I asked is that...well...at the club, I met Alcyone. Morrison and I were talking, and...well, we thought it might be fun to have a play night. You and Morrison, if you wanted to, and me and Alcyone. Just one night. And I'd understand if you didn't want to, but I thought it could be fun." He waited as she snuggled closer to him in the water, the bubbles teasing her skin.

"Sounds promising. Yeah, I think we could do that. So, this Alcyone's pretty hot, then?"

He smiled into her hair and moved her to face him. "She's hot, but I thought I'd go out with a bang, my last fling. She's not you, my sweet. She is pretty, but she's a Succubus, and, well, you're perfect."

"Why don't we go upstairs, and I'll show you just how perfect I am, tiger?"

Feyd saw the heat in her eyes and knew that he was in for a very wild night indeed. "Okay, minx. I can't do those funny disappearing tricks that Fallon does, but I'll get us there, angel. And then you can show me anything you wanna show me, okay?"

She moved off his lap. He got out of the tub, lifted her in his arms, and carried her up the stairs and through the door.

Chapter Ten

Fallon shimmered them to the bed. Astrid was dripping water all over it. He blinked a few times to straighten out his blurred vision. He shouldn't be able to shimmer more than himself. It was against all the rules. When he was younger, he'd seen it done but never tried it. He'd seen it go wrong a few times too many. Once, he'd moved Feyd out of the way of a bullet, but that had almost killed him. The trip, not the bullet. He'd had to draw on all his power to do it.

Astrid, though...she was different. For one, she was just so damn tiny. Shimmering her wasn't so bad. It still left him gasping for breath, but he could manage it. Especially at a time like this, when all he wanted to do was hold her close and sink himself deep into her. He pushed her onto her back and began to lick the droplets of water off her skin. She giggled under his ministrations.

"Is something funny, vixen?" He lifted his head and pretended to look around. "I don't see anything funny, love. What could it be that you find so funny?" He raised a questioning eyebrow as Astrid put on her best serious face.

"You, cookie. So intent on making me dry." She giggled again.

"Oh, no. You got me all wrong," he said with mock seriousness. "I'm just trying to make you wetter. Is it working?"

"Umm...what do you think?" She stretched like a cat, her naked breasts derailing Fallon's attention from their current track as he watched them.

He licked his lips and grinned up at her. "I think I better check. Don't you?"

Without waiting for an answer, he slid down her body, pausing now and again to lick the last droplets from her. Once he reached his destination, he gently spread her legs open and held them where he wanted them. He lightly teased her clit with his tongue, chuckling as she gasped when he slid his tongue into her heat.

"Hmm, it looks like it to me. Does it feel wetter to you?" he asked before going back down.

"Umm..." She wiggled slightly under him, but he held her still.

"I'll take that as a yes, then," he said playfully, pulling back to look at her. He blew gently onto her, just enough to make her juices cold. He wanted to warm her up. He set about doing just that.

"Yes." She giggled as she tried to twist away from him. "Cookie, I have a question."

"A question? Okay, shoot." He lifted his head and rested it on her thigh. This should be good.

"I love this." She held up the medallion that she wore around her neck. "I have never taken it off. Why did you give it to me when you left?"

"Well, vixen, you tell me. You're the clever witch of the family." He played, knowing that she would never be able to figure it out. It was too well-

spelled. She frowned and bit her lip, pouting slightly as she tried to figure out the purpose of the medallion.

"I don't know. I always wondered. Tell me." She sat up, pulling her legs up and under her. "Tell me, please. I'll give you anything you want."

"Anything? I already have everything I want, right here."

She sat back worrying her lip, choosing her next words carefully. "Then why did you leave me? It was a year. A long year."

Fallon lay back on the bed and began to slowly unbutton his shirt. Once his shirt was off and draped on the side chair next to the bed, he reached over, pulled a cigarette out of his pocket, and lit it.

"It was that, vixen, and I'm sorry. The medallion's spelled. I asked a witch that I trusted to do it for me. It let me know where you were at all times. I'm surprised you actually wore it."

"I've never taken it off. What type of spell was it?"

He shook his head, looking around for somewhere to flick his ashes.

"Sorry, I just...I had no idea that you would have wanted to see me again. I thought that was it. Sure, you said that you'd be back." She nodded toward his cigarette. "You'll have to flick it out the balcony. Ash has all the ashtrays. I think I'm going to have to glue one to her hand. I'll get more tomorrow."

He finished the cigarette and flicked it out the window above the bed. He looked out of it, making sure the stub didn't fall into the garden. Ignoring

the sounds coming from the hot tub outside, he returned to the bed. They better clean that up in the morning. He climbed onto the bed and took Astrid in his arms, spooning her naked body.

"No, I always wanted to come back. Always planned on it. You were never far from my thoughts. My life hasn't been...it...my childhood was less than ideal. My parents died when I was four, and it kind of went downhill from there. Maybe some day soon I'll tell you that story but not now. Now, it's not important."

"Whenever you're ready. You don't have to tell me anything." He tightened his grip on her, willing away the memories. It was almost easy for him now. "I don't think I'll ever be ready, but thanks for understanding."

"I'm here now, with you. I'm never going to leave you. I left because I was happy, and I'd never been happy before. I panicked. Not very manly, but there it is. I was always going to come back, but work just didn't take me in the right places. I don't have a whole lot of friends out there. There are a hell of a lot of people who would do anything to hurt me, and they would use anybody to do it. They would just love to see me like this. I do love you, Astrid."

"I can look after myself. Love you, too."

"I know that. I trust you not to die. Hell, vix, you could kick my ass if you wanted to. Before we met, I would wake up every morning, most of the time not even knowing where I was or who I was with, and it was rarely morning. I would look in the mirror and hate myself. I'd hate everybody around

me. Feyd, Lorna, Morrison, and a few others were the only ones I could stand. I hated being me. Then I met you, that day in the park. Everything changed from there. I can't even describe it. I had to be around you. Just seeing you made me smile. Your hair in the morning, your really bad jokes, your sexy accent, your cooking—which, by the way, is better than Feyd's. The fact that you are completely nuts, but exactly like me—the good me, the me I can see myself being with you. I want to be that person."

She turned in his arms, kissing him as she unbuckled his belt and unfastened his jeans. He growled in her mouth as she pulled him out of his jeans and wrapped her small hand around him. He broke the kiss, gasping for breath.

"So, the medallion was so I could find you, as I knew I'd be back. I did say that I'd—"

She cut him off with a long, bone-crushing kiss. "Enough talking now, cookie. Thank you." She pushed him down and climbed on top of him, pausing only briefly to position herself before bearing down on him and riding him well into the night.

Once he was through the gate to the mansion, Arcady grabbed his cell phone and hit Alcyone's speed dial.

"Yeah, Arcady?"

"You didn't upset Cole too much, did you? I know you were pissed, but jealousy isn't something

you used to do, Al. Are we changing our ways?”

“Stuff it, Arcady, I wasn’t jealous. I was just rather pissed she had the nerve to go against my rule. Fuck, Thisbe and the Ice King don’t even break that rule. But come on, I wasn’t that pissed. I did let her go to the back room for the surprise, didn’t I?”

“True, Al, you did. So, she’s okay?”

“Yep, she just finished her last act of the night, and she’s on her way to the shower. She said for you to meet her there. So, what about Feyd?”

“I met his girlfriend tonight. She’s quite sexy, but he is looking forward to a little scrump with you, my luscious temptress. So, it looks like you might get to try that out after all. I’m sure he’ll call me tomorrow.”

“Yeah, let me know. We’ll set up something amusing, I’m sure. Have fun tonight, Arcady. Cole has been looking forward to you all day.” She hung up, and Arcady quickened his steps, hoping to still be able to catch Cole in the shower. They *don’t call me Mr. Fantasy for nothing*.

Morning brought a sense of belonging for Astrid. Before last night’s conversation with Fallon, she still thought she was just a passing thing with him. Until he’d told her about the reason he had given her the medallion. Now she knew they were meant to be together. He had taken steps to ensure that he’d always be able to find her.

I can forgive him for the year, now that I

know, she thought as she rolled over and cuddled into his warm and very naked body. Fallon always slept naked with her, and she took all his wonderful flesh as a comfort. *He's all mine now. No straying back to the life he hated, no running from me and his feelings. All my dreams are coming true. All of them.*

She moved her hand on his chest, and he tensed. She knew he was awake. She had a second to sigh before he scooped her up and moved her closer, giving her a breathless morning kiss. *I don't even mind the morning breath with Fallon. It must be love.* She kissed him back and shifted so that she was laying completely on top of him, her body fitting perfectly on his. "Morning, cookie. Sleep well?"

He grumbled and turned over so that she was under him. He growled into her ear, moved her right leg up, and slid into her. She sighed and hummed into his mouth as he kissed her. They made love, and she gasped when he brought her, falling into her normal morning fuzzy feeling. Fallon was always gentle in the morning and a wild man at night. It was something she had come to expect as the norm. She found comfort in getting back into their old routine, as if he hadn't been away from her for a year.

For the past year, she had told herself it was as if he were in the military, away on an assignment of great importance. It had been the only thing that kept her from running after him around the world. *Now I don't have to even think about that anymore. He's here to stay.*

She turned her attention back to her lover, who was working on bringing her once again. When she came this time, he followed her, and she was content all over again. He nuzzled her neck, and she chuckled.

“Something wrong, vixen?”

“No. I just love how you’re always ready to play with me.” She cuddled him, and he ran his hand down her side. She giggled as he lightly tickled her, and she knew he was just teasing her. “So, what do you want to do tonight?”

“We have some more recon to do, but then I’m thinking we can pick up where we left off. What do you think?”

“Maybe. I was thinking you, Feyd, and Arcady could meet Ash and me at Dry Ice. I really could use a night out, and Dry Ice is a good place to do it. And before you say something about protecting Ash and me, we know the guys that work the place. We won’t be in any danger. Come on, please?”

“I don’t see why we can’t meet you, vix. I can’t say no to you. Wear something sexy.”

Astrid beamed as he spoke to her. She was extremely excited, and she was going to get to show Fallon off, too. *Hmm, sexy, eh? I think Ash and me are going to have to go shopping today. Best not to tell them that, though.* She returned the kiss he gave her and watched him with interest as he got out of bed and went looking for his silk pajama pants. *I say, goddamn. He really is fucking beautiful.* She watched him walk about the room, naked, and her body clenched in all the right places. She made a sound in her throat, and Fallon

turned around, one eyebrow up, and smiled.

“Vixen, you’re amazing.” He moved back to the bed and kissed her once more. “I’m getting into the shower; then I’m going to meet with Arcady, okay?”

“Sure thing, cookie. I’m going to find Linus. He’s got a grooming appointment today.”

“Good. The thing smells awful.”

“Don’t have to tell me twice. That’s what happens when he hangs out with Feyd and you.” She winked, and he threw his t-shirt at her.

“Think you’re funny?”

“Oh, yeah, sexy. Now, get in the shower before I drag you back to this bed.”

“That’s not a threat.” He smiled once more at her and walked through the bathroom door.

Astrid sighed and smiled. She got out of bed and grabbed her blue robe. She left the bedroom and went to the kitchen, hoping to find Ashlyn there to tell her of their new evening plans.

“Morrison,” Arcady said as he answered the phone.

“Hey, prick. How was Cole?” Feyd asked with exuberance.

“How do you think? How was the lovely Ashlyn?”

“I can barely walk this morning. If that’s not an indication, I don’t know what is.”

“Crude. So, what can I do for you?” Arcady blinked and looked at the clock next to the bed he shared with Cole. “Christ, Feyd, it’s not even noon

yet!”

“Morning to you, too, asshole. I spoke to Ash. She’s down.”

Arcady perked up at the thought of being able to play with the lovely Ashlyn. “Really? What was it my animal magnetism?”

“Nope. Asty said you were good, so Ash wants to find out. So, the deal stands. You get a night with Ash, and she agreed with me having a night with Alcyone. One night each, and she comes home with me. That’s the deal. You still in?”

Arcady feigned that he had to think about it. “Duh, Feyd. She’s gorgeous. So what?”

“I told her you’d call her on her cell today. You guys can work out the details. I’d rather not know.”

“Sure, mate. Al has something all planned for you, so don’t worry about that. You wanna call her?”

“Nah, I’m going to fuck her. I don’t have to talk to her about it. I’m not you, Mr. Fantasy. So, give Ash a good time, but not a great time, okay, fucker?”

Arcady chuckled and agreed, telling Feyd he’d see him later that evening at the mansion. He sat up, looking around the room. *Where the hell is Cole?* He got up and went to the dresser, spying a note.

Arcady,

I had to make my tanning appointment. I’m sorry I wasn’t there when you woke up. I know how you get. You rocked me last night, and you’re mine again tonight. I got something planned.

Cole.

He smiled and whistled, knowing that when Cole said she had things planned, she had things planned, and he was always pleasantly satisfied. He padded to the bathroom to take a shower, resolving to call Ashlyn once he was fully awake.

Ashlyn woke, warm and happy. She glanced at the clock on her nightstand. *Shit, just past noon. It's way too early to be getting up.* She squeezed her eyes shut, willing herself back to sleep. Her inner muscles protested the movement as she turned around, burying herself deeper in the nest of covers. A masculine chuckle came from behind her. Feyd.

"Morning, lover. Care to join me?" she asked from under the covers.

"Afternoon, minx..."

She groaned, sticking her head out of the covers to correct his mistake. "No. Twelve is a fake afternoon. It stays morning right up until one. It's a common misconception. You're forgiven for thinking it."

Feyd chuckled, sitting down on the bed's edge. "Since when are you so smart? You know, I do prefer my women rather dumb," he commented, wiggling his eyebrows at her jokingly.

Dumb? "Dumb?" she screeched in mock outrage. "I'll take that as a compliment, seeing as how I'm so...smart." She stuck her tongue out at

him briefly before grabbing her pillow and smacking him in the face with it.

"Minx, calm down. I was just joking." He laughed, grabbing the pillow out of her hand and throwing it out of reach. He rolled over the bed to her, rocking slightly with the waves. He kissed her, and she pulled back, licking her lips.

"Umm, so my earlier question, tiger. You joining me?"

"Sorry, precious. I have a few things to do with Morrison and Fallon. Can I have a rain check? I'm late as it is."

She took a deep breath letting it out in an exaggerated sigh. "I suppose, maybe tonight then. Unless, that is, you're doing something with Fal and Morrison then, too?" She pouted.

"Baby, no pouting, it's for your safety. You trust me, don't you? I think I heard Asty talking about going out tonight. Check it out with her."

"Really? Where? I wouldn't mind a night out to Dry Ice. Club's pretty hot."

Feyd nodded in agreement. "Go talk to Astrid, love. I'm sure she can give you more info than I can."

"Will do. So, you're going now?" Ashlyn asked, pouting and playing with the end of her hair.

"Yeah. I'm sorry, love. Forgive me?"

"Okay. Kiss?" She reached up to him and kissed him, slowly and thoroughly.

"Hmm, if I don't leave now, I won't. See you later, okay?" He pulled back and made for the door, picking her pillow up on the way and throwing it back to her.

"Thanks. Bye, lover."

He winked and left, gently closing the door behind him.

Ash lay looking at the ceiling for a while, trying to decide what she could wear. *Hmm, maybe Ast has something that I could borrow. If not, we'll have to go shopping.* With that thought firmly in her head, she went downstairs to question Astrid on her wardrobe.

Chapter Eleven

Arcady sat in the big oversized chair in the room he was currently sharing with Colette at Pinky's and opened his cell phone. He took out the piece of paper on which he had written Ashlyn's cell phone number and sighed. *So, Feyd says I get one night to play with the lovely Ashlyn. Pity it's just one night.* He dialed the number and waited, and two rings later a sultry voice came over the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Ash, it's Arcady. You know, Feyd's friend. Word has it he's letting you out to play...and I'm the lucky guy. You still interested?"

"I don't know. It's not that he gets to lend me to his friends like a dog," Ashlyn purred teasingly.

"It's not like that. He told me you'd be coming to Pinky's for a little playtime, and he did mention that you were slightly interested in me, so I wanted to know if you...well...would like to star in a scene with me. I'm an Incubus. They don't call me Mr. Fantasy for nothing."

"I know...and I have heard." Ash giggled. "And, we've met."

“No shit? When? Besides the other night, that is.” He thought back on recent past events and snapped his fingers. “Wait! I remember. The girl at that party. The mutt that growled at me...whatever happened to him?”

“Fallon and Feyd tortured and killed him about five months ago.” She didn’t sound too torn up about it.

“Really? Wow...leave it to them. They always tend to get rid of the riff-raff. And let me guess, the fucker sent them to you before he died, but Feyd fell in love with you. Am I getting this right? Believe me, kitten, you’re much better off. At least Feyd would die for you.”

“Yeah? Feyd would die for me, eh? Alec and I weren’t lovers. And Fallon can be quite...creative with his blades. He killed my waterbed, and he took a chunk of hair. He’s a very scary guy.”

“Fallon? Nah, he’s a pussycat...he’s a teddy bear. He’s not scary, ever.” He sniggered, knowing Fallon could be a very scary guy indeed. “Fallon is a genius with blades. He’s even more creative than me. Astrid is a lucky girl, just like you are, having a guy who’s open about things with you. I tell you, get your kicks in now. Once he pops the question, it’s no more fun.” *Yeah, get your kicks with me one night. How the hell did Nightly end up with such an amazing-looking woman?*

They talked a bit longer, mostly about the guys and how well Arcady knew them. He was seriously starting to like Ashlyn, more as a person than as the sex object he was making her out to be.

“So, what was Feyd like before I knew him? A

moment ago, you said I tamed him. What did you mean by that?"

"Feyd? He never was one for waiting for a chick. Got his rocks off and bounced. I hear it's different with you though. You just did for him. He was a drunken fool, and the number of notches he's got on his belt is about half of mine."

"You're kidding. That's great! God, I feel special now."

"Ash, you are a special girl. So, what's your fantasy?"

They talked a bit more about exactly what Ashlyn wanted, and Arcady decided that if nothing else, she was quite possibly one of the coolest girls he'd ever met. He now understood why she and Astrid were so close. He agreed to what she wanted, thinking of some amusing things of his own to round out the night. He only had a little time with the temptress, and he was going to enjoy her to the fullest.

They hung up a little while later. Arcady was satisfied he'd gotten all the info he needed to rock her world. He looked at the clock and realized that Cole would be back any minute. *Hmm, now I wonder what the little witch has planned.*

Dry Ice was hopping as usual. Astrid and Ash navigated the crowded floor to the table where Cole sat, waving to them.

"Hey, you're Cole, right?"

"Yeah. You're Fallon's girlfriend? And you're

Feyd's girlfriend?" The two nodded, and they sat down. "Hope you don't mind. Arcady said to get a table. I need a drink. What do you guys want?"

"Drink? Hell, yeah. I like your style. I'll have a Jack and Coke," Ash said as she relaxed fully next to the pretty girl.

"Sure thing. What about you, sugar?"

"Pimms, on the rocks. If I get shit-faced, Fallon will so take advantage of it." She grinned at the other two women, who both laughed.

"Sure thing, hon. I'll be right back."

They watched Cole steer through the crowd to the bar a few feet behind them and were floored by how quickly she got their drinks. Astrid looked at Ash. "Bet he's a customer at Pinky's." She smiled at the thought of being that free, being able to be an exotic dancer and not be self-conscious. Hey, Fallon might like it...

"Ast, look at every guy in here, the way they look at her. They are all Pinky's customers." Ash smiled at Ast and giggled.

"True, and we can't even say our guys haven't had the pleasure. You are dancing with me tonight?"

"You asking?" Ash raised an eyebrow at Astrid.

"Duh! I know I don't often, but I think I can be persuaded to get on the floor tonight."

"Great. The boys will like that. Did you see the disappointment in their little faces last night?"

Astrid laughed. "Tell me about it. Fallon was grumbling about it as he was towel-drying me. It's kinda funny, but Arcady did tell him, and he was hoping to find us in a compromising position. Boy,

were they upset when they didn't find it." She laughed again. Cole came back with their drinks and looked down, smiling.

"Feyd would have loved that. They must have marched home, hoping to see us."

"I have no doubt about it." Astrid grabbed the drink from Cole and smiled. "Thanks, hon. So, how were they at the club last night? Did they behave themselves?"

"Good as gold, and I must say that they are very hot. Congrats, girls. You really must tell me how you managed to snag them."

"Thanks, Cole," Ash said then swung her arm around Astrid. "I owe it all to this gal."

Astrid beamed. She loved hearing that Fallon was sought-after. "Trust me, Cole, it wasn't easy. Hell, I'm not even sure he's actually staying this time. Feyd is Fallon's best friend, so it was only right I set Ash and him up. Who knew he'd adore her so much?"

"Wow. He got anymore friends in that magical closet of his?" Cole smiled at Astrid.

"Lord knows, although I think you got the other part of the trio. Arcady is quite a piece. So, dish. How is he these days?"

"Hmm. Fantastic, as always. He comes and goes...mostly comes, but we're just good friends."

"Yeah, he's very fun. Hey, at least you guys have fun together, right?"

"Oh, we do, but his heart's not really in it nowadays. Still fun, though."

Astrid thought over Cole's words, knowing that Arcady was looking for that knight-in-shining-

armor situation. He really was a romantic at heart. She smiled at Cole and laughed. "Girl, life's too short!" She grabbed her drink and downed it, much to Ash's surprise. "So, what shall we do until they get here? And where the hell are they, anyway?"

"Fuck if I know." Ash knocked back her drink and smiled.

"Nope, no idea." Cole shook her head and smiled. "Arc just called me, said he'd be here soon."

"Okay, so what do we do 'til then? Get drunk? I think we've decided that if I get drunk, Fal will just take advantage, which isn't such a bad thing. But I'm gonna try and refrain from that. So? Any ideas?"

"Shots?" Ashlyn asked, and quirked an eyebrow at Astrid, who whooped in return.

"We could dance." Cole looked back and forth at them each in turn.

"Yeah, good idea. I think it's about time I got out there and shook my ass. How the hell are we going to save the table, though? This place is getting filled quick."

Cole smiled and tapped the table. "This is my table, hon. Trust me, nobody's gonna take it."

"I believe we should take the lady's word for it. Shall we?" Astrid got up, and the two women followed her to the dance floor.

"Yup, I'm already there, Ast." Ash got on the floor and the song changed. Astrid and Cole followed her out, grooving in time to the music.

Feyd, Fallon, and Arcady quickened their pace; they had to get there as soon as they could. They were running slightly behind. They had been running off schedule before they reported back to George; now they were just plain late. Fallon let his mind wander to the events leading up to where they were now, timewise.

"What the fuck? Ipwhisk, what the fuck have you and Nightly been doing for the past two fucking days? If the two of you could stop fucking each other long enough to get the spell and kill the goddamn whore, it would be a fucking miracle. Need I remind you that there's a long vacation coming up?" George raged, pacing back and forth.

"Yeah, we got a real fucking long holiday coming up. Look, I told you the 'goddamn whore,' as you call her, is proving difficult to find. Not impossible, just difficult. We'll get her." Feyd shuffled slightly to Fallon's right, obviously uncomfortable.

"No, not difficult. You fucks aren't even looking, just off gallivanting with that prick Morrison, fucking everything that moves. It stops now, you hear me? What the fuck is that prick doing in on this anyway? He's off limits, as in not employable, not to be touched."

"Well, shit, Georgie. I wasn't gonna touch him," Feyd chimed in.

"Fuck you, Nightly." George spared Feyd a small glance. "He took out one of our buildings. It was full of people."

"Well, that's what happens when you piss him off. It's far from subtle, but I think it gets the

message across. Georgie, he's an energy demon. Stability isn't their thing," Fallon said softly.

"And this is your justification for having him here?"

Fal sighed inaudibly. *One of these days, Georgie, your head's just gonna explode.* "I don't need to justify any decision that I make, George. You said it yourself. Fallwell wants us calling the shots. I've got Dante looking for the spell. That should tell us if she's sold it or if she's sitting on it."

Georgie frowned for a minute, trying to picture a face. "Dante? Which one is he?" he demanded angrily.

A few adjectives immediately sprung to Fallon's mind to describe Dante. Smiling at a few of them, he decided to say what George wanted to hear. "He's the best. He'll find it."

"You better hope so."

After that, it was just a case of getting out of the hotel. They had told George that they were off to see if Morrison had come up with anything yet. George didn't suspect anything, of that Fallon was sure. But it was only a matter of time before they had to deal with him.

He stored his thoughts away to deal with them another time. They had finally arrived at the club. Morrison walked up to the bouncer and said something that Fal couldn't quite make out. Whatever it was, it worked, and the big guy moved the rope and ushered them inside.

The atmosphere in the club was electric. The people were buzzing with it, in their conversations, laughter and motions on the dance floor. Arcady stood still for a second, catching the ends of energy dregs. *Hmm, a Succubus? Here? Eh, I'm not even going to worry about it.* He stepped beside Feyd and Fallon and smirked. "Jumping place tonight. Are we late? Where are they?"

Fallon smirked and pointed out to the dance floor, where a crowd was forming a circle around three women. "Gentleman, if you'll excuse me?"

Due to the general smoke and haze in the club, no one saw Fallon shimmer to where the crowd was forming. No one, that is, but Arcady and Feyd.

"Fucker is such a show off," Feyd said with a grin, watching his woman gyrate with Astrid and Cole. "Shit, man, I didn't know she could do that."

"Feyd, you'll find that women can do many an amazing thing when in an exhibitionist setting. Come on. I know Cole's table."

They walked over to where the girls' drinks were, and Feyd sat in Ashlyn's chair, sipping at her drink. "Shit, they do make it strong here, don't they?"

"Nah. Cole knows Mike, the bartender. He's good to her, and she's a regular, so he makes all her drinks with top shelf."

"Nice. So, what shall we do about the other two? I see Fallon has accosted Astrid."

"I think I'm going to see if Cole would like a rescue." He walked down from the platform the table was on and made his way into the crowd, spying Ash on her way out of the throng. He gave

her a quizzical eyebrow, and she smiled at him.

“Feyd called me back up. I think he wants me to sit on his lap.” She giggled and hugged him then went to find her boyfriend. Arcady watched her go, eyes trailing her ass as it moved beneath the little black dress. *Lordy. One night with that? Never enough.* He turned around again and headed toward where Cole was shaking her ass. He closed the gap between them in record time, grabbed her hips as they moved, and bent down to her ear. “Cole, love, you moving like that should be illegal in all fifty states.”

Feyd watched Arcady leave the table. He looked back to the dance floor and caught Ashlyn’s eye. He crooked his finger at her, and she nodded, intercepting Arcady when she moved through the crowd. They spoke for a minute and embraced; then he watched with a smirk as Arcady watched Ash’s ass when she took the steps up to the table. *Damn Incubus. I know him. Once with my lovely angel won’t be enough. Tough.* He was looking down at the floor while he thought this. His eyes focused on Ashlyn’s black heels, and he smiled. He lifted his gaze slowly, taking in the long legs, short skirt, and killer breasts his girlfriend possessed. He gulped and kept his gaze moving up to her face and the smile she wore, just for him.

“Hey, minx. Saw you dancing. I didn’t know you could move like that.”

She bent down and put her hand on his thigh,

lightly heating the spot she was touching. She kissed him and smiled. “Wanna join me, tiger?”

He shook his head, grabbed her around the waist, and turned her, sitting her down on his lap. “Sorry. I don’t dance. Well, not like that.” His voice lowered, and he leaned closer to her ear, his tongue snaking out to lick the lobe. “But you know damn well what kinda dancing I do, don’t you?” He slipped a hand under her skirt discreetly, and she gasped as his hand spidered across her thigh to the hem of her underwear. She fidgeted, and he chuckled in her ear, slipping his fingers under the flimsy lace she called panties.

“Umm, Ashy, you like that? I’m sorry I don’t dance, love, but I was thinking maybe I could get you to dance, or at least wiggle on my lap, here. Seeing you move was so fucking hot, baby. If we weren’t here right now...” He proceeded to whisper what he would do to her in her ear, and she did indeed squirm and give little gasps in response to what his hand was doing to her under the skirt. She wiggled for him as she moved her face toward his ear and bit down, sending shocks through his body, straight to his cock, which was already protesting its imprisonment with her so close by.

“Feyd, baby.” She moved again, wiggling against his groin. “You’re teasing me. Take me home. Do those things, please?”

The heavy, smoky lust in her plea clenched things low in his body and tugged at his heart. *I love that I can get her like this. Fuck, she’s begging. That’s so fucking hot.* He came out of his thoughts when Ash reached behind her and

squeezed his groin through his pants. He groaned and bit her earlobe.

“Ash, let’s ditch.”

She nodded. He reluctantly removed her hand from where it was playing and kissed her. He looked over at Arcady and smirked. *Hey, fuck face. I’m going back to the mansion. You have been warned.*

Arcady nodded and went back to dancing with Cole. Feyd grabbed Ash’s hand and led her toward the door.

On her own, Astrid was a goddess. She was his goddess. Seeing her on the dance floor—arms raised, eyes partially shut as she gyrated and writhed with Ashlyn and Cole—all he could think about was holding her, touching her, and possibly fucking her right there. *Steady there, Fal. We’ll see how far she lets it get. Hell, I’ll settle for a dance.*

He shimmered over to her, watching her move with the girls. She noticed him as she turned, her eyes meeting his. A slow smile spread across her face, and she licked her lips. She put her arms around Ashlyn as her eyes traveled down Fallon’s body suggestively. He instantly tightened, watching her hands wander over the other girl’s body. *Fuck, this is better than Pinky’s.* Taking a moment to recover and discreetly adjust himself, he made the two steps to meet them.

“Vixen, only you could get me this hard just from watching.” He reached out to her, pulling her

close. "See?"

"Hmm, cookie. Dance with me." Slowly, they began to move. He leaned down to kiss her neck, working his way to her ear.

"Fuck, Ast, you smell so good. So, did you miss me?"

"I always miss you," she purred into his ear.

They danced for a while, enjoying each other's company. Fallon held her close as he told her about George and his plans. He laughed as she told him about Ash borrowing one of her outfits. *You really are something, vix. Look at you. Every man in this club wants you. But you're mine, and I'm not letting you go.*

"So..." he said, his tone going serious. "What shall we do about *this*?" He lightly rubbed his swollen groin against her, showing her just how much he wanted her. He smirked, raising an eyebrow waiting for an answer.

She whimpered, feeling what she knew he wanted her to feel, her body clenching in just the right places. *Fuck, only him. He's the only one who's ever able to do that to me with a light touch. Fuck.* She smirked back to him, slipped her fingers under the waist of his pants, and giggled as he nibbled on her ear. She moved her mouth to his.

"Follow me, cookie." She led him to a dark corner that was oddly void of life and sank against the shadowed wall. In seconds he was against her, kissing her as she undid his pants. Touching her here and there, slipping his hand up her skirt and groaning when he found no barrier for him to wrench and rip off. She had his pants open in a

matter of seconds, and he lifted her up and pressed her against the wall, quickly entering her. She moaned into his ear and whimpered as he began to talk to her.

“Asty, you’re a bad, bad girl. Look at you, letting me take you right here in the club, where everyone can see. Umm, but baby you feel so good. You’re so ready for me. You gonna scream for me? No one will hear you, the music is too loud. Come on baby, scream for me.”

She whimpered as he took her, faster and harder, sending her over the edge. She came quickly, screaming her passion, and he chuckled in her ear as she shuddered around him. “That’s it, vixen. That’s it. Oh, God, all for me, wasn’t it?”

She nodded. He kissed her then moved his lips back to her ear. “Mmm, let’s go home, okay? That was fun, but I’m not done with you. I can’t wait to get you home and take you every way I want to.”

She grinned, and he let her slip to the floor. He zipped up. She moved closer, and he checked around, making sure no one was watching. He kissed her as he held her, shimmering them back to the mansion, right into their rooms.

She moved back, and he was panting but smiling at her. In one quick movement she had the dress over her head. She stood there in heels and thigh-high stockings and nothing else. He sat back on the bed and groaned.

“So, vix, what now?”

She didn’t answer him, just jumped on him.

He came violently, without warning. Well, not much warning, unless Astrid's moaning and shuddering around him wasn't enough of one. *Fuck, I love this woman*, he thought to himself as he lay on top of her naked body, panting. *But one day she's gonna break me*. He rolled off her and smiled, taking in her whole beautiful body. "Morning, vixen."

"Mmm, a very good morning, cookie. I love when you do that."

"Really? Do what?" he asked coyly, playing with a strand of her hair.

"Make me feel all fuzzy in the morning," she said, stretching. "It's the best way to wake up."

"Yeah, it is." *But for how long? Once we do this Fallwell thing...*

"What's wrong? I don't like seeing a frown on your face. It means you're thinking, and after what you just did, you shouldn't be able to think." She giggled, cuddling closer to him. "But seriously, what's wrong?"

"Hmm? Oh, I was just thinking about what we're going to face if we go against Fallwell. I just don't know if we have the strength to do it."

"Cookie, I was putting it off, but I was thinking of calling a friend in."

"A friend? Vix, no offense, but—"

"Casha, or Cash, depending on who you talk to," she said, cutting him off.

"Oh. The brat prince." He laughed, impressed. "He's one of your friends?" *Wow, you and your friends.*

"The brat prince? Yes, Casha is a friend. Sells me spells from time to time. When he was in town, he'd take me out to dinner. Nice guy, if a little sad."

Nice? Yeah. I'm not the bridge-buying kind.

"Sad, yeah, I'll give him that. But nice? Who else do you know, huh? Who else do you have hidden up your sleeve, vixen?"

"I know lots of people. I'm a spell dealer, for Christ's sake. Hell, I think I have even met your buddy Dante at one point. Why, are you jealous?"

"Jealous? Hell, no. I find it sexy as hell that you know just as many bad men as I do. Next you'll be telling me that you had a fling with Trent Duvall—no, vixen, I don't want to know. So, do you think he'll help?"

"Casha? Sure, he adores me. I mean, you know, the usual demon 'what's in it for me' thing, but I think I can swing something. You trust me? Don't worry, I'm not stupid, and I have dealt with him before. I know how to bargain."

"Yeah, okay. But be careful. He's unpredictable"

"I will. You know I won't do something stupid."

"You better not. I'd hate to have to kill the ice demon. Plus, he's pretty unstable."

"Like I said, he's just sad. He's had a hard time of it. Don't worry, okay?" Fallon watched hungrily as she stood up and turned to face him. "You do what you gotta do, and I'll get a hold of the demon. Okay?"

"Yes, ma'am. So, when did you meet Dante?" he asked, curious to find out what she had needed the Saint for.

"When we moved here, he sold me a spell.
Good looking guy, but surly as hell."

Hah. Yeah, he is that. "Yeah, he's kinda angry,
and that's coming from me." *People call me angry
and hard to get along with.*

"Strange guy. But enough about angry old
Dante. Get your ass moving, okay?"

"Yup. I'll stop by this afternoon to see how you
got on, and maybe a quickie?"

"Maybe? Count on a quickie." She bent down to
him, and he gave her a lingering kiss before
saluting her and shimmering back to his hotel
room.

Chapter Twelve

Casha was rarely in his house at all. It wasn't his home, not his real home, anyway, so he avoided the place, which was more a prison than a shelter. The last time he had visited, he'd commissioned Fallon to steal the Falcon. That had been an interesting week for him. He had even gotten to share some of his thoughts with someone at least halfway intelligent. He'd never considered loneliness as a drawback of exile. Sure, there were other bad things about being so far away from home, but the company of his own kind was something that he missed more than the souls he'd lost. The others rarely searched him out to talk, and when they did, they often twitched in his presence. He had even limited all contact with his brother to speaking through emissaries. It wouldn't do to get him exiled as well.

Casha had fucked up, and he knew it. However, he highly doubted that Feurety would accept an apology. To start with, he didn't regret what he'd done, just regretted the planning of the event. He regretted that his trusted Colette had turned out to be such a traitorous bitch. Whether or not he was going to give her to another demon didn't matter anymore. She didn't matter anymore. The only

things that mattered anymore were souls. *If I'm ever asked to Shadow Heights, I'll pay sweet Colette a little visit. Until then, she stays out of my mind.*

He found himself with nothing to do. Earlier in the week, he'd managed to get a school bus full of teenagers to give their souls for minor powers. He was up on souls for the month and at a loss. He had nothing to do to keep his mind off the madness that was, piece by piece, infecting his brain.

He made himself something to drink and sat at his laptop. He'd always pondered taking souls over the Internet but never really thought it could work. There has to be someone stupid enough to fall for it. He logged on his hotmail account and got himself another drink as he waited for it to load. *Hmm. Twenty-six new messages?* He clicked on them and started filtering out the spam.

"Advert, crap, advert, advert." *Huh! And people call me evil. Hell, I'd give a soul away just to be able to check my e-mail without it taking three hours.* "Fucking Hotmail. I really should stop this account," he muttered to himself.

He deleted a few more without opening them. *Ah, here we are. Word of the day...masticate; to grind or crush with or as if with the teeth in preparation for swallowing and digestion; to chew; as, "to masticate food." Fair enough. That was hardly worth the effort. No wonder people want to give up their souls.* He was about to log off when he received a message from a sender he didn't recognize.

Hey, Cash. It's Astrid Buchamps. Long time no talk. What have you been doing? It's been years. I'm thinking I could use your help on a few things. You up for it?

Astrid? Well, that's certainly...unexpected. Darling, I'm always up for anything you propose. He sensed the opportunity for some meddling.

Astrid, my favorite little spell dealer. How have you been? A little birdie told me you were playing around with Fallon Ipwhisk. Can it be true? He did some work for me, good work. I liked him. I've been doing the usual. I know it upsets your fragile mindset, so I won't give details. My help? What have you got for me? I'm up on my quota this month; I got a bus full of teenagers.

Grinning, he sent the message and logged onto his IM. She sent a message back.

That little birdie was right. We are, or will be, co-habiting. Cash, I love him. You liked him, eh? He's amazing and quite good at his job. Sweets, I need your help. See, my friend, Ash, well, she's wanted by Fallwell, and I need to have him taken out. Arcady Morrison is in on it, along with both Feyd and Fallon. But I think this is gonna need your expertise. What are your terms, love? A whole bus full?

Those are the magic words, pumpkin. I can get rid of Fallwell for her. How much does she want

him gone, though? Wait, did she say Arcady Morrison? Fuck, now there's somebody I want to see.

*My terms? What are you willing to give? What's he willing to give? Who has his and his friend's souls? Purely out of interest. Fallwell's been a thorn in my side since he took over the family business. I'd be glad to help you get rid of him, for a price...
I won't touch Arcady; he has nothing to bargain with. I only deal in souls, so you better have something good for me. Where are you? My mail account's pissing me off. Log on your IM. I'll talk to you there. I trust your account is the same.*

He closed down and logged off the Hotmail account. A few seconds later, he got a message.

Astrid4007- Cash, I'm willing to do anything to help Fallon, but unfortunately my soul and Spinner's are in transit as it is. Ishtar won't let them go. Ammit has Fallon's, and the Acer queen has Feyd's. I can't bargain for them. You might wanna ask them yourself. What would you consider in payment? We're in Shadow Heights; you know the place.

Shit...Shadow Heights, rid of Fallwell, Arcady Morrison, Feyd and Fallon's souls. This is getting interesting. Shaking his head, he began to type.

Casha- Quite a few surprises there. The first

being Shabriri. She rarely ever...I'll see what I can do though for the sake of this conversation I have no contact with the other royals. I'll get them, but I'll keep them for now.

Shadow Heights? I've been waiting for an invitation to go there. I do have some spare time. As for payment, I told you I deal in souls, and Fallon already knows that I want him and his friend to be at my disposal.

I could tell you a few things about your future husband, you know, all you need to do is ask. I deal in secrets. You know that, don't you? Secrets and souls.

And on the odd occasion, weapons of mass destruction and living organs, but I'll keep that to myself. While he waited for her response, he counted all the things he was going to do to pretty little Colette when he got his hands on her.

Astrid4007- Future husband? Oh, do tell. I love hearing all about him. Hah. Fallon and Feyd at your disposal. Being that they will be at my home, I don't see that being such a problem. You'd have to talk to him to make sure. I'm okay with it, as long as he's home enough. Ha. Well, come to Shadow Heights. I got a bedroom waiting for you...as long as you don't mind Linus, but then if memory serves me right, he loves you. Tell me about Fallon.

Well, that was too easy. He'd expected more than that. One chance to get out of it.

Casha- I'll ask him about working for me. There are a few things I have my eye on that I'd like him to acquire for me.

Not many animals like me, so Linus is a joy to be around. Do you live near the Cherry Street district? I have an old friend who's around there.

Are you sure you want me to tell you about him? It's not the prettiest or happiest story; it's about...well, how much do you know about his childhood?

Would she take the bait? He knew Fallon would be crushed if she did, but curiosity was a fickle thing. He should've told her by now, anyway. Honesty is the only policy when it comes to life.

Astrid4007- I'm actually right across the street from Cherry. Linus likes you 'cause you turned his water to ice, remember? He loves ice cubes. Tell me, Cash. He mentioned things vaguely but hasn't told me. I think it's too painful for him to talk about. But I'd like to know, to help him if I can.

He shook his head. So trusting, pumpkin. We're going to have to work on that. After all you've been through, you still trust people just because you think you should. Did she really believe he wasn't trying to hurt her? I'm a fucking demon, a nasty one at that. Evil. She'd never be able to help her lover. He was too far in. He couldn't go back. Sure, he can pretend and put on a

happy face, but he's only clinging on to your reality. You're not the one to change him. Now, should I keep it factual or should I embellish? Factual, he decided. Can't be seen to lie, now, can I? Humming gleefully, he began to type.

Casha- Very well. His parents died in a car crash, but you probably knew that. What you might not know is that they were drug running at the time. His uncle was...a dealer of sorts. His parents were cutting profits, or they wanted out and the uncle put a stop to it. Something like that. Maybe both. The crash didn't kill them, but they died soon after. Poor little Fallon was in the car at the time. Saw it all. Whether he remembers or not is another thing. Let's just say that his uncle and his men had fun with his brother's wife before putting a bullet in her head.

Fallon grew up with his uncle and his junkie wife. He had a cousin as well...I don't remember her name. She was younger than him. The wife, Carla, took a liking to him. Apparently boys can be raped too, you know, especially ones who have no idea what sex or rape is. He must have been ten. Old enough to get an erection, anyway. His uncle got an idea then started pimping him and the cousin out to anyone that would pay and not just women. A lot of men will pay to have a young boy. It's sick, really. People can come up with worse ways to torture than Royal demons. Hitler, for example, started off very human. That man was so creative...anyway back to Fallon.

How is he on the subject of rape? Ask him to

have another man in the bed. It won't go down well. To cut a long and painful story short, Ammit offered him a deal. He took it. But what he did to the others was...magnificent. True genius. To have managed to keep them alive for so long...Have you ever seen his Cipere? Book of souls? You'd be surprised to see quite a few names on it. He collected souls, for Ammit and for himself. Have you ever seen him get angry...truly angry? You need to be sure of whom you're marrying. For a few years before he turned twenty, your man was a force to be reckoned with. Even I would think twice before aggravating him. He could have been better than Hitler...Spanish Inquisition good. I miss the good old days.

Casha chuckled and waited for her response. Poor, hurt little Fallon. Why do I have the feeling that someone will be sleeping on the couch tonight?

Astrid4007- I didn't know Fallon had a Cipere. He doesn't talk about anything. What the hell would Fallon do with souls? He's not a royal, is he? I'm glad he got revenge. He deserved it. And I know he's quite talented with torture, he's done it for me a few times. I don't have the stomach for it.

Cash, I'd never ask him to have another guy in bed...other women, well, that's just fun, ain't it? Thanks for telling me. And how the hell do you know I'm gonna marry him? He hasn't even proposed. He still doesn't know I can't have kids, and I'm scared to tell him, for fear he wouldn't

want me. Thanks, Cash, it means a lot to me.

Kids? Why would she ask me that? Pumpkin, I'm not your friend. I don't care about your ability to procreate. I'm only going to use this against you, and I already know, he thought to himself, *frustrated that she cares what he thought. Sighing, he explained.*

Casha- All lesser demons have them. Collecting souls prolongs their life, but it takes away their humanity. He's not a royal, but Ammit did take a shine to him. He must have some power. I have my ways of knowing things, and I like to keep track of future...investments.

Kids? You think he's the type to try to make up for his childhood by being a great daddy? Well, you never know. I'm surprised that he can even touch another person sexually. Most people that go through...that hate to be touched, or the very thought of settling down. But then, you are quite a woman, and he's strong. You have to ask yourself how you would have fared in his shoes. Anything for you, my lovely witch.

Astrid4007- You're telling me he's gonna propose? Lord, that's funny...could you see me in a wedding gown? Or him in a tux? Funny shit...not to mention almost 75% of the people invited wouldn't be human. As for kids...it doesn't matter, really. I can't have them, and no matter what, it's not gonna happen. To answer the shoes question, I don't know. I'm strong, but never as strong as he.

If Ammit thinks sideways about Fallon, I'll fucking gut her...royal or not.

You'd probably give her a good run for her money, but Ammit wouldn't look twice at Fallon. He's too old. She likes them young and naive; Fallon is none of those things.

Casha- The wedding sounds like a fun event, or at least it will be. It would be nice to get an invite. It's not going to be at a church, is it? You'd suit the dress better than he would, I'm sure.

Kids? Why can't you have kids? Surely there are spells around the whole issue? Tell me, I might be able to help the two of you. Would you have them if there were a way around it? You're pretty strong and feisty, too. You've had to deal with some bad things in the past. It's not the past that matters, just that everyone came out okay. I wouldn't worry much about Ammit. She won't have his soul much longer.

Astrid4007- An invite? Shit, you'll sit at the main table, and no, it won't be in a church. Ishtar won't allow it.

As for kids...I'd only seek to change my situation if Fal wanted it. It's a medical condition. Non-specific ovarian cancer. It's okay now, but when I was nineteen, I found out. Yeah, we did all come out okay, sort of. Could you see Fal in a dress? Pure genius!

You know damn well you're always welcome in my house, Cash. When should we expect you?

Invited? Sit at the main table? That could be fun. Poor girl, at nineteen, never to have children, that's what happens when you fuck about with dark magic. She was lucky to be alive.

Casha- Wow, a wedding? I love weddings. Cancer? You gonna be okay? It's not still there, is it? Cancer is a nasty thing.

That must have been hard for you, knowing you'll never have kids at that age. What about you? Do you want them? Surely that's important, too. I'm sure I can find something that will help if you want me to. I'd be a great uncle. Not that Dimitri would ever grant me the pleasure, damn pimp.

When do you want me?

I could give her kids, he thought. Pretty little ice demons, something to remember me by. I wouldn't mind helping, just as long as I get first crack at the kid's soul.

Astrid4007- Kids...nah, I don't think they fit with my lifestyle. Look at Fal's parents. I'm okay, and it's gone. I try not to think about it much. You're welcome any time, Cash. I have a pretty bedroom you'd love, all icy blues and whites. I think you were my inspiration on that room. If you want it, it's yours. So, dear, when can I expect you? BTW...you met my roommate, didn't you?

The lovely Ashlyn. He grinned in memory of

the skittish girl.

Casha- Your roommate? I could pretend no, but I'd rather not lie to you. I met her at the airport. How is she? I hope she got everything sorted out. She owes me a drink.

Well, parenthood isn't for most people until they try it. I almost had a child once, and I raised a witch. You would be surprised at how one's views change. They don't really change you so much as you adapt to suit them. Fallon's parents were trying to get out; they were doing right by him.

My offer still stands if you want it. Keep it in mind. I'll take you up on the visit, and we'll talk about Fallwell. When do you want me?

He sat back in his chair and cracked his back. This typing thing would hurt after a while if he weren't a demon. *This is fun, talking to her, talking to somebody that grasps the English language.*

Astrid4007-Sweet...Ash said she'll meet you in the pool room. Anytime, hon, you're always welcome. When can you be here? Thanks for the offer, Cash. You are good to me even if you do have a hidden agenda.

He smiled. *Clever girl, I knew you had it in you. Now, kick me in the shins and tell me I'm a very bad man. Then run away from me, pumpkin. I'm only going to cause you more pain. I can't help it, it's my nature, and I do enjoy it.*

Casha - Hidden agenda...me? Why, whatever would give you that idea? I just like to see you happy. I can be there in about a week. I've still got a few souls to round up. But I'll be there by Tuesday. Sound good?

Astrid4007 - Great, I'll see you then. Do you really think Fallon will propose?

"Cassiel, should I wear the red one or the blue one?"

Blinking in surprise, he turned around to see the most beautiful and deadly creature he had ever set eyes on. She was completely naked and holding up two dresses, identical but for the color. He hadn't seen her in years but managed to reply as if she had only been in the next room.

"Well, princess, that depends on the occasion. I like the blue, but the red suits your...temperament so much better."

She smiled and walked to a full length mirror holding each of the dresses to her perfect, tight body.

"The occasion? Why, Cassiel, I thought you knew. Why would you know...tonight is my betrothal. I'm getting married."

Cash forced a smile and typed a short message to Astrid as the temperature dropped in the room.

Casha- Astrid, I'll be right back. Give me ten minutes. Yes, I do think he'll propose.

He slammed the roll top of the desk shut in

anger. Not enough to disintegrate it, but enough to make a loud noise. Sometimes making loud noises helped him to control his temper. "What do you want, Faris?"

"For you to help me pick a color. For my betrothal," she said with a cruel smile.

"So, Daddy has finally decided to marry his little girl off. Who's the unfortunate man, princess? Who are you going to get your claws into next?"

She looked down then back up at him. He could see the barely concealed rage in her eyes. "The shadow king's son."

What? That bastard, how could he give you to them! You were mine. As Cash raged on the inside, his face showed nothing. "The fat one or the stupid one?" he asked nonchalantly as he picked up his mug and took a drink of cocoa.

Faris stomped her foot at his apparent indifference. "He's not fat, and it's the stupid one."

"So, what? You come to me? I haven't seen you since you told me you were pregnant. That was thirteen years ago. Thirteen years is a lot of time. Go home, princess. Things have changed."

She huffed and looked at him with pleading eyes. "They're going to make me marry him. I hate him. He beats me."

Bullshit, he wouldn't dare. "I'll beat you if you don't leave. Now get the fuck out of my house."

She paused, looking at him thoughtfully. He sat back in his chair and finished his cocoa. Faris tried a different approach. "Fuerety is forcing me to marry. I don't want to. I need your help. Would you do that for me, Cassiel? Help me?" She looked in

his eyes, hers still pleading.

Princess, I would have crawled over the burning plains just to get to you. I would rip apart Fuerety and the bastard that he's giving you to with my bare hands if you asked me to. But you know that, don't you? My beautiful deadly fire demon, my lover, my equal. Cash shook his head, his words nothing like his thoughts.

"No. Why should I help you? You're royalty. You will get married off, and you have no control over it. That's what happens, princess. Strengthen the bloodline and all that jazz."

"I know who I have to be with to strengthen my bloodline. My father's just too foolish to see it."

Casha's lip twisted in a smile. "Really, and who might that be? Sure as hell couldn't have been me. Last I heard, you destroyed our little...venture into binding our bloodlines."

"That was not my choice. He forced it. Fuerety has far more power than we do."

"Than you do."

"Whatever. My point being I wanted that child, our child. He forbade me to see you. I'm scared of him, Casha."

"Scared? Well, that's strange. Last time I saw you, you had your daddy wrapped around your little finger. No deal, princess. Try another plan—one that doesn't involve me."

"There is no other plan. I've tried all my options. None of them worked. You were my last—" She clapped her hand over her mouth, fearing that she might upset him.

"Resort? You were so desperate that you

decided to come to me. Someone you have avoided for thirteen years. Why?"

"Why, what? Why have I avoided you or why have I come to you now?"

"I know why you're here now. What I want to know is why you haven't come to me sooner. Thirteen years, princess. What was your reasoning? Surely there wasn't anyone better. I know for a fact there's not."

"He's having me watched. He was, at least. He doesn't trust me anymore. I've not been in his circle since...Casha, you must believe me. I fought for my child, for yours." She held her head up high as tears threatened to spill from her eyes.

"Save your tears for someone who cares. Go home."

Her tears dried up in an instant. "How can I call it my home if I'm forced to share it with someone whom I do not like? Tell me that!"

"Princess, do you want to fucking swap stories? At least you can go home. I'm stuck here, on this godforsaken plane, fighting for what little sanity I have left. This isn't easy. Sitting here talking to you isn't easy. I have to mentally hold myself together. I'm falling apart, and I can't stop it. The only thing that is keeping me going is this picture I keep in my head. It's the look that will be on Fuerety's face when I sit on his throne, and by God, I will have that day! It will come to me, and I will have my revenge!"

"Wow, I always did get hot when you took to a rant, but we were talking about me. Please do try to keep up."

Casha's mug hit the wall next to Faris' head. She coolly raised an eyebrow at him as he stood, visibly shaking with rage. "What? What do you want me to do? What can I possibly do to help your situation? Tell me. Please I'm interested. How can I possibly help you?"

"Casha, calm down. You're not doing any of us any good by having a tantrum. You're losing you cool, lover. I find that very...unattractive."

"Watch me care." *Damn it, she always does that to me. Makes me lose control.*

"Why are you still without a sorceress? You and I both know that what happened to Natalia wasn't your fault. I'll be the first to admit that the binding process is less than desirable. If you had someone else collecting souls for you, your exile would be over twice as fast. Then we could kill Fuerety and rule together. Between the two of us, we have the loyalty of pretty much every house. I'm working on Addu's son, the fat one."

"I thought he wasn't fat." *And Amaro should be on his father's throne, youngest or no.*

She smiled at his remark. "Cute. I need you there, with me. I cannot kill Feurety by myself. I don't have the power."

"And you want—no, need—my help. What's it worth?"

"Anything."

A slow smile curved his lips as he stood in front of her. He began to unbutton his shirt with slow yet violent motions. He threw the shirt to the floor, and in a few seconds, the rest of his clothes joined it. He sat on the couch, naked and relaxed, letting her see

the effect that her presence had on him. She stood in front of him, her bare legs slightly apart.

"On your knees, princess."

Without a word of complaint, she knelt down and took his rock-hard cock into her deceptively small mouth and began suckling. He closed his eyes and put his head on the back of the couch, enjoying the sensation of her wet, warm mouth, accompanied with the small sounds she was making. *Ah, the way it should be.* Her hands began to knead his thighs, working in time with her abnormally hot mouth. Cash brought one of his hands to her hair, holding her in place as he fucked her mouth. Slowly, she drew him out of her mouth and blew on him, kissing his tip. Letting her hands linger on his thighs, she made her way up to his mouth, kissing a trail that felt like fire up his chest. A feral groan escaped from his mouth. He grabbed her head between his hands and kissed her, forcing his tongue into her mouth. He touched her as they kissed, his hands remembering her naked body the way a key remembers a lock.

He groaned into her mouth. "Did I give you permission to come up here?"

She sat back from him, a wicked smile gracing her luscious lips as she impaled herself on him, driving him into her molten core. His breath hissed out at the sensation, and his body instantly cooled. She moaned at the feeling. "All hail the new king," she said as she began to ride him at a galloping pace.

Cash's hands went to her breasts, teasing her nipples. His mouth followed soon after as his hands

went to her back, supporting her for a deeper thrust.

"I suppose I can let you stay up here for a while longer," he murmured as his teeth skillfully nibbled at her. He stood up and flipped her over, so she was on her stomach and entered her, her hips and ass in the air, and drove her small body into the couch over and over. He finally angled her so that he was scraping that spot inside her. She yelped, and he thrust deeper into her, making sure to hit it each time he drew himself out and pushed back in to the hilt. There was no space between them now. She was clawing at the cushions of the sofa, thrusting her hips back to force him deeper into her.

"Casha, please...now...now, please...need you, all of you. Now!" She sobbed as her orgasm took her, flinging her head back and screaming his name. As she tightened around him, he let himself go and let her body milk him until he was spent.

Fire and ice, you gotta love it. He pulled out of her and slapped her on the ass as he sat next to her on the couch.

"You should visit me more often."

"I will. So, will you help me?" Her voice was hoarse.

"No, there's nothing I can do."

"What?"

"Calm down, princess. I can't do anything now. Go home and play blushing bride with your fiancé. He won't live much longer. I promise you, we will be together. You are mine. Remember that when you're fucking your betrothed."

She placed a fingertip on his chest, just above

his heart. "And you're mine, Cassiel, and I'm not letting you go. Ever."

Her fingertip glowed as she called her fire to mark him. He hissed in pain and reached out for her, but she was gone. *Damn Ley-line. They were so much more fun when I could use them.* He iced up the wound to stop the burning. *Now, what was I doing? Ah, Astrid. I seem to need a sorcerer. I wonder, will she and her friends help me in my bid for the throne? Will she be more accommodating than her mother?*

Astrid sat at her laptop, waiting for Casha to return, and wondering what the hell could be so important as to stop the riveting conversation they were having. She couldn't bring herself to think about what Cash said about Fallon's childhood. It was just too painful to explore now. The thoughts sat there, and she pushed them further back in her mind, knowing they would spring when she least expected it.

She jumped as her IM rang, alerting her to a new message. *Finally. What the hell was he doing?*

Casha - *Sorry about that. Now, where were we?*

Astrid4007 - *Well, before you left I was going to ask what you wanted for your help. Is there anything we can do to help you? Fair trade is no robbery, Cash.*

Casha - Sure. Tell me how to kill a more powerful, older demon. Or how to get, eight thousand souls before I go crazy. Maybe a football stadium. I have always wanted to figure that out. Stop the assassination attempts. There's lots of ways to help. Just talking is good, too. It's been a while since I got to talk to someone. Without lying too much to them.

She felt his despair in the words written on the screen. She had always liked Cash, and even though he was so secretive about his personal life, she always sensed that his exile weighed more on him than he let on to the natural world.

Astrid4007 - Too much, eh? Well, let's see. What if we cut a deal? We help you get some more souls, and you gimme back Fallon's soul and help us out with the Fallwell thing. What do you think? Or do we need more negotiating?

Casha - How many souls? What about your friends? Feyd and Ash?

Astrid4007 - Feyd and Ash, too, of course. But Fallon is my top priority. If they help out, you do know they will ask for their souls back. I don't know how many, but I think with all of us helping, we could make a dent in what you need.

Casha - Sounds like a deal. We'll finalize things when I get there.

What, does he think I'm crazy?

Astrid4007 - Sweet. Cash, we better have a readable contract for this, too. Not just verbal. Swear it will be fair to both sides of the deal.

Casha - Can I do that? Is that legal? We'll work something up. Fallon could give me his collected souls. That would be a nice tidy sum. We could come to an arrangement. That would be fair.

Fallon's Cipere? She tapped her fingers against the edge of the keyboard. Hmm, that could work.

Astrid4007 - He hasn't said anything to me about a Cipere. I'll talk to him about it, but it is a possibility. I need to talk to him about a few things.

Casha - Have I caused problems? That wasn't my intention. I only wanted you to know. You have a right to know. If you were mine, I would tell you all. My offer always stands. You would make a perfect sorceress. I would give you anything you wanted. All the souls you could want. I would lavish you with affection.

Astrid pursed her lips. Sure you would, demon. Sorceress, eh? Bingo. Knew he wanted something. Doesn't he know he can just ask, and I'd say yes? The most powerful demon ever cast out of the Afterverse? I'd be insane not to.

Astrid4007 - Sorceress, eh? Cash, my soul belongs to Ishtar. That's never gonna change, even if I wanted to. She won't give me up. I'm the last in her direct line. You already do lavish affection on me. And trust me, I think Fal would have a problem with me fucking the lights outta you although maybe Spinner might take you up on your offer. She always wanted to tie you up and make you beg her.

If there was any way around it, I'm sure I'd think on being your sorceress. But Fallon might have a problem with that. Like I said, there's always Spinner. Not to mention she'd love to attack you, Cash. Your human appearance is very sexy.

Casha- Thanks, I'm flattered. You're not so bad yourself. I don't have to fuck you to make you a sorceress. Look, what if Ishtar is lying to you? She has little or no claim on your soul. She just doesn't want to lose you. You could be mine. We would do great things. With Fallon as well. I wouldn't ask you to leave him or be with me. I could give you their souls.

His words rang true to her as she had thought the same a while ago but knew that she owed Ishtar her life.

Astrid4007 - Ishtar isn't lying to me. I'm the last in her direct descendant line. Since I can't have kids, I can't give her anymore, understand? I

know you don't have to fuck me to make me a sorceress, but it would be nice. Heh. Spinner is available, and she's not in line. Ishtar will give her up. She's not a priestess. Technically, I am, hence the five star tattoos on my back, love. No one could take me away from Fallon. I love him too much. Plus, Fallon would fucking be pissed as hell if I did it. Regardless, once you rule the Afterverse, we will all still stand by you. That's what friends are for. Even if you don't believe it, we do care for you.

Casha - Yeah, I don't want Spinner. She is hot, just not what I'm looking for. If only Ishtar would give you up. We would be magnificent. The offer always stands. Run away with me. I could do all sorts of things for you. I hope you stand by me if you even live that long. I'll give you anything you want then. I'm good to my friends.

Astrid4007 - Running away with you—Fal might tend to be angry with that. How the hell would I leave my husband? I'm not saying no outright. Maybe one day, though.

Casha – Really? You'd run away with me? You can keep Fallon. But we'd be partners. No longer would I talk to you and hide my intentions with words. I'd tell you what I was planning. Although, to your credit, even now you can guess my intentions. You're intelligent. That's why I respect you and want you. You would be my equal. And your friends, including Fal, would have their souls.

Astrid4007 - *That's quite a deal, but what's the catch? With you there was always a catch, and there always will be.*

Casha - *No catch. Being my sorceress is enough of a catch. I'm exiled. You would be target to lesser demons looking to make a name for themselves.*

Astrid4007 - *It's okay. And I didn't say no, did I? Just gimme a little time to think it over.*

Casha - *It's okay. I can give you anything you want. Think on that. There's no time limit. Or rush.*

She told him again that she'd think on it and signed off. The memories of what Cash had said a few hours earlier started to permeate her consciousness. She sat back and sighed.

Faris blinked back to her bedroom, panting. *Fuck, exactly how I remembered it. He hasn't lost an ounce of it for me, has he? Good thing, I thought he forgot me.* She grabbed the dresses and threw them on the bed, leaning against the wall, still shaking from their lovemaking. He always knew what to do to drive her over the edge, ever since that first time in the throne room. She giggled and leaned back, remembering the indiscretion.

She'd stalked in wearing a flimsy, blue see-

through dress, knowing he was in there alone, making notes on the Royals' meeting with her father, the most recent overlord of the Afterverse. She knew he saw her come in and lock the throne room door, but he didn't once look up at her, not until she was closer to the throne itself. She had turned sixteen two weeks before, and at her party, he had danced a few dances with her. When she tried to steal a kiss, he just smiled and bowed at her, leaving her to her frustrations. Well, her frustrations were going to be dealt with, here and now. They were completely alone, with her father going to the Succubus Court for some down time. *No one is here to stop me, and I know he wants me.* She stalked around the throne, shaking her ass as she passed him and heard his intake of air as the light caught in her dress, revealing she wasn't wearing a thing under it. She circled the throne twice, making sure she got him enticed enough, and then sat down on the throne, something no one was supposed to do. She slipped her finger into her mouth and smiled at Cash.

Seconds later, he was on his knees in front of her, his arms around her waist, pulling her closer to the edge of the chair. He kissed her then. For real, not just the chaste kisses he had allowed her up until then. His tongue swept into her mouth, and she groaned. His fingers worked quickly on the buttons on her dress, and she was completely exposed to him in a matter of seconds.

He pulled back from the kiss and looked her up and down then dipped his head and took a taut and straining nipple in his mouth, making it cold as he

did so. She moaned low in her throat, truly enjoying Cash's ministrations. *He's using magic, eh? Let's see how he likes this.* She grabbed his shirt, licked her finger, and trailed it down his shirt, scorching it. Then she grabbed each side around the scorch and pulled his shirt apart, ripping it at the scorch. He raised an eyebrow at her and smiled; then his attention went back to her breasts. His right hand slipped down from kneading her breast to slide up the inside of her thigh, quickly finding her core. He hissed at the heat and then smiled at her as she started to undo his belt and pants, exposing him to her for the first time.

Wow. Lord, I didn't expect that. He chuckled. His fingers were like ice as he delved inside her. The extremes mingling inside her, fire and ice, made her pant as he worked her, his mouth coming close to her ear.

"Like that, princess? Well, it's better when I fuck you...and I am going to fuck you, make no mistake. You think you're ready for me, for this?" He guided her hand to his cock, and she moaned as she touched it, squeezing and sending slight fire to her palm. His moan was her reward.

"Please, please, Cassiel." She was close to her first orgasm; she knew it. The pressure built as he worked her, inside and out. He grabbed at her nipple and bit down, lightly freezing it. She came, shaking and moaning his name as he chuckled.

She sagged against his chest, her head on his shoulder. His arm circled her waist and pulled her closer to him. She felt his tip at her entrance and wiggled closer, eliciting a moan from him. He

grabbed her hips and thrust, quick and easy, into her wet and molten core. He growled as he did, icing himself over and her as well, a slight layer of frost visible on her body. She moaned as he entered her, the slight pain overshadowed by the pleasure he was giving her. He rode her for a while, her orgasm growing once again. *Fuck, he's amazing. Holy shit. Oh, my God.* She started panting as his thrusts got harder.

“Princess, you’re so fucking tight. You feel so good...”

He talked dirty to her, and in no time she was coming once again, screaming his name over and over, and she heard him growl in her ear that she was fantastic. He pulled out and kissed her then pulled his pants up and buttoned them. He looked at her and smiled.

“That was fun. You’re fucking hot and great. And you’re mine.” He kissed her on the cheek. “And call me Cash.” He left the room, and she was alone, giggling at what had happened, happy that Cash was her first.

She still giggled at that memory. Since that time, he had gone to other pursuits, but then, so had she. It wasn’t until a couple hundred years later when she got the notion in her head to go topside and attend school that things had started heating up between them. He had been away from the Afterverse a while, topside, and she missed him. So, in keeping with their secret liaisons, she told her father she was going to go topside and become a student, to learn about the realm above. Fuerety, ever the doting father in those days,

indulged her. He set up a residence for her and an identity. Once she was topside, she called Cash and told him they could pursue their little affair with minimal resistance. He was delighted and came to visit her when he could.

She thought back on the one time he had agreed to pick her up at high school...

She walked out the front door of the building, checking once more in the side mirror on the building to make sure she was perfect. She had spent the last period in the gym bathroom, primping. Cash was picking her up from school today. *Yes, now, if Richie sees me get in the car with Cash, perhaps he'll leave me alone.* She wore a short denim skirt, cut shorter to make the ends frayed, a tight, red tank top and red Prada wedge sandals. Faris knew Cash loved watching her stalk around in heels, so she made sure she wore a very short skirt that made her legs look even longer with the heels on. She smiled as one of her human friends, Chastity Montclair, came up to her.

“Hey, Fari. What the hell are you dressed up for? Now, I saw you this morning, girl. You were not dressed to kill, so who’s the lucky guy? Richie? Girl, if he sees you wearing that, he’ll stroke right there.” She smiled at Faris as she spoke, a good-natured glint in her eyes. Chastity was the only human friend that she could stand for more than a few minutes at a time; something Cash told her numerous times would only lead to trouble. Faris liked her outlook on life and her outrageous behavior, so she continued to hang out with her.

“Ugh, Richie? Right. He completely wishes.

Bastard would sell his soul for me to dress like this for him.” *That’s an idea*, Faris thought as she griped to her friend about the over-exuberant Richie Minkman. *That would be an easy soul, that’s damn sure. I’ll have to think on that one. Hmm, maybe too easy.* “No, no, not Richie. The boyfriend is picking me up today.”

Chastity knew about Cash, no last name, the older guy that her friend was head over heels for, the one Faris had been seeing for about a year. She’d never met her friend’s guy and was overly curious. “Oh? You’re kidding? Cash is coming here? You mean I finally get to meet the orgasm king? What are you guys doing today, then?”

”The usual, but I think we are going out for ice cream first.” The usual, as Faris called it, was Cash buried deep inside her for the remainder of the day and night, something Faris always looked forward to when he came to town. He had called her the previous evening to tell her he was coming home, and she told him if he wanted any he’d pick her up at school. *And of course, me being me, he couldn’t resist.* It had been a long time since she lost her virginity to him on her daddy’s throne, and since then the only lover she ever had return to her bed was him.

She knew he was courting her, in the traditional demon sense; Cash was nothing if not traditional. He infuriated her, he pissed her off, he set her on fire, and she was completely his, always. The horrible thing was he knew it and used it to his advantage. He routinely just blinked into her bedroom after she caught him in some liaison with

another princess. She would attack him, and he'd restrain her, and in the end they would end up sweaty and sated on the floor or on the balcony or on the bed. He knew exactly how to push her buttons, but she wasn't completely clueless about his. She knew exactly what turned him on, and in a word, it was her. Hence the outfit.

A few more friends walked up to chat and shoot the shit, curious about whom exactly Faris was waiting for, dressed to kill as she was. She heard a familiar voice wafting up her left side and knew it to be Richie Minkman, the captain of the football team, who had recently gotten the bug in him that she was to be his next victim. The venue? Prom. *Good gravy, Richie, right on time. Cashy will put you in your place.* It was then she heard the squeal of the tires coming around the corner. She smiled, pulled her sunglasses down to the tip of her nose, and licked her lips. The black Porsche pulled up to where she was standing just as Richie Minkman strode over. He saw the car and the driver and blinked as if trying to figure out exactly what was going on.

Cash got out of the car in one swift movement, pulled his sunglasses down the bridge of his nose, and looked at the girls in turn. They all got those sloppy grins on their faces as he did, turning the charm way up.

Damn, Cashy, have to turn them all to jell-o don't you? You're such an arrogant prick. Heh, my arrogant prick. His eyes fixed on Faris, and he looked her up and down, taking in the short skirt and the tank top her breasts were popping out of,

and licked his lips.

Yeah, I knew this little outfit would turn you on, Prince. She stalked toward him then, careful to accentuate her movements as she walked, to let the entire crowd of spectators, including Richie Minkman, know that she was all his, and anyone who got in the way would catch hell for it.

He met her halfway, grabbed her around the waist, and nuzzled her ear then kissed her soundly, grinding his hips into hers as he did so. He was making it very clear that she was his; something she had hoped he would do. He just loves playing these games with mortals, doesn't he? She kissed him back but sent a little of her fire into the kiss, and he growled low in his throat. She knew then and there they were never going to make it to whatever destination they were headed for; he was going to have her as soon as they left the school grounds. The thought clenched things low in her body, knowing that Cash's brand of taking was well worth it.

They ended the kiss, and he looked at her. "Faris, you going to introduce me to your little friends?"

She introduced the girls to Cash, who was oddly flirty with each of them. He chatted with them casually for a few minutes before nibbling on her ear again. "Faris, we better go, or what I'm going to do to you right here and now would constitute as one of Amos' ball entertainments, and I don't think you want that," he whispered and then bit down on her earlobe, sending his ice up and down her spine at the same time from the hand

placed on the small of her back.

“You’re right.” She touched his arm and sent her fire to scorch him. His breath came in a short gasp. No one seemed to notice that major demon foreplay was going on right before them. “Let’s go. Chastity, I’ll call you on Sunday, okay?”

“Sunday, eh? You’re going to be busy for the next day and a half?”

Faris detached herself from Cash and walked over to her friend and the rest of the girls and said loud enough for everyone to hear, including Richie, “Look at him. Wouldn’t you be? Trust me, Chas. I won’t have the strength to pick up the phone.” She smiled and winked at the girls, who looked over to Cash one more time. He gave them a sexy smile then turned his attention back to Faris.

“Faris?” Cash took on the air of a man late for an appointment. She turned, stalked back to the car, and got in the door he held open for her. He closed it and walked around the car. Both his and her eyes on Richie, who was not looking amused at being shut out for an older guy with a Porsche. Cash smiled at him and shrugged then got in the car. He pulled out seconds later, and Faris whooped laughter.

“What the hell was that about? That meathead looked about ready to kill me. Not that he would have succeeded but still.”

“Richie Minkman wants to nail me.”

“Who doesn’t?”

She ignored his comment as he drove. Her hand moved to his trouser-clad thigh and squeezed before slowly sliding toward his groin. “He’s been

after me for weeks for a date, but now I think he'll leave me alone. Thanks."

"Don't be so sure, princess, but it hardly matters. So, how was school?"

"Like you care. How was soul stealing?" Her hand was on his groin now, and she squeezed again. He grunted slightly.

"Like you care." He used his left hand to undo his pants then used his other hand and caressed her cheek, slipping a finger into her mouth, which she licked and suckled as if it were his throbbing cock. He groaned again, removed his finger from her mouth. He put his hand on the back of her head and guided her down to his open pants. She took the hint quickly, his groans as he drove urging her on as she sucked him off. "That's it, princess, that's it. Miss me?"

Faris got chills down her body at the memory of the rest of the evening. She and Cash had spent the weekend in some posh hotel room in the city, barely coming up for air. On Monday morning, he'd dropped her off at school, and she had asked him about the prom. He told her he'd go with her, but there were a few conditions that they had to work out beforehand. The look in his eye said he was going to be around longer than expected. She had kissed him, and he had told her he'd pick her up later.

She had walked into Roger Wilhelm High School, and every girl she spoke to was curious about her weekend, about Cash, and more importantly, if he had any friends or brothers. She thought of Dimitri and laughed, knowing he'd

adore just fucking with the high school girls. She figured she'd set Dimitri up with Chastity. Hell, it wasn't the first demon she had set her best mortal friend up with, and it probably wouldn't be the last.

She'd made it to her locker pretty much unmolested when Richie Minkman sauntered up. She looked at him and frowned. He was pretty, granted, with dark brown hair, green eyes, a good complexion and body. A jock to the fullest, but he was no Cash. She thought back to something Cash had said Sunday while they watched television, about how Richie wasn't going to give up now that he had a rival, and thought, yeah maybe my idea about getting the bastard's soul might work out. Lord knows, Cash would love the present.

She laughed at the thought of what had come next, thinking that the next three weeks before prom would be very interesting indeed.

Richie Minkman was crushed when she told him her boyfriend was taking her to the prom, but she conceded a dance to him, knowing that the prick was going to try everything to get some from her when they did. *You keep thinking you're "The Man" Richie. Maybe you'll get a kiss, for your soul. Is a kiss from me worth your soul, Richie? We'll just have to see.*

Chastity was delighted when Faris set her up with Cash's brother, Dimitri, and spent a couple nights with him. He had agreed to go to prom with her but had to back out last minute, citing business issues, so Cash did the only noble thing and brought both Chastity and Faris to the prom, a la, 'Valmuddo' from Grease. The end result was much

better.

Chastity was wasted even before they got to the prom, having drunk three margaritas at Faris' place and a bottle of champagne. She was pretty good to go.

"Now, Chastity, no puking. That dress is too pretty."

"Fari, I am so not going to puke. I'm going to dance and have a good time. You'll come and get me when it's time to jet, right?" she'd asked Faris around Cash as he walked them in.

"Of course. I'm not leaving my best friend here to stew. I'll find you, regardless." *Yeah, and between then and now, I'll have a new present for Cashy, here.* Once inside the ballroom, Chastity left them to go and dance. Cash pulled Faris close to whisper in her ear. "Remember the last ball we went to together? You were the main entertainment."

Faris blushed, remembering the last court ball where they had met up. She was part of the entertainment that night, and after the ball, he'd shown up at her suite in the Cento Palace and showed her just how good he'd thought her performance was. "Yeah, Cashy, I remember, but this time if we fuck on the floor, the teachers and chaperones might frown on that."

"True, princess. So, shall we dance?" They danced a good portion of the evening, and soon enough Richie Minkman had come to her to ask for his dance. Cash let her go, amusement playing in his eyes. He stood there for a while watching then, as per the plan, went to find Chastity, to keep her

occupied.

Faris danced half a dance with Richie before he tried to kiss her, and she politely pulled away from him and motioned for him to follow her.

“What’s this, Faris? Where we going? Why can’t I kiss you?”

“Richie, I’m here with my boyfriend, who would completely kill you if he saw that. It’s hardly proper now, is it? So, we need to go somewhere he’s not.” She made a quick scan of the dance floor. “Ah, perfect. He’s with Chas. Follow me.”

“Right, Faris. Like I’m going to follow you somewhere where the boyfriend can kick my ass.”

“He’s occupied, Richie, and I do want that kiss.” She got closer and planted a small kiss on his nose. His eyes glazed over, and he followed her like a lost puppy to a dark corner of the ballroom with a few plants for cover. Once there, he tried to paw at her. She danced out of his grip, leaned against the wall, and looked at him thoughtfully.

“You know, Richie, I know you have tried to pursue me all year. Sorry it never worked out.” She bit her bottom lip and smiled. “So, what would you actually give to kiss me?”

He looked at her, a little confused. “What? What would I give? Hmm? Well, I’m not paying for it, but you don’t seem like that type of girl, so, like what?”

I’m really thinking this idiot is denser than Cash suspected. “Like, I know you want me, Richie. I see the way you’re looking at me, and you’re right. I’m not that kinda girl, but I don’t give up anything for free. Call it a family trait. So, what do you have

that's of value?"

"I don't follow you, Faris."

"The only thing we actually own is a part of ourselves, you know. Souls and whatnot, so would you willingly give that up for one kiss?"

"You want my soul? Hmm, that's going to cost you, Faris. A kiss and a quick feel should do it." He was laughing, seriously thinking he was getting out of this transaction unscathed.

Idiot. He's thinking this is a game. "Okay, Richie-poo, say it. Say 'I'll give you my soul for a kiss and a quick feel.'" *Retard. Quickest soul I ever got.*

Richie parroted her words verbatim and then moved in for the kill. The kiss was sloppy. His hands were rough and did nothing for her. *Christ, what the fuck has he been drinking?* She moved away from him and straightened her dress. His eyes were on her and hungry in the horny-high-school-boy sort of way, not the I'm-a-big-bad-demon way Cash looked at her.

"Come on, Faris, you can't just stop me there. You were so liking it, and I liked feeling your big titties."

She scoffed. "Ah, I can and will stop it there, Richie. You're horrible. But it doesn't matter, the transaction is over." She pulled a book out of what seemed like thin air and opened it. "Yep, you're in here, so, toodles, Richie. Enjoy your life, it's going to be a short one." She left the bewildered jock standing by the potted plant and went to find Cash. *Maybe some mouthwash first. What the fuck was he drinking, lighter fluid?*

She found Cash whispering to Chastity and wondered what was up. He saw her and put his arms around her waist. "Hey, princess. Miss me?"

"Oh, yeah. And I got a surprise for you." She handed her Cipere over to him and smiled. "One new soul, just for you baby." She kissed him, and he squeezed her.

"I have a surprise for you, too." He grabbed Chastity by the waist, looked at Faris, and winked. "Shall we go?" They both nodded and were back in the limo in no time, racing to the hotel where Cash had reserved a room.

It was in the car that Faris found out Cash's surprise. It involved Chastity, who was reluctant at first. Faris quickly took up the slack, and the three of them had quite a memorable prom night.

Faris laughed at the memory of Chastity and Cash hooking up. Chastity was her best friend, and she adored her, so sharing Cash like that was nothing to her, and Cash seemed to like it. *Hmm, I wonder whatever happened to her. I'll have to check on it.* She smiled as new thoughts took hold of her.

Faris' thoughts flittered to the first Pleasure Ball she and Cash had attended together, making their courtship public. She had worn a slinky dress made of shimmering silk—red, of course, as it is the color of her royal house. Cash looked dashing, as usual, in his black slacks and white silk shirt, his royal brand showing clearly on his wrist.

They'd entered the doors and listened as they were announced. "Prince Cassiel of the Conglacio, and Princess Faris of the Cento house." Cash grabbed her hand as they walked through the doors, claiming Faris as his intended in the old style, just a simple show of affection. The lower houses bowed as they entered the throne room. Many an evil glance was shot at Faris from the hopeful younger princesses and lower house females who all had designs on Cash. *Let them look. They are just jealous, and they should be. He's courting me, no one else. He's here with me, and he'll leave with me. All I need to see is him announce it to the king and queen for the courts, and it will be official.* The fact that it wasn't their parents they were going to be announcing it to didn't matter. As long as some royalty acknowledged the match, it was public. The formalities of whether or not the match would work went on later, and they rarely ever were gainsaid. Faris had high hopes of being Cash's princess by the end of the next year.

"Ah, Cassiel, and the lovely Faris." Amos looked at them with approval, waiting to hear Cash's claim to the woman at his side.

"Greetings King Asmodeus and Queen Camions, I present my courted intended, Faris, to the court and for your blessing."

Faris looked at Cash and squeezed his hand as he looked at the old king and waited for the next part of the ceremony.

"Congratulations Cassiel and Faris." Asmodeus rose and addressed the court and ballroom. "It

seems that we have a real reason to celebrate, not just the season change. Please bow to a future royal pair, Cassiel and Faris.”

It's done, she thought as he looked at her and moved closer to kiss her, sealing his claim to her in front of the whole court. *I'm really going to be his, for real. Nothing is going to change that.*

Faris' thoughts took her deeper, to the night's disappointment.

She stood beside him watching the night's entertainment. This year it was the queen herself doing a very erotic dance in a swirl of veils. She felt him withdraw from her side and immediately felt alone. *Damn him, he knows how I hate to be left alone.* She turned to scan the area for him, but he was nowhere in sight. *Maybe he's playing a game*, she thought as she turned and started walking toward the balcony. *Yeah, maybe he's playing, like when we met up at the ball a few years ago, after the throne room incident.* Cash had danced with her and in the middle of the song took his leave of her. She'd watched, stunned, as he left the dance floor and walked out to an alcove into a deeper part of the palace.

Thinking he had a liaison planned that didn't include her, she'd followed him. He'd caught her around the waist and, without a word, hiked her dress up and had her right there against the wall of the darkened alcove, much to their mutual pleasure and delight. When she had asked him afterwards why the theatrics, he smiled and said, “Faris, it would have hardly been proper for me to have you right there as we aren't betrothed or promised or

even public yet. You were being rather insistent and not taking my hints, so I had to take action.” She knew he was meant to be hers that night when he threw caution to the wind and had to have her.

So, maybe that’s the deal. It would be fun to do it now although protocol has been followed. He could just fuck me right there, and no one would say a thing. Hmm, I wonder. She had reached the balcony and heard the music from the ballroom and something else, under it. It sounded like someone rapt in pleasure, and Faris smiled. Looks like someone else is having a good time tonight. She crept closer. Around the corner, Cash was engaged in a little *tête-à-tête* with Bethany, her biggest rival for his affections, the one princess that she might have some competition with. Worse, Bethany’s father, Aldinach, King of the Illusion Demons, approved of Cash and wanted the two to get together, whereas her own father, Furerety, liked and considered Cash a son but had made it known that the Conglacio heir wasn’t good enough for his crown princess. She saw red.

“Cash.” She couldn’t bring herself to say anything else; her heart was breaking. *I am so not going to cry for this. He doesn’t deserve it. And here I thought he wanted me.* He looked at her, a mixture of amusement and guilt on his face. He said nothing. She looked past him to the girl against the wall, who was smirking at her. She couldn’t take it. Cash had betrayed her, and there were no words to say.

She turned on her heel and left the balcony, seeking out Jacob, Bethany’s most recent suitor.

She found him looking bewildered near the side alcove. Jacob wasn't the smartest demon on the plane, more muscle and brawn, something she thought Cash would love to deal with while he was engaging in his actions. Yeah, maybe Jacob will break something on Cash. Serve the fucker right.

"Hey Jacob, if you still have any designs on Bethany, you might wanna check out by the balcony. She's with Cash, right corner." She didn't stay to hear his oath or see him tear off toward the balcony. Instead, she left the ball, alone, something she hated more than anything. Leaving the ball alone meant that their claim wasn't concrete, and she hated Cash for being who and what he was.

She entered her father's palace and went to her room, not a tear in her eyes. She was more angry than sad, angry that she had given him so much of herself, wanted him so badly. *Christ, I'm just as bad as the rest of the princesses sniffing after him. And here I was, the fool, thinking he really cared for me. I should have listened to Fiona's sisters. Cash doesn't care about anyone, only himself.* She frowned as she took her dress off and grabbed a towel, intent on showering all her thoughts of Cash down the drain. She never made it.

She turned and looked at her balcony, feeling like someone was watching her. Someone was. Cash leaned against the doorframe, his arms crossed, a look of pure amusement on his face. "So, you sent Jacob out there did you? Naughty little princess."

"I have nothing to say to you. And I revoke your bedroom privileges, so get the fuck out." She turned

and walked toward the bathroom once again. Cash stopped her by blinking in front of her. “What the fuck do you want?”

“What do you think?”

“I told you, you’re done, Cash. You don’t get to have me anymore. Go back to the Celo princess. I have had it.” She fought back tears, determined not to let him see how broken he had made her. “You must really think I’m stupid. Fuck, you just can’t keep it in your pants, can you? And on the night we go public, with the one girl I have been vying for your attentions with.” She slapped him, hard, across the face. His surprise showed on his face. *Arrogant fucker. Bet he’s just surprised ‘cause he didn’t think he deserved that.* “You deserved that. Don’t pretend like you didn’t, and you’re lucky I didn’t do worse. Thanks, Cassiel. Now I’m the laughingstock of the courts. I might have won you, but I don’t get to keep you.”

“I deserved that? And you’re using my given name now? What the fuck, Faris? What happened to Cashy?” His tone was mocking, and she wasn’t sure how long she could argue with him without breaking down.

“Fuck you! This is bullshit. I just have to give in ‘cause you’re here? Fucking bullshit! Newsflash, Cassiel. We didn’t leave the ball together. Your claim is null and void, and everyone knows. So go home.” She sagged, and she heard him chuckle.

“Faris, I’m a crown prince. My claims cannot be contested.” The smug sound of his voice infuriated her. “So, you see, you are mine, regardless of what you think you saw.”

“Oh, so here comes your Jedi mind trick, eh? Okay, Obi-wan, what exactly did I see?”

“Oh, you saw me and Bethany hooking up, make no mistake about that. And what the fuck is a Jedi, and who is Obi-wan?”

She could scream but wasn't going to give him the satisfaction. “Pop culture. You'd do well to learn about shit topside.”

“I know all I have to know about topside, thank you.”

“Yeah, and you don't know what a fucking Jedi is? Weak. So, what's your excuse? She enticed you? Bet you something? Come on, you fucking prick, tell me. I have a right to know why I was cast aside.”

He leaned against the bathroom door and smiled. “She bet me she was a better fuck than you were, and sorry, princess, but I had to defend your honor.”

“Nothing you just said involves my honor. It involves your selfish wants and needs. So go back to her. It's what she wants, and she got the one thing I swore she'd never have. You.”

“Well, I'm not with her, am I? I'm here, begging your forgiveness.”

“You call this begging? Fuck you. I'm tired of all the fucking games.” She pushed past him and grabbed her robe, not wanting to be naked in front of his roaming gaze any longer. “So, go.” She was close to tears, closer than she'd ever been.

“Why? I did what I said I would do, didn't I? I defended your honor, although I must say, she does rival you, in every way. Pity I can't have you both.

I'm sure she can teach you a thing or two."

At that statement, her resolve was lost. Instead of crying, she jumped on him and attacked him, throwing him off his feet and straight to the ground. She called her fire and burned two handprints in his shirt, scorching his chest.

"That's it, princess, get angry." He kissed her as she continued to pummel at him. She sent her fire into the kiss, and he groaned, her body clenching in low places as he did. He clutched her ass, and she wrapped herself around him, ripping at him until his clothes were pretty much tatters on his body. Her robe was askew, and he quickly pushed it off her body. Her hands burned the rest of his clothes off his body. In minutes, they were both naked, and he had her against the wall.

In one quick thrust he entered her, his growl ringing in her ears. It was a growl of possession, and as much as she hated him right now, she reveled in the fact that he got so wild over her. *If he thinks this fight is over and he's won, he's got another thing coming.* She scorched his back, which only drove him to go harder, deeper, and she was reaching oblivion quickly. He whispered in her ear with each thrust, sending frost over her skin. "Princess, you're it for me. I didn't fuck her. I just showed her what she'd never be able to have. I belong to you."

She came at the end of his words, her body triggering his, his growl and shout of her name mingling with her screaming his name over and over. He kissed her hard, turned them to her bed, and collapsed, with her underneath him, sated and

happy. *Sick fucker. It was a fucking game to him. God, but he was good.* He sat up, grabbed her left hand, and slipped his mother's ring onto her finger. She looked at him, astonished. He just kissed her and blinked out of the room.

Joile's ring? Oh shit, he really is serious. She slept soundly that night, content in the knowledge that she had his ring and she was going to be his wife.

It was the next morning that she realized she was pregnant. That's when all hell broke loose.

"Faris, I don't want to hear a word about it. You're getting rid of it, and that's that."

Her heart had sunk as she heard her father's cruel words. "Daddy, it's your grandchild. Your first one. You're telling me that you want me to terminate what could be an heir?"

"Not an heir of the Centos, darling. You said it yourself. You're feeling cold. There is no way in hell I'm letting a Conglacio sit on this throne. I should have seen this coming. I should have listened to my gut, but no, I indulged you and your childhood wishes regarding that whore's son and look what happened. Well, my darling daughter, you will get rid of it, and that is the end of it."

"He won't let you hurt me or the baby. Christ, he just found out. I just told him."

"And that will be your last contact with him, Faris. Is that clear? You're not to see him."

Three days later, Cash tried for the throne and was exiled. His soul now belonged to her father. She'd been sent to the Arcuo court, and the baby was dealt with.

It had been hell the past twelve years without him, with her father not trusting her and keeping things secret from her. Then, suddenly, he'd started acting like her father of old and told her she was betrothed. She knew not to mention that she was already attached. When she'd found out her marriage was eminent, she'd waited until the security around her had become more lax, and she'd gone to find Cash.

And he was caustic as ever. But he still cares for me, I can feel it. Fuck me for not going to find him sooner. It can't be helped now. I have him back, and he wants me. Now all I have to do is marry this fucking jerk- off, and daddy won't suspect anything.

Right, Faris. If you believe that, I've got a bridge I can sell you. I'll just have to be careful. But I'm not going to quit seeing him, not when I found him again.

She took a shower and put the blue dress on, in defiance to her father, and in regard for her true prince. Then she left her rooms, headed to the palace throne room.

Chapter Thirteen

Cash's words echoed in her head, her heart breaking as she realized what Fallon had been through as a child. Tears spilled from her eyes as she read, her disbelief overwhelming her. *Not my angel. He lived through that? And he didn't trust me to tell me, but Cash knew. Maybe I really am just a passing thing to Fallon. Maybe I'm just another of the women he's used to forget. So much pain! So much. He hides it well. Oh, my poor baby. It's not fair.*

She wiped the tears away from her face, knowing they were useless. He's alive, and he overcame the crap he was put through. *I have to talk to him. I mean, this entire situation is just bullshit. If they weren't dead already, I would kill them all. He's got to trust me. I'll let him know he can trust me.* She walked to the bedroom, trying to collect herself before she confronted him.

She opened the door to the suite. He was sitting at the desk in the room, lounging back, a cigarette in his hand, ready to light. "Hey, cookie."

"Hey, vix. What's shaking?"

Me, because I have no clue what you're going to say. Calm down, girl. He can't freak out. You're saying this because you love him and want to help

him face it. “Not much. I...um...I was talking to Cash, and he’s coming to help. We should expect him within the week, so I have to set up a bedroom for the brat prince.”

“Cash is a powerful ally, Astrid. We’re lucky to get him.”

“Tell me about it. We talked about a bunch of stuff. He’s very knowledgeable.”

Fallon turned to her. The look on his face gave away nothing. “Oh? Like what?”

“He asked if the rumor was true, if you came home. I told him yeah. Then he asked me if I was happy, and I said extremely. He’s very sweet to me Fallon. Always has been.”

“Yeah, he was okay when I met him, too. I stole the Maltese Falcon for him. Did you know that? I didn’t even know the thing was real,” he said as she giggled. “What else did he say?”

He was relaxed, and she took it as a good sign. “Well, cookie, that’s what I wanted to talk to you about. He asked me to be his sorceress, and I think I might do it if the bargain is right.”

“Really? Wow, that’s a big offer. Yeah, make sure your bargain is sound, love. I can’t have you burning in the pits with me.”

That’s never going to happen, cookie. I’m getting your soul, as well as Feyd’s and Astrid’s for my own. She smiled and pressed on.

“And...um...we talked about you.” She took a deep breath and waited for his reaction.

His face turned grave as he looked at her, the fear clear in his eyes. “Really? And what did you talk about?” His voice was measured, clipped even,

as if he was seething with rage but refused to show it.

“He told me some stuff.” She looked up at him, and the tears streamed down her face. “I had no idea.” When he stood up, she went to him, tears still trailing down.

She was in range of touching him when he shimmered to the right. She looked at him, puzzled. The look on his face stopped her dead. The mixture of terror and disappointment was apparent, and the venom in his voice when he spoke to her gave him away. “Astrid, I can’t believe you would betray me like this. If I had wanted you to know anything, I would have told you. You of all people. And the demon helped you do it.” His words were quiet, and she cried anew.

“Cookie, I didn’t mean to hurt you. I just wanted to know why you’re so sad sometimes. I wanted to help. I...I love you.”

“Save it, Astrid! You were being selfish. I can’t be here right now. I can’t—look, just forget it. I’m leaving.” He shimmered out of the room before she could say another word. She looked at the area he had stood and sank to her knees, trying to figure out where she’d gone wrong. *Fallon? You’re leaving? No, not again!*

She got to her feet and ran out of the room to Ashlyn’s room, not bothering to knock. She walked in on Ash and Feyd in a most compromising position.

“Fuck, Astrid!” Feyd jumped off the bed and grabbed a sheet. “What the hell? The house on fire? Linus choking on a chicken bone? I didn’t give it to

him, I swear! What the fuck is—” He looked at her face, the tears, and how red her eyes were, and stopped flat. “Astrid? Where’s Fallon?”

She broke down, told them everything she had said to him and why they had the conversation. Feyd grabbed her as she finally gave in and collapsed, holding her to him, and Ash held her hands and tried to calm her down.

“Ast, honey, where did he go?”

“I know where he is, and I better go and get him before he kills something. On second thought, he might just kill George, and then all our problems are over.”

Ash looked at him with the “not-the-time-for-jokes” look, and he sobered. “Ast, it really wasn’t smart to ask the demon. I mean, the demon probably has information Fallon doesn’t even have. Trust me, Fallon’s past is better left there, in the past. He’s not okay with what’s happened to him.”

“Feyd, he’s going to leave me again. I know it. I fucked up really good this time. I just couldn’t leave well enough alone, and all I wanted was to help him. I didn’t know he would react like this.” She sobbed again, and he got up and got his clothes on as Ashlyn cuddled Astrid.

“Look, I’ll fix this. Please calm down, okay? He won’t leave you. I won’t let him, I swear. But I’ll tell you, don’t expect him home tonight. I’m going, love.” He bent down and kissed Ash on the lips. “If you need me, call my cell. And Ast, please calm down. I’ll help sort it all out, okay?”

“Really, Feyd? Promise?”

“Yeah, it’s the least I can do for you healing me.”

I won't let him run again, Astrid. Last time almost killed him." With those parting words, he was out the door.

"Ash, I fucked up, good and royal."

"Shh. Ast, relax let's get you some tea, and then we'll go to the bedroom and watch TV, okay? We'll get Linus, and we'll just relax."

Ash didn't wait for an answer. She helped her best friend up off the floor and out of the room. Slowly, they headed for the kitchen.

Feyd was dressed and out of the house minutes after Astrid told him that Fallon had gone MIA. He reached into his jacket, catching a scent of Ash as he did, and groaned. *Shit, why did this have to happen tonight?* He grabbed his cell phone and hit Morrison on speed dial.

"What, Feyd?"

"Fallon is having an episode."

He didn't have to explain. Morrison was well versed in what the statement meant. "Where is he?"

"I'm thinking he's probably back at the Rosco. I'm heading there now. I think it's going to be a bad one, mate."

"What happened?"

"Astrid and the brat prince of the Afterverse had a little talk, and he told her about Fallon's past." Feyd knew he sounded tired, and Morrison would get the gist of his mood.

"Fuck. Bad idea, but she was probably just trying to help him you know? Astrid has never done

anything to anyone of us maliciously, especially Fallon.”

“I believe her when she said that she didn’t mean to piss him off, but she did, and he’s a fucking mess. And quite frankly, I’m not cleaning that mess up, unless he’s just going to kill old Georgie boy. Then it will solve so many problems.”

“And cause so many more. Fal might be having a psychotic episode right now, but he’s never been too far gone to not think about the consequences.”

“True, but he’s never had the only woman he loves betray his trust.”

“Fuck. I figured he’d look at it like that. Okay, I’m on my way. I’ll come right up.”

“Thanks, mate, I owe you.”

“Don’t mention it. I know how he gets. Now to break the news to Cole.”

“Ah, shit. Looks like no one is going to get any tonight.” He laughed, mostly to break the tension.

“Expect me momentarily.” The phone clicked off as he hurried through the doors of the Rosco and hit the elevator button. *It’s times like this I wish I was an Escensio.*

“Who was that?” Cole looked over at Arcady as he sat up in the king sized bed.

“Feyd. I’ve got to go. Fallon’s gone postal, love. So don’t expect me back until the morning, okay?”

She pouted, and he kissed her, lingering on her sweet lips. *I have got to be out of my mind leaving this woman here alone. But duty calls.* He broke

the kiss and smiled at her as she lounged back against the pillows.

“Damn, and here I was hoping for some quality time tonight, Incubus.”

He turned as he was putting his pants on and quirked his eyebrow at her. “When have I not given you quality, Cole?”

She giggled and licked her lips. “Tomorrow is my day off. Think we can pick this up later?” She sat up, the sheet coming down and showing him the little white cami top she was wearing. He smiled back at her and sent her a thought of just what he had in mind for her later. She gasped, and her eyes went wide.

“Like that, Cole? Just remember that, okay? You’re mine once I come back, kitten.”

She nodded, grabbed for him, and kissed him, pulling him down onto her. *You better, Incubus. After that, I don’t think I’m going to be satisfied until you do.* She broke the kiss and smiled once more.

“As you wish, my dear. But I really have to go. Sleep well. You’re going to need your strength.”

He put on his t-shirt, grabbed his jacket, and headed out the door.

Chapter Fourteen

He sat in the room, a bottle of Jack hanging loosely from one hand. A cigarette burned down in his other, the ash falling on the carpet below. He had started with a glass for his whiskey, but somehow the glass had ended up smashed against the wall, lost in the broken glass from the pictures. Most of the things in the room had been either smashed or thrown. Even the bed lay upturned, the mattress blocking the door. He had taken his frustrations out on the room, and when that hadn't worked, he'd turned to the bottle.

So he sat, surrounded by debris, muttering to himself and drinking warm Jack from the bottle. *I can't believe she did that. She asked the fucking demon!* "I'll kill him. I'll fucking kill him," he gravely swore to the empty room. He took another swig and grimaced as the fiery hot liquid scalded its way down his throat.

She had no right. "Very knowledgeable," she'd said. I fucking bet he was. Had a good little talk and a laugh about it.

"Fuck!" He flicked the glowing cigarette butt across the room. He took another swig, feeling better with every taste. It was always this way. As long as he had a spirit in hand, he could face

anything. He couldn't deal with it straight. It had been his way of dealing with things. He could handle the everyday chaos of life just as long as he could get shit-faced at the end of it.

How could I have trusted her? How can I look her in the eyes ever again? Pity. That's all I'll ever see. Pity in those beautiful, sea-blue eyes. A lone tear escaped from his eye and glided down his cheek.

He took a shaky breath and ran his free hand through his hair, cradling his head slightly with his palm. *I don't want to deal with this. Shit, I shouldn't have to deal with this.* "It's not fucking fair." *Life isn't fair.* The thought invaded his head in a voice that sounded a lot like his uncle's, the voice that had been plaguing him since he was four. Fallon loathed that voice. It had never mattered what the words were saying, the voice always made his hairs stand on end.

Taking another healthy pull from the bottle, he put another cig to his mouth and lit it. He noticed for the first time his bleeding hands. Blood still seeped from the shallow cuts he must have given himself when he had thrown the pictures at the wall, causing shards of glass to fly everywhere. He filled his lungs with smoke and sighed it out in a big cloud.

"I can't stay here anymore," he said to the empty room. "Fuck you, Ray. I was happy, and you just had to take her from me as well. You and her stupid selfishness. She just had to fucking know everything. Ray, you know something?" His voice was high and strangled. "You're fucking dead, and

I'm not. God, you must just hate that." He laughed bitterly. "You're dead and dust, and I'm still fucking here. I'm better than you, always was. Even if I wasn't the one to kill you, I still saw your cold, bloated body. I saw the mess your little princess left of your body. You can take what you want from me, but you'll never take that memory. Never." His words ended in a harsh whisper.

So what the fuck are you waiting for? Pick up and leave. "And go where?" He sighed. "I can't go, not without..." Feyd. The last he had seen Feyd, he had been laughing in the kitchen with Ash. "He won't come with me." He felt a stab of pain at being separated from Feyd. The two hadn't been apart for more than a week since their first meeting. He took another drink of the nearly empty bottle, the taste no longer bothering him.

"There's always Fallwell," he joked humorlessly. *So what? You're just going to give him Ash? You do that and walk away, Feyd's as good as dead, as will Astrid be.*

He shook his head. "No, they have the demon now."

Hah! You think the demon cares? Sure he might want a sorceress, but he's just playing with them. You think he cares either way?

"No, he'd happily give them over to Fallwell. Fucking dick!"

"So, what's it going to be, cowboy? Grab your things, shimmer the fuck out of here? Maybe go to Vegas, spend all your money, drink and whore, and try to forget her. Just like you did a year ago. Tell me, how well did that work out last time? Or are we

gonna just pick up and get on with things? So she knows. Big whoop. Deal with it." *Hah! Deal with it? She betrayed me!*

"She's off playing with her little demon friend now, laughing and joking. Having a good old time, at my fucking expense." *Yeah mate, you've said that already. You don't believe that for a second. You saw the look on her face.* Guilt stabbed through his heart as he remembered the look that was in her eyes when he'd left.

"I can't live with that look, those tears. They were for something that happened a long time ago, something that you know very well that I can't think about. I can't live with those tears. I can't live with pity." He continued to argue with himself. "Those tears were because you were leaving her, and you can't live if you're dead." *You leave now, and I guarantee you'll have killed yourself within the year.*

"Maybe I want to die!" he shouted at himself as he took another drink. "Huh! Maybe it's all I ever wanted. Should have done it the day they died. Should have done it the first time Ray touched me, or when Ammit left me to rot. Maybe it's what I want."

Bullshit! If you wanted to do it, you wouldn't have clung to life for so fucking long. The only thing that makes you happy is the sweet little witch, who right now is crying her eyes out because...

"What fucking right do you have to judge me?" he screamed as he stood up, ready to fight off the annoying voice. He turned to find the room empty.

"Oh." His voice was subdued as he discovered nobody but himself in the trashed hotel room. "Not good. I have a pretty good right to judge myself, I suppose." He finished the bottle of Jack and listened to the sound of the glass shattering when he threw it against the wall.

"Now what I really need is to stop talking to myself and maybe kill someone." He sighed. "And where the fuck is Feyd? He should have been here to baby-sit me by now."

Somebody started to pound on the door. He drew his knife from its sheath as he went to the door. "Ipwhisk, what the fuck is going on in there? Where the fuck is Nightly? And who the hell are you shouting at?"

Grinning savagely, knife in one hand, Fallon shoved aside the mattress and opened the door. "Ah, Georgie. Right on time." He stood to the side to let George pass. "I was just thinking of you. Come on in."

As the doors to the elevator were closing, Feyd watched Morrison catch the sensor. The doors slid open again and allowed him access to the cramped space.

"That was quick. Cole pissed?"

"You have no idea. Have you called him?"

"Nah, I figure we have the element of surprise on our side if I don't call him. I just hope he hasn't killed George yet."

Morrison grinned. "Now, now. Killing old

Batman wouldn't be such a bad thing. Except for Fallwell sending someone in his place, or worse yet, coming to deal with the situation himself. Trust me, mate, you don't want that one bit."

Feyd nodded, well aware that when Morrison left the company there was no love lost between Fallwell and him, just a building in Belgium and about one hundred innocent lives. Morrison had blown up Fallwell's Belgian offices, and he never felt remorse for it. In Feyd's eyes, he'd had a right to be a dick.

"And you see the dilemma. I don't know how far gone he is. I just hope he hasn't destroyed everything."

"Feyd, it's Fallon we are talking about, here. That room is trashed. Don't worry, I'll settle up with the manager once we assess the damage."

The elevator dinged to their floor, and they stepped out to behold Fallon, glaring murderously at old Georgie, who was standing his ground. They listened to the exchange between George and Fallon with interest.

"Right, Fallon. I don't have a death wish, Christ, what the fuck did you do to the room?"

"The mini-bar ran out. I was looking for more Jack. You got any?"

"Funny. No, Ipwhisk, you know damn well I don't get rooms with mini-bars. What bug crawled up your ass and died? Little French whore not giving you any? She prefer Nightly over you?" he sneered.

Fallon's eyes grew darker as he stared at him. "What French whore?" He ground his teeth.

"Ipwhisk, I know perfectly well the French witch is in town. Fuck, I even know that she moved her shop here," he gloated at Fallon. "There isn't much I don't know about you two. I know since the second night we got into town that you've spend a good portion of your nights with her, as does Nightly. Shame, giving your heart to a girl you share with your partner."

"You know me, I love to share. You do know me, don't you, Georgie? You've...touched me. You know my past. Hell, you know I'll do pretty much anything I'm asked. Come on in. Make yourself comfortable."

George shuddered and shook his head. "No fucking way, Ipwhisk. Deal with your shit, or I'll deal with her for you." He turned around and spied Morrison and Feyd coming out of the elevator, making their way toward Fallon's room.

Not a smart man, is he, Feyd?

Feyd shot Morrison a look and nodded. *Yes?*

With that, they both cautiously strolled forward, careful not to spook the very irate Fallon. George scoffed at Fallon's gaze then followed his gaze to where Feyd and Morrison were approaching.

"Ah, good. The cavalry has arrived. Gentleman, your boy is a fucking mess. See to him, or I will," George said, motioning to the man seething in the doorway.

Fallon laughed. "I swear, Georgie, I'll kill you. You'll know everything my blades have done and met everyone that they've killed. You'll feel it all. I promise. Now go back to your little hole, back to

where you keep your illusion of control." He turned to Feyd and Morrison. "Boys! You're early. Georgie was just about to take me up on my offer."

"Fallon, your threats will get you nowhere." George turned to Feyd and smirked. "I advise you not fuck his girl anymore. He's not stable. Keep him under control, Nightly. I fucking mean it." He turned from them and went back to his room and shut the door, locking it.

Feyd looked at Fallon and shook his head. "Fuck, mate, you truly have gone round the bend, haven't you? Look, we gotta talk."

"I'll fucking kill him." Fallon's voice was pure venom, slurred, but venom nonetheless.

"Regardless, man, this room is a fucking mess. What the hell? Was he involved in all this?" Feyd gestured to the room and the chaos that surrounded them as they entered.

"Who, Georgie? Nah, I haven't even begun to have fun with him yet," Fallon answered raising his voice. "He thinks a lock will stop me. Like I'd come in through the fucking door!"

"Calm down, mate. Re-fucking-lax. We gotta talk. Seems your little witch is a bit put out about you leaving...actually she's hysterical."

"She's not the fucking only one. She went to the fucking demon. I trusted her."

"Fuck, Fal, you still should. She's a mess, and she didn't do it to make you upset. She wanted to help you! Fuck, man! That's all she ever wanted to do for you! This is just like last time. Shit happened, and we handled it, and you still fucking ran from her!"

"I'm not running. I'm getting drunk, trashing a room, killing Georgie, then later, I hope to get into a bar fight or two."

"Fallon." Morrison laid a hand on Fallon's shoulder. "Mate, she needs you. She almost died before, when you left. I saw her after. I didn't know it was you that she was crushing on, but she was a mess. Nothing mattered."

"Yeah, I know that feeling. What the fuck do you want me to do about it? Hmm?"

"Quit being a prick." Feyd moved back against the wall and sighed.

"What? Do you want me to go to her now? Like this?" He gestured to himself. "Oh, and I suppose that you want me to tell her how I've forgiven her for going behind my back to a demon and prying into my childhood. Yeah, well, I can't. Not right now, and not like this. She's not the injured party, okay? I'm hurt, and I don't see why I should have to go to her and make her feel better, all because she's doing the crying thing. I hate that I want her to feel better." He shook his head then spoke in a calmer, more sober-sounding voice. "I don't trust myself, not like this. I'll say something tomorrow. I'll go back, just not now."

"Fal, she didn't go behind your back. Hell, until you blew up at her, she didn't know she'd gone behind your back at all. Fuck, you have never told her a damn thing about yourself! She's taken it all for you, not knowing the man she fell in love with, but after a while, it takes its toll. You love her, don't you? Yet you won't tell her. I'm not trying to tell you how to deal with this situation, but fuck, man.

The woman waited a year for you, and she would have waited longer if you hadn't come back to her."

"She isn't a fucking mind reader, Fallon. That's Morrison over there." He grinned at his best friend, hoping to lighten the mood. It didn't help.

"She knew it was bad. She knew."

"Fal, she didn't. She's a fucking wreck, crying and so sad you won't come back to her. Look, mate..." Arcady looked over at Feyd and shrugged. "She never would betray you consciously. You're everything to her."

"I know. She's everything to me, and tomorrow I'll make everything right. But I just can't right now. Plus, I'm sobering up. Feyd, please tell me you've got another bottle of Jack in your room."

Feyd motioned to Arcady, who pulled a bottle of Jack out from behind his back. "Don't worry, mate. We came prepared."

Chapter Fifteen

The first thing Fallon knew was that he was warm. He laid there in bliss for a few seconds, surrounded in the scent Astrid used when washing the linens, before the memories of the night before hit him. He opened his eyes just a crack but shut them tightly against the invading light. He was back at the mansion but not in his bedroom. *Shit.* He gave himself a moment as the hangover took hold, trying to ignore the taste of old alcohol and stale cigarettes in his mouth. He pulled the covers over his head and tried to get more sleep.

"Don't try to play that card with me, Ipwhisk. I know you're awake. Don't you dare make me pull drastic maneuvers to prove it."

Shit, man, just leave me alone. Fallon ignored Feyd and closed his eyes. Someone jumped on his bed. His stomach lurched, and the contents threatened to spill. Feyd jumped up and down mercilessly, pausing for a few words.

"So, still thinking getting piss drunk last night was a good idea?"

Fallon opened his bloodshot eyes to look at his friend. "Feyd, please. Just let me sleep. I can't do this, just let me sleep," he pleaded with his friend.

"I'd love to, but there's a sweet little witch up in

her room crying her eyes out because she thinks you're gonna leave her. Then there's Ashlyn, who is comforting her. Man, because of you, I didn't get any last night."

The room spun as Fallon tried to concentrate. "I have to be sick." He sat up, looking for a receptacle of any sort.

"There's a bowl next to your head, Fal."

Fallon grabbed the bowl and vomited hot, blue bile. *What the hell did I drink last night? Oh, God.* He dry-heaved for about a minute to make sure his stomach was empty. Feyd passed him some tissue, and he blew his burning nose and threw the tissue in the bowl.

"The bathroom is over there. Go wash up. At least brush your teeth. I don't care how much she loves you, brush your damn teeth."

Fallon walked to the bathroom, emptied the bowl down the toilet, and flushed. He leaned against the counter for balance.

"Mate, you want me to run a shower? Bending down is not in the cards for me yet."

Fallon looked at the tiles, his head still swimming. "Is Astrid all right?" His first concern now was her. "What the hell happened?"

"Officially? All I know is that she asked Cash about your past, and you freaked out. You got drunk. You threatened the hell out of Batman. Then Morrison and I came and got you. We settled you down and took you here and put you to bed."

"And what about unofficially?" He tried to stand up straight and failed miserably.

"Unofficially? I sat with you after Morrison

went home. I couldn't make out most of what you were saying, but what I did get was bad. Fal, they are all dead, aren't they? If you ever need help, you know I've got your back in a second. You're my best friend. We're practically brothers."

Fallon held out a hand to stop him. "They are all dead, all of them. Dead and worse. Is Astrid all right?"

"She'll survive, but she's really shaken up. You think you'll make it to her, Fal?"

"Yeah, I'll have to."

"Are you sure? You don't have to. We'll leave right now. I don't want to leave Ashlyn, but I will. Fal, you don't have to relive that. Not if you don't want to."

"I did last night. Feyd, I can't leave her. You can't leave Ash. Don't say you'll do things you can't do. If she needs to know, then I'll tell her. She already knows everything Cash told her. I'm just going to explain things from my point of view, and hope that she understands."

"How could she not understand? She loves you. She wants to make you feel better, not have you deal with things by yourself. That's what couples do, deal with all the crazy shit together."

"Since when did you become such an expert?"

"As of today. Hanging out with Morrison has rubbed off on me. Go and make that sweet little witch of yours happy again. Have a shower. I'll get Ashlyn out of the way. Then you can...do what you're going to."

"Thanks, Feyd."

"Don't mention it. I don't mind keeping

Ash...occupied. You go deal with your demons, mate."

Fallon got out of the shower, feeling slightly cleaner than when he went in. He could feel a slight trembling in his normally rock-still body as he brushed his teeth again. Dressing was not in the cards as his clothes were all upstairs in the bedroom, so he wrapped a towel around his waist and headed to find Astrid. He padded barefoot up the stairs. He didn't want to shimmer to her for two reasons, the first being that he was still feeling the effects of the alcohol, and the second was that he wasn't about to intrude on her if she didn't want him there.

At the top of the stairs, he turned left and walked to the door at the end of the hall. He knocked gently on the door, listening to the sounds from behind it. He could hear gentle sobs coming from the room. *Oh God, what have I done?*

He opened the door and walked into the room, keeping his expression neutral. She sat in the middle of the bed, her eyes red and puffy. There were several used tissues scattered around the bed. She looked up at him, and his heart sank. She looked as if she hadn't slept all night.

How could I have done this to her? He remembered the night before quite clearly. Her asking the demon about his past. His feelings of betrayal leading him to the bottle, the trashed room, and the threats on George. He remembered hating her for making him relive his most painful days, for betraying him. But as he looked into her big, blue puffy eyes, none of that mattered to him.

She had never looked more beautiful to him. She cared for him. She loved him, and now she was crying because of him. *My beautiful, sad little angel. Now it's up to me to make her smile again.*

"Can I join you, vixen?"

She nodded and scooted over. He dropped the towel and slid under the covers, careful not to touch her. He still wasn't sure if she wanted him to. She looked tentatively at him and held his hand. He took this as his pass to touch her. He pulled her close to him and kissed her gently on her brow.

"I would never leave you, not even if you wanted me to," he reassured her. She smiled at him, a little watery, and he continued. "I'm a tricky guy to get rid of. Vixen. I don't know how much Casha told you, but I plan on telling you everything. So make yourself comfy, and we'll do this."

"Fallon, I never meant to hurt you. We don't have to do this. I don't have to know. I'll make some lunch, and we'll go over the recon you and Feyd have gathered."

She sat up and started to leave the bed. "Are you hungry? What do you want? I'll make anything."

The thought of food turned his still-queasy stomach. He appreciated the offer of a reprieve, but she had to know. He didn't want to keep it to himself anymore. He couldn't. It was killing him. The memories were eating him alive. If he left it now, he knew it would be years before he had the courage to tell her. He grabbed her arm and pulled her down onto the bed. He held her so that his naked body spooned hers.

"You ready?"

"Fal, you don't have to..."

"I know. I need to tell you. For me. If I don't tell you, then how can you help me through it?"

To that she had no answer, so she lay there and let him continue. Fallon mentally braced himself for the conversation ahead. He detached himself from the moment and began to tell his story.

"I don't remember my parents. I was too young when they died. I don't even remember their deaths. My father and his brother Raymond were drug dealers, dangerous people. My father met my mother, and she became pregnant with me. My father lavished affection on her, and by the time I was born, she had convinced him to stop running drugs. They cashed out. They took all the drugs they had and sold them for money; then we all fled to London.

"I was told that we lived there until I was four. Then Ray phoned my father up inviting us to a wedding. He was getting married. His fiancée was pregnant. He told them that he had gotten out of the game. He just wanted a family, like we had. I don't know why my father fell for it. From all the accounts I've heard, my father was a very intelligent man. So why he condemned us to that, I've no idea. Maybe he just wanted to believe that there was some good in that man. It's funny how drugs can take your soul faster than a Royal demon.

"Both of my parents died that day. For a long time, until I met you, I wished he had killed me, too. But he didn't. I don't know why, but that

bastard kept me alive. He made me suffer. His wife was pregnant with my little cousin, Alice. I got to raise her while they both injected their way into an early grave. Poor Alice. She was so sweet, this little blonde, blue-eyed angel. Her life was ruined before she was born.

"We were stuck with them. I took most of the beatings. Carla, the wife, knew a witch who healed us when we were too injured to heal ourselves or be of any use to them. We never had to go to a hospital. Nobody even knew we were being abused. I learned a very important lesson. Actually, I learned a lot of very important lessons. The main one being that people don't want to cause trouble for themselves. They'd sit in a room and watch a child being beaten almost to death, and all they'd do was avert their eyes—pretend it's not happening.

"Then one day, something happened, something I didn't understand. I must have been ten, maybe eleven. Carla started paying special attention to me. She was nice, and she was never nice. I should have known not to trust her, but when you're that age, you want to believe that everything's okay. To believe that the people who have been torturing you all your life will suddenly be nicer, change their wicked ways. Alice and I always liked to watch the films where that happened, where someone comes along and makes it all better. That's why I have that thing for cowboy films. The good guys always win, and the bad guys get what's coming to them.

"I often wondered what would have happened if I hadn't followed her into that room. Maybe

Raymond wouldn't have gotten the idea to turn pimp. But none of it matters now. I followed her, and she used me for her own pleasure, showed me what to do. I just wanted her to be nice to me, and she was...for a while. I did what she told me...showed me, and she was nice to both Alice and me. I didn't know it was wrong. I just wanted her to like me. God, I was such a trusting fool.

"Raymond caught us one day. He nearly killed me. He left me there on the floor, in a pool of my own blood, gasping for breath. I thought I was going to die. I wanted to die. He didn't let me. He brought Alice up, and he beat her and raped her in front of me. She was seven...it nearly killed her. My uncle was a large man in a little more than stature."

Fallon scrunched his eyes tight to try and ward off the memories. A lone tear escaped from his eye as he pulled Astrid tighter to him.

"That day changed everything. He set up a new business. For five years, he pimped us out to anyone with the money. We were forced to do things...to men and women. Once, he even had us work on each other. Most men like the idea of dominating a small boy. My pretty little angel of a cousin was no longer. She started on the drugs to numb the pain when she was twelve. I would have been sixteen. Soon after that, Ammit found me and my leash exchanged hands.

"She showed me how to take a soul. She showed me how to keep someone alive for weeks, how to cut them open just right. I killed Carla, slowly. Raymond was killed by his own drugged-up daughter. His little Alice turned on him, stabbed

him to death. Mutilated the body beyond recognition. Alice was beyond saving. I tried. We went our separate ways. I was sixteen and in the mood to enjoy my freedom, not clean up a twelve-year-old. I gave her money and left with Ammit.

"Little did I know that I was exchanging one kind of rape for another. Ammit promised me a lot of things. She took me places. I collected souls for her, for myself. I was good, one of the best. I collected for four years, doing things willingly for her that my uncle had forced me to do. Then one day we went to Russia. She had someone whose soul she had had her eye on. I was about to turn twenty. She took me to a crack den. The place was crawling with prostitutes.

"She pointed to a girl and a man. The man was getting what he paid for, really slapping her about. She just moaned convincingly, acting like she was loving it, really playing her part. He finished off and threw the money at the prostitute's junked-up form. When he moved off her, I saw my sweet little cousin, all bruised and beaten. The man shimmered to me and winked at Ammit before leaving. It was that moment that I started sticking up for myself. I decided that I was fed up, sick of being played with. Ammit nearly killed me. Her words were just as bad as the beating, but I'd taken beatings and harsh words before.

"Her words still haunt me. She told me that I'd never be free of Raymond, that when she took my soul...that I'd be back in that room for all eternity. Being beaten and raped by whomever she chose. Eventually she left, or I passed out. I haven't seen

her since. Alice was gone by the time I came to. I didn't look for her or try to find her. From what I saw, she was beyond help. Junkie whores don't live long. If the drugs didn't kill her, then the Russian winters would have.

"I killed a few people for money, collected souls for a while. I started stealing things to fence for cash. That's how Fallwell found me. He offered me a job. I got to eat regularly, so it was a bonus for me. He put me up with George and Feyd. Through Feyd, I met Lorna. I'd gut myself for that woman. She helped me, put me through counseling...of sorts. I was able to cope. I went looking for Alice, but I never found her. Then I met you, and somehow I knew everything was going to be all right."

As Fallon finished talking, he began to feel better. The weight of his past was off him. He began to see Arcady's point. Astrid could help him. She loved him, and they would get through the things they'd done together. But first, he knew, she had a story to tell him.

Astrid lay in Fallon's arms, tears running down her face. Her wonderful guy had been through so much. Her heart ached for him. Her sadness subsided as he spoke, quietly turning into anger. She could feel the tears running down his face, and her rage grew, angry that her strong, perfect man was breaking down. She cuddled closer to him, knowing he needed the comfort, knowing he needed her. He finished talking and sighed.

She was quiet for a time, knowing he was comforted just being with her. No matter what his

past, Fallon was a perfect man. Her soul mate. He deserved to be happy. All she wanted was to take away his pain.

“I’ll kill that bitch,” she whispered. “How dare she? I swear, Fallon, as Ishtar as my witness, I’ll make that fucking bitch pay.” She turned in his arms to face him. His naked body—his perfect body—was flush with hers. She looked into his eyes and kissed him fiercely, letting him know she meant every word she had said.

“Vixen, I didn’t know you were that bloodthirsty,” he said in a joking tone, but Astrid knew her words and actions had made him feel better about the situation.

“I’m only bloodthirsty when it comes to keeping you safe, cookie. And I mean everything I said.” She leaned closer for a small kiss, and her mouth was engulfed by his. He kissed her fiercely, and Astrid returned the favor, letting her body melt to his. She fit perfectly against him; it was her place in the world. Astrid never wanted to let go of her wonderful, strong, beautiful man. He was all she ever wanted.

The kiss ended, too soon in her eyes, but she knew that before they made up completely, she had to spill her secrets to him.

“Cookie...”

He pulled her closer and kissed the sweet spot on her neck, his hands pushing her robe off her shoulders and down her arms. He exposed her body to him, and she felt his wonderful warmth, skin on skin. She moaned into the moment, knowing Fallon would be relentless once she gave

in. He always made love to her as if it were the end of the world, as if there would be no tomorrow.

“Cookie,” she whispered again. “We still need to talk. I need to tell you things. Fallon? Oh, Fallon...” She moaned his name as his hand found her moist heat. Her body was more than ready for him.

Her hands slid over that taut body of his, the muscle rippling as he moved. To Astrid, Fallon was a god. To Fallon, Astrid knew, she was his salvation. Astrid knew there could be no secrets between them if they were to remain together.

“I want to, baby...Fallon.” She gasped as he nudged her legs apart and bent down to capture her tight nipple in his warm mouth. “Fal, baby, I can’t...I can’t until I tell you. It’s not right.” She moaned into his ear.

He stopped his ministrations and looked up at her frightened eyes. “Vixen, you’re right. Hold on.” He positioned himself between her legs. She looked at him as he rolled onto his back, pulling her on top of him.

“Nothing you’re gonna say is going to stop me from making love to you. I just want to be ready.”

“Don’t be so sure. Granted, my past is nowhere near as bad as yours, but it is something I am ashamed of.”

“Okay, let’s hear it. But I’m telling you, love, nothing you’re gonna say is gonna change anything.” He gave her a slight nudge with his hips, and she shivered and relaxed, knowing he loved her no matter what. The knowledge gave her the courage she needed. She sighed, and he kissed her

tenderly.

“Tell me, vix, I can take it,” he whispered against her mouth.

“I was ten when my parents died in a boating accident. It was me and Spinner, whose mother died a year before of cancer. It was just us. Spinner is my mother’s best friend’s daughter, so technically, she’s not my cousin. I was the baby. I didn’t understand why we were alone, but we were taken care of, by the clan and our nannies.

“When I was around sixteen, I started messing in some dark magic. Spinner was my partner, and together we sought out the dark goddess, Lilith. I fell out of favor with Ishtar in the years that followed.

“I was an acolyte of the dark goddess for four years, Fallon. I participated in and orchestrated blood sacrifices. I killed two innocents, two children. I don’t even remember their names. Once I had finally lost my virginity, something the dark goddess doesn’t urge you to do but will use once it’s done, I was made to participate in sexual rites. I was raped during an important one on Lilith’s orders by her only male priest, Harmon. It was then I realized that I was being used for my body and my strength by a petty goddess who didn’t love me. I wanted out. Spinner and I had been through so much because of our quest for knowledge of the dark arts, her more than me. The rape was the worst I suffered. Spinner...well, let’s just say that she’s damaged for good reason.

“When we were leaving the dark goddess’ service, doing the severing ritual, Lilith cursed me.

She wanted a child from me and Harmon, which is why I was raped by him. He had tried to seduce me before, but I wanted no part of him. She took my ability to have children because I had not cooperated with her wishes. I can still hear the words in my head: 'If not for me, then for no one. You shall never create life, unless you return to me.'

"I killed Harmon that night, out of spite for the goddess. She still mourns that fucking prick to this day. I watched him bleed to death, tugging at the wounds, giving him major pain, as payment for what he did to Spinner and me. I swore no one would hurt me again.

"The next day I found out that I had ovarian cancer, and the doctors said having a child was impossible." She sobbed as tears streamed from her eyes. Fallon kissed them away.

She gave him a wan smile and continued. "I prayed to Ishtar, begged her to take us back, me and Spinner. I begged her to take the curse from me. She welcomed us both back to her love, and while she couldn't take the curse away, she now holds dominion over my soul so that no one may possess it and take advantage of me once more. I'm safe. But, I'm sorry, baby. I can't have children. I'm so sorry."

Fallon kissed her sweetly. "That's your secret? Don't worry. It's okay." He hugged her close as she cried for a future she'd never thought of 'til now.

"I don't care about any of it. I have you, vixen. You're all I need. Please, stop crying love. Could you see me as a daddy?"

"I could. You'd make a wonderful, protective

daddy.” She started to cry again.

“Shh. Don’t think on it. I love you, Astrid. None of it matters. I’m your baby. I’m never leaving.”

She kissed him hard, her way of telling him she believed him. She wiggled her hips on top of him, and in one motion he flipped her over and entered her tight body. The tears streamed down both their faces as they made love, softly and beautifully. He took his time with her, loving her, letting her love him. She healed him with her words, and she healed him with her actions. This was the first time it had been tender for them, the first time it wasn’t driven by wanting. Astrid gasped as she held him, enjoying his body and the slow, sweet love he was making to her.

They came together in one shuddering moment. It was then he whispered in her ear, “Marry me, Astrid.”

The words had slipped out, but they sounded right. There was no desperate need to take them back. He truly wanted this, her. She was silent for a moment. *Come on, vix. It shouldn't have been a hard question to answer. Say yes...be my wife.*

She looked at him, tears in her eyes, and smiled. “What? You mean it?”

“Of course I do, Astrid. Marry me. Please?” He looked imploringly at her, his eyes searching hers.

“Oh, my god, yes! Yes, Fallon, I’ll marry you!” She grabbed him tight and cried, kissing him.

He let out a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding. “Oh, baby, thank you. You just made me the happiest man on earth.”

“You’re happy? Fallon, trust me, all my dreams

just came true," she all but squealed.

"Yeah? You dream about me? What kinda dreams?" he asked her teasingly.

She smiled at him. "Cookie, all my dreams involve you. Always have."

"As it should be. I hope that we've acted them all out."

"We have now. You sure you mean it?" She looked up into his eyes.

Laughing, he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her. "I've never been more sure about anything in my life. Plus, Feyd's always wanted to be a bridesmaid," he joked, trying to lighten the mood. "Or was it fuck a bridesmaid?"

"I'm sure it was fuck a bridesmaid. Feyd in a dress...scary. His legs are way too hairy." She laughed, all of her uncertainty vanishing.

"Yeah, and he could never pull off the hat. He just doesn't have the facial structure."

"Very true." She giggled and kissed him, snuggling closer. "So, what's on the agenda today, love? Ring shopping?"

"Yeah, sounds perfect. Anything in particular that you had in mind?"

"Something different. Something that says forever."

"Well, in my line of work, rings tend to get in the way. I'd hate to lose a finger, and won't metal ruin your spells?" he asked with something special in mind.

"Quite true, although I do want an engagement ring. I was thinking tattoos. And then I'd be Mrs. Fallon Ipwhisk forever."

Damn, you always stay one step ahead of me.
"My thoughts exactly." He kissed her again. "So, we'll get you a big shiny engagement ring today. Yes?"

"It doesn't have to be huge, Fallon." She giggled and kissed his nose. "So, darling, I was thinking, we could find little Alice. I mean, if she's still alive, that is. If you want."

"I appreciate the thought, vix, but she can't be still alive. I did look for her." He frowned remembering his sweet little cousin as she first was, beautiful and carefree. A true innocent.

"Did you have a witch by your side? It's a simple enough spell. What's the harm in trying?" she reasoned.

"No, no harm, I suppose. She'll be dead, though. She was too far gone to have come out of it. When I last saw her...she was bad. If she's not dead, then she'd be better off dead. She wasn't living. It's..." He sighed. "I don't know. I left her like that." His voice trailed off as he pushed away the familiar feeling of guilt.

"So, let's try then. Okay?" Her voice was soothing and gentle. "I know you feel responsible, but if we find her, we can help her."

"Sure. Thanks, love." He nodded, gaining resolve. "What do you need?"

"Just you, a map, and a tiny bit of your blood." She got off the bed and threw on her robe. "Meet me in the library. I gotta find my athamé."

"Sounds almost too easy."

"Cookie, come on, now. I might never have worked a spell in front of you, but trust me, okay?"

There are reasons why Casha wants me as a sorceress."

"I trust you. Does it call for ritual sex?" he joked, this time failing to lighten the mood. He swallowed hard. *Oh god, what if we find her?*

"This spell? No, baby, it doesn't. It just calls for us to touch each other. But if you want, I can work a spell later that calls for it." She grinned at him and winked as she walked out of the room.

"Sure. Let's see if we can find my little Alice first, yeah?" he called after her as he got up and started toward the closet to look for clothes.

"Of course, cookie. Meet me in the library," she shouted back before she was out of hearing range.

He found his jeans and shimmered to the library, standing in the darkened room with his thoughts.

She rummaged through her ritual trunk in her sanctuary, looking for the rowan wood box where she kept her athamé. The athamé had been in the Buchamps family for seven generations, and this was its last owner. The thought made her a little sad. She cursed her luck and wished there was some way she could give Fallon the family he deserved.

Since she couldn't, she would just have to settle for finding the only family left in the world. Little Alice. *Maybe Casha can help me with the baby thing.* Seems a long shot, but still, I'll have to ask him. She found the box and opened it, careful not

to cut herself on the sharp edge of the box's metal clasp. The last time she had used her athamé was the night she severed ties with Lilith, and since then she had come full circle. She had people to care about again, and people that cared about her. Hell, she was even going to be sorceress to one of the most powerful demons in the entire Eververse. *And a wife. I'm going to be a wife, Fallon's wife. How the hell did this happen? I never thought this would happen. I get to have him for my own, alone, forever. I can't believe it's all falling into place.* She kissed the hilt of the blade and turned, leaving her sanctuary and heading down the hall.

The library was dark when she entered, the glittering silver knife in her left hand. She saw Fallon standing at the mahogany desk and smiled when he looked at her. She crossed the room to him and wrapped her hands around his waist. She breathed him in, loving his unique scent, the faint sweetness of sugar cookies, something that was strictly Fallon. She looked up to him and smiled. "Ready? Thanks for pulling the map out. Have you seen those fire opals I had in here the other day?"

"Yeah, I'm ready." He took a deep breath, steadying himself. "No, I haven't seen them. Why? Are they important?"

"Yeah, I need them as markers." She left his side, went into the desk drawers, and pulled out a bright blue suede bag. "Ah! Found them! Okay, touch them for me. Make them warm, okay?"

"Sure, I can do that." He took them from her.

"Okay. Here's the deal. I cut your finger, and you smear a bit of your blood on each one, and then

place them where you think she might be on the map. Pretty easy, right?"

"Where I think she might be?"

"Yeah, I mean, like the last place she was when you saw her, and other places you think she might be. Hold on, this might hurt." She pricked his index finger on his right hand with a hat pin she had in the drawer and kissed it, his blood lightly coating her lip. "So, set the opals up."

"Okay. Sure thing, sweetness. Will you be able to tell if she's dead? Or will it just show where her body is?"

"It will show where she is. If the glow is strong, she is alive. If she's not, well, then, the glow will be very weak. But let's not think that. You finished?" She watched him place the last of the fire opals on the map.

"Yup. So what happens now?"

She moved off to his right and put his hands on her shoulders. "Okay, stay behind me, and don't break contact. I have to tap into Ishtar's powers, and it's not gonna feel good for you. But don't break contact, okay?"

"You got it, vixen."

She took a steadying breath and stilled. Fallon had no idea that not only was he going to be her grunder but her conduit as well. Usually she used Linus as her ground, and her athamé as her conduit, but with a spell this personal, she needed him more than ever. She moved her arms out toward the map and started the incantation, keeping it a very low volume as not to freak Fallon out by what she was saying. Heaviness pervaded

the room as she spoke, and the telltale warmth of the goddess' power filled her. She knew this power would feel extremely painful for Fallon as Ishtar didn't like demons all that much, but she pressed on quickly, for Fallon's sake.

"Cookie, don't move. Are you okay?"

"There's a slight buzzing, love," he said through gritted teeth. "Can we move it along?"

She nodded as she said the last of the incantation and felt the full measure of power flow into her. She was glad Fallon couldn't see her eyes because she knew they had turned black with the goddess' power. She spoke Alice's full name, as Fallon had told her, and sent the magic out over the stones and heard a very audible sigh coming from Fallon as the magic left him, also.

"Not good with a hangover. How did it go?"

The stones all glowed at first and slowly started to die out. Astrid was almost heartbroken as she watched them, one by one, go out. France, England, India, Japan, and Germany. She sighed and then noticed a bright stone in Russia, still glowing with the original power. She gasped. "Fallon, I think we found her."

"We have? Where? Is she okay?"

She pointed to the only glowing stone, turned in his arms, and smiled. She whispered, "Russia. Baby, I think we found her." She thanked the goddess as she felt the power completely leave her and looked up to Fallon, sure that her eyes were back to normal.

"And is she okay? She's alive?"

"The stone still glows. Fuck, really bright, too."

Yeah, she's alive. Damn, really alive." She watched as the opal gained in brilliance and then shattered. She and Fallon both fell to the floor to avoid the shrapnel. "Fuck, baby, she's still alive, all right. Wonder why it shattered? So, what do you wanna do about this? Should I tell Casha?"

"I don't know," he said in shock. "Should it have exploded like that? Was that a good sign?"

"Who knows? Look, baby, if she's still in the same line of work, Cash's brother Dimitri will be able to find her. At the very least, he might have a girl that knows where she is."

"Yeah, yeah. Good thinking. You tell him, for me. I'll...I don't know. Arcady owes me one. He'll be looking for an excuse to get away, anyway. I'll ask him to go. He'll find her."

"Okay. You talk to Arcady. I'll get a hold of Casha. Deal?"

"Yeah, deal. Thanks, Ast, this means...so much."

"No worries, baby. Let's get our shit done and get going, okay?"

She hugged him and smiled then gathered up the map and the stones and put everything away while he was still standing in shock. She kissed him, and they left through the door, each on a different mission for the afternoon, before they left to find her engagement ring.

Spinner stepped off the plane expecting Arcady to meet her. Instead, her phone rang. "You got

Spinner.”

“Ah, finally. What happened? You touched down a half hour ago.” It was Arcady, and her heart leaped.

“Blame Customs. I think the Guards wanted to strip-search me, but they didn’t dare. Where are you? I thought you were going to meet me here.”

“Sorry, sweetness. Something came up. I had to take care of stuff here for Al. It’s too late to come get you, love. I set up a room for you at the Holiday Inn across the street. I’ll be there to get you in the morning, okay? I’m really sorry, but it was an emergency, Spin.”

Spinner held back tears as she listened to Arcady, feeling cast aside, and not for the first time that week. She hid it well, though. “No problem, hon. I understand things come up, you know? I’ll go to the room and soak in the tub. You did get me a suite, didn’t you?” she asked hopefully, thinking of the tub being large and able to support her tall frame.

“Of course. Just the best for my favorite girl.”

Favorite girl? That’s debatable. Maybe the favorite girl of this week, surely of the minute, but I’m not going past that. She listened to the information Arcady gave her.

“Okay, hon. I’ll call you in the morning, and you can tell me what time you’ll be by to get me. And don’t worry, Arc. I won’t run up too much of a room service bill.”

“Spin, love, do what you will. Run up a billion dollars if you want. It’s taken care of. But I’ve got to go. Fallon and Feyd are coming to get me for some

recon. Call Astrid, okay? She's worried since she hasn't spoken to you in a while."

"Will do, love. Talk to you tomorrow. Give Fallon a squish for me."

"Spin, I'm so not giving Fallon anything. He'd gut me. Love ya, babe." Arcady signed off before Spinner could say good-bye.

Typical Arcady. *I wonder how the hell Astrid got back in touch with Fallon? Hmm, this is worth looking into.* She scrolled through her contacts until she came to Astrid's cell phone and hit send. Astrid answered on the second ring.

"Spinner? That you, hon?"

"Yeah, Ast, it's me. I just got in. Arcady ditched me, so I'm on my way to the hotel. Why didn't you come and get me? You have a car."

"Sorry, hon. Fallon doesn't think it's wise for me to leave the mansion, me or Ash, so I'm under house arrest until they take care of George."

Ah, no doubt that's why I was called in.

Fucking bait. Figures. Arcady was being too nice. She listened as Astrid prattled on. "Spinner, I have something to tell you. Fallon asked me to marry him. Isn't that great? He was actually serious, too."

Spinner almost dropped her phone. "Fallon, what? It's been a year since you saw him, Astrid! And now he just shows back up, and it's all 'marry me' bullshit? Ast, that doesn't sound like Fal."

"I know, but I'll have to tell you the story later. Well, most of the story."

"Why don't you tell me the story now, cuz? I'm rather interested in how you got the world's most sexy and eligible bachelor to fall for you." She

chuckled half-heartedly as Astrid ran through a half-assed story of what had recently happened, and Spinner felt her stomach sink. She'd had no idea Astrid was pining for Fallon, but then again most of the world's women were pining for Fallon. Astrid had managed to do the impossible and snag him, and of that, Spinner was extremely jealous. "That's awesome, Ast. I'm really happy for you. And yeah, I will be one of your bridesmaids. Who is giving you away?"

"Cash. Um, you remember him, don't you?"

Christ how could I forget? I'm still walking funny. How the hell did she shack up with the demon prince? "Remember him? Christ, Ast. No woman forgets Cash. Why is he giving you away?"

"Because I asked him. He's a good friend, and I'm going to say yes to being his sorceress. So, it was only right."

Inwardly, Spinner was seething. How the hell did she manage that? I swear, Astrid is a very lucky girl. It's not fair. Fallon and Cash, and Cash's sorceress? How's this possible? "Wow, Astrid, you have been busy." She tried to keep her venom out of her voice. "So, how's Linus?"

They chatted a bit more, and once Spinner got to her room, she told Astrid that she was in need of a long, hot soak and that she was going to go. Astrid was quick to sign off, stating she needed to get things finished at the mansion. "Oh, and Fallon will be online later, I think, if you wanna say hi, I'm sure he'd love to hear from you, girl."

Yeah, what I got to say to him is gonna make him forget all about you, dear cousin. I think I

deserve my shot at Fallon. He was receptive to me before; he will be again. “Sure thing. Probably later, after I soak. I’ll talk to you tomorrow. Have a good one, cuz. Love you.”

“Love you, too, Spin. Enjoy your soak, girl.”

Astrid signed off, and Spinner was so angry she could scream. No, I won’t give her the satisfaction. No, I’m going to get something out of this. The question is how. She went into the bathroom of her suite, saw a big tub in the middle of the room, and gave a silent prayer of thanks to Ishtar. *At least I can get a nice, hot soak*, she thought as she stripped her clothes off and turned the water on. *And then, after that’s done, I’ll start working on Fallon.*

Chapter Sixteen

Fallon was still in shock when he went in search of Morrison. Alice was alive. *I wonder if she cleaned up. She could be married, with kids. I could have family. She's alive. I do have family. I could be an uncle.* He shimmered back up to the room and threw on a shirt. Maybe she cleaned up and then stayed there, running a shelter. She was so sweet, the type that could get away with being like that.

An image of her as he last saw her flashed in his mind. *Well, at least she's alive and strong, Ast said. We'll help her. She'll be that little angel again.* He picked up his cell and dialed Morrison's number.

"Morrison."

"It's Fal. Where are you?" he asked, pacing the room.

"If you have to ask that question, then I'm not going to answer you. Where the hell do you think I am? Oh, and Spinner's in. I gotta get her tomorrow," Morrison answered, sounding more than a little pissed off at having to allocate time to the woman.

"I know where you are. I want to know what room you're in. I'm coming over."

"Cole's room. She just left to go tanning. I have to get the other room ready for tonight."

"Yeah? For Spin? Does that mean that you have to spend your nights with her?" Fal asked as he shimmered into the room, hanging up his phone.

"Not for Spin, for Ash. Tonight the deal's going down. Me and Ash, Feyd and Al. It's all wired. I told Spinner something came up, and I'd get her tomorrow. She's at a hotel near the airport. I'm surprised she hasn't called you. She call Asty yet?"

"No clue. Why would she call me? I never answer. She just rubs me the wrong way," Fal said frowning. He really disliked Astrid's attention-seeking cousin. She and Astrid had always had a rocky relationship, and anybody that made Astrid cry would never be a friend in his books. Plus, she always came onto him strong, sitting on his knee, trying to pet him. He hated to be treated like that. Just because he was male didn't mean that he would fuck any hole that showed interest.

Morrison chuckled. "Oh, believe me, she'd like to. I mean she digs me, but she's got it bad for you."

"I'll bet. I'm sure she'll be glad to hear that I'm marrying her cousin," Fallon said wryly. Spinner would spit nails when she found out.

"Exactly." Morrison smiled. "Don't be surprised if she gets a bit odd the next few days. So, what do you need? I mean, you never just shimmer over, so what's up?"

"I need a favor," Fal said sheepishly.

"Obviously. What would that be? Someone else killed?"

"No," he said hurriedly. "Well, not that I know

of. I need you to find someone for me. It'll get you out of Spinner's reach."

"Fuck, if I have to search the deserts of Arabia, I'll do it. Who and where?"

Fallon took a deep breath. *This isn't gonna be fun.* "She's my little cousin. Her name's Alice, and I think she's in Russia."

Arcady winced. "Russia? Shit, I think there's a price on my head there. Wait, did you just say cousin? Fal, I didn't know you had family. What's she doing in Russia?"

"You? A price on your head? Never," he mocked, hoping to delay the next sentence a little longer. "Umm, yeah. I don't...well, there's her. Little Alice. She...I...well, I don't know what she's doing there, but I've got a good idea. The last time I saw her she was in a bad way. Y'know, drugs, prostitution. But she could be straight now. She's alive." He finished, looking at Morrison, hoping that he had given enough information. *Please don't make me tell you how I left her, twice. How I gave a junked-up twelve-year-old a grand and sent her out to make a life for herself.*

"Alive? Fal, you know me. I would love to help. But, it's Russia. Last time I was there, I barely made it out by the skin of my teeth."

"What happened?" Fal asked, curiosity getting the better of him. People didn't just fuck around in Russia.

"Let's not talk about that. I can't help you, mate. I'm sorry"

Fallon sighed. "I hate to do this, but you owe me, and this is how you're going to pay me back."

He lowered his tone making it threatening. He hated to have to call in the favor, but it had to be done. Alice had to be found. "Casha will talk to Dimitri on your behalf. You'll go, and you'll find her, skin of your teeth or not."

Morrison sighed. "Knew you were going to play that card. Okay, fine, as long as I'm not going to be hunted when I'm on a rescue mission, I suppose it's cool. Who's gonna deal with Spin while I'm away?"

It was Fallon's turn to sigh. "I'll think of something fun for Spin to do. I'm sure you won't be hunted too badly. This means a hell of a lot to me."

"I know. So, tomorrow, eh? I mean, I have to pick Spin up at the airport tomorrow afternoon, so make the flight for the evening."

"Okay, sounds good. Thanks, mate. You find her, and I'll owe you," he promised.

Morrison shook his head. "No, I find her, and we are even. A loved one for a loved one. You helped me with Electra. I'll help you with Alice."

Fallon smiled weakly at him. *Yeah, but I knew and loved Electra. Everyone who knew your twin did, mate. You don't know my Alice.*

"Okay, just don't get yourself killed. Ast would never let me hear the end of it. Then I'd still have to find somebody stupid enough to go to Russia."

"Can do, mate. Oh, and congrats on the engagement. Feyd told me."

"Yeah, I got that by the total lack of surprise. I think he's been telling everyone." *Damn Feyd.*

"Dante already thinks I'm getting married." *Damn Feyd again.* "There will be nobody left for me to tell." *Just wait 'til it's his turn.* "What did you do in

Russia? People don't normally want you dead, just out of their way. Killing you would just make you worse, so what did you do?" he asked, really wanting to know.

Morrison sighed. "Brought some girls over for Al. The syndicate there isn't happy with me, something about stealing their girls. Funny, they were Succubus, and they belong to Cam, so how was I in the wrong?"

"Syndicate? As in Dimitri? Fuck! You stole his girls? Shit, you know what he does to people that mess with his business. Not even Fallwell operates in Russia," Fallon said, not believing that his friend would do such a thing as mess with Dimitri. His ruthlessness in protecting his territory was well-known.

"Hence the reason I didn't wanna go to Russia, dolt! But a bargain is a bargain. Speaking of which, get the hell outta here. I got a lot to do before I get to play with Ashlyn."

Fallon laughed at Morrison's eagerness. *I suppose if it was me, I'd be pretty eager as well. Ash is hot.* "Okay. I'll talk to you tomorrow. It's appreciated."

"No problems, mate. You're like my brother. I'll see ya."

Smiling, Fallon shimmered out of the room and went in search of Astrid.

Her cell phone in hand, Astrid went out to the back patio and found Linus lying in the sun. She

bent down, and he came to her, snuffling and slobbering on her hand. *Dirty puppy*, she thought as she shook the dirt and the grass from the backyard off his back. She knew Fallon was out with Arcady, talking about Russia, so it was her turn to hold up her end of the bargain. She dialed Casha's number and waited, hoping he'd actually pick up and not send her to voicemail. He picked up.

"Casha, he proposed!" She couldn't even believe how excited she sounded. She bit her lip, waiting for him to say something, anything.

"Do you have any idea what time it is over here? You're talking about Fallon, I assume."

Ah, shit. Damn time difference. I have been in the states way too long. "Yes, Casha, I'm talking about Fallon! Who else would I be talking about? And yeah, I know what time it is over there, but you hardly seem the type to be sleeping."

Casha sighed. "Yeah, I do sleep from time to time. So, how is Fallon? Not lying to you anymore, I hope. You ready to run away with me yet, pumpkin?"

"No, things are fine, darling. He told me everything. It was a bit rocky there for a bit, but we are okay now. And yes, Cash, I'd love to be your sorceress."

"I hope I didn't cause too much trouble. So, you're taking me up on my offer? I thought you might. What are your terms, love?"

"My terms? Well, how's this? I keep my soul. Sorry, love, but I can't get it for you, not with everything that's happened. I want Fallon, Feyd,

and Ashlyn's souls, and I want us to be equals, Casha. No master and slave thing, and I want the power to protect him."

"Don't want much do you? You're underestimating your worth, love."

"Casha, I'm doing this for him, to be able to help him and you. I want them all safe. I don't want them ever going to the halls. Ooh, ooh! And I want to be able to visit the Afterverse."

"Don't we all. Help me go back home and get that bastard's throne. Do that, and I'll give you anything you wish, within reason."

"I think we can arrange that. You agree to my terms? Now, what about the binding?" Astrid knew the different ways through a binding but was only interested in one. A year or so back, her cousin Spinner had the distinct pleasure of an evening with Casha and has never once let Astrid forget that she hadn't had the pleasure herself.

"Ah, the fun part."

"Well?" She hoped he would suggest the sexual binding, was silently praying that he did. It wasn't the fact of infidelity; it was mostly because a demon that was bound sexually with their Sorcerer had a deeper connection with them. The power was more potent, and the bonds that bound them would be harder to sever. She knew that with Casha, this might be a bad thing, as he was an exile and all, but she had always felt close to him and wanted him in the worst way.

"It would be a waste to not find out what Spinney had. Cash? Why is it that you never made a pass at me?"

"Because I knew you were far too clever for a one night stand with yours truly."

Wow, he knew I'd want more, didn't he? I should have known. I mean he is a demon. "Oh. Well, that's a compliment, isn't it? Thanks for thinking so highly of me, Casha."

"You're welcome."

"So? What's the decision?"

"Decision? With what, the binding? I wouldn't do a non-sexual binding. Well, that's what you can tell your fiancé."

Score! If I'm going to have a fling before I'm committed to Fallon, I can't think of anyone better to spend my last night with. She grinned, happy to hear that he did, in fact, want her.

"And that will have to do, won't it? I'm sure he won't have a problem with it. Wait, who am I kidding? He will. I think you'll have to talk to him about that yourself. But wait 'til you're here for that, okay? So, a sexual binding is what we'll do. Think you can handle me, there, demon?"

"I hope not. I do love a wild one."

"Always a smooth talker, but let's get back to that when you're here. If I know Fallon, if he does agree to this, it's gonna be a one time thing. I'd rather get all hot and bothered when I know I'll have a chance to take care of it with you. I called for another reason."

"Oh you did, did you?"

Crap. Nothing worse than a suspicious demon. "Yeah, darling, I need a favor."

Casha sighed. "This whole master/servant thing is going to swing the other way a lot, isn't it?"

What is it?"

"I found Fallon's only living relative. It's his cousin, Alice. She's in Russia, and he's sending Arcady to find her. Could you talk to Dimitri for me? I mean, she was a working girl last he saw her, and if she still is, Dimitri should know where she is, right?"

"Arcady's going to Russia?" Casha laughed.

"Yeah, Fallon's asking him to find Alice."

"Okay. You want me to talk D into granting him free passage and handing over...Alice, who is Fallon's cousin. You don't want much, do you? I haven't spoken to my brother in years."

"Please, Casha? For me?"

"Okay, I'll see what I can do. Expect me tomorrow."

"Okay, darling. And Cash?" She couldn't help herself.

"Yes?"

"I am looking forward to that binding. Do you know how many years I have fantasized about having you in my bed?"

"I have a pretty good idea, pumpkin."

So, he wasn't always totally clueless. "Yeah, I bet you do. See you tomorrow. And thanks, Cash."

"I would say no bother, but it is going to be a bother. A really big one, plus now I'm going to have to put up with Dimitri's whining. It's always dangerous going to Russia. The last time I was there I caught a blade in my back."

"If you get a knife in the back this time, I'll heal you, darling. I owe you, Casha." She hung up and sighed, trying to figure out why all of a sudden the

cosmos had decided to grant her all her wishes. Maybe it's getting out on good behavior for time served. *Either way, I know at one point or another I'm screwed in the long run. I'm going to have to pay for this, all of this, and soon.*

Her thoughts changed from bleak to wanting as she remembered she had to meet Fallon in the pool room for some 'lessons.' She smirked when she thought of it. The only lessons she would be getting that night, if she had her way, would be how to give a sex show seventy-five feet in the air. She scratched Linus' ear as he sat next to her. She stood and walked into the house, toward the main staircase and up to the pool room to wait, as she had no clue how long it was going to take Fallon to convince Arcady to go to Russia.

He took his time climbing the stairs. He didn't want to rush. He'd been planning this for a while and didn't want to ruin it all now. By now, she'll be up there waiting. He had originally planned to be fifteen minutes late, but his impatience had made him speed up. He was seven minutes late. At the top of the stairs, he took a moment for one last check in his bag of tricks and headed for the pool room.

"Fal, wait up."

Fallon looked over at Feyd, who was at the bottom of the stairs. Shit. He turned around and met Feyd at the bottom, shimmering this time.

"What? I'm in a rush. Why are you two still in

the house? I thought we agreed on you two pushing off to Pinky's."

Feyd's eyes widened. "Shit, mate, that was tonight? Oh God, we're..."

"Don't try to pull that crap with me, Feyd. Not even you could forget an evening with Alcyone. Plus, Ash has been talking about fucking Morrison for days now. You're a brave man, letting her go with him. So, why are you late?"

Feyd frowned at the thought of Ashlyn and Arcady then shrugged it off.

"Ash is doing the finishing touches on her makeup. That, and finishing her bottle of wine. I think she opened it last night."

Fallon shook his head. "She does drink a lot. More than me, anyway. Why? What's her story? Before Mallory. What does she need to escape so much?"

"Fuck if I know. I think it's kinda like a hobby for her. Her past isn't as bad as...others. I don't think she gets on with her family, but they are all still alive, as far as she knows."

"As far as she knows?" Fal raised an eyebrow in question. Feyd shrugged.

"I don't think she cares either way. Strange, I don't think I could ever be like that."

"Yeah, we all know how great Lorna is. When is she coming over? Have you told her about you and Ashlyn yet?"

"Nope, it's gonna be a surprise. She knows about your marriage plans. I swear, she nearly dropped the phone; then she started crying. I think they were happy tears."

Fallon grinned, seeing an opening to wind his friend up, but Ash chose that moment to join them in the hallway. She looked stunning. Fallon had never really been a leg man, but anyone, male or female, had to appreciate Ash's legs. They were perfectly shaped in all the right places, and they went on forever. Morrison would have his work cut out for him tonight.

"I take it you like?" Ash looked up at him, her big green eyes pleading him to say yes.

Fallon nodded. "Yes, you look...amazing."

Ashlyn grinned at the compliment then frowned at the paper bag in his hands. "You better get up there, mister. How long ago were you meant to meet her? She's been up there for a while, something about impatient people being early."

Fallon jumped and checked his watch. Damn Feyd. Seventeen minutes late. He waved at them as he shimmered to the pool room door. *I hope they have as good a time as I will...if I'm still in the good books.*

"You're late, cookie," was the first thing he heard as he walked into the room. Astrid was sitting on the couch, her legs crossed and her arms folded. Fallon took something out of the bag, then set it down, and knelt down in front of her, looking up into her eyes pitifully.

"I'm sorry, vixen. Forgive me?" He pouted slightly, giving her puppy eyes as he took her bare foot into his hand and began to gently massage it.

She made a small noise of pleasure. "I can never stay mad at you." She looked to the bag and raised an eyebrow. "Did you bring me toys?"

He lifted her foot up to his mouth and placed a kiss on it then grinned at her.

"I might have, but they are for later. Feyd was telling me about Lorna coming over. He and Ashlyn just left. Have you been keeping yourself amused in my absence?" He looked to the pool table. The balls had been haphazardly set up, and the cue stick was lying on the table.

She followed his gaze and shrugged. "Not really. I really can't play. I tried setting them up."

"Would you like me to show you, vixen?"

"Sure, why not?"

They both went to the table, and he started to set up the balls. "You see, it's different for different games. We'll start with Eight Ball. It's arranged like this." He moved the colored balls around in the rack. "The black one goes in the middle—that's the eight ball. In the bottom corners, you have one stripe and one solid. The rest just go in at random. Got it so far?" He looked up, and she nodded convincingly, even though he knew she was looking at his ass. He finished setting up the balls and stood behind her, holding the cue thoughtfully.

"Have you ever held a pool cue in your hands before?"

"Yeah, I kinda know how to play, just not well."

He threaded the cue through her hands and showed her how to hold it correctly. He leaned her forward slightly, and she moved back against him, her bare legs smooth against the roughness of his

jeans. He took a few shots, guiding her hands to where they should be. A few balls went in, but Astrid let go of the cue, placing her hands where she thought they should be. She turned around in the circle of his arms and kissed along his jawline.

"Cookie," she whined, pouting her lip at him.

He let the cue fall to the floor and looked at her, a question in his eyes. "Vixen?"

"I want you, now. Give my body the attention that it craves."

Typical demanding vixen. I love you for it.

Letting his amusement show in his eyes, he bent down to her and gently bit the soft mound of flesh just at the top of her breast. She arched into him, and he pulled back.

"Je vous aime, la vixen."

"I love you, too, and I love it when you speak French." She jumped on him, wrapping her legs around him. One of his hands automatically went to the small of her back to support her while the other slid under the hem of her dress and tucked something into her panties, making sure that it went where he wanted it to go and stayed there. She moaned into his mouth and grabbed hands full of his hair, pulling her self higher up onto him.

"Take me now," she murmured into his mouth.

He bumped her higher up onto him so that her molten heat was centered on the bulge of his trousers. She tightened her legs, forcing what little space there was between them to lessen. He groaned as his cock began to protest its imprisonment. She was the only one that could do this to him. Force his hand and make him lose

control. He pulled a slender control out of his pocket and switched it to low. She pulled back from the crushing kiss and looked at him, blinking in surprise, taking a moment to figure out where the vibrating sensation she felt was coming from. He grinned and flicked the dial up higher, and she collapsed moaning in his arms.

"Do you like that?"

"Yes. Oh, God...Fallon, please." He moved the dial down a little and set her on her feet.

"I want you to stand on your own, vix. You got me?" Not waiting for an answer, he went to the bag and pulled out a silk scarf. He walked back to her, concealing the piece of silk from her view.

"Now, close your eyes."

He tied the silk scarf over her eyes and kissed the back of her neck. "Now I don't want you to move. If you move from that spot, you will be punished. Understood?"

She nodded weakly then licked her lips and answered hoarsely. "Yes. Understood. Good punished or bad punished?"

He chuckled into the base of her neck. *Typical vixen.* "Bad, vixen. Very bad. I'll tie you up on top of the table and tease you, giving you enough pleasure to keep you aroused. But no more than that. I'll fuck you with my tongue but not my dick. I'll bring you to the brink but never over it. I'll do that for hours and hours, until I'm satisfied that you have been suitably punished."

She tried to lean into him, but he danced out of the way. "That doesn't sound so bad. Besides you're always impatient when it comes to me," she purred.

He laughed silently and shook his head. Instead of answering her, he flicked the control to high. Her knees buckled instantly. He watched as she caught herself on the table. "Understood, vixen?" he asked, the amusement clear in his voice.

She whimpered and nodded again. He stepped in close to her, peeling her dress straps away from her shoulders to reveal her breasts. He rolled her already hard nipples in his calloused hands before shimmering to the other side on the table, leaving her standing there alone and exposed.

He looked at her from across the table. She would do anything he wanted. She stood there, a slight tremor running through her whole body, using both her hands on the pool table to steady herself. Her large, perfect breasts shuddered with every uneven breath she took. The black silk scarf was doing its job; she had no idea where he was. The room was silent. The only noise was that of the small vibrator resting gently on her clit.

Grinning, he shimmered behind her and lightly stamped his foot to make a noise. She jumped and turned her head toward him, her hands still grasping at the table for support. He shimmered back to his original position and watched her. He loved to watch her like this and loved knowing that he caused it. The way her body trembled with uncertainty, the heat that he knew would be in her blue eyes once the silk was removed. Just the very sight of her, her face turned away from him, her body straining to be touched, made him want to go to her and end it, but he held back. It took a hell of a lot more effort, but he wasn't done playing yet.

"Did I ever tell you about Miami?"

Her head jerked around. "No. Come over hear and tell me." Her voice was breathy, and the smile she was wearing promised him everything. She was enjoying herself as he knew she would be.

He walked around the table to once again stand behind her. He grasped her hips with his strong hands and guided her back, so her ass was flush against his now-throbbing cock. Nuzzling the back of her neck, he growled into her satin-like flesh. He inhaled her scent and sighed it out onto her bare shoulders, provoking a shudder from her.

"I love the smell of you when you're hot for me. Did you know that? Normally, you smell like fresh green apples, but when you're turned on, you smell and taste like the ripest red apple I've ever seen, just ready to be eaten. Did you know that?" He slipped his hand under her short dress and slid her wet panties down her legs. The vibrator fell uselessly to the floor, its purpose having been served. He kept his fingers on her, not doing anything more than holding her, letting her wetness seep out onto his hand. She wiggled at the contact but clearly wanted more.

"Miami, cookie?"

"Yes, vixen. Miami. It was a few years ago before I had the pleasure of knowing you. I was invited to watch by four...interesting young women. How could I refuse? They were most insistent." He began to move his slick fingers over her, touching all of her, but not paying specific attention to any one part. He was enjoying the feel of her, studying her with his hands as if he were a blind man with a

Braille book.

"So, I went with them and watched, for a while."

"You joined in?" She was getting wetter and wetter at his words. He began to circle his fingertips around her, keeping her aroused for his story. "Yes, I did, vixen. I left every one of them a very happy woman."

"All four?" She groaned under his ministrations.

"Yes, I took them all, and they offered themselves up to me. Would you like me to tell you what I did to each of them?"

"Hmm, did they scream your name?" She leaned against him, giving him a better angle.

"Every one of them did." He slid a finger into her tight warmth, and she shuddered, so tight and warm. His finger started to work her hard from inside and out, his thumb drawing gentle circles on her clit. She bucked and threw her head back against him. "Will you scream my name? I want to hear that. I need to hear that. Come for me, my vixen. Scream my name," he whispered into her ear.

She came violently, screaming his name, just as he'd asked for. Only his arm supporting her kept her upright. He held her as she caught her breath. Once she could breathe and stand on her own, Fallon took off the blindfold and his own clothes, showing himself firm and upright.

"Oh, Fallon. You are amazing and happy to see me." Astrid grinned at him, her eyes glowing with lust. She started to take the dress off, but he

stopped her.

"No, I like it like that. It covers, but it doesn't. Climb on the table." His voice was low and throaty, more of a growl, and she didn't hesitate. She was up on the table, legs open wide waiting for him. He hopped on the table and crawled over to her, turning her to face the window. He forced her up and onto her knees and positioned himself behind her, teasing her swollen opening with his throbbing cock.

"Is this what you want, vixen? You want all of this inside you? All of me inside you?" He quivered at the heat that radiated from her core. It passed over him as if he were already sheathed inside her. Whimpering, she tried to back up onto him, but he held her hip firmly in place.

"Ah, no. That's very naughty. Tell me, is this what you want? To feel me inside of you as far as I can go? You can take all of me, vixen. Few can. Do you want me to show you just how deep I can go?" He pushed himself over her clit, and she groaned. He moved back to her center and positioned himself, so all he needed was one quick thrust to be inside her.

"Yes, Fallon...yes. I want all those things. Show me, lover, please."

And with those words, he entered her, not waiting for her to loosen up, knowing just how she liked it. His pace was mercilessly fast, but he couldn't have slowed down if he tried. Astrid's small gasps and moans only encouraged him.

"Vous vous sentez si vous mouille, donc chauffer, donc tendu." Vixen, you feel so wet, so

warm, so tight. The sound of flesh on flesh cracked through the room. He turned her to face the street, with the light so bright the whole room was exposed to anybody who could be watching below.

"Is there anyone in the street below, watching us? Watching you while I thrust myself deep inside of you?" Her noises changed slightly, and he smiled, knowing that he had hit her spot. He changed his pace but kept the angle and found himself close to letting go.

"Tell me, my vixen, are you close?" His thoughts clouded over. All that mattered was that he go as hard and fast into her as he could.

"Yes...yes, oh, Fal, so close. Please, harder, faster...need...need you to..."

Couldn't slow if I tried, vix. He felt her tighten, and he lost himself, pounding into her as she came around him. He found his own release as her hot body squeezed every last drop from him.

"So, was there anybody watching outside?" he asked as soon as his breath was back. He pulled out of her and watched as their mixed juices ran from Astrid onto the pool table before lying down next to her. She laid her head on his chest and played with the line of hair under his belly button.

"There were a few. You think they'll leave money at the door?"

"They'd better, but the show was for us, not them. I think we stained the table."

Chapter Seventeen

The room Arcady walked into was dim with candlelight. He looked around the room, taking in its contents. A large bed was in the center, draped in tons of black silk. A wide, overstuffed chair, also in black, was to the left of the silk-draped bed. Mirrors lined all but one wall. Yes, he thought, Alcyone followed my instructions to a T. I'll have to thank her later.

He turned his attention to the wall with no mirrors, to Ashlyn. Her arms were bound over her head, wrists tied together with black silk, and attached to a silver hook above her head. She was blindfolded, exactly like she'd wanted. If nothing else, Arcady was a man who gave a woman her deepest fantasy.

Silently, he crossed the room to Ash, who was shaking with anticipation. Arcady could hear her thoughts, and not one of them held a note of fear. She was enjoying this; the helplessness, the limited senses, and the uncertainty of when he would show up, all sent her body on edge.

It's a shame I only get to see her like this once. Feyd really is a lucky man. She's so receptive, and I haven't even touched her yet. He put a hand out and traced her naked body with a fingertip.

She shivered. "Arcady?" she whispered the question. When no answer came, she asked again. Ash had told him her fantasy was to be fucked raw by a stranger, her choices taken from her, her will dominated. Arcady planned to give her her heart's desire, but since he only had a limited amount of time with her, he was gonna give her everything he had.

He positioned himself in front of her and slid his pants down his hips slowly, sending a mental picture to her via telepathy, starting at his chest and sliding down. He stopped just before his groin, and Ash squirmed and moaned, upset that the thought cut off. It was his way of teasing, not letting her know exactly what he had for her.

She was shaking with need now, and he knew just by the way she was moving that she was wet and ready for him. He bent down and grabbed her by the backs of her thighs and slowly spread her legs so that he could fit between them. She was wet, sopping, he could see. She practically dripped for him.

He hooked her legs around his hips as he teased her swollen slit with the tip of his rock-hard cock. She sobbed, her arms still suspended over her head.

In one swift motion, Arcady detached her wrists, still bound together, from the silver ring. He slipped her arms around his neck and slid himself to the hilt inside her, which was no small feat. She moaned as he slowly slid out, wiggling her hips to capture his length once more. He pushed her completely up against the wall and slid back inside

her. They moaned in unison.

Against the wall, he started to fuck her hard. Her body grappled to his, pressed hard against him. She was light, and holding her up was easy. She sobbed as his hips hit a rhythm she loved, hard and driving. She was close; he could feel it. He quickened his thrusts, her body welcoming him with every thrust.

“Arcady, shit. Oh, my God!” She came with a long moan. He tore off the blindfold, and she saw him watching her. “Um...um...oh...That was amazing. Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me yet, sweetness; I still have plans for you.”

Feyd walked in behind the sexy succubus he was trailing. The room was big but not suited for normal Pinky’s activities. He looked at the large ebony desk, the black leather couch, and the comfortable looking chairs. “Your office?”

Alcyone nodded. “My day office. It’s comfortable, don’t you think? Please, make yourself at home, Feyd.”

He turned and sat on the couch, which was soft as butter. “So, Al, what do you want to do?” He had been waiting for this day for about a month, and now it seemed as if his heart just wasn’t in it. *She’s not Ashlyn*. The thought hit him hard, and he pushed it away, determined to give his last romantic rendezvous his full attention. *No doubt Alcyone will be giving me her full attention.*

She sauntered over to him, her black dress clinging to all the curves on her small frame. She stood before him in stiletto heels, and he couldn't help but notice that although she wore them well, Ash wore them better. He licked his lips as he took her in.

She smiled. "Fuck?"

He quickly got up and grabbed her, lifting her up. He walked them over to the desk and sat her on it. *Perfect height*, he thought as he grabbed her shoulder and slowly peeled the gauzy dress from her chest.

She watched him in amusement, her hands working at the buttons of his shirt. Seconds later, her entire chest was bare to him, and he looked at her high, tight breasts and groaned. They were smaller than he liked, but they were perfect on her little body. He reached up, grabbed her face, and laid a searing kiss on her lips. She mewled into his mouth, and he deepened the kiss. Her hands left his shirt and were now undoing his pants. Before the kiss ended, his pants were resting around his knees, his cock stiff and at attention. She looked down and saw him ready, clearly impressed.

"Looks like you got a lot more for me than I bargained for." She licked his bottom lip. His hands found her thighs, a smirk playing on his lips.

"A hell of a lot more, love." He slid his hands up her inner thighs and brushed her wetness. "Mmm, no panties," he murmured. *Let's see if she's as responsive as Ashlyn*. He delved deeper into her secrets, issuing a gasp as he began to work her tight flesh. Her clit begged for attention. She moaned

and then grabbed his cock as he slid a finger inside her. “Mmm, Feyd,” she moaned. She worked him slowly, apparently not wanting to speed things up. She wiggled on his hand, bucking her hips. His finger was still inside her, his thumb working her sensitive nub.

She cried out minutes later as she came, her muscles grasping his finger. She was now leaning back on her hands, half lounging, and he withdrew his hand only to slip his cock easily into her heat.

Her eyes widened as he filled her. Slowly, her tongue darted out to lick her lips and her eyes closed. “Mmm, God, that’s heaven,” she said.

He smirked. “No, love, heaven is the end result.” With his words he pushed in quick and deep, his thick cock taken to the hilt. She moaned and then sat up a bit, only to be pushed back down. He lifted her hips, so he could get a better angle. She moaned and sobbed every time he sunk back in and pulled out, creating a wonderful friction.

“Hurry. Hurry, Feyd. Come with me.” He began riding her faster, pistoning into her with no small amount of force. “Yes! Harder! Hurry!” Seconds later, she screamed his name and sobbed.

She came, and he kept at her, knowing he could get her once more. The orgasm on the heels of the first sent the succubus over the edge, shaking, and he pulled out and came on her stomach, something she had asked him to do earlier in the evening.

Spent and sated, he panted and looked at the disheveled mess of a woman and smiled. “At least you got my name right.” Not realizing she wouldn’t get the joke, he smiled at her, and she kissed him.

“I’m surprised I got it out at all. You’re amazing, Mr. Nightly. Pity it was just this one time.” She smiled at him. “And I think I need to go get cleaned up.” She looked at the clock. “Hmm. Arcady said they would be done by now. Go get your woman, love.” She kissed him once more and smiled then walked out the room.

He couldn’t get enough of Ashlyn. He was sitting in the overstuffed chair with Ashlyn riding his cock, her back to his chest. As she slid mercilessly up and down his hard shaft, his hands were busy of their own accord. One was kneading her left breast, teasing her nipple tighter and tighter. The other hand was busy, tucked inside her secrets. Her own hands were supporting her bouncing frame, planted on the arms of the chair.

This little demon is riding me into oblivion, he thought as she quickened her pace, evidence that she was very close. He moved his mouth closer to her ear, a thing he had been doing from time to time in the past hour of their playtime, urging her on with murmurs of encouragement and dirty talk. She was so close. She only needed a bit of encouragement, the right encouragement.

“That’s it, sweetness, take it all. Harder, baby, I can take it. That’s right; get your fill, Ash. You’re mine after this.”

At those words, Ash came once again, shaking and sobbing, all the while Arcady still working on her flesh. She came again seconds later, under

Arcady's ministrations, grasping Arcady's exposed thigh, humming and licking her lips. She lay back against him, panting.

"Satisfied, sweetness?"

Ash turned her head and softly kissed his lips. "Hardly. I haven't done a thing for you, killer."

"On the contrary, you have provided me with much delight. Seeing you come is a heady thing."

Ash kissed him again and laughed. "I'm sure, but I really wanna make you feel good." She wiggled her hips on his still-hard cock, and he groaned. She squeezed him while he was inside her wetness, and he moaned into her ear.

Taking his hands up, he grabbed her by the waist and slowly slid her off his body, regretting the loss of her heat. He turned her around, and she slid her legs around his waist. His hard cock nestled in her heat, teasing the area he had so recently been buried in.

She wrapped herself around him, enjoying the friction of his hard, taut body on her soft one. She kissed him then, the first real kiss between them. *Jesus*, he thought. *She's delicious. So damn hot, too.*

He stood as they kissed, once again holding her with little effort. She broke the kiss and smiled at him. His heart jumped. It was the smile of a very happy woman.

"Mmm, Arcady. I like kissing you."

"Feeling's mutual, sweetness. But I think you'll enjoy what I have planned for your mouth next a little bit more."

She nuzzled his neck. "Hmm? What's that?"

He sent an image into her head of her moaning and biting a pillow. Ashlyn purred into his ear. “And just how are you gonna accomplish that?”

He knelt on the bed. She released him and slipped to the cool silk. He moved back, admiring her body framed by all the black bedclothes. She truly was gorgeous. She watched him, eyeing him quizzically. “Hmm?”

He moved closer to her and lightly kissed her lips. “I’ll show you, Ash. You’ll be screaming my name in moments.” Arcady kissed down Ashlyn’s body slowly, savoring her salty sweetness with every kiss.

Her back arched as he kissed down her chest, his hands slowly trailing after his mouth. He knew she was enjoying the attention to her hypersensitive skin. He licked and nibbled at her belly, his hands now at the junction of her thighs. His mouth followed suit. The second he tasted her charms she came, moaning and clutching at his hair, grinding his face into her wetness.

That’s it, baby; he sent the thoughts to her. You taste amazing, Ash. You like that? Like my tongue sliding in and out of you? I like it, Ash. Come again, so I can taste you once more before I fuck you.

She moaned and gasped. “Arc...ady! Shit, how did you do that? Baby, please... Please, oh, please...”

A second later he got his wish, and she shivered as he lapped her up with slow, long trails of his tongue, from her slick wet opening to her clit. She sobbed his name as he turned her over and slid her

half off the bed, her knees now pressing on the lush, black carpet. She turned her head to give him a look but shuddered and closed her eyes as he positioned himself behind her and drove himself into her.

“Yes, Arcady. Fuck, yeah,” she moaned as he worked her, pistoning in and out of her slick slit. He held her hips still as she tried to wiggle on him. He had plans for her.

“Ash, look at the mirror. Watch while I take you, angel.”

She looked up at the mirror, at the gorgeous man behind her pushing her toward oblivion. She watched him watch her, and as their eyes met, he winked at her. He swiveled his hips as he was working her, creating a sensation so profound Ash did indeed moan and bite down on the pillow in front of her as the force of her orgasm shook her entire body.

Arcady felt her body twitching as was always the case when he turned on his signature move. Her body tightened as he brought her, as she milked his body still working inside her. At last, he lost himself.

“Oh, my...Ashlyn...ugh...umm, Ash! Mmm.”

She smiled as he collapsed on her back, kissing it.

A while later, when they both learned to breathe again, he pulled out and turned her on her back, cuddling her tummy and touching her. Her hands found his hair, and she absently ran her fingers through it. “That was so—” she said, but he shushed her.

He crawled up her body and kissed her then smiled. "Shame I have to give you back to Feyd, sweetness. You were amazing."

"You're not half-bad yourself, Morrison." She kissed him hard, a goodbye kiss. "Arcady, you did succeed."

He looked up at her, a question in his eyes.

"You wore me out, killer. I need sleep."

He kissed her once more. "Sleep, sweetness. When you wake, you'll be home," he whispered softly. "With Feyd, where you belong."

He got up and sighed as she drifted off to sleep. In all the time they had been locked in that room, not once had he fed off her, a thing he had never done for anyone, not even Astrid.

Casha sauntered into his brother's Russian mansion and tried not to openly show the disgust he felt. The place was covered with hookers—not that he minded them. Hookers had a place and a use. *Not many other people could say that about their chosen profession.* But when they were so junked up that they had no idea what was night and day, that's when he began to take offense. They were everywhere, lying in doorways, shooting up in the hall. The place disgusted him, and it was filthy. It never used to be so bad. *Dimitri has really let himself go.*

He had never understood the point of drugs. If he could use them to gain his goals, then he would, but the whole idea of it left a bad taste in his

mouth. *Trust humans to come up with something more evil than us.*

"What's the matter? You don't like my home?"

Casha turned to see his little brother, Dimitri. He was standing at the top of the stairs. His short blond hair was spiked up at different angles, and his impeccable tailor-made suit clung to him perfectly. *Brother, why is it that your appearance never suits this life you've chosen? Such pride in your appearance, yet...can you really hate yourself so much that you feel forced to live like...this?* Cash suppressed a sigh and fixed himself with his best brotherly smile. "No. I'm just wondering what happened to it."

Dimitri bobbed his head and smiled. "What happened to it? I think it's just fine."

Cash smiled genuinely. He always had liked Dimitri. *He isn't a complete waste of space, unlike the others.* "Sure, it's fine." He looked around nodding his own head up and down. "For a Russian crack den."

"Well, it gets the bills paid." Dimitri shrugged. "So, to what do I owe this unannounced intrusion?"

"I did have a favor to ask, brother. However, if you are going to be like that..."

"You're making it sound as if I have invited you here. Now, aren't you banned from contact with our kind? Should I be talking to you?" Dimitri slid out of existence and appeared next to Cash, who looked unimpressed. The whores didn't even notice.

"If you don't want to be part of my plans, then I'll go," Casha said evenly. "I really did want you to do something for me, but I understand if you don't

want to get into trouble." He added a teasing lilt to his voice.

He turned but made no move to leave. *Now, take the bait, and we can do some business and stop this ridiculous little game.*

"Now, now. Let's not be too hasty. Come into the kitchen, and we'll get a drink." Dimitri started walking toward the kitchen, but Cash stopped him.

"I won't be staying long, and I'd appreciate it if you dropped me off at my location when I'm done. Plus, I don't want to ingest anything that comes from this...place." Dimitri's taste in drink was well-known, mostly the tendency to lace his vodka with something that would give it more of a kick. This decade he'd been using car brake fluid, not something Casha ever planned on trying. "I'd rather not test the limits of immortality today."

Dimitri swiveled around, sighing out a great puff of air. "Fine. What do you want me to do for you, Cassiel?" He sat on one of the steps, and a whore laid her head in his lap. "Lord knows it's something only I can get, or you wouldn't be here."

"A girl. I need you to find Alice Ipwhisk. She was last seen in Russia, ten years ago. Her profession at the time was...very much up your alley."

"Ipwhisk? As in..." Dimitri frowned slightly trying to grasp the name. "Falcon?"

"His name is Fallon, and yes, she's his cousin. Will you and your...women be able to find her? She might be dead."

"If she's in Russia, we'll find her. What do you want me to do with her?"

Good question, brother. "If she's one of yours, send her to me."

"And if she's not?"

"Make her one of yours," Cash said carefully.

"And if she won't make the bargain?"

Casha had to think about this one. If she died, and it was his fault...But he couldn't have her alive and not owing anything to him.

"Then kill her but quietly. Then send one of your girls to me, regardless."

"May I ask why?" Dimitri played absentmindedly with the whore's greasy bleached hair.

"I'm coming home, Dimitri. If I have to rip the layers between the verses with my bare hands, I am coming home. But in order to do that I need to make alliances within the demon community. Arcady Morrison."

At the name Dimitri suddenly stood up, sprawling the whore onto the floor. "What! What does that Incubus have to do with this? That fucker has been sent to Russia a number of times to clean out my houses by that fetching creature Alcyone. Cash, honestly, what the fuck?"

"I want you to make no move of retaliation against them. I need them both."

"What—"

Casha cut him off. His tone took a deadly turn, like a ship approaching an iceberg in the night. "I mean it, Dimitri. Camions is very much in awe of this Alcyone. Arcady will fall for the Ipwhisk girl. He's the hero type, and with Asmodeus' golden boy on my side, he will have to side with me. If you hurt

either of them, you'll deal with me. Understood?"

"Playing matchmaker now, are you, Casha? You've fallen so low. You used to be future king. Now you're..." Dimitri sneered, his green eyes blazing. "Not much, really."

"I can still show you how much I am. If you're not with me, brother..." He left the threat open, not needing to say any more.

Dimitri knew how far to push him. "I'm with you. I'll look for the girl and do as you ask. But I won't be exiled with you. I draw the line at that. How many souls have you got to go? Can you feel their loss dragging you down yet?"

"Yes and no. Some days are worse than others," he answered, suddenly tired. "Call me when you find out what happened to the girl. Now, take me to Shadow Heights."

Dimitri stepped back suspiciously. "Shadow Heights? Why?"

Casha rolled his eyes. "I'm visiting an old friend, soon to be my new sorceress. Now, if you are referring to our father and his...whore, I'd like you to keep in mind that if I kill them now, while in exile, our brother will retain my throne. That's not something any of us want. He has to live, for now. Now, take me to the damn town. If I have to get another plane, I will kill you."

Dimitri took Casha by the arm, and they both disappeared.

Chapter Eighteen

Astrid looked around the room and smiled. She had indeed outdone herself. The walls were a pale, pale blue, and the bedclothes were swatches of color: blues in varying degrees of coolness, black and white. All silk. She knew the demon prince would approve of and love his home away from home. She turned and checked the bathroom, making sure the midnight blue towels were stacked neatly, and everything else was in its place. She looked into the room from the bathroom, noting how the bed was positioned in the middle of the floor and how the dresser was set up and grinned. *It looks exactly like the old room in Paris. He will love it.*

She looked at her watch and smiled. *And I still have at least four hours until I can even start to expect him. This binding thing better be worth it. I haven't even told Fallon yet about it. I think I'll just let Casha deal with it, with him.* She left the room and closed the door behind her, taking the stairs two at a time and getting to the ground floor in less than a minute. Linus came snuffling out of the living room and charged her, and she smiled.

“Stinky puppy. What are you doing? Where’s Daddy, huh? Is he here, or did he go out with Uncle Feyd?” She barely heard the door open and shut, but she did hear the voice calling to her.

“Astrid? You here?”

Casha? Already? Christ! “Cash? That you? Shit, darlin, you’re early! Everything okay? It’s so good to see you!” She walked into the kitchen and saw him standing there, grey suit with the ice blue button-up shirt, and licked her lips. *And I get to play with that? Oh, Lord, another wish coming true.* She rushed him and hugged him. His arms came around her slowly. “I missed you, Cash. It’s really been far too long!”

"That it has, pumpkin."

"You're early! You sure everything is okay?"

"Everything's fine. Dimitri took me over the lines. I'd have killed him if he made me get on another damn plane." He shuddered. "Stupid metal death traps. So, you smell nice. Been decorating?"

"Smell nice? I always smell nice, Casha. Your room is done. I just finished it. Watch out when you walk in the living room. Linus is itching to get at you." She winked. "He's not the only one."

"Where's the lucky man? He around?"

"Fal? Nope, playing covert crap with Feyd and Arcady. I think they have sent George on a wild goose chase today." She looked at her watch "He should be in for tea with Feyd in about an hour. Why?" She smiled at him. "You need to talk to him?"

"Unless you wish to tell him that I'll be boning his fiancée? Is he okay with it? He knows I'm

coming?" He grinned a very Casha grin at her, and it set her blood on fire. "Which I will be doing."

She inhaled quickly and blushed. *He really has no idea what he's doing to me, does he?* "No, he doesn't know the details, just that I agreed to it and that the deal is fair. I figured you could talk to him yourself. I don't need him mad at me again, Casha. He knew you would be here today. He was looking forward to seeing you, too. Said you guys had a good time together. So, you want something to drink? I just made lemonade."

"Pumpkin, breathe. It's okay. Today is a good day. I'm strangely lucid; it's one of my better moods. I saw my brother, which always cheers me up. Everything will be okay. I'll talk to Fallon." He paused, looking around. "Now, as fun as lemonade is, I'd much prefer something much stronger."

"Bar is upstairs. Come on." She walked around him and grabbed his hand, leading him to the door. "Linus, back! Sorry, Casha."

"Nah, it's okay, I love the smelly mutt." He bent down to pick up the dog, which immediately set about licking his face. "Upstairs bar, yeah?"

"You were always fond of the smelly thing. Come on." She led him up the stairs and to the pool room. "In the corner. This is Fallon's new playroom."

"Nice." He set the dog down. "You guys have built up quite a collection of toys."

"You mean the pool table? Shit, I can't play. He tried to teach me the other night, but, um..." She giggled and looked away. "We got sidetracked."

"I can imagine. So, you're sure that you want to

do this, Ast? I'm a fair demon." He took a moment to think about it. "Okay, that's a lie, but if you say no right now, I will leave. If you don't, you're stuck with me for all eternity, or until someone finally manages to assassinate me."

"Cash, no one—*no one*—will get close enough, you hear me? Trust me, okay? I want to, Cash. I really do, as long as we hold to the bargain, I'll never regret this."

Astrid walked into the bedroom after Fallon had left and lit all the candles she had set up while Cash and Fal had been talking. She was going to do this right. *One night with Cash, a binding. Explosive sex, and I save my friends. Not a bad deal. Goddess, I hope I have made the right decision.*

Before Cash had shown up, she had consulted Ishtar by way of meditation. She was told that as long as her soul stayed with the goddess, and the demon was content to hold up his bargain, she had no problem with the binding, on the extra condition that Astrid continue to perform rites in her name. Seeing this as extra protection for both herself and Fallon, Astrid heartily agreed. Nothing would change except her power level, and that made her relax a bit.

Cash had explained that a binding, with the amount of power being poured into her, should take several sessions, but as Fallon had only agreed to one night, they had to make the best of it. *One is*

better than never. I just hope it will be enough. Christ, Casha has been a fantasy for how long? Three years? It will have to be enough; I'm not losing Fallon again.

She sat on the bed in a blue satin hip-length dress complete with sexy undergarments and tried to relax. Closing her eyes, she didn't notice the door open but felt the bed shift as it was leaned on.

"Casha?" Her eyes still closed, she leaned back onto a prop of pillows.

"Were you expecting anyone else?"

She giggled. "No, just making sure." She opened her eyes. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah, everything's...perfect."

"Perfect? I don't know about that, darlin.' So?"

He sat down next to her and slipped an arm around her. "So, you're mine for tonight, pumpkin. All mine." He grinned down at her.

"True. And what do you plan on doing? I mean, flirting is one thing, but you have never even kissed me." That wasn't entirely true. He had, a long time ago, and she relished the memory every time she remembered it, but this was all new, a new experience for a new phase of life. So, it wasn't really a lie.

"Well, then maybe we should start there, then? A kiss sound good to you?"

She smiled, leaned up, and kissed him, taking the initiative. His lips were like ice, and she moaned, her mouth opening just a bit. It was enough to give him the in he needed. His tongue slipped into her mouth, and she squeaked. *Oh, my God...Spin wasn't kidding.*

He placed his hand on the small of her back, deepening the kiss before pulling back. "That's us better acquainted, wouldn't you say?" He smirked down at her.

She nodded, breathless. She smiled at him and licked her bottom lip. "Cold...mmm, you cold everywhere?"

"Not always." He grinned. "You want to try and warm me up?"

She grinned wickedly. "You know me, always up for a challenge. I like you cold though. It's really sexy."

"You think?"

She nodded, bent her head down, and licked the hollow of his neck. He tasted good. His skin was cold and hard around the muscles of his body.

Wow...he's rock-hard perfect. Like Arcady, but better, God, look at that stomach! Oh, God, he's built for sex. Oh, Lord, what did I get myself into? She kissed a trail down from his neck to his nipple and bit down, hard.

He hissed at the switch of sensations. "Fuck! So, you like to mix a little pain with your pleasure?"

She winked. "What's the difference? Fine line between the two." She licked his nipple again and looked up.

He smiled down at her, letting her have her way with his chest. "Oh, love, there's a big difference. Well, for some women."

"Not me. Why do you think me and Fal get along so well?" She grabbed his waist and used him as leverage, moving slowly down his chest, licking and kissing here and there, running her tongue in

the muscle definitions that traversed his stomach. She reached his belly button, nipped at the light dusting of hair, and looked up. "Casha, anyone ever tell you you're a perfect plaything?"

He laughed down at her, marveling at how perfect she was. "You know, I don't think anyone ever has. Why?"

"'Cause you are." She licked around his belly button and started lower, going finally to that straining piece of his anatomy still confined in his pants. He watched her, his shirt open, evidence of her travels glistening in the firelight, and smiled. *She'll be mine soon enough. Well, not all mine, but as much as I can get. That's just gonna have to do, for now.*

"You are a dark fantasy, Casha...a very dark fantasy."

"As are you, love. One that's about to be satisfied...completely."

She giggled as he mentally recounted all the ways he was going to pleasure her and take his pleasure in her.

"Sure I am." She nuzzled him through his pants, eliciting a groan from him. "I think he might wanna come out and play."

He growled, bucking into her slightly. "I think you might be right, pumpkin."

She moved her hand and mumbled. His pants seemingly worked themselves open. She kept her hands around his waist, bent her head into his now-open pants, and took him into her mouth, moaning as she slowly slipped down his length.

Oh, pumpkin, yeah. We are going to have

some fun, aren't we?

"That's a handy trick," he muttered as he looked heatedly into her eyes.

"Yeah? Think that's impressive? I'm sure I can take all of you, too. Wanna find out?"

He grinned at her. *We do that, and I'll have to keep you forever.*

"Maybe later, but for now what I really want is another kiss." He lifted her up his body and placed her on top of him as he sat up and kissed her mouth, begging entrance. She squirmed on his lap, opened her mouth to him, and molded her body to his. He inched the cami off her shoulders and down her torso, using the action to touch as much of her as possible. Edging it down her hips, he groaned. He grasped her hips and rubbed himself along her, feeling her wet and ready against her panties.

"Pumpkin, you're already ready, and I haven't even begun to work you." He groaned again as she wiggled to feel more of him.

She sobbed, her body going on edge. "Is that a problem? I told you, you're a fantasy. One I have had many a night these past few years."

He chuckled into her hair. "No, no problem. I just love that you're so...receptive." He pulled back and looked her up and down, groaning at the sight of her, sitting on top of him, sopping wet, and in nothing but very revealing cobalt blue lingerie. He kissed her again.

"God, you are a real treat, you know that? Fallon is a very lucky demon."

She looked down at herself doubtfully and took stock. "You think so? Sometimes I'm not so sure."

Oh, pumpkin, you're perfect, and don't ever think otherwise. He cocked an eyebrow and looked down her body appreciatively, letting his thoughts show in his eyes. "Love, if you're not sure you could always leave him and come and live with me," he half-teased as he rolled them both easily so that she lay on her back with him between her legs.

She giggled and whooped as he rolled them, smiling at him. "Still trying to get me to run away with you?"

No, I'm considering kidnapping you and locking you away to keep for myself.

"Always." He nuzzled at her neck, kissing and licking and biting his way down to her breasts. He kissed both her nipples through the rough material of her bra, wetting them with his tongue. "So, still intent on staying?"

"I love Fallon. Have since I met him...but I kinda love you different."

If you call me a friend, I will kill him.

"You're my best friend, always have been—"

He bit her nipple, and she cut off her words with a gasp. "It's the reason why I agreed. Well, one of the reasons." She wiggled her eyebrows and smiled. "I want to help you." He pulled back and looked up at her, her words pulling him out of his sullen mood.

He'd decided on the plane trip to Russia that he would be as happy for her and Fallon as he could be. There was no reason for him to be selfish and make everyone as unhappy as he was. Fallon was a useful commodity, and Astrid would make an excellent sorceress. Both of them were of more use

to him happy, but he still wanted her. There was no point in beating himself up about missed opportunities. *If only I could get Faris off my damn mind.*

"Thanks Ast. This...it means a lot."

She kissed him to show him exactly what he meant to her. The kiss was deep, and she pulled back, biting his bottom lip. Her hands ran down his back. Groaning, he leaned into her, the room going cold. He watched her shiver, and her nipples hardened. He smiled.

"Foreplay with you? Oh, God."

He chuckled, moving back down her body. His mouth went to her nipple, and his hand slid in between her thighs, his fingers stroking her over the thin layer of material.

"You love to tease, don't you?" She arched into him and sobbed, wiggling on his hand.

"Please...please."

"Please, please," he mocked lightly before ripping off her panties and plunging an ice cold finger inside of her, slowly working her from the inside as his thumb made the occasional flick over her clit.

She arched into him, moaning. "God, yes! Oh, God, that feels so good. Mmm...so good!" She started to ride his hand, leaning forward and biting him hard on the shoulder.

"Fuck! I do love a biter." He moaned as he began to work her harder.

She tensed and sobbed as she played. "Casha, oh, dear God, I'm close."

He chuckled against her breast, his ice cold

tongue playing with her rock hard nipple. "That's the whole idea, love."

She came suddenly at the feel of his tongue on her and screamed his name. He lifted his mouth to her ear and said in a low gruff voice, "That's it, baby. Fuck, you feel so good, coming around my finger. Oh, sweetie, I can't wait to feel you convulse around my cock."

She sobbed at his words, shivering and whimpering. "Fuck, you are amazing."

He shrugged as he eased his finger out of her. "I try."

"Believe me, darlin, you don't have to." *Oh, my God...one night, just one night with him and Fallon...good dear Lord.*

"No?" He kissed her deeply, relieving her of the rest of her garments.

She whimpered as he kissed her. "God, no, you are sex, Casha." She giggled and nibbled on his throat.

Casha groaned as the delightful witch nibbled on his throat. *She's so complimentary*, he thought to himself. *I am sex....* He smirked down at her. "I like that."

"I'm glad. So?"

Grinning, he sat up and removed the rest of his clothes, throwing them in the same direction he'd thrown hers, not really caring where they went. *Just clothes. I have more important matters to attend.* He came back to kneel between her legs, looked appreciatively down at her naked form, and groaned. So inviting. *If I wasn't already hard, that sight would have stiffened me instantly.*

She giggled. "Wow." She licked her lips, causing more of a reaction than he showed.

Baby, your lips are perfect.

"You look like a big piece of candy."

"And you've already proven that I can be sucked." He lifted her up, slowly rubbing himself over her clit and groaning. "Fuck, you feel amazing."

She groaned and arched into him, opening herself. "Umm, did you enjoy that?"

"Hmm, not as much as I will enjoy this." He slowly slid into her, holding her body still. She gasped as he entered her in a painfully slow motion.

She moved to allow him more leverage. "Oh, God, that's good."

He pushed until he was hilt-deep and groaned at her slick heat. "God, yeah!" She whimpered and wiggled on him. "Please...you fill me up just right, darling."

He grinned down at her. "I bet you say that to all the boys." He slowly started to move in and out of her, keeping a steady pace. *Oh, God, she feels like tight, warm, wet silk.*

"Never...only one other person...Casha, you're fantastic!"

And Fallon is very lucky.

"We haven't even started yet."

He picked up speed, no longer able to keep a slow, aching pace. He lifted her higher and drove into her, her juices dripping down them both. He hissed as she moaned and scratched him. The room temperature dropped as she clawed deep furrows

into his back.

That's it. Mark me, baby.

"That's it! Oh, fuck, such a bad ice demon..."

He pulled her onto his lap, filling her completely and causing her to gasp. "Oh, I am bad, baby," he growled into her ear before kissing and biting her neck, tasting her salty flesh.

She sobbed, opening herself wide to him, allowing him deeper. "Oh, fuck, that's good. I'm close, baby...so close."

"Oh, Asty, I've waited years to hear you sob those words into my ear, love. Now, you enjoy this one. I really do want to feel you come hard around my cock. We'll do the binding on the next one. For now, I just need you to scream my name." He pushed her down onto the bed and fucked her harder.

"Fuck, baby. Oh, my God, you're so—Casha!"

She screamed his name as she came, giving him just what he'd wanted from her. The feel of her convulsing and writhing around him was like nothing he could describe. He instantly regretted letting her go to Fallon but didn't dwell on it much as he watched her tremble beneath him.

"Oh, yes...Ast, you feel just as good as I imagined."

She sobbed again and kissed him deeply, licking her lips. "Fuck, you're a god."

"Not yet, baby. One step at a time. I'd settle for king," he joked as he pulled her back up to him and kissed her, still sheathed inside her. His body ached for release.

"And king you shall be. I swear it."

"Me, too. It's do or die, pumpkin." *And I don't plan on dying.*

"Casha..." She tightened and wiggled on him, causing him to groan and lose his balance, dropping forward so that Astrid was on her back once again.

"Dirty trick." He glared at her for a few seconds before thrusting harder into her at an almost painful pace. Her gasps only drove him harder.

"Harder. Fuck me harder!"

He raised an eyebrow but said nothing, pumping faster at her command.

She screamed. "Fuck! Don't hold back, please..." She looked up at him, the heat in her eyes scorching.

At her look, he lost all control and unleashed himself, fucking her faster and harder, not caring or giving any thought to her comfort. He began to gather his energy as both their orgasms steadily built. He could feel everything but concentrated on the wave of power, readying it to flow into her. She thrashed beneath him, her movements and sounds urging him on. Begging him to go faster and harder.

"Make me yours, Casha!" she moaned breathlessly.

"You gonna scream for me, pet?" he grunted hoarsely into her ear as he pounded her roughly into the bed, with nothing but a cold need and desire to possess her, to mark her as his.

"Fuck me! Damn!" She clawed at his back.

He bit her hard enough to draw blood as he felt the opening of their releases approach them both.

She sobbed, wrapped her legs around his waist, and gave him a little more leverage. He took the leverage gratefully and immediately put it to good use, pounding deeper still into her.

"Oh, my God! Cash!" She screamed as she came hard, creaming around him.

He pushed as much power as he could into her before his orgasm followed hers. The power flowed freely between them as their juices mixed.

Groaning, he threw as much as he could into her before her aura snapped back up, protecting her. He collapsed, panting and sweating on top of her, as they both twitched with the aftershocks of their labor.

"Oh, my God, Casha." She licked the blood from his shoulder. "Oh, God, I feel fuzzy. It's so wild. You're amazing." She pulled back and licked her lips.

"Yeah." He ran his hand along her body, still pinned beneath him. *God, I can't stop touching you, pumpkin.* "It was pretty wild," he remarked, still panting.

"Mmm, it was great, and I get you for the rest of the night, don't I?"

"Oh, yeah, you really do. How do you feel, other than fuzzy?"

"Umm...good...Like cold fire is coursing through me...is that good?"

He nodded. "Yeah, that's perfect." *Well, at least not unusual.*

"Good. Are you okay, darling?"

"Sure, for now. We'll start to feel really shitty in a few hours." He rolled off her, pulled her up onto

him, and kissed her.

"What do you mean?" she asked, a little panicky.

"To bind you as a sorceress, I have to push all my power into your body while your aura is down. Hence the sex. Then, it..." He shrugged searching for the right words. "Mixes with your own powers. They merge, which makes you feel shitty for a while. You'll most likely sleep through it. It'll take an hour or so. I, on the other hand, will start to feel the loss of the energy fairly soon. I have to wait for it to filter back through your aura before I can get to it." He snorted. "That could take weeks. But at the end of that...then our energy should move freely, leaving you to draw off me, and vice versa."

She snuggled into him. "Okay, cool. I think I get it."

"Yeah? Good, you'll be fine. Normally, it's done over a space of a few weeks, but that's not really to save the witch from discomfort." He kissed her on the top of her head as he suppressed a groan. *I'm gonna feel like shit for weeks. I just pray to God that you're not an emotional creature.*

"I don't know how I'll be able to not have you after tonight."

Quite right. You should just...No, stop it. No more of that.

"Simple, you'll have Fallon. There will be a small craving over the first few weeks, but we're strong. I'm fairly certain that we'll survive it."

"You'll always have me. Always. I do love you. You know that, right?"

"Yeah, I do, baby."

*And now you're mine...forever. I can wait for
Fallon to grow old and die. I'm the patient type.*

Chapter Nineteen

Arcady knew he was late. *Shit, she's going to be so pissed*, he thought as the limo pulled up to the hotel. *Well, I'll just have to fix it, won't I?*

He got out, went to the front desk, and asked about Spinner's room. They called her and sent him right up, which took a few minutes by stairs, as the elevators were out of order.

She answered the door with a pout. "Poo, Arcady. I thought I was going to spend the night with you last night."

Nope, darling. I spent the evening with quite the luscious creature, and it wasn't you. "Sorry, sweetness, things came up. You ready to go?"

"Mm-hmm. I only have one bag." She retrieved it. They left the room and went back down the stairs to the lobby, and she signed out.

"So, Arcady, Fallon is marrying Asty, eh? Seems a shame."

Yeah, a shame for you, isn't it? "Eh, what can you do?"

"Well," she purred and grabbed him around the waist. "I could do you, baby. What you driving?"

"The limo. You feel up to playing, Spin?"

"With you? Always. Been too long since I have had the pleasure."

Yeah, he thought, she's not that pissed. This could be fun, not to mention I haven't fed in a while. "So, you down for anything?" His eyes went dark at the thought of a full feeding. Spinner always gave him exactly what he wanted. In his eyes, it was really all she was good for.

She licked her lips, looked him up and down, then rubbed her body against his, gaining contact with his groin. He grunted. "Get in the car and let's find out."

As the limo raced from the airport back to Shadow Heights, Arcady was firmly nestled between Spinner's legs. The second they had gotten into the car and closed the door she was on him, ripping at his clothes as he undressed her. Fully naked, she attacked him, and he set to showing her restraint.

He turned her over onto her belly on the soft seats and entered her, much to their mutual delight. *Shit, she's fun. The dirtiest chick I have ever known. She'll let me do anything. Good thing I'm not a pervert.*

She moaned, wiggling with each thrust as he fucked her. He could feel the orgasm building in her and knew that this session was going to be short but satisfying. Well, for him, at least. The amount of energy Spinner put off was enough to make a lesser Incubus swoon and become power drunk, but not Arcady.

She came violently, as always. He opened his Incubus side and drank in her energy, lapping at her pleasure. The orgasm was strong, the sexual energy it produced of the highest quality. Arcady let

it seep into him, and thought, *Christ, I should send her to Amos one day. He'd love this amount of pleasure. She truly is special, in her own way. Amos would appreciate her, at least for a while.*

Arcady knew she knew he was feeding; he always did with her. She wiggled on his still hard cock, waiting for the aftermath when he got even wilder from the energy. The high hit him a moment later, and he took her hard and fast as she moaned his name over and over. It was those sounds that sent him over the edge.

Later, he withdrew and righted her, smiling. She fixed her hair and smiled back. "I missed you, too, Arcady. How's that for a welcome home present?"

He kissed her on the forehead and cuddled her to him, thanking the ones who watched over his kind that she was so compliant of his feedings. The rest of the ride was spent in silence as Spinner slept cuddled against him.

He looked down at her sleeping form, as he had so many times before, and felt nothing. She was a fantastic lay, compliant and beautiful, but she was damaged in a way he knew he could never fix. She didn't need a knight in shining armor. He wasn't sure what she needed, but as much as she might enjoy him, he wasn't it.

He thought about the rest of his day and how after her dropped her at the Rosco, he had to go to the mansion and have Fallon drive him down to the airport. A different one this time, to make his way to Russia and pay Fallon back for the favor he asked of him so long ago. *Shit, I'm on the go*

nonstop today, aren't I? And I didn't get to say goodbye to Cole, either. Eh, she'll understand.

They drove in silence. The black Porsche cut through the traffic easily as Fallon veered in and out of the opposite lane. He gripped the wheel tightly, his jaw clenched. His mind was firmly on the task at hand, getting Arcady to the airport. He was absolutely not thinking about Astrid and Casha. It was the furthest thing from his mind. *Yeah, sure, and if you believe that...Oh, God.* His thoughts were ripping him apart. All he could think of was the two of them, all sweaty and naked. He looked at the clock, needing something else to concentrate on, anything to take his mind off the current situation. *One-fifteen. Damn, we're too early.*

"What time's the flight again?" he forced out, needing to talk to someone.

"Four-thirty. Flight 675 from Newark to Moscow," Morrison answered. "Relax, mate. What's wrong?"

"I am relaxed." He swerved the car out of the way of a truck and slid back into the right lane. "See? Relaxed."

"Right. Last time I saw you this keyed up was when we were in Taiwan." He slouched into the black leather seat. "So, what's the fucking deal? Tell me."

"Nothing, I'm just a little out of sorts. Y'know, my fiancée is fucking a demon as we speak, and I'm

sending one of my only friends to get his balls cut off in Russia. It's okay. I'm fine...honestly."

Arcady laughed. "Would you relax, man? Seriously, it will all be okay. If she's there, I will find her. Dimitri gave me a free pass, so I'll be fine. As for the binding..." He looked out the side window and realized they were going faster than he'd thought. "It's a good opportunity. I mean she's going to be bound to the most powerful demon of the Conglacio line. One night won't kill you, Fal. Fuck, she forgave you for being Mister Dip- Your-Wick the past year. Give her this one."

Fallon swerved out into the opposite lane to overtake another car, zipping back in and narrowly missing a passing car. He shoved the gearshift back and spoke. "It's not that. I know all those things. I spoke with Casha. It's fair, and it has to be done. Hell, I even agree with it, but I don't have to like it."

"Well, duh. But Lord knows she didn't like hearing you have been fucking everything in sight since you left her a year ago, and I think she handled it pretty well, so suck it up. Okay, Fal?" He sighed.

"I am sucking it up. You won't see me taking it out on anything but this car." Fallon braked sharply to avoid hitting the car in front of them.

"Careful, mate. Piss this mean machine off, and you'll have to drive Ast's GTI, and we know how much you love driving around in the Volkswagen." Morrison laughed and lit a cigar as Fallon winced at the thought.

He patted the steering wheel, laughing. "This baby wouldn't let me down. She likes me too much.

Now, what do you need to know? Have you had any ideas on where to start?"

"Fuck, nah. I'm thinking I'll go to Dimitri's and see what he's found first. Fal, listen, if I can't find her..."

"Better hope that free pass is valid. If you can't find her, then you can't." He shrugged, hoping to God that she was okay.

"But I'm going to try my damndest. I swear. You think you'll be okay with just Feyd and Dante to keep you company?"

"Oh, yeah." He smiled. "Feyd always keeps me amused, and I always appear happier next to that old surly bastard. You gonna be all right with Dimitri?"

"Eh, as all right as I can be. He's still pretty pissed about the extraction I did last year, but Cash said I'm untouchable. So..." He sighed. "Dude, don't miss the exit."

Fallon checked the lanes and swerved, cutting off a few cars. "I wasn't going to. I just love doing that." He grinned as the drivers angrily honked at him. "Yeah, well...try to behave yourself, and if you do find her..."

"If I find her, I'm bringing her home. No questions, no shit. You deserve family, Fal, we all do." He looked out the window. "Terminal C, international flights. Look, we got at least two hours before I gotta board. Wanna grab a beer and dinner?"

Fallon considered for a while before deciding that he'd rather be drinking with Morrison than sitting by himself, thinking about Astrid and Casha.

"Sounds like a plan."

Cash left Astrid sleeping and found his way back to her study. *It's my study now*, he thought to himself smugly as he looked around it. He found some good scotch locked in a drawer, and filled a crystal glass insanely full. He took the iced glass to the padded leather chair and threw himself down on it.

"Things have certainly been interesting." He spoke into the empty air of the dark study. He took a deep drink from the glass, knowing that it wouldn't be very long before the power that he had thrust into Astrid became sorely missed. He wasn't looking forward to the next few weeks; they would be painful for many reasons. The main reason being that Astrid's emotions were almost certainly going to leak into him with his returning power.

He'd been lucky with his last sorceress. She'd had little, if any, emotion; she'd been all ice and brass balls. *If only she'd had the power or smarts to keep herself alive*. He grinned wryly at the thought, knowing that he was being unfair to the poor witch. Natalia had indeed been powerful, but she could never have held a flame to Faris. If his fire demon took offense to someone, they either died or...well, mostly they died. He felt almost sorry for her new husband; the demon had no idea what he was getting himself into. *If she doesn't kill him, I most certainly will*. He sighed, a slight frown marring his perfect features. *That is, whenever I*

get home.

He stretched, rolling his shoulders to loosen them. Astrid, though, he knew she'd best Talia in every way. The feisty witch had power and smarts. So like her mother it was uncanny, but of course her mother had refused him. In anything he had offered. It had almost been too easy to get Astrid to accept him. He took another drink, reflecting on his end of the bargain.

He would have to pry Fallon's soul out of Ammit's cold, dead hands. He smiled. *Now, that will be interesting. How easily will she give up her former pet's soul, I wonder?*

He didn't expect too much trouble, but he wasn't always right, and it was good to have a counter plan. It was as simple as finding something the old queen desired, and there was no one better than Casha at finding desires and secrets.

Speaking of which, Fallon had called him and said he'd be back in a few hours. Casha fully intended to be sound asleep by then. He may have to put up with the Escensio, but he didn't have to like him or interact with him much. In fact, he didn't plan on doing much for the next few days. His fever was due to settle in within the hour, and then he'd be rendered more or less incapable of even simple speech. He planned on spending it all as comfortably as possible, preferably in his new bedroom, with his sorceress fetching him ice packs to keep him cool. Maybe even with the dog keeping him company or maybe the lovely Ashlyn. He grinned, knowing that the lower level fire demon would do nothing for his temperature.

Then there was, of course, his sweet betrayer, Colette. She would have to be dealt with fairly quickly before any of his new found “friends” became too attached. He was looking forward to playing with her, her sweet body. Her sweet screams would truly make his day, whichever day in her near future he decided that would be.

And his brother, little Dimitri, sitting pretty on his castle of flesh. *I wonder what his reaction will be to our paladin? I'm sure it will be most unpleasant for them both.* For the time being, he was just happy they both were out of his hair. Dimitri, he knew, had disgustingly strange morals. The less he knew about Casha's activities, the better. The Incubus would be fine, just as long as he didn't get on the wrong side of Dimitri's pet butcher. He chuckled. That would be just his luck, all his hard work and planning down the drain due to the unpredictability of one little snowflake.

He sat back, slouching in his newly acquired chair. Fallwell would have to be dealt with, but that would be fun. In fact, he'd had been looking for a good excuse to rid himself of the fool who was nothing but an insult to his family name. His father and grandfather had been very valuable to Casha. Keen, intelligent minds who'd been worthy of Cash's time and friendship. Roman, however, proved to be quite the opposite. He was lazy. Lazy, intelligent people were worse than the stupid in Casha's books. Roman was a waste of so much raw talent. *Besides, the slimy fuck would need to stop smoking pole long enough to create a fourth generation of little Fallwell's.* He stopped and

thought back on his words.

He growled loudly, cursing. “Fucking Nightly! He’s like a disease,” he shouted. “If I start talking the same type, verbal diarrhea that...that useless Aspectus spouts out his mouth...” He trailed off, muttering a list of vicious diatribe.

He took another drink, letting the fiery liquid scorch its way down his throat. He unbuttoned the top few buttons on his shirt, fanning his collar open to cool himself. The dog nuzzled his way in to the darkened room before his train of thoughts could pull him back to Fallwell. Casha bent down to pick up the smelly, wiggling dog. Lifting him was more than a struggle than he’d ever care to admit. He sighed deeply, holding the now content dog in his arms.

“What’s done cannot be undone.” He shivered as the full effect of the power share hit him. He growled as his glass started to warm and threw back the last of the scotch, holding the empty glass so that the dog could lick at the warm glass. He rubbed his eyes as if to try and fight his coming migraine.

“It won’t be very fun around me, mutt. You sure you can take the pace?” In reply, the smelly dog licked the demon prince’s face.

Casha laughed. “Very well, then. I suppose we better go to bed before I start shaking so badly that walking completely eludes me, and you’re the one that has to carry me.”

He tenderly tucked him under his arm. He got to his unsteady feet and grinned down at the little creature. “And now, the true beginning of our end.”

He laughed as heartily as his current condition would allow and walked out the door.

Epilogue

Arcady looked once more out the window of the plane as it was on its descent. Even in spring, Russia looked desolate. He sighed and sat back as the flight attendant asked passengers to fasten seatbelts and return tray tables to their upright positions. Minutes later, they were on the ground and exiting the plane. His phone rang just as he was getting out of customs.

"Morrison."

The voice on the other end was even, cultured. "I see you made it, unfettered."

"Yeah, Casha, I did. Now, who the fuck is supposed to meet me?"

"I'm not sure. Just look for a driver with your name. That's probably your best bet. Dimitri said something about sending a car."

"Thanks. Fal and Ast okay?"

"Fallon is worried a tad, and Astrid...well, she is still sleeping from the night's festivities."

"You didn't ruin her for Fal, did you?"

"Heavens, no. I merely enjoyed her, same as you with Miss Ashlyn. Am I right?"

"Low blow, demon. But I didn't bind to Ash, nor did I feed on her."

"Astrid will be fine, I assure you. Fallon is with her now as is the dog. She's just tired. After all, Arcady, she loves Fallon. She doesn't love me."

Arcady thought over the demon's words. *Just how attached to Astrid is the demon? He must care for her to say something like that.*

Casha spoke again. "Fallon asked me to remind you to please check in with any progress."

"Whatever you say, demon. Tell Fallon I'll do what I can." He hung up the phone, grabbed his bag from the claim deck, and set off to find the carport.

The motor pool was near the exit doors, and Arcady found it quickly enough. Off to one side of the drivers stood a large man, wearing a uniform and cap with a sign that said simply, *Morrison*.

He walked up to the driver and nodded his head. The driver smiled and winked at him. "This way, sir." His voice was gruff, unrefined. Arcady followed.

The limo he was led to was ice blue. Arcady chuckled to himself. *Trust Dimitri to have a fucking ice blue limo.*

The door was opened, and the interior was blue suede. Arcady got in, and the driver closed the door. The car started and pulled away, and in a minute they were on the highway, heading away from the airport.

It was then the partition came down. Arcady looked up, too late, as a dart imbedded itself into his exposed neck.

"What the fuck?" were his only words before the darkness took him.

Turn the page for a sneak preview of the first in Stella and Audra's dragon elementals series *Fire in His Eyes*, Alcyone Sterling's story, out this October from Tease Publishing...

As she stepped out from behind the back room door, the party was already in full swing. Camions was already holding court to the left of the bar, about ten men obstructed Alcyone's view of her queen. She smirked and shook her head. *This has got to be the reason she plans these things.*

With so many people milling about, all in masks and costumes, she wasn't sure who the invited regulars were and who were the individuals that Camions has specifically invited. She was sure, however, that not everyone here was on the guest list, which was the beauty of it. Crashers at a party such as this were an everyday occurrence, the anonymity their safety net. Surely her admirer would be here by now. She made sure her own mask was in place, a white domino with what looked like dragon scales and rubies around the eyes, the bottom of her face exposed.

The crowd was dense, the dance floor peppered with bodies moving in time to the music. Alcyone, having entered the dancing throng, surrendered herself to the beat of the music, gyrating in the center of the floor. *So? You're watching me are you?* She thought to herself as she raised her arms above her head, *Goddess I hope you like what you see... whoever you are... join me, please join me.*

She danced some more, gaining anonymous partners here and there, but none were what she was waiting for. The dancing was working her up, the hands touching her, bolder for the anonymity, heightened her awareness of her body, of the sensitivity that was climbing as her temperature rose. She was hitting that aerobic high, her endorphins and

her lust threatening to break through from just beneath the surface.

As a succubus, this was dangerous in a normal setting, but tonight, well, she could let go without the worry of setting a crowd of unwitting revelers into an out and out orgy. She felt eyes on her, penetrating, from somewhere in the room. She felt it, coming from all angles, and her body responded to the unseen force. She moved just for the one watching her, her hips gyrating, making the dress whip and sway, beckoning whomever it was to her, daring them to touch her.

Somebody behind her slipped their arms around her waist pulling her against a very hard, masculine body. The stranger inhaled the scent of her hair then rested his hot lips on the side of her throat. "You smell wonderful little one."

She smirked and moved against him, rolling her hips. "Do I?" If this wasn't him, then she hoped her admirer was watching, and hoped what she was doing was making him extremely jealous.

"Yes, you do love. Like fire..."

Fire eh? I can do fire. She turned and wrapped her arms around the man that caught her, looking right at her mask's twin, just in blue. She drew in his scent as well, still moving in his arms, her hips making seductive passes, teasing his own. "And you smell like a hot summer night in the Cotswold's."

He smirked down at her. "Really? You think?"

She giggled and nodded. *Is this him? My admirer? Goddess, I hope so...*

He pulled her closer to him as they danced for a while in silence. His body so close to hers, moving

with hers, she almost lost her mind. He was large, and she could feel the muscles under his long sleeved grey shirt. Her hands roamed his body as he kept them always touching from the waist down. She could feel him, how aroused he was, his thickness riding low on her belly. *Goddess he feels good. It's got to be him.* She looked up and kissed his warm lips, clutching him close and rotating her hips into his. He slipped his tongue through her parted lips, and the kiss was explosive. Heat, searing and sexy, ran through her as his tongue danced with hers, the soft feeling of flames licking at the inside of her mouth as he plundered her body and soul. Her body thrummed in time with the rhythm of it, and she used everything she had to hold back a moan. The stranger broke the kiss and smiled down at her. "So my little pixie, do you like what you see? Or were you expecting someone else?"

She shuddered and nodded. "I like what I feel too." she ground her hips into him again and then turned, rubbing her body down his. She felt him everywhere, her body responding to his nearness.

His large hands tightened around her hips, crushing her into him. "Well I always like what I see when I watch you." He whispered into her ear biting teasingly on her lobe.

It is him... Goddess this luscious man was the one that sent the flower, and the choker. Her heart was palpitating as she tried to figure out how it was she got so lucky, she turned her head to his ear and purred. "And do you watch me a lot?" His voice was so smoky and thick, all she wanted was to hear it as

he touched her, the effect of both sending her into a frenzy she would have had to keep in check were she not at this party.

"Ummm hmmm, I watch you a lot." She could hear the smile in his words, and his hand began to leave her hips. One slid lower and the other higher to cup her breast. "I watch you always. Even when you're alone at night, love." He gently pinched her nipple as his other hand slipped low to cup her through her dress, adding pressure to her clit. "I know where you like to touch yourself..." he whispered, kissing and biting at the sensitive flesh on her neck. "I know how to touch you." he all but growled into her ear.

She shuddered, leaning into his hands. His caresses were bringing her to the edge and the situation, this strange man touching her, telling her such things with such a sexy voice... she shook for him. "You... you do?"

"You're a goddess Alcyone... my goddess. You should be worshipped, let me..."

Her name rolling off his tongue made her whimper. She nodded and licked her lips.

"Anything you want, just don't stop touching me."

"Oh, I don't plan to; it's not in my nature. But I'm not into public shows..." A deep chuckle escaped him. "Well, at least not on this dance floor. Should we allow the shadows to provide more cover?"

She nodded and motioned to one of the darkened alcoves. He slowly guided them over, the pounding beat of the music providing enough cover for them both. She followed him, her eyes on his

ass, hugged nicely in his dove grey pants. This was crazy; in her life as a succubus she never had something this out there happen to her. The corner was dark and void of life as they settled in and she wrapped herself around him, both their masks still in place.

He kissed her deeply, lifting her with ease, and she shuddered and whimpered as he did, wrapping her legs around his waist with a smile.

He growled as he broke the kiss. "You taste just as good as you smell, my love."

She kissed him again, words eluding her. All she could do was feel, and boy, did he feel good. She moaned, her body keening with energy.

He slipped her dress up, his hands kneading her thighs.

"Gods... please..." she bit out as she whimpered, loving the feel of his hands on her bare skin.

He pressed her small frame against the wall, letting her feel his need.

"Baby... please don't tease..."

"Teasing?" He guided his hand between them, and slipped a finger inside of her. "Love, I haven't even begun."

She whimpered again, riding his hand as he touched her, his thumb pressing on her clit. If she had been standing, she wouldn't have lasted long, as it was; her legs were shaking as they were wrapped around his waist. She bucked, trying to get him to move, to touch and caress her wet and wanting flesh.

He tortured well, and he didn't lie when he said

he knew just how to touch her. She wondered, idly, just how he was able to watch her alone in her room. She didn't have any windows that faced anything remotely useable to peep from, and unless he was a Caligo, which was entirely possible, he could use the shadows for transport and spying like the shadow court did. *Shit, maybe he is a Caligo* she thought as she moaned into his mouth, a bruising kiss the object of their mutual enjoyment. *Can't be a Caligo, I think I have met all the men, well except for Amaro, but it can't be him.* When he finally slipped his fingers into her willing flesh she surrendered conscious thought. When he moved away from her lips and found her neck, biting down hard, and she moaned in response. He growled into her skin, working her harder, his finger raising in temperature and thumbing hotly on her clit.

About the Authors

Stella and Audra Price are multi-published, award winning authors of the Eververse books, including many not yet in print. They have opened the minds and hearts of readers and reviewers alike with their tales of Were-snakes, Satyrs, Djinn, Unicorns, Fallen Angels and Demons, and live daily in the Eververse.

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