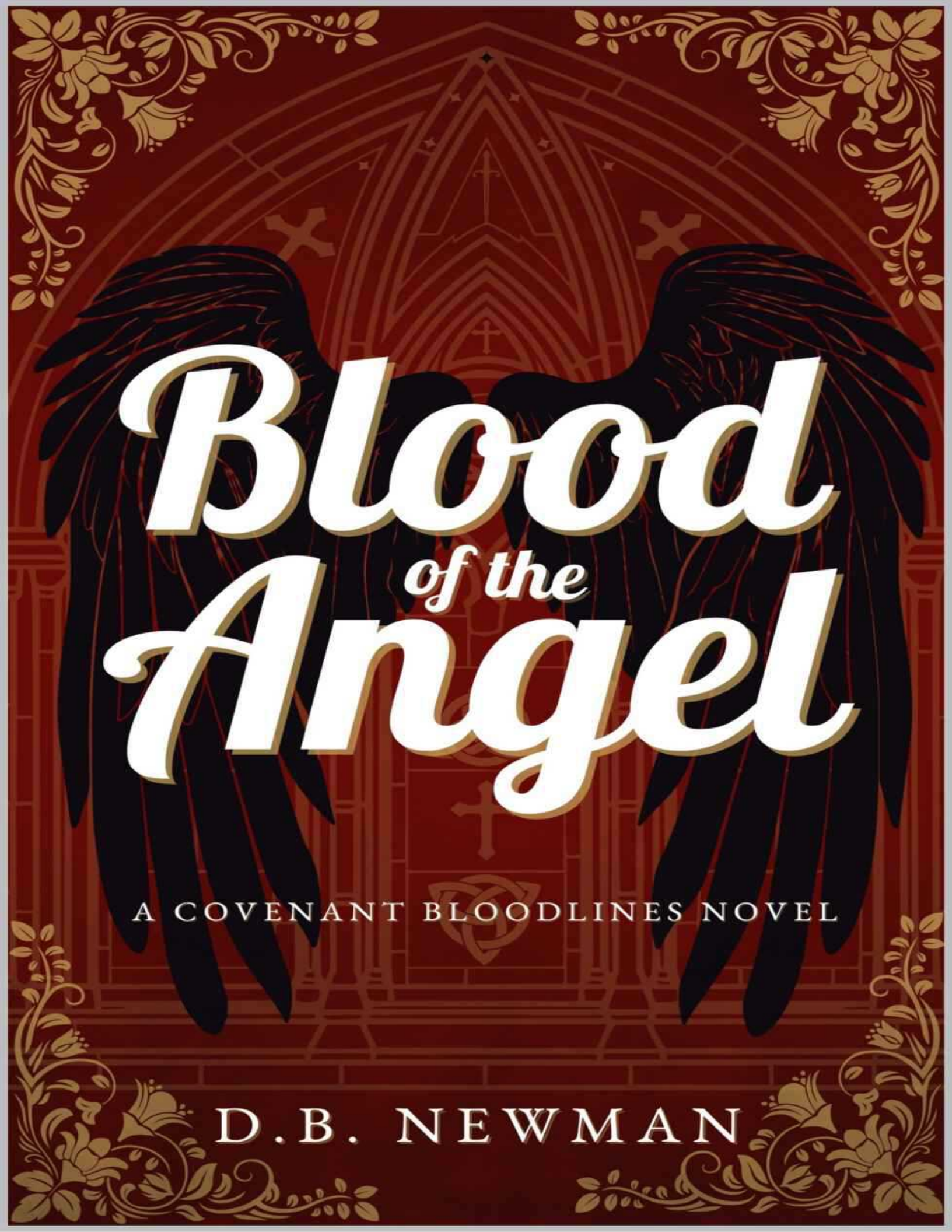

Blood
of the
Angel
A COVENANT BLOODLINES NOVEL
D.B. NEWMAN

Blood of the Angel

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This book is dedicated to my mother. For she is what allowed fantasy worlds to become a safe space for creativity and escape. She and I were not meant for this simple modern world, but the worlds beyond found in words on pages.

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Author’s Note: This novel contains content that may be difficult for some readers including; graphic violence, sexual violence, self-harm, drug abuse and torture. This book also contains graphic sexual content.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Arrival

Oaken Academy, a private university for the wise and curious, stood proud. Its tall spires reached into the sky attempting to touch the Heavens above in honour of God. The new student found himself craning his neck towards the clear sky, his eyes squinting against the light. The windows arched at the peak, displaying intricately crafted stained glass, allowed the early morning sun to cast dazzling rays across the surface of the castle. A visceral polychrome spectacle that beautifully captured Oaken's fantastical opulence. *It was simply breathtaking.*

The Half-demon found himself frozen right at the base of the stone perron steps, the large dark oak doors greeting him. For now they remained closed and stiff as steel. Taunting, yet daring.

If you had asked Peter five years ago if he believed in creatures of legend—of Angels and Demons—the answer would have been no. The only monsters he knew morphed and twisted into the forms of mundane men who used their fists in shows of affection.

Peter's thumb ran over cigarette scars on his forearm. His mind tried focusing on the reasons why he was at the institution in the first place. He recalled the night his magic broke free and punished the monster who abused him and his mother, Sandre Bronze.

There was no denying what he was now. *A Demon*.

His magic had started small, when he discovered he could ask people, especially women, to do anything he wanted. All he had to do was ask in the right way. But his connection to his magic grew stronger the more he used it. Buried beneath his anger was a fire— volatile, simmering and

destructive to those around him. That’s what had happened that night—the night Peter tried to never think or speak about. The night he took Thomas’ life.

Peter remembered his first encounter with the academy’s headmistress, Helena Penns, who had found him on the streets in Toronto, running with a biker gang and thieving to make a living. A wave of shame washed through his chest cavity, squeezing around his heart and heating his cheeks. He swallowed the lump in his throat and thought about the redemption that was offered. The clean slate. One that awaited him in the secret world of the Covenant.

The large dark oak doors groaned while opening, drawing Peter’s attention from his cold fingers to the newcomer. The headmistress was dressed in a black two-piece jumpsuit that was coated in navy iridescent flowers which refracted the light of the sun. Her short hair was perfectly styled with care, and she smiled at Peter through vibrant red lipstick.

"I was not sure that you were going to accept my invitation." She spoke with the same softness that Peter remembered; calm, but authoritative and welcoming.

"It's not like I really had a choice..." Peter grumbled sarcastically. With hands now in his pockets, he felt his heart begin to race. Every instinct was telling him to run, a factory default for anything uncertain. He knew the supernatural existed, he was a perfect example of that, but the Half-demon was not ready to completely leave the human world behind. Driving through the invisible barrier and watching the academy warp into view had been one thing and using fire magic another, but walking through those doors meant everything changed. It meant facing all he had done. The *sins* he had committed.

"You are not a hostage here, Peter. I can sense your unease, but I do hope you find it in your best interest to give us a chance." She stepped aside and gestured inside the university.

Peter kicked at the gravel a few times debating whether to go into the building. *Is this where I’m meant to be? Will it really help me? Or will I just get more people hurt?*

As if fate would have it, the new student glanced upwards towards the right of the central face. He felt someone's eyes on him, then goosebumps rising along his skin. Peter found a figure standing in an arched window, watching him like his gooseflesh had warned. He could not make out the

figure from the distance, but their gaze burned his skin. Branded him. Beckoned him forward.

Peter’s azure eyes fell back to the headmistress who smiled at him with growing impatience. He took the first step towards the front entrance.

"Leave your bag. I will have someone fetch it and bring them to the Daemonium Praetorium.” A single backpack contained everything Peter owned.

The Demon Hall.

The words rang the inside of his cranium like a deafening bell reminding him that he was a creature of Hell. A Demon—well, Half-demon—with an unknown Demonic father who had impregnated his loving human mother. A mother whom he had left behind after the accident.

I didn't even leave her a note. Peter took a breath, calming his mind to face his new home.

Keeping his shaky hands in the pocket of his hoodie, Peter found the courage to continue walking up the stone steps. Once through the front doors, Peter’s jaw became slack.

The halls of the academy were lined with grand gothic arches and floors were made from a checkered black and white marble. Light from the large stained glass ceiling, domed at the top, sent colours streaming across the surface of the floors. Statues of Archangels carved by the talented hands of artists, stood guard in four spaces like a compass. The Archangel Michael, stood strong at north. The marblesque statue wielded a longsword pointed downwards, to pass judgement to all who entered. It filled Peter with a sense of awe and reverence. And fear.

"It is quite something isn't it, Mr. Bronze?" She placed a hand on his shoulder trying to get Peter to thaw from the spot he was frozen on. His eyes continued to shift around the area as they began walking through the left corridor. Peter started to notice the students who were milling about, watching him with curious side glances. He was quick to notice their inhuman qualities; scales, weird coloured eyes, and horns that protruded from skulls caught his attention.

“It is best to try and not gawk at the other students. I know you have had limited interactions with the supernatural, but there is a wide diversity of people enrolled at this institution that will not go easy on you. It is a pride of mine to know that we are welcoming to all creatures based on strength of character and dedication to God’s divine power. I believe everyone deserves

a chance to find purpose in this life and the next,” Headmistress Penns told Peter as they ascended the grand staircase to the western side of the academy. The staircase held the same patterns of grandeur. Running his hands along the bannister, he took in the texture beneath his fingers as he ascended.

“Will I be given a tour?” Peter asked, noticing that his voice drew attention from the other students wearing similar matching uniforms. He stiffened under their penetrating gazes, his skin prickling with unease.

“Yes, you will be given a tour from a fellow Half-demon. A daughter of Lilith, Gabrielle Clear, has volunteered to help you assimilate into the university’s environment and understand the rules here. I like to keep strict discipline, for several reasons. One of them being that hyper-emotional and supernaturally charged individuals can lead to disasters, as you know personally."

That's one way to put my accident.

Headmistress Penns chose to ignore his eyeroll, but did not miss the way his shoulders dropped.

"As much as I like to think that I am a 'woke'," she gestured with air quotes, "the students will be better at helping you settle in here."

The two of them continued to walk the corridor to the farthest western side of the second floor. The headmistress took him down the hall to the right, and stopped in front of another large oak door. Intricate designs were burned into the surface, reminding him of the swirls within the paintings of Van Gogh. Atop the doorframe, carved in stone was the Latin phrase '*daemones ex cinere*'.

"Demons shall rise from the ashes," she read for him and extended her hand to the door. "This is where you will find your common space and your boarding. You will share a room with Crow Morpheus who transferred here last year. I will have someone summon you closer to the evening to discuss your classes and *your situation*. I will be keeping tabs on your adjustment here since—well, the unfortunate events that led me to finding you." She smiled at Peter for reassurance, but knowing she was going to be watching him like a hawk did not make him feel at ease.

"I really do hope that this place can become home for you Peter. I pray that you take this chance to have a fresh start. To find out who you are meant to be. Who you choose to be." She gave a quick nod and began to

head back the way they had come, her heels echoing and fading into the general ambience.

Peter closed his eyes briefly, taking a shaky breath to try and ease the pressure inside of his chest. His heart pounded as his palms became moist. There was an unpleasant feeling in his gut. One that told him that he was not going to like it here. Every nerve in his body was screaming at him to run. The Half-demon swallowed, slowly opening his eyes to the Demon Hall. Reaching out his hand the door opened automatically without him even touching the surface.

Peter stood frozen with his hand still extended outwards as heads turned his way. Many of them took a double take, while others didn't even bat an eye. They were all Half-demons, like him. The new student was the most unsettled by the obsidian eyes that landed on him from the back of the room. The Half-demon didn’t blink as he stared.

He took a confident step forward, entering the shared space.

The Demon Commons was a large room with massive book shelves that lined the walls, all stacked with various coloured volumes. At the back of the room was brightly lit with full-scale windows that overlooked the perfectly manicured lawns of the side yard. Being on the western side of the building meant the sun would cast its glow through the massive panes when it set. The thought gave Peter enough strength to put a smile on his deadpan features.

There was a fireplace to the left side of the room surrounded by a leather couch occupied by an albino female lost in a book, and two empty arm chairs. The coffee table sat on the centre of an old red rug that had definitely seen better days. There was a male laying in front of the fire with his eyes closed, unbothered and listening to music in his earbuds.

His head nodded, impressed at the unexpectedly cosy atmosphere, regardless of the several Demonic residents here. Tables were scattered through the space, many currently occupied by dutiful students.

Peter noted the beastly looking Half-demon in the far right corner who still had his midnight eyes locked and unwavering. The Half-demon's chocolate skin glistened in the lamplight, as his large muscular chest heaved with steady, deep breaths. His magic flared in response to the threat, sensing that this Half-demon was powerful and untrusting of newcomers.

"You must be Peter." A bouncy redhead came his way drawing his eyes away from the back corner. The male couldn't help but notice the tightness

of her shirt and how her breasts were fully on display. Peter’s mouth went slightly dry with instant attraction. He had a thing for redheads, he couldn't help it.

This must be my tour guide, Gabrielle.

"I am," Peter finally spoke, taking her outstretched hand.

"I knew you were going to be hot, but I wasn't expecting you to be this hot. Us Demons always get gifted good looks, unless your father is Amon. They often come out with freaky animal features."

Peter just blinked at her.

"Ah, you're a virgin aren't you?"

"What—no."

"I meant to Demon history and culture. You grew up not knowing what you were," she teased with a smile, knowing full well she had caught him off guard.

"I knew that I was different, but I don't know much about anything supernatural…" Peter trailed off noticing how her attention had shifted to his lips when he spoke. Peter could feel himself wanting to be devoured in her gaze. He wanted to find a way to snake his fingers into the lining of the lacy panties she was sure to be wearing. Peter could sense she wanted him. He could always tell when women wanted him. Finding people’s hidden desires came naturally to him.

"Well, that's what I am here for. For whatever—you—*need*." She purred, pausing to place emphasis on each word. She took a step towards him, moving gracefully and carefully to place his eyes where she wanted them.

"Oh my Inferno, Gabby. You can't just fuck every new guy that walks through that door."

Gabby smiled at him once more before acknowledging the voice of protest.

Peter stared at Gabby’s side profile a second longer, taking in the freckles that danced over her nose, before letting his eyes wander to the new creature. She was much shorter than Gabby, skin as white as snow with short wavy white hair and startling white eyes. White eyes that were as sharp as blades, holding an extreme intelligence behind them. They calculated him, aware of the danger that hid beneath his human-like appearance. The white Half-demon’s head tilted to the side.

"But, Snow! Look at him. He's shiny and new... and," Gabby turned back to Peter and dragged a single long finger nail down his hard chest, "I am sure he knows exactly what to do in the bedroom. The perfect fix."

Peter leaned forward brushing Gabby's hair from her ear to lean in close. "I will show you exactly what I am capable of doing to you." Peter lowered his voice as he spoke, every woman's kryptonite. Gabby sucked in a breath making her chest heave.

Peter stood tall with a victorious smirk on his face. "But, after you give me a tour. Can't be pissing off the headmistress on my first day here." Snow rolled her eyes at the pair of them before returning to the book she had been reading.

"Well, let me give you a tour of your bedroom first." Gabby's voice was sultry, trying to regain the composure and confidence she had previously.

"I'd much rather start with yours," he teased. Gabby was already putty in his hands and he was going to take full advantage.

Peter and Gabby exited through the northwest corridor to the training fields that had Peter stuttering to a stop. The cool breeze kicked browning maple leaves in a tumble.

“This is where combat training takes place. One of the few mandatory courses at Oaken and depending on your major, supplemented training.” Gabby gestured to the three sections before them. Field one directly in front of them was segmented in two. The closest segment was an obstacle course used to test agility and strength. The top half was a horse field with a small stable. There were a few students running barrel drills on two large black steeds.

“Why is training so important?” Peter questioned his tour guide as they made their way to the centre field. It was a large sports field with two tall goal posts on either end. They watched a few students running drills on the field. Others were running laps on the track that encircled it.

“Combat and war have a long history at Oaken. This institution wasn’t always a university, it was once a holy fortress. Fighting is entangled with their beliefs and their faith as a form of spiritual devotion. That’s what’s taught. Discipline and spiritual practice. Some people in the Covenant

believe we are heading for dark times. That's why they brought in General Carter to train us."

Peter stopped walking, processing her words. Gabby paused, her uniform skirt billowing as she turned towards him.

"Dark times?" Peter's eyebrow was cocked. Curiosity was a dangerous thing.

Gabby's smirk attempted to portray innocence, but there was a devilish glint in her eye. Her voice was a whisper as she stood on her toes to tell him a secret. Her breath was hot against his ear, the lobe numb from the cool air. It sent a shiver down his abdomen.

"There are rumours that the end of the world is coming." Peter just scoffed, disbelieving his immediate reaction. Gabby just shrugged and pointed to the middle field, changing the subject.

"Oaken prides itself in its sports. It's currently rugby and lacrosse season." She jumped up with a hand on his arm that had his cock responding. "You have to join us for the opening game! Damon Kurne, one of my friends, is on the lacrosse team. He's a Half-demon too, son of Astaroth." She pointed to number ten, who waved at them. Damon was yelled at by the coach, and his small form hopped back into the drill.

The third field was in session as they approached. Three pairs were engaged in hand to hand combat on top of three platforms. The others were undertaking a step by step exercise with quarterstaffs, all perfectly in sync.

Peter felt instantly drawn to the field, like his blood itched to join them, to train alongside them. His eyes fell to the instructor. A large, muscular Half-demon with midnight horns and eyes had his hands behind his back. Observing and barking orders.

"Alright, let's continue the tour. We still have the east side to explore." Gabby pulled at his arm and they cut through the upper east courtyard, passed the greenhouse, and returned to the interior of Oaken Academy.

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CHAPTER TWO

Dreams of an Angel

What was Heaven trying to communicate?

Blair Dawn had awoken from another nightmare filled evening with the same dark stranger who had been a visitor for several weeks now. One with azure eyes and messy hair.

The Covenant princess stared at the stone ceiling and pondered the meaning behind the repetitive dreaming. She knew her dreams were special, but they weren't always the most clear on their importance. This stranger had to be significant or she wouldn't be dreaming about him so often. And what did he have to do with the flames that would destroy the precious Oaken Library?

Blair pulled back her quilt, regretting the action when the cool air nipped at her skin. She shivered and shoved her bare feet into well-loved bunny slippers. Blair immediately made her bed, pulling the sheet and quilt up towards the top of the mattress and smoothing it over with her hands to make sure it was flat.

The morning light slipped through the thin curtains in a pale, disciplined line. Blair drew the curtains open, letting the dorm room brighten causing Willow, her roommate, to groan and stuff her head under her pillow.

Blair sat in front of her small vanity on top of her neatly organized desk with her back straight and shoulders squared, as if even the act of preparing for the day required impeccable posture. As the daughter of the Archangel Michael, she was expected to look the part of a perfect princess. She could hear her mother’s voice droning on about slouching or eating too much dinner.

The mirror showed her a face that was almost flawless. She leaned in, assessing every detail with the practiced precision of someone who had built an entire life on impeccable presentation. As an heir to the throne, she was expected to be nothing less than perfection. She would have to hide the imperfections; the smudges under her eyes and the small blemish that decided to break out on her chin.

A single stray hair was smoothed back. The faint shadows beneath her eyes were dabbed away with concealer. Each motion was deliberate, controlled, ritualistic.

Blair opened her makeup case, its contents arranged with military precision.

Foundation first. She swept it across her skin in even strokes, watching her complexion transform into the porcelain finish people expected from her. Powder followed, tapped lightly along her cheekbones until the texture blurred into something airbrushed.

Next came the eyeliner; a step that always required the most focus. She held her breath as she drew the line–thin and sharp–the kind of stroke that suggested she never made mistakes. When she finished one eye, she checked the angle, then matched the other with surgical accuracy.

Mascara coated her long lashes, tilting them upwards with more volume. Her chapped lips were coated in a simple gloss. She rubbed her full lips together delicately making sure it covered the entire surface.

A final touch of highlighter at the tops of her cheeks with her pinky finger, catching the morning light. She tilted her head left, then right, searching for any imperfection that might betray her. None remained.

Her hair, kept tightly in curlers overnight, was the last step. She removed each instrument carefully, laying them on the surface of the desk. She fluffed out her waves before spraying them quickly with hairspray to hold their shape. Blair coughed and waved her hand through the air to clear the putrid substance.

Only then did she allow herself a small exhale.

She reached for her simple gold earrings, fastening them with a soft click. The Nephilim in the mirror looked composed, polished, untouchable —exactly as the world expected her to be. Exactly as the princess needed to be.

For a moment, she studied her reflection, not with vanity but with vigilance. Perfection wasn’t a luxury for her; it was armour. And now, fully

assembled, she was ready to step into the day.

Blair cleaned up her mess, returning her makeup to its place in the drawer of her desk before she walked to her closet and grabbed out her uniform.

"You feeling okay, Blair?" Willow asked, sitting up and stretching her arms overhead.

Blair buttoned up her blouse and sat on the edge of her bed to put on her knee high socks embroidered with golden swirls.

“I’m okay, just tired.” Blair offered a small smile that Willow didn’t buy.

“Same dream?” Willow rubbed the sleep from her eyes, before making a face at the clock. Willow was not an early riser.

"Was I making noise? I'm sorry," Blair mumbled. Tasting her morning breath made her scrunch up her face in distaste.

"No screaming tonight, but lots of whimpering. Have you figured out what the Angels are trying to tell you?" Willow was always concerned about Blair’s well-being, which the princess always appreciated. It was nice having someone who cared about her. Willow was one her closest friends and understood absent Angelic fathers as a daughter of Jophiel. The two of them had shared a dorm since they were in the secondary level. Their dorm room was testament to their life within these walls. It was highly decorated, fairy lights splayed across the walls and ceiling. Years of collected memories, decorated throughout the cosy space. Snapshots of their lives displayed amongst textbooks and candles.

"Not yet. But I’m sure there is some ancient meditating practice that I haven't tried." Blair put a smile on her face, hiding behind it to save her friend the burden of knowing what darkness was before them both. And covering her rising suspicions that her dreams may be showing their Revelation.

Blair could vividly picture the shade of his hair and the vibrance of his blue eyes. She remembered the heat that pooled off of his skin whenever she went near him. The dream flooded back and consumed her.

His beautiful blue eyes aflame in emotional agony.

"Please." Her voice coarse, pathetic.

His palm rested against her cheek, wiping away tears already evaporating from the heat.

"Stay away from me, please." He kissed her forehead and ripped himself from her white knuckled fingers.

She shivered, wrapping her arms around herself and gathered the courage to leave her dorm.

The Nephilim princess walked down the stone corridors towards the entrance of the school when she felt herself stop. Blair turned her head towards the window and tilted her head to the side. Stepping forward she stared through the glass.

There he was, the new student. She observed him closely trying to make out his features from this distance. The only thing she could make out was the dark colour of his hair and that he slouched his shoulders too much. He kicked the gravel a few times before he paused and looked her way.

Heat spread through her chest that froze her in place. It was the same feeling she got within her Dreaming, trapped within the burning flames of the academy. Her whole body screamed at her to be closer to him, to see the blaze within his eyes and make sure it was really him. A tether stretched between them. A single thread.

"Blair!" She broke her trance to see Willow running down the hall towards her. "The new student arrived!"

"I can see that," she stated while pointing out the coloured pane towards the newcomer.

Willow inhaled a large breath and nodded. "He's part Demon according to what everyone is saying—which is unfortunate because he looks like he's quite firm, even from this distance."

Blair agreed with Willow. He did look strong and broad in the chest. She wondered what it would be like to run her hands along his skin.

Would it burn me like it did in my dreams?

She bit her lip. She didn't experience these thoughts often when it came to men, but if he was the man from her dreaming, then she had to know more. Even if it was just curiosity.

Blair had spent the rest of her morning following class in the old library, pulling out books on Dreaming, and doing her own research on some of the most infamous Seers of all time. She prayed that she would find the answers she seeked within these pages, to know why God had chosen her to see fragments of the future. Mainly she prayed that she was not alone in the horror that was before them and maybe offer a way that Revelation could be avoided. A way to save her people from destruction.

Blair chewed on the end of a pencil, translating the text before her.

The Oaken Library had walls lined floor-to-ceiling with book shelves that appeared to stretch as far as the eye could see. The shelves, made from various dark woods, had been carved with biblical symbols of knowledge and spirit. At the centre was a beautifully crafted tree with hearty branches and roots. The tree of knowledge was a calling to God’s garden of Eden, where Eve had taken a bite of the forbidden fruit. The edges of the rectangle were decorated with raised lines and tiny doves; the bird being a representation of peace and spirit. It was a reminder of the importance of knowledge and the burden of carrying it. It called for all who pulled a book off the shelves to understand the importance of the past, of learning, and moving forward toward harmony with all.

Hanging chandeliers overhead softly glowed with an ethereal shimmer, a light that casted decorative shadows across the collection of books. Blair took in a deep breath, smelling the scent of old books and parchment—it was a scholar's wet dream.

So far none of the tomes provided insight on dream-walking, and none had any of the omens or symbols she had witnessed. Blair simply wished she could talk to her father once in a while to see if he had any information on the subject.

"This is the library. But if you're like me, you won't be here very often. Books are outdated."

Blair recognized the voice of Gabby Clear and it drew her attention from the Old English she had been reading about the Demon, Stolas, and his son, Gregory.

There he was, the new student, trailing behind her. Willow had updated Blair after their Forensics and Magical Laws course that his name was Peter Bronze. Father unknown, which made sense considering his birth mother probably either did not know or didn't want him to know. According to rumours, he had an outburst of power that led to the injury of several people

a few years ago when he was in his last year of high school. She was not sure what the details were and wanted to ask him herself, but knew their—ancestral *differences*—would be an obstacle.

Now that she could observe him closer, and because he was wearing a tight fitted t-shirt rather than a bulky hoodie, she could see how strong he actually looked. His biceps were what caught her attention first before her eyes grazed along his jaw and the way his dark hair bounced as he walked. He had light stubble along his face that didn't take away from the cut of his jawline. She still couldn't see the colour of his eyes at this distance, but she could imagine that they were the striking blue from her vision.

She could feel herself wandering into dangerous thoughts, wondering what he smelled like and how the warmth of his skin would seep into hers.

He had sensed her gaze, his head moving around in jolted motions, trying to find the source. She quickly ducked out of view and held her breath. She wasn't sure why she had decided to hide, but she had already dug herself into this hole.

"Well, let's head to the dining hall for lunch. I am starving." Gabby spoke loudly, getting the librarian and Water Caster, Kirian Renfields, to shush her. Blair released her breath and peaked over the table to see that they were heading out of the room, back the way they came. Even his back looked muscular. Blair hadn't realised that her heart had been racing inside of her chest until she laid her palm over the pumping organ.

She sighed to herself, a single finger twirling in her curly waves.

Focus, Blair.

“May I ask you something without judgement?” Merlin took a seat across from the princess who was lost within her swirling thoughts.

“Of course, Merlin. Always.” Merlin and Blair had promised each other long ago that they would always be transparent. His intelligence and ability to recognize patterns was a valuable asset for a member of royalty. Blair valued his opinions and forethoughts, as it always provided perspective.

“If this rumour is true, and I pray that it is not, then your dreaming—I believe—may be connected to the prophecy.” Merlin was suggesting that her other nightmare, the one of strife and pain, was their first glimpse that their judgement was about to be upon them.

“You may be right,” Blair confessed.

“I will continue to keep my ear to the ground and my eyes in the sky.”

Blair bowed her head in appreciation. Her teeth clamped around her bottom lip, needing God’s guidance more than ever.

Almighty Lord, is that what you are showing me? Revelation? What am I to do to keep us from this fate?

As Merlin and Blair approached the dining hall, she felt her heart begin to race. She found herself subconsciously fixing her hair and quickly pinching her cheeks.

"What's got you in a twist? Worried that asshole Jules will be present? You need to stop seeing him. He's toxic," Merlin told her for the millionth time this month. Blair knew that Jules Orson, descendant of the Archangel Zachariah, had his issues but was capable of being sweet at times, and was the only male who had actually tried to pursue her.

They had been on and off since the ninth grade. But, after the death of his twin sister, Amanda, two years ago, Jules changed. There was no more effort put into their relationship and he buried himself in drugs. It wasn’t long before he started missing practices and his courses. The only reason he was still enrolled in the academy was the tuition that his mother had prepaid.

At the beginning of summer, before Jules returned to the Zachariah country estate for rehabilitation, Blair had broken off their relationship and they hadn’t spoken all season.

Blair felt ashamed that her mind hadn't even thought about him once today.

"For an Angel, he's kinda the devil, and not in a ‘kinky daddy’ sort of way," Merlin continued.

"In all honesty, we haven’t spoken all summer break. But Jules hasn't made me feel good in a long time."

"Heard that before. You'll crawl back when you need a daddy issue fix." They continued to navigate through the busy doors. Her eyes scanned the Demon table for a certain broad-shouldered individual.

“This is our second last year at Oaken, I don’t want to waste it being distracted by boys.”

Blair's gaze fell on Peter, Snow, and Gabby chatting away at the Half-demon table. Peter sensed her as he had done earlier this morning. His shoulders stiffened, and his head turned in her direction. The chatter within the hall faded into the background as all of her senses honed onto him.

Blair knew she was beautiful, blessed by Angelic features and the dark hair of her father that shimmered red in the sun. With a quick motion she flipped her messy waves, drawing his eyes to her face. She made sure to walk with confidence, making her hips move in just the right ways.

His piercing blue gaze tracked down her slender neck and over her muscular, yet curvy form. It was only seconds before his eyes returned to hers with his lips parted in awe. As she continued forward, she started to feel the expected heat pour from him.

Blair had captured his full attention and she couldn't help the smirk that blossomed. Letting her tongue jut out between her lips, his gaze immediately darted to the action. He swallowed. She saw the lust fill his eyes, his pupils now fully dilated.

Blair decided that she would sit directly behind him since Jackson and Willow were already in the area. She took her seat and immediately crossed her legs from the sudden heat that she felt between them. She wasn't expecting him to have that kind of effect on her. It felt good to know she was desired.

She dared herself to take a final look at him over her shoulder.

"Hey, Blair. Didn't see you at breakfast this morning," Jackson Norman stated.

She returned a trying smile as Merlin took the seat next to her. He glanced between her and Peter briefly, raising eyebrows that meant she would have to explain it to him later.

"Sorry, I was with Father Morgan. Have you seen Jules?" Blair asked, looking at the empty seat. Jackson and Jules had been best friends since they were kids and she prayed she had seen since they shared a dorm room. Both of them had once been on the path to be Warriors of the Blessed, until Jules began slacking and Jackson continued to excel without him.

"You know him, still probably asleep. He was up partying pretty late last night. I didn't know you guys were back together," Jackson commented as he used his chilling breath to instantly turn his coffee from hot to an icy slush, just the way he liked it. Jackson’s eyes asked questions as Malakai Green, son of Gabriel, took a seat next to his cousin. Though they were

cousins, there was little fondness between them due to the rivalry of inheritance between their parents.

All that was missing was the daughter of Raphael, Arlie Cascade, the last of their small pod of Archangels. All six of them had been training together since they were fourteen. A special squad of Nephilim fighters that would one day serve the Covenant. Made lethal in order to protect.

"We aren't together, but he texted me and asked me to meet him at the greenhouse last night… He never showed up." Blair shuffled in her seat, adjusting her hair. Willow just shrugged her shoulders silently. Willow felt the same way about Jules as Merlin did.

The others began to talk about the upcoming weekend, since the annual fall festival was Friday evening. It was a tradition for the dorms to compete in a friendly game, this year being Capture the Flag in Titan Pine Forest. Afterwards, the higher ups would get together for a bonfire at the old willow tree and party all weekend. Blair normally attended the Friday night, but dipped shortly before midnight. She had special training on Saturday mornings with Father Morgan that she couldn’t miss.

Blair let herself tune out the mundane conversation and paid attention to the body heat that pulsated behind her.

"It's nice to meet all of you," she heard Peter say, though it sounded forced. He was the man from her dream; his voice was exactly the same. The same voice that warned her to stay away from him.

It didn't stop her from enjoying the scent of mahogany teakwood and freshly fallen rain that consumed her. She had a feeling that she was not going to be able to stay away from him. Her body called to him, but her mind reminded her of the flames that were going to consume the entire school.

It had something to do with him and she was going to have to find a way to stop it.

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CHAPTER THREE

Continuing the Tour

Gabby Clear skipped the third table decorated in white and gold, pointing to the table closest to the left wall under the portrait. This table was highlighted in various shades of purple. "That table is for the Charmers. Sirens, Succubi, empaths."

His eyes fell on one of the women sitting at the table. Her eyes were an iridescent purple that beckoned him closer.

"Careful, Peter. You got a bit of drool on your chin," Snow interjected as she appeared beside the Demonic pair. Peter Bronze shook his head, breaking the intense eye contact and looking down towards Snow's small frame.

"Succubi are dangerous. They get energy from sexual interactions and have one hell of a sex drive," Gabby added, but Peter was not seeing a downside. Gabby just rolled her eyes as if she knew what he was thinking.

"Come sit with us, Peter. Lunch should be served soon." Gabby gestured to the fourth table that was garnished in black and silver embroidery.

"This is where we sit," Gabby continued as they followed Snow to where their clique sat. Peter took a quick seat and pointed a thumb over his shoulder to the white and gold table.

"Nephilim," Snow added before Gabby could open her mouth, confirming Peter's suspicion. He felt the most out of place since he was still in the clothes he had arrived in. The rest of the student body was in their required attire.

"All of them are pretentious assholes who think they are better than us," Gabby whispered.

"That's because we are."

Peter turned to see a blonde male standing behind him, his hair fluffy from constant care. He was muscular with broad shoulders and a strong jawline. Angelic features that Peter knew artists would spend hours carving on marble. Peter had an appreciation for masculine features and this guy certainly knew he was pretty, as vanity pooled off of him.

"*Fuck off*, Jackson," Gabby spit at him.

The descendent of Archangel Gabriel smirked and made eye contact with Peter. "You must be the new Demon kid. Welcome to Oaken."

Peter could tell this was not a warm welcome based on the vice grip that got placed on his shoulder. He was beginning to understand very quickly that there was a rivalry between the Angels and Demons. Rather cliché if you asked him.

Jackson continued on his way and sat at the Nephilim table where he was joined by a few more rowdy males.

"It's best to keep your distance from them," Snow said to him when he turned.

"So, what? Are we only allowed to interact with other Demons? Aren't most of the classes mixed?" Peter began thinking about a certain pair of purple eyes at the Charmer’s table in front of him. Gabby smacked his chest as if reading his thoughts.

"You can hang with whomever you please, but Half-demons and Nephilim tend to keep out of each other's ways." Gabby was studying his face as he began to disassociate.

With a loud clang, the large bells of the academy sang to life and echoed throughout the room. Peter winced at the reverberation, feeling the loud clang press through his chest. Students began to file in to take their seats at their respective tables.

Peter’s shoulders got tense making his spine straighten. He felt the similar sensation he had this morning, gooseflesh rising over his skin. Peter glanced around trying to find the person who had triggered the bodily reaction. His eyes landed on a woman with dark wavy hair that swirled around her in chaotic waves as she navigated through the crowd.

"What are you looking at?" Gabby's question was laced with distaste, as if his attention should have been solely on her.

Peter’s eyes tracked the figure and met a beautiful set of green eyes as she came forward. She looked strong, muscular even. He noticed the

sharpness of her jaw that wasn't unfeminine, but added to her overall sculpture-like form. She was stunning, in a way that took the very air out of his chest. They both didn't break eye contact as she came forward.

Peter couldn't make himself look away from her.

She was wearing a white uniform outlined in gold that hugged her body. She was a Half-angel, he deduced, and she certainly looked like one. The Heavens themselves had spent time crafting her beauty, a beauty the poets spent their whole lives trying to translate into abstract words.

Peter tried to swallow away the dryness of his mouth. He could feel her warmth, her power, as she came closer to him. Peter closed his eyes, inhaling the sweetness of her perfume. He glanced over his shoulder as she sat down in the seat directly behind him. Peter saw that she had done the same, their eyes meeting once more before her attention was taken by Jackson.

"Hey, Blair. Didn't see you at breakfast this morning." Jackson was upset that she hadn't been present from his jealous tone.

"Sorry, I was with Father Morgan. Have you seen Jules?" she asked. Peter’s stomach was filled with butterflies as he finally heard her voice. Peter hadn't realised he was waiting in anticipation for her to speak. Her voice was beautiful, soft, alluring. He imagined she could sing and desperately wanted to hear it.

God, what is wrong with me?

Snow Harrison snapped her fingers in his face. "Earth to Peter." He blinked several times and came to attention. There were several others who had joined them.

"This is the crew," Gabby stated as trays of food came floating through the air from the talented skills of Air Casters. Peter watched in awe as triangular cut sandwiches and cauldrons of various vegetable soups were placed on the table by invisible hands.

"Hi, I'm Damon. This is Luca and Crow, your new roomie." Damon Kurne was the lacrosse player Gabby had waved to earlier. He was built but smaller than Peter in muscle. He had striking grey eyes that Peter was sure he used to his advantage.

Luca Morgan, a descendant of Lord Azazel, was willowy. His brown eyes darted around everywhere but Peter’s face. Luca still gave Peter a small smile when they shook hands. This was the male that had been stretched in front of the fireplace like a feline while listening to music.

When Peter got to the child of Asmodeus, Crow Morpheus, he realised that Crow was not much of a talker. They had shoulder length blonde hair, clearly dyed from the colour of their exposed chestnut roots. Their dark chocolate eyes scanned him from head to toe. Peter felt slightly violated, but dismissed it.

"Crow is non-binary. They don't speak too much verbally," the albino daughter of Abaddon added before offering a small smile to her friend. A silent conversation was passing between Snow and Crow by the way the two of them looked into each other's eyes. Snow blushed and quickly returned to the safety of her romance book.

"*But I will speak via telepathy*."

Peter blinked, startled by the sudden voice that had appeared in his mind. He pursed his lips. "It's nice to meet all of you."

"It won't be for long." Luca laughed, making the others join the chorus of chuckles. Peter could imagine that Half-demon company would probably lead to that.

But his mind was wandering to a different kind of company.

The kind that was radiating heat behind him and smelled like sweet strawberry rosé.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Dreaming

Blair opened the door of the library, already ajar with smoke and bright light spewing from the crack. Blair's brow grew moist from the heat as she passed the entrance to see the nightmare that would unfold.

Peter turned towards her, standing in front of a pentagram that was glowing a dangerous crimson. He stood amongst the flames bowing around him while leaving him unharmed. When he turned, his eyes were a bright yellow, instead of the usual sapphire gems. Blair knew she was dreaming, but took a moment to look around the rest of the library to see if anything else had changed.

Gore took her breath away. Her hand jumped to cover her instant sob when she looked at the pentagram once more. At Peter's feet lay entrails—human organs. Blair felt herself turn in her bed and the image before her blurred. She forced herself to calm her heart, so as to not wake her conscious body.

Eyesight returned, the scene sharpened on the severed hearts and livers. Blair quickly counted five sets of two, evenly placed in each pointed quadrant.

Her eyes returned to him, the Half-demon, studying her as if awaiting for her to confirm she was ready for the dream to proceed.

"Who are you?"

The Demon just smiled, his features shifting into a large shadowy figure with the same cadmium orbs.

"*We are at the beginning of the reckoning. The undoing of the Nephilim Houses,*" the Greater Demon hissed while smoke billowed from his nostrils.

The library was no longer the centre stage, but a concrete chamber with large pipes that lined the ceiling. The logo on the boiler was one she recognized, a business in the pocket dimension of the Covenant.

The Demon charged forward, catching her by surprise and enveloped the princess in a cold so frigid it burned.

Trepidation filled the Half-angel, startling her awake. Seeing that the light of day was still beyond the horizon, Blair turned on the light of her nightstand. Willow groaned and flipped over, burying her head under her pillow to shy away from the brightness. She opened her dream journal and quickly jotted down everything that she had seen.

The lights above her twinkling like stars as she listened to Willow's soft snoring. Peter was still at the centre of her dreaming. She truly believed, in her gut, that what she saw would come to pass, but she wasn't sure what side he sat on.

Blair would allow them to become friends. People would talk, yes, but eventually it would fade into next week's gossip. Angels and Half-demons were often not friends, but that did not mean that they couldn't be. She would get closer to him, figure out his parentage and what happened during his accident. That would have to come with time, with trust.

She would wait a couple weeks before telling Father Morgan about Peter, until she knew for sure about the danger that Peter brought to the school, if any. Her vision did not make it clear that it was caused by him, and she would try her best to decipher more information. She would try everything she could to be able to lucid dream.

This could work. *It would work.*

All she had to do was keep her body in check.

Blair surrendered herself to her nightly prayers, asking God for His strength and His guidance. She fell asleep before her amen.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Run Boy Run

Peter Bronze shot up from his bed sheets covered in a thick layer of sweat. "I am sorry if I woke you. I had a nightmare."

Crow just tilted their head, their messy blonde hair falling to one side.

"Falling. It was about falling from the sky."

They frowned at Peter's response, as if somehow it was abnormal of him to be dreaming about falling.

"Is that weird?"

Crow shook their head and went back to minding their business. Peter sighed and pulled back the covers to get ready for his morning run. He slept limited hours in the night, a trademark of the insomnia that plagued him.

He thought back to his adventure last night. He had been wandering the halls of the academy in the after hours to get a better sense of the layout. That was when he had found himself in the library, being pulled to it. There had only been two students and Kirian, the librarian. Peter had had full intention to remain in the shadows—he was light-footed when he needed to be—but in the soft glow of the library orbs, he had been unable to resist talking to Blair.

She was otherworldly; her pale skin had a gentle glow to it. He wanted to run his fingers through her thick curls. Feel the softness of her skin beneath the palms of his hands and the tips of fingers. And hearing her say his name, as it escaped through her lips, was a siren call. He wanted her to scream it.

He wasn’t sure how he managed to walk away from her. He was more curious however, about how she had managed to resist the compelling

allure of his magic. It had an effect on her but she didn’t immediately cave to his whims.

He pictured Blair’s nose deep in a book as he double knotted his shoe laces. The memory of the orbs lighting her high cheekbones and long, dark eyelashes. She had been so exquisite pressing her thighs together whenever he spoke her name.

His morning wood continued to ache.

Peter blew out a breath, then pulled his one and his only hoodie over his compressed athletic undershirt.

Blair had only offered him friendship, and told him that he had to earn it. He intended on doing so, he just had to figure out how. That would take time and, right now, he was just grateful that she was even going to bother speaking to a low-life Demon like himself. He truly hoped he was not some charity case, or worse, a test subject for her incredibly intelligent brain.

Peter looked over his timetable on top of his history textbook.

His weekly schedule was packed. Tuesdays and Thursdays began with Herbology and Potions, followed by Intro to Magic at 10:30 a.m. Each afternoon ended with Combat Training, and tonight he’d finish with Arcane Languages and Runes. Mondays and Wednesdays started with History; afterward, he had Magical Artifacts and Relics on Mondays and Intro to Supernatural Mythology on Wednesdays. Fridays were reserved for his bi-weekly Herbology tutorial and a weekly Magic session with the other Fire conjurers. Just looking at the timetable had him wondering when he would have time to himself.

A sudden wave of unease coiled in his lower abdomen and had him flexing his fists in agony. The nausea faded after a few seconds, and Peter decided that he needed to burn off the building anxiety that swelled inside of him. He had to run.

"Crow, do we have a place that we can run? That isn't those stupid dirt tracks around the training fields." He’d take any help he could to orient himself in this new world. Peter was unsure if he would trust his roommate, nor did he desire getting close to anyone that he could potentially harm. It left him reeling as Crow spun around at their desk chair and nodded at him.

It’s too late to bail now.

Peter watched as Crow looked towards their own set of running shoes, worn from repetitive use and love.

"I will take that as you accepting my invitation. Let's go."

Crow pointed to their left. “*That’s where we will be playing Capture the Flag this Friday. The first of the Dorm Hall Games.*”

The Half-demon slowed his pace, giving himself the opportunity to take in the training area that had been manipulated by earth magic. It was molded into an interesting labyrinthian obstacle course made of stone and root. Peter Bronze did not linger and began to return to his original pace, seeing Crow had not slowed and was now several paces ahead down the trail. Peter took one more quick glance overhead, taking in the bridges that were strung through the trees before sprinting to play catch-up.

Crow jumped as Peter ran past them. His roommate stumbled a bit in the dirt of the trail, letting him take the lead.

Just before Peter reached the treeline, back towards the connecting path to the training area behind the H-shaped academy, he smelt sulphur and *blood*. He could only see her flaming red hair pulled into multiple, interwoven braids. She stood to her feet, a rabbit with blood stained white fur swinging in her grip. A blade in the other.

Peter looked back to see Crow was still running and chose not to call after them. When he looked back, she was no longer anywhere to be seen.

What the fuck?

“*What?*” Crow called to him, now realizing Peter had stopped. “*You practically shouted. What did you see?*”

Peter scrunched his brow wondering how the Half-demon heard his thoughts. He would have to learn how to keep the child of Asmodeus from being able to penetrate his mind. While keeping his eyes on the trees, Crow jogged back towards him.

“I thought I saw someone… killing a rabbit or something.” Peter searched the Half-demon’s face for any indication of their internal thoughts.

“*This early? Probably… The magic that we have access to comes from the Nine Realms and requires a payment to cast spells; hence the dead rabbit. Come on, let’s get back. We need to eat.*” Crow pointed and began jogging once more, leaving Peter to grimace at the thought of killing a helpless animal just to be able to conjure magic. He sighed, hot breath rising in the air, before running after his roommate. Peter dared to push himself, to see if he could close Crow’s lead and surpass them before they hit the end of the trail. His lungs heaved from the strain. He ran finally past

Crow, unease and fear laced his bowels, making his pace increase. Peter prayed the burning in his legs could numb his mind.

As soon as he broke the trees, he slowed into a jog. While hearing Crow catching up behind him, Peter inhaled violently trying not to throw up. Sweat trickled down his face and back.

"*Bro, you are fast. Superspeed has to be one of your abilities. Even at full speed I couldn't catch you*," Crow mused, finally looking winded.

Peter held up a finger, still not being able to catch his breath. He dramatically leaned back and, while looking at the sky, made a very unattractive sound.

"I," he inhaled, "don't have telepathy..." Peter breathed.

"*It is a perk*." Crow smiled at him, lifting their hands in a shrug. They gestured their head towards the school. "*We should hurry. Don't you have tutoring this morning with Mrs. T*?"

Peter nodded, though couldn’t stop himself from looking back at the trees.

I *am so behind.*

"Relax, Peter. There's no need to work yourself up, I can sense it from here." Mrs. T inhaled deeply, signalling him to do the same.

He inhaled and counted to four before exhaling. He repeated it a few times before his heart rate settled.

"I'm sorry. This is just so overwhelming," Peter confessed.

"I know it is. You will catch up. We have a lot of resources here and people willing to help you," she offered, but Peter wasn't convinced. "Our hour is up, but I do encourage some extra reading. I can give you some of the text titles that are in our library for Kirian to help you. Studying them will help with your Demon exams." Peter was frozen in his chair. "Tomorrow, I will go into some of the major historical moments like the Great War."

Peter felt how shaky his legs were when he did manage to unstick himself. Grabbing his bag, he wandered to the door, not even realising that Mrs. T was by his side escorting him out. Once outside, he stood alone, silent for a moment.

"PETER!" The voice that called his name was distorted. He turned his head slowly, finding himself landing on a familiar redhead. "Can I walk you to class?" Gabby asked him.

He nodded, unable to find the words. He zoned out as they walked across the courtyard to the greenhouse, his mind on his lesson on Hell. His thoughts were a downward spiral like the diagram he had drawn inside of his notebook.

What circle of Hell will I be sent to?

Peter knew that Gabby was talking to him but he was incapable of listening to anything that spewed out of her mouth. He froze in front of the entryway making her come to an abrupt stop. She apparently had a hold of his arm. He saw a flash of her hands coated in blood, that had him yanking from her grip.

His body was telling him to run. Away from the building, away from it all.

"Peter? You have Herbology this morning, right?" she asked him. He blinked a few times and looked around for an exit.

I have to get away.

"Hey, you okay?" A hand pressed into his other arm and suddenly everything came into focus. His nose filled with strawberry rosé and his eyes met a beautiful apple green.

Blair.

It was like all the oxygen had filled his lungs again.

The urge to run had dissipated.

All he could focus on was her.

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CHAPTER SIX

The Greenhouse

Blair Dawn didn't remove her hand from Peter's arm as he finally snapped back to Earth. This was the first time she had touched him, feeling the heat spread into her palm through the sleeve of his blazer. A warmth that contrasted the cool bite of the air in the courtyard. Her heart rate soared, nostrils flaring to intake breath. His scent entangled with the dampness of the changing leaves. She wanted to drown in the smell of mahogany teakwood, and rain, even if it ended her.

She sensed the anxiety that radiated off of him, his power rallying behind it and threatening to take all within the vicinity. It had been a throbbing, rhythmic beat. It had prickled her skin to attention, warning her own magic of the danger he presented. The minute she had touched him, however, it faded into a small pulse. His blue eyes searched her face, frantically trying to understand what had just happened.

"Back off, Blair. He's fine." Gabby's irritating voice electrified her nerves.

Blair was about to snap, but remembered Peter needed her—*needed someone*. She stilled her eyes on him while asking him, “I will back off when he asks me to. Are you okay, Peter?”

Peter nodded once and swallowed audibly. Blair watched his cheeks, already tinged from cold, deepen into a crimson. The Half-demon’s face held that chill, still betrayed by his embarrassment and redtipped ears.

"You have nothing to be embarrassed about. I have anxiety too. I think you were having a panic attack." Blair’s fingers tightened ever-so slightly

but he just shook both of their arms off of him and stared down at her with fury.

His brow was sharp and his lips drew back to expose his teeth in a sneer. He opened his mouth before thinking. "I don't need your help."

Blair frowned and nodded. "Okay."

She swiftly proceeded back into class, then took her usual seat beside Merlin. Blair attempted to not take the outburst personally. She experienced how anxiety or fury could trigger violent outbursts. A certain scorched Michael statue was a testament to that. She prayed to the Lord that Peter could find the control he seeked.

"You good? You ran out of here quite fast," Merlin whispered to her.

Sitting sideways on her stool, she watched Peter take a seat beside Gabby at the bench behind them in her peripheral.

"Yeah, I just thought I could help. I am very good at telling when I am not wanted." She made sure to speak loud enough for Peter to hear.

As her sentence finished, Professor Osric waltzed in, late as usual with a large travel mug filled with bitter espresso. To be fair, he spent long nights as one of the campus nurses. He could cure any rash known to man or creature, but he was also a notorious stoner. If he wasn’t caught up in the medical wing with a fire class gone wrong or a broken rib in need of mending, he was probably simply baked and sleeping. He sold the best weed on campus, not that she had ever obtained any. Jules had however…

I wonder where he’s been the last couple of days. I need to make sure he is aware that we are over.

"Alrighty, folks. I am Osric, the Herbology professor and on-campus remedy man."

"He also sells the best weed," Blair heard Gabby whisper behind her. She rolled her eyes and opened her textbook to where they had left off.

The princess wrote down her various notes about the plant beside the diagram that she had drawn. A note was tossed onto her bench. Her pencil lifted from the paper and she looked over her shoulder to see Peter. He pointed his pen towards the folded delivery.

Blair sighed and unfolded it open, seeing the apology written inside. She wrote that she would talk with him after class before throwing it back to him. Gabby's face was purple with frustration watching the exchange.

Peter was waiting outside the classroom for Blair, underneath the courtyard oak tree. Gabby was yapping at him, clearly upset about their interaction from her crossed arms and dark eyes. Blair paused out of sight, pushing her hair behind her ear. She could hear them loud and clear from her enhanced senses.

Merlin looked at her, then glanced around her to see Peter. His eyebrows rose. Confusion danced along his face, silently asking what the deal was with this Half-demon she was suddenly so obsessed with. She offered him a shrug.

"I'll meet you in the library later. Be careful, Blair. I hope you know what you are doing with him." Merlin's eyes glittered with trustfilled concern.

"I'll be careful, Merlin," she assured him.

"I know you have your reasons for wanting to get close to him, but if he is the one who causes Oaken to burn to the ground, you need to report him. What is the point of your gift if you're just going to ignore the warning? Peter could be dangerous."

"I know. There is something pulling us together, Merlin. I can't explain it, but it's like a cord that has been tied around us. There has to be a reason." She truly believed her words, that God brought them together. Every cell in her body ached to be near him. She recalled how she had felt when Peter was anxious. How warm his body felt beneath her touch. Merlin held her arm briefly, then pushed up his glasses before leaving her near the entrance way of the greenhouse.

"You can't be serious about being friends with *her,* Peter. She's a Nephilim. Angels don't like Demons. People will talk; our friends will not be happy." Blair heard the frustration in Gabby's voice.

"Our friends? You mean your friends. They have done nothing to declare that they are my friends," Peter shot back. He was losing patience, huffing out steam.

"Are we not friends?" Gabby asked him. She leaned in closely, hand on his chest. She stood on her toes. Her lips were so close to Peter’s that it had the Nephilim princess shifting uncomfortably, but she didn’t look away.

Blair’s eyes burned with envy, watching him smirk and lean into her seductions.

"Gabby, of course we are." The two of them looked more familiar and intimate than friends were.

Gabby pulled back, returning to the heels of her feet.

"Then take my friendly advice, you cannot be friends with a Nephilim, you will be *crucified*. You can literally be friends or fuck anyone—or anything else—except an Angel. That's the way things are here."

The daughter of Lilith wasn't wrong.

Demons and Angels had an ancient rivalry that had lasted over a millenia. Polar opposites destined to clash relentlessly, as the Dark always tried its best to rise to power, filled with envy, lust, and greed for the Light.

Their war was a dark time for the Covenant. Plagued with violence and famine, the Demons aligned themselves with Lucifer, trying to gain their freedom from being banished to the Nine Realms. The Angels came to Earth to defeat them and locked Lucifer in Hell with mystical and unbreakable chains.

"Well, maybe it's time to update old traditions. What happened that allowed these two groups to hate one another? This is the twenty-first century for Christ’s sake. Even the humans are coming around to accepting others of difference, why can't you?" Peter asked.

Gabby rocked on her heels, resigned in defeat. "Whatever, Peter. If you want to be a social pariah, then go ahead. When she breaks your heart, don't come crying to me."

Blair peaked around the corner of the greenhouse, watching Gabby storm off in a huff. Lights flickered around Gabby as she retreated, a clear indication of growing strength. A wave of her dark magic chittered and brushed through the air. Blair pushed off the surface of the greenhouse and walked towards Peter. He was staring at the sky like it would somehow give him answers.

"You okay?" she asked him.

His crystalized sapphire gaze landed on her. "You heard that?"

Blair nodded, hoping that he was going to follow up.

"I am sorry for snapping at you earlier. I’m stressed as all Hell, but that is no excuse for saying what I did. You helped calm me and I am grateful for that."

"I am glad I could help. Do you want to grab coffee?" Blair was already getting intoxicated off his scent. It was starting to cloud her judgement. She subconsciously stepped closer to him, wanting to be closer.

He is so warm.

Blair took a breath and felt instantly at ease, feeling her guard come down.

Peter's pupils dilated. He licked his lips nervously, looking down at her with unwavering eye contact.

"Y–yeah," he agreed.

"There's a really nice café by the Chapel.” She pointed. “We could go there to talk about what's going on with you." He looked stunned as she spoke, his eyes dipping to her lips and back to her eyes. He reached upwards and brushed a strand of her hair behind her ear that got caught over her brow from the light autumn breeze. Her breath hitched as his rough fingertip came in direct contact with her skin.

She melted into his presence like it was the most natural thing. His power, his scent, the danger it offered. It was *enticing* to her.

“Peter,” her voice whispered as the wind. Her hand pressed flat between his pectorals, feeling his heart thundering within.

She watched pink spread across his cheeks, his hand closing into a fist at his side. Peter took an abrupt step back, jaw and shoulders tense.

"Lead the way," he spoke softly, his voice deep and steady. The moment had passed. He was trying to be respectful of her wishes to be friends. She was grateful he hadn't overstepped the boundary, despite his clear desire.

What if I hadn’t stopped him?

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Coffee Foam

Blair led Peter to the campus café, *The Brew Box*. The sounds of decadent chatter filled the corridor along with the steaming of the espresso machine. The café had been the old greenhouse at the front of Oaken Academy before its expansion in the 1700s. But now, with the new greenhouse in the northeastern courtyard, this space was turned into a fun sitting area where students could study, hang, and enjoy their beverage of choice. Lattes and other steamed concoctions were favoured, since the head barista was an Air Caster. Perfect foam every time.

The Brew Box was comfortably bustling with several students in-between morning classes and getting their next fix of caffeine, but while others were a grab and go, Blair usually spent her gap soaking up the sun and sketching.

Blair’s stomach flipped about at the thought of what people would say about her and Peter. Those from the Royal Houses would stir, especially Jackson, the son of Patrick Norman. Duke of the House of Gabriel and a senator on the Great Council, Jackson’s father had a lot of political influence in their society. This could be exploited and turned into a scandal, perhaps more so if he was dangerous.

She reminded herself of her plan, knowing people would stop talking about it eventually.

Peter was a fawn, eyes darting around and assessing the potential danger that lurked ahead.

"Why does everyone here have a staring problem?" he muttered under his breath.

"You get used to it," she encouraged. "We are making quite the statement, you know."

They walked up to the register seeing Taylor smile as she approached. Taylor McManamy was a talented Air Caster and made a mean latte.

"Hey, Blair! The usual?" he asked her.

"Yes, please," she responded, knowing that her oat milk latte would complete her routine.

"And for the new guy?" Taylor raised an eyebrow. She knew that the Caster was not ignorant about who Peter was, just being friendly. He would be the last person to judge, as his boyfriend was a Werewolf after all.

"What would you like, Peter?" She peeked over her shoulder to see Peter was still looking around the café. His eyes snapped to her once his name rolled over her tongue.

"I'll have whatever she's having." Peter didn’t like the attention, despite his ploy to play the arrogant manwhore.

"Two oat lattes, on it. Tap your card when you're ready." Blair pulled out her Graduate ID card and tapped it. The machine responded with a high pitch beep.

Blair was compelled to reach for him, placing her hand on Peter's arm. She had his full attention, the noise fading into an indistinguishable blur. Most didn’t pay too much attention to them.

"Just focus on me, none of them matter," she said softly. "Let's go sit on the loveseat."

Blair didn't let go of his wrist as she led him to the back of the sunroom to the loveseat. She always loved how the sun hit the front of the academy; how warm it became. Oaken had always been frigid this time of year, but not in her spot. She gracefully took a seat and placed her messenger bag on the floor next to her feet. She patted the cushion beside her.

Peter sat down and rubbed his hands over the legs of his uniform pants. He took a deep breath and relaxed into the couch, swinging his one arm around the back. Though he could no longer fool her into believing his collected demeanour, he appeared more at ease.

Orienting himself to face her, the sun sparkled through the glass. It casted a blue glow over his hair, reminding her of the feathers of a crow.

Blair continued to appreciate his features. Her lips parted slightly as light struck his eyes, casting beyond the frame of dark eyelashes. Sapphire melted into a sharp and frozen powdered blue. Striking, but cold. She made

note of the way flecks of brown and green marked the blue; a constellation of hazel. His brows were in desperate need of a plucking, but they were full and sharp, marking him with handsome allure.

"Do you want to talk about what happened this morning?"

The steamer from the coffee machine screamed, steaming the milk for their lattes.

"Do you want to explain to me how you knew I was having a panic attack?" he deflected.

"I'm not sure. I heard Gabby outside and then I felt sick with panic, but I knew it wasn't my anxiety. I rushed outside to find it was coming from you." Blair was honest with him. She was unsure why she had picked up on his emotions so easily. She was empathetic towards others, but she had never been so closely connected to another person's feelings. Blair put her legs up onto the couch, encroaching on the line between the cushions. “Sometimes when we are really emotional, our magic can take on a life of its own. Act on our deepest impulses or fears. One of the things I felt was your power—your magic. It called to me.”

Peter looked away, his face was lined with sorrowful shame. "I– I was panicking because I learned that I have several examinations that I have to complete in order to major. And since this is my first round trip through supernatural funky town, I don't even know what I would even major in or what I want to do for my long and Demonic life." Blair sympathised with Peter's experience. That would be overwhelming, to be tossed into an unfamiliar world with strange customs.

"I could help you study for your exams. They aren't as hard as they seem," she suggested. It would give them more time together and allow her to find out more about him.

"Says you, Miss ‘Top of your Class’."

"I am not top of our class. I am in the top three, though."

"Glad you're not bragging." He rolled his eyes playfully. Peter leaned in closer to her, her knees now flush with his thigh.

"Two oat milk lattes," Taylor called out.

Blair hopped up from her seat and grabbed the caffeinated potions. She thanked Taylor with a smile before returning to the loveseat. Back in her original position, the two of them joined by the slightest touch. She held out the cup. Their fingers brushed, a spark igniting down her arm.

"I would like it– Your help I mean… with studying." Peter got slightly sheepish, his cheeks turning mulberry. Blair thought Peter looked cute when he blushed. She quickly batted away the thought.

“I am sure the Demons will be up first; it’s an entry level exam. One long answer, two short, and twenty-five multiple choice. I think I should have my old notebook somewhere in my dorm. I’ll check."

Peter blew out a breath, he had never taken a university level exam. He took a sip of his latte and blinked at it in surprise. "What were you working on in the library last night?" His eyes shone with curiosity as he took another sip immediately after, enjoying the taste.

Blair smiled in victory at his pleasure. She tugged on her knee-high socks, knowing Peter would not miss the flash of skin, before answering, "I am working on a personal project. One of my talents is being able to see the future, but only while I am asleep. It's called the Dreaming, but right now I cannot dream-walk lucidly. So there are still many 'blind spots' that make it hard to decipher what exactly it is trying to tell me." She paused seeing that Peter was listening intensely. "My gift is rare amongst Half-angels, but my father is an Archangel. So, I am sure that has something to do with it. Archangels aren't supposed to have children, because their powers can be unpredictable and powerful." *That and Angels risk becoming mortal if they stay on Earth too long.*

"So you are trying to find other people with the same ability?" he deduced.

She nodded before taking a sip of her coffee. "I am hoping to find a teacher, someone who understands what it's like. Dr. Brenton majored in Premonition Theory, but he doesn't have the gift and often doesn't understand my experience. Nor does Father Morgan… When I dream-walk, it feels incredibly real to me. I can feel pain. I can smell everything. It's paralysing… Suffocating."

"That sounds terrifying." Peter's face was laced with sympathy.

“It can be.” Blair looked through the glass and over the front yard, across the patio that sat across the right side of the academy. It was too cold for people to sit outside, the patio chairs and tables vacant.

"I don't get much sleep these days, but I will manage." She faked a small smile, letting herself feel her exhaustion, then began fiddling with the tab of her coffee lid.

How do I tell him that I’ve dreamed about him?

"I don't sleep much either," Peter confessed.

Blair lifted her eyes to his as he ran a hand through his midnight hair, observing the dark circles that sat underneath. She was surprised she didn't see them before.

"Nightmares?" she asked. Peter's head bobbed a couple of times before his eyes made their way back to hers. He had started to lean in closer to her, parting his lips as if to say something quietly.

"**Blair,**" a voice boomed near the entrance of the café.

Fuck.

Her eyes closed, knowing who the voice belonged to. This was going to get messy and fast. Blair turned her head and saw Jules stomping towards her and Peter.

"Who's this guy?" Peter whispered with an arched brow.

"My ex. Let me handle it." She kept her voice low before smiling, then made sure to sit up and away from Peter. "Hi, Jules. Where have you been?"

Blair hoped to get a better understanding of the mental state Jules was in. He had a dependency on marijuana by Blair’s standards, always needing to be high in order to 'function'. Their relationship had been codependent, a condition that made Jules controlling and possessive. His insecurities and grief took over his rationality, which led to constant fighting before their departure last term. Jules hated Blair being near any male, regardless of species. He wasn’t always this way though.

It wasn't until last year that Blair had finally decided she needed a clean break from him, even though Jules was clearly under the illusion that they would be getting back together. He still thought she belonged to him, but Jules had left her heart ages ago. She no longer felt that romantic attachment to him as he had.

"So you're hanging with Hellions now, eh?" The slur rolled off of his tongue. Jules spit onto the table. His saliva splashed against the glass. Blair couldn’t stop her nose from wrinkling.

"Don't make a scene, Jules," Blair warned, looking at the splattered saliva. They had begun to gather an audience, word already making its way into the weekly gossip blog of the Covenant.

"Don't make a scene?" Jules laughed. "Like you aren't? You're hanging with a Hell-spawn."

"You don't own me, Jules. I can be friends with whomever I choose." She stood her ground.

"I didn't know you had a thing for Demon cock, Blair. I didn't peg you as a Hellion whore." His tone made Blair riddled with guilt, but as her gaze tracked along the increasingly populated café, she saw how many were captured in the fly trap of scandal. Including Jackson and Willow, she realised.

She looked at both of them around Jules' blocking form. Willow's eyes were apologetic. Blair knew Willow had probably tried to stop him, but Jackson definitely encouraged it. Jules and Jackson were firm believers that Nephilim and the Angels were superior to Half-demons and the like.

They were bystanders. *What great friends.*

"Man, what's your problem?" Peter was standing now. He was much taller and more muscular than Jules. Her ex had once been similarly muscular, until he had lost Amanda. It was clear the Nephilim was neglecting his needs from his unkept hair and unwashed uniform fraught with fraying threads.

"You, *Hell-spawn*, are my problem. Stay away from my girlfriend and crawl back to whatever Hell Realm you came from." Peter stepped around the table and stood mere inches away from Jules' face. The Half-demon's fists were clenched at his sides as their magic brushed up against each other. Daring and taunting the other to throw the first shot.

"This '*Hell Spawn*' will not be intimidated by an entitled piece of shit like yourself. Back off, Blair isn't yours anymore." Peter's body was coiled to strike. She could feel Peter's magic heat in the already toasty space between them. Blair knew that his abilities were still unpredictable, but also lacked the experience of the Nephilim who was aching for a fight. She had to de-escalate this before all Hell broke loose.

"And you think she's yours? She would never date—let alone fuck—a Demon. You will never be good enough for her," Jules spit into Peter's face. She watched the brief flicker of disgust in Peter's eyes before they hardened once more. The Half-demon aggressively wiped at his face.

"I don't have to be. From what I can tell, I am already better than you and she fucked you didn't she?" Blair was stunned. Insinuating they had been intimate before marriage was blasphemous and dangerous for someone of her status.

"Peter…" she whispered. Peter's face fell once he had realised what he said. He had insulted her too by saying that, and called her a whore for all to see.

Blair stood from the couch, fed up with this childish testosterone display. She tossed the rest of her latte in a nearby garbage can. The bitterness of this dispute left a pungent aftertaste in the back of her throat.

"Enough both of you. I am tired of being treated like some prized whore." She looked directly at Jules. "You and I are over Jules. We have been for a long time. I have watched you destroy yourself everyday causing your own fall from grace. You hide in a cloud of weed, away from feeling anything or dealing with the trauma of losing your sister. It's time for you to move on from me. I am not yours anymore."

Jules' face shattered, his red eyes glassy from her infliction. “We can’t be over. I love you. I can’t lose you too.”

Blair’s shame slithered through the spaces between her ribs.

“I loved you too, but I can’t be with you anymore.” She reached out grasping his cold fingers. “I am still your friend, and as your friend I am worried about you.”

Peter looked smug as she turned to him. "Peter, I don't need you to save me. I can stand up for myself, but you need to think before you fucking speak." He nodded at her, understanding that he was going to need to apologise again.

Blair then pointed at Willow and Jackson as she walked towards both of them. "And you two, suck. What great friends you are just standing here letting him call both Peter and I names. We are Nephilim for God's sake. We are meant to be better people, yet you stand there allowing prejudice to dictate your every move. *Grow up*. We aren't in secondary school anymore. We are the next generation to enter the Covenant and you want to do so with outdated notions of Half-demons?"

The whole café was a silent voyeur.

"She's not wrong," she finally heard. They all looked at Taylor, leaning behind the barista counter as he shrugged. "I think we should be more tolerant."

"It's unnatural, Blair. Angels banish *his kind* to Hell," Jackson stated, clearly not being swayed by her words.

While she was talking to Willow and Jackson she hadn't seen the staring contest that had gone on between Jules and Peter. She heard a crash and swung around to see Peter and Jules had tumbled to the ground, breaking the table that sat in front of the loveseat. Glass shattered across the floor in various directions from the impact.

"Get off me, *Demon*!" Jules yelled. Peter landed a stiff punch to Jules' jaw.

Jackson sped forward and caught Peter's arm before he could land another punch. Peter was thrown into the glass of the greenhouse wall, causing it to crack from the force. Several students were beginning to file out of the room in fear. The Nephilim picked Peter off of the floor by the collar of his uniform before slamming him into the wall once more. The glass groaned underneath him. A spiderweb pattern spread across the surface.

"Come on, fluff-butt, take your best shot," Peter taunted, blood shining on his teeth. The Half-demon spit blood to the side, allowing a small dribble to fall down his lips.

Blair rushed forward before Jackson could take a swing. She grabbed the back of his neck and threw him to the floor where Jules sat holding his jaw.

"Enough." Her voice sounded like thunder through the space. She could feel her power flourish to the surface, charging her skin with electric energy. The clouds darkened outside, leaving them in shadow. Behind her, a bright strike of lightning, sprung from her back like iridescent Angel wings.

"So you've chosen a *Hellion* over your own brothers—your own friends!" Jules spat.

"I haven't chosen anyone. I am fed up with this toxic display of masculinity. You call yourselves men, but all I see are a bunch of immature boys," she spit through her teeth. Thunder rumbled outside, vibrating the crackling glass.

"She's right, gentlemen." Headmistress Penns was standing near the entrance of the café with Taylor. Her hands were behind her back with a look of disappointment across her face."We do not tolerate those kinds of slurs at the academy, Mr. Orson. I would like to see you all in my office. Now."

Blair felt her power dribble away, the golden light behind her fading. The clouds retreated, as she released her hold on the sky.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Consequences

Rumours were floating rampantly through the halls of Oaken Academy. Its stone walls documenting each whisper between students, echoing the events that took place at the café. Peter Bronze's fame was increasing. Images of him smiling at Jackson through bloody teeth were being constructed and idolised. The daring and brave new baddy at Oaken. He was wreaking both terror and desire in the public imagination. *Desirably damaged*.

Inside the office of the headmistress, the culprits remained oblivious to the news that was circulating. Momentarily impervious to Peter's new elevated status as Oaken's next eligible bachelor.

The group was spread across the office, keeping as much distance as they could in the confines of the space. There was an attempt to avoid all eye contact with each other, though Peter’s eyes often trailed over Blair. He was tempted by her curvature and shape beneath the modest uniforms.

The headmistress had stepped out briefly for reinforcements, with a quick and stern warning that they were not to cause anymore harm to each other or to her office.

Jackson and Jules had taken refuge in front of the fireplace. Jules held an ice pack to his jaw, a bruise already decorating his face in yellows and various shades of purple. Jackson was comforting his friend, rubbing Jules’ shoulders for him.

Willow hung close to them, off in her own little world. Her hands continuously folded over one another in constraint tendrils.

Peter's mouth was still filled with the taste of rusted pennies, lacing each swallow with metallic discomfort. Blair too was lost in thought by the west facing window. He wished at this moment, he could pierce into her thoughts and find out exactly what she was thinking.

Peter tried to imagine what Blair saw within Jules. The unstable Nephilim clearly prioritized his own needs over all and expressed serious attachment issues.

Not that I am one to talk.

His own attachment issues aside, Peter wondered if their relationship had been unfulfilling for Blair, leaving her unsatisfied. The way Jules held himself was an indication of his own lack of self respect and his possessive display left little to the imagination that he was secure in their relationship.

Jules' leg was bouncing with intense verberation, his high fading with each tick of the grandfather clock. The Half-demon smiled to himself, enjoying that Jules would hurt himself more than Peter ever could.

Peter pushed himself off of the bookshelf he had found solitude in. He was mentally prepared to offer another pathetic apology to a goddess. Beg for her forgiveness. There was just something that compelled him to kneel before her and confess, to appease her. It offered clarity to the Half-demon and fueled the desire to rise above his trepidation. To defeat his fear of his own temper and the blood on his hands.

He wanted to be a different person, someone who could control the burning and dark power within him. He didn't want it to control him.

Peter wanted nothing more than to do right by her. Part of him desperately wanted to be good. To be good enough for her. Every cell in his body—every breath he was taking was for her. He was devoted. He was obsessed. He had to have her. Even if he knew deep down, he didn't deserve her. She was untainted by murder, by death, in a way that he never would be.

She came from the Heavens. He came from the depths of Hell.

Polar opposites. Different destinies.

Regardless of the forbidden nature of their desires, because he knew she felt it too, Peter couldn't stop himself from being near her. He would kill himself with effort, do anything to make himself worthy of her. An impossible ideal, he figured. Damon and Jules had said it, he would never be good enough for Blair.

But Hell, he was going to try.

Peter shuffled towards Blair, swallowing more metallic misery. Her arms were crossed over her chest, wrinkling the fabric of her blazer. He loved the way her hair fell down her back in dark messy waves. He wanted to run his fingers through it, to feel the softness he had earlier when he had tucked a few strands behind her ear.

He observed the distant look in her forest-like eyes. Her thoughts running, flying, escaping over the courtyard of the academy's perfectly manicured front lawn.

"I'm sorry," he whispered to her, trying not to let the others overhear. Blair seemed to snap back into her corporeal form, observing him with discontentment. Peter had hurt her and her reputation. His palms became unbearably moist. He resisted the urge to rub them on the cotton of his pants.

"I know what I said hurt you. I don't think that you have low standards. In fact, I know you have high standards. Ones that I may never achieve, and I am sure there was a time where Jules met those standards. You wouldn't have dated him otherwise. I was trying to insult him and ended up hurting you too."

She remained silent, her eyes flickering towards the others by the fire briefly.

"I know I also acted like an immature little boy, by encouraging the fight and initiating it. When I– When I get angry or protective, I lose all sight of anything. Consequences don't matter, all that matters is striking. *Surviving*." He paused for a moment and looked towards Jules. If looks could kill, this would be one of them. Hell, it looked like Jules was vibrating on the spot. "I shouldn't have punched Jules. As much as he deserved it."

He looked back towards her, hoping that his eyes told her everything—that he was being sincere in his apology. If she had asked him to get on his knees to grovel, he would.

"You shouldn't have punched him, no. But I understand that his face can be quite… punchable. I've debated it a few times," she whispered with a smile on her face. "Jules and I have known each other for a long time, over a decade you know. There was love between us once, but now it is more familial for me. He is still in denial about our romantic relations. I just wish there was a way I could communicate and solidify that." Her shoulders relaxed and she uncrossed her arms to lean on the windowsill.

"I could think of a few ways," he teased, hoping she would catch the innuendo.

She slapped his chest with the back of her hand. "Don't be crude."

As the two of them giggled at each other, the front door of the headmistress' office reopened with her new recruits. Mrs. T was among them, looking rather stern. The other two officials were some that he had yet to meet.

"That's Dr. Brenton and Professor Hope," Blair filled him in with a brief whisper. He tried to conceal his intuitive glance that he was sure had been broadcasted on his face.

"What do they teach?"

"Dr. Brenton teaches Angel and Demon history. Professor Hope is the magic professor."

"Brenton is the guy helping you with your vision thingy, right? Him and the priest?" he inquired. Blair simply nodded as the headmistress took a seat at her desk.

Penns sighed, then she shook her head. "I cannot believe that I've been forced to pull in some of our brightest students during the first couple days of the term. I expect this from lower freshmen and even secondary students, but not from university level Nephilim. Your bullying and language towards Half-demons is unacceptable and down right insufferable. We at this academy believe in equal opportunities for all classes, regardless of parentage." Headmistress Penns folded her hands over her lap and looked over the students that occupied her space this morning.

"Headmistress, I completely agree that our actions were inexcusable and we will take full responsibility for what occurred in *The Box*. Please decide our fate diligently." Jackson had practically transformed from the asshole he actually was. Peter had no idea he was capable of holding himself in such a manner. Peter rolled his eyes thinking that Jackson was a royal kiss ass. Son of Gabriel indeed.

"I have discussed with Dr. Brenton and Professor Hope about what we believe is good punishment, but I am willing to hear your trial."

"HEADMISTRESS!" Willow blurted out. "I understand that I am here because I was a bystander in the situation, but I don't think that I deserve punishment considering that I felt like I was incapable of interfering. These men are like forces of nature and I didn't want to get hurt." Peter felt Blair

roll her eyes beside him and couldn't stop the corners of his mouth from turning up.

"Something funny, Mr. Bronze?" Penns asked, catching his amusement.

He cleared his throat. "No, Headmistress. I just find it funny the lengths that people will go to to remove themselves from any involvement."

"And what would you say about Willow's involvement?" she asked.

"Well, for one, I am unsure whether or not she encouraged Jules to confront me. And, did not stick up for one of her good friends, from what I gather. So her lack of involvement began before the actual 'forces' clashed." He put air quotes around forces. "She stood by and let her friends use slurs towards me, so—by the very lack of involvement—I think there was prejudice expressed towards us Demonfolk."

"I have nothing against Demonkind, Headmistress!" Willow exclaimed.

"Enough, Willow. Mr. Norman, Mr. Orson, what do you have to say for yourselves?" Headmistress Penns was looking increasingly disappointed.

Jackson was the first to speak. "Well, Headmistress, Jules felt like there had been a great injustice done to him by his girlfriend—"

"I am not his girlfriend," Blair interjected while turning towards Penns. "Headmistress, Jules and I have not been together for quite some time and he came into the café with some moronic claim over me like I cannot interact with the male species, let alone one that is half Demon. His manner is utterly inexcusable and Jackson simply encouraged it. He did stop Peter from laying a second punch, but he is the one who slammed Peter into the glass."

Jackson went to fight her claim, but closed his mouth quickly when she gave him a dagger-like glare. Blair was not one to mess with from what Peter gathered, as the leader of their group.

"So, from what I have gathered, Jules came into the café targeting Blair and in turn started things with Peter through vicious language. Peter and Jules engaged in physical violence, in which Mr. Norman intervened and slammed Peter into the wall."

"That sounds about right," Peter found himself saying.

The headmistress sighed once more. "Okay, we think it is best to give you each detention tonight–"

"Each!?" Willow protested.

"Yes. Each. You will be expected to meet Kirian in the library this evening, where you will be given whatever tasks he desires. I hope that we

do not need to do any further punishment. And I hope that you all understand that there is not to be any tolerance for discrimination. Now get out. You have classes you should be attending." Headmistress Penns looked at each of them, then pointed to the door, letting her magic blow it open.

As the group was heading for the door past Dr. Brenton and Professor Hope, the headmistress, called after them. Blair halted and turned, making the others nearly pile up.

“Blair, I almost forgot about your message. Peter you are dismissed, I need to speak to the others. It’s in regards to your recent dream.”

Peter wanted to wipe the smug look off of Jackson’s face, but opted to keep his face neutral. He watched the door shut in front of his face, the school crest rejoining in the centre.

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CHAPTER NINE

A Fiery Classroom

Peter Bronze made his way to Auditorium Four, which resided on the floor beneath his lodgings. His palms were moist, holding his notebook to his chest and unwavering outside the door, watching most students file into the circular stripes of seating.

Gabrielle Clear had a bright smile while skipping towards him. Her mood was radically changed from their morning spat. She took his hand and dragged him. The small classroom auditorium featured four neat rows of seating that curved towards the back of the class. It created an intimate and organized learning space. At the front, two large whiteboards dominated the wall, ready for instruction and presentations.

“I heard you got detention.” She giggled. Everyone was looking at the two of them as she pulled him towards her friends, but Gabby paid no mind to the others. She sat next to Crow and Damon who were digging into their bags for their class supplies.

“Yeah, for fighting.”

Damon Kurne gave him a cheeky grin. “So it’s true, you punched Jackson and Jules?”

“Just Jules. I was interrupted before I could hit Jackson.”

“Damn, you have a death wish,” Crow Morpheus told them as they waved to Snow.

“I second that,” Snow Harrison added and sat next to Gabby at the end of the row. “They are going to be out for your blood.” Crow and Snow looked at each other, a private exchange between them. Snow stuck out her tongue at them, which had Crow chuckling.

“They can try,” Gabby huffed, tucking her red hair behind her ear and shoving into his shoulder in support. She bit her lip. Peter saw her canines were longer than most. If she was going to chew on her plump bottom lip the whole class, he would not be listening to their lecture.

“What was your punishment?” Damon sent off a text message before tossing the device in his bag. Peter turned to the son of Astaroth, adjusting his own pants and tie.

“I have to go to the library. Help Kirian with something.”

“Ugh, boring,” Gabby groaned, but Peter shrugged. He knew how brutal punishments could get, and going to the library for the evening was not on that list.

“Hey, at least it’s not shovelling horse shit in the stables. I heard Jonathan had to last semester when he got caught fang-banging Vivian.” Snow's quiet comment had all of the Half-demons halting and turning towards her with widened eyes.

“The Succubus?” Bounced through their minds. Snow just nodded and pointed to the front of the room.

“Alright class, settle down.” Professor Hope waltzed into class in a long green dress with billowed sleeves that draped to her midthigh into a point. It made her look like a witch paired with her long straight white hair.

“Good morning, welcome to Magical Basics. I am Professor Hope and —as a Nephilim and a historian—I have found the principles and rich foundations of magic fascinating during the course of my mortal life. Now, many of you have been using and practicing magic for most of your lives. Others,” she looked directly at Peter, “may have recently discovered their connections and affinity for it.”

The professor stood at the front of the room and with a fierce gaze and clenched fists; the air around them became a vacuum. She channelled the restless ambient magic that swirled through the air, sucking it inwards and bending it through her body like a conduit. Students held onto the edge of their desks to keep themselves in their chairs. Before she opened her palms and began to swirl the stolen breath into a tornado.

The intense sharp swoop of their paper, notebooks, and pens fluttered. Peter furrowed his brow as he repositioned his body to brace against the current. The Nephilim mentor smiled, watching them anchor and with a crackling surge that rippled through the air, revealed that magic wasn’t

simply cast, but wrestled from the very chaos of within, and the world itself.

Professor Hope released, the wind immediately disappearing letting their flying debris to float towards the floor.

The room was silent and observing as the professor watched them scour for their lost items. She turned, grabbed a dry erase marker and took off the cap with a pop.

“I do apologize for the dramatic demonstration, but I wanted to highlight a key component to all of our magic. We do not create, we manipulate and use—the energy, the power, the elements—that are already around us and inside us.” She pressed long fingernails to the centre of her chest with the end of the marker. “It is important for us to establish this, for God granted us access to these gifts but within a limited capacity. We must respect the balance, for channeling or using too much can do serious harm to yourself and to others.” She wrote on the whiteboard in bold, capital letters.

Fire. Water. Earth. Air. Angelic. Demonic.

“These are the six categories of magic.” Professor Hope wrote each tutorial underneath the four elements. Angelic and Demonic left blank.

Gabby raised her hand, catching the Nephilim Professor’s attention. “Hi—Gabby. Why are there no special classes for Demonic and Angelic magic?”

“Angelic magic is for upper year courses and only for those who express the affinity for the magic.” The magic instructor made no mention of Demonic incantations. Gabby leaned back into her chair with a displeased chuckle.

“And what of Demonic magics?” Peter raised his hand to catch her attention.

The bug-eyed professor recognized him from the headmistress’ office, before she stammered, “Well, Demonic magic is—*unnatural*.” Gooseflesh rose over his arms and the back of his neck as the other freshmen gawked at him. “There has never been classes in the subject for it is forbidden by the Church.”

“In what way is it unnatural?” he asked with a sneer, leaning his elbows on the edge of the crescent desk. Whispers buzzed around the room.

“Demonic magic feeds on dark energy and emotion, or at the cost of bodily fluids; blood, saliva, sexual excretions, and sometimes full sacrifice.

This kind of magic is illegal, Mr. Bronze, and those found using it are persecuted by our Sacred Laws.” Peter’s brow furrowed. The same shame pressed down onto the shoulders of his new companions and the other children of Demon descent amongst them. Peter shrank into his seat, making himself as invisible as possible.

“What makes Angelic and Demonic casting different from the other forms of casting?” a Siren asked.

“Excellent question–” Hope paused for the student to offer their name.

“Connor.”

“Connor, pleasure. You have asked an important question that I am sure plagues most young minds. While elemental casting is the most common form of magic for all creatures, Angelic and Demonic magic are sources that extend beyond our realm. Angelic magic comes from the Heavens or from ancient relics that contain celestial energy. Similarly Demonic magic comes from the Nine Realms, but this magic is outlawed.”

Peter looked at his companions, whose eyes were burning with vexation. He was beginning to understand how this world worked, where they stood in the social hierarchy.

“When a conjurer of Half-demon or Half-angel descent uses these forms of magic, it supercharges their magic with that selective energy. For example, some of our current students in upper years are able to summon this kind of power through prayer and divination.” Peter wondered if Blair could summon this special type of magic. He certainly knew he could, though he had been unable to since the night he killed his step-father. Peter shifted uncomfortably in his seat, feeling his magic stirring within. *His power*.

The lecture proceeded with others explaining what it felt like to channel their magic. Earth Casters talked about how it smelled of rust or wet soil. Water Casters mentioned how it smelled of seaweed when they conjured, while Air Casters mentioned the pressure that built within them then expelled outwards when they directed it.

Peter wrote down the term *‘Well’* in messy black ink, after Hope wrote it on the whiteboard underneath her categories. It was a common term to describe a retention of magic internally. After a few moments of concentration, he could feel the pit at the centre of his soul, where his magic purred. It was an intense, bright ember, but surrounded in shadow.

“Using magic consistently drains the caster until there is nothing left—like a battery. One of the few things you will develop from the course is strategies to conserve this energy and how it needs time to recharge and refill. Experienced casters can go days without rest, building it relentlessly and continuously.”

I wonder how much power I could build. Peter quickly batted away the thought, feeling his chest prickle with unease. His fear nipped his curiosity in the bud.

“Let’s end the lecture by conjuring your element in the palm of your hand. Reach for it through the room. Call to it. Control it.” Professor Hope held out her arm, a feather she had taken from the desk rose above her palm.

A Water Caster down the row pulled water from her water bottle, twirling it in the air to land in her open hand.

Peter hesitated, staring down at his calloused palm hoping the magic would just appear on its own. The shadows across his face, emphasized the doubt in his eyes.

What if I mess this up? What if my magic spirals out of control?

He watched another fire conjurer snap his fingers to make flames appear around the tips of his fingers. Peter swallowed, trembling as he considered the consequences.

Could I really do this? What if I hurt someone again?

His mind flashed with visions of flames consuming everything, of a spell gone wrong ending in tragedy.

Crow had their pencil doing somersaults through the air, snapping chewing gum between their teeth.

"No,” he whispered to himself, voice trembling. He stood from his seat, everyone turning towards him. Some of the other students broke their concentration, the first Water Caster spilling her water over the desk.

I can't risk it. What if I hurt him? Or her? Or anyone else in this room?

The trepidation gnawed at him, a relentless voice echoing in his mind.

“Peter?” Gabby turned him towards him, seeing his chest rising and falling in frantic, desperate heaves.

Peter took a shaky breath while his eyes closed for a moment.

“Maybe I’m not meant for this. Maybe I should just leave it alone.” The weight of responsibility pressed down on his chest, heavy and suffocating.

“Peter, look at me. You can do this. You wanted control, right? Don’t be afraid of it, it’s part of you.” Gabby brushed sweat from his forehead before forcing his fingers open between them. “What you did in the past does not matter, it’s what and who you chose to be now.”

Deep inside, a tiny voice whispered, *You’ll never know unless you try.* And yet, the fear of what might happen still held him back, rooted in his own doubt and the unspoken dread of unintended harm.

“I need to go.”

Gabby stood her ground, not allowing him to pass with a hand on his chest. “Don’t be a *coward*.”

Peter scoffed. She aggressively returned his hands between them. His palms upwards, hers laid underneath.

“Close your eyes.” She gave him a look daring him to argue with her. Everyone was watching their exchange, knowing about Peter’s past and waiting in anticipation to see what kind of magic he would bring forth. “Picture it in your mind. Its warmth, its light.”

Peter’s breath hitched as he hesitated. His heart pounded loudly in his ears, a deafening reminder of the risk he was still afraid to take, but he closed his eyes and called to his magic.

Flame stirred beneath his skin like a snake made of molten lava.

Come on, just a little.

With his eyes closed, he focused on that faint flicker of warmth deep inside him—the faint pulse of fire that had always been part of him, yet so elusive and fragile.

Slowly, he extended his trembling hands, visualizing the fire of a candle. Hot and small. His fingers curled inward as if bracing for impact.

A tingling sensation spread from his palms outward, and suddenly, a tiny flicker of flame appeared—no bigger than a candlewick, dancing softly on his open palms. It shimmered with a gentle glow, casting warm light across his face. The heat was real but mild, more comforting than threatening.

Peter stared, wide-eyed, at the delicate flame. Gabby jumped with glee.

I did it. It's small, but it's mine.

He recognized the flickering light—pure, fragile, and full of potential. A cautious smile crept across the Half-demon’s face, a mixture of awe and relief washing over him.

For a moment, Peter just held the tiny flame, feeling its warmth and realizing that maybe—just maybe—he didn't have to be afraid. Maybe he could control it. Maybe he could use it; to protect, to heal, or simply to prove to himself that he was capable.

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CHAPTER TEN

The Combat Field

The morning faded into a swift afternoon heat, the autumn air wafting through the colouring trees surrounding the academy. The rumours of the encounter had circulated full swing through the student body making Peter into a new celebrity. Half-demons often avoided their Nephilim rivals at all costs, knowing of how the academy policies would protect the Nephilim over Half-demons based on their 'limited' social status, but that's why Peter's bravery and challenge had spoken to many.

Over lunch, Gabby and the others had bombarded him with questions. Discussing the logistics of the whole thing, the reactions of the participants and, of course, what his business was with Blair Dawn.

Peter had done his best to dodge the questions with mediocre answers. He was too exhausted to try to deny or change the opinions of others. He figured it may come in handy, this new reputation.

Gabby had insisted they walk together to combat training. Peter could feel the flutter of wings within his abdomen. He knew that the subject of all of his desires would be on that field.

Gabby was mumbling away beside him, talking about trivial and unimportant gossip between the professors at the academy and the ban of Demonic magics. Peter gave a nod every few minutes to fool her into thinking he was listening. All he could picture was Blair, wavy hair falling down her back and swaying with each step along with her uniform skirt.

The combat field stood behind the eastern side, the third of three massive fields. Peter observed the three distinct padded platforms that were spread out into thirds. On the largest of the three, in the middle, was Jules

and Jackson engaging in hand-to-hand combat. Jules stepped into his punch, leaving his side open. Jackson didn't miss the opportunity to swing, landing perfectly into Jules' exposed ribs.

"JULES! What have I told you about exposing your sides? You left yourself wide open! Do a lap."

Peter recognized the professor who was teaching the class from his clear conviction.

"That's Professor Carter," Gabby filled in as they approached the armour table. The equipment for use—longswords, quarterstaffs, simple black armour, bows and arrows—were scattered around the front of the field in various categories and display racks. "He's a retired soldier from the Royal Army, a skilled weapons master and also Half-demon. Rose in the ranks off of pure spite. One of the first Half-demons to be of such a high rank."

Gabby grabbed a longsword and evaluated the blade as she continued, "There's a conspiracy that Carter being sent here to teach was the Great Council's way of forcing him into retirement. I don't know why they let him go, since he is known for his dedication to their religion and their beliefs. A traitor to everything that he is, and what we are." Gabby's nose turned up towards the professor.

Was it not honourable to be completely devoted to a cause?

The breastplate beneath Peter's fingers was rough to the touch. Its noir material was tougher than any plastic he had seen, but softer than metal.

"It's made of onyx. It's a special material created by Tinkerers in the Coven of Ravens. Harder than any human plastics, but still light for combat. It can take the force of a bullet," Gabby rambled while picking up her own plate to make sure it wasn't warped.

"Bronze!"

Peter halted his fingers, whirling towards the sound of his last name. Professor Carter was prowling towards him. Black eyes fixed on him like a snack. He felt his back straighten as he approached. Carter stood several inches over him, and was made of muscle. The void-like eyes and horns that protruded out of his skull could make anyone feel intimidated.

"I heard you would be joining my class. I read about the… unfortunate events that led to your enrollment in the academy." Peter felt himself cringe internally. Images of burning flesh shoved deeper into their locked casket of his mind. "I have been asked to give you personal lessons to catch you up to

speed. Your abilities could make a deadly asset, if you'd want to consider being a warrior."

Peter had never considered being a warrior. He'd grown up in the world of humans, a world that didn't recognize and honour those skilled with delivering death. Maybe this was his calling. Maybe Carter could help him gain control.

"I believe that would be an honour, sir." There was diligence in his words.

“It will be an exceptional amount of work.” General Carter crossed his arms over his large chest, black eyes assessing him.

“Hard work doesn’t frighten me.”

“We will see.”

To be worthy of any mentorship had Peter’s chest warming. Carter motioned to the sparring areas where Jules and Jackson had been previously. The two Half-angels now stood mocking Peter from a distance. Their glances and chuckles were a clear indication of their directed conversation. Peter rolled his eyes at them.

"Blair, in the ring." Carter motioned his hands to the circle. Her name seemed to roll off any tongue with blissful ease.

Blair got up on the pad, her feet bare. The onyx gear hugged her muscular and toned body, accented by the grey long sleeve beneath. Her wild hair was sternly braided to keep it tamed while she unleashed her hidden wildness.

Carter called forth another student, Malakai Green, from the Nephilim class to spar with Blair. The son of Gabriel and cousin to Jackson—as explained by Gabby in Peter’s ear—was in the same year as Blair. They were both being considered for joining the Warriors of the Blessed at the palace.

The princess spun a quarterstaff in a loose wrist catching his gaze. She gave a small smirk, her eyes ablaze with warrior’s excitement. Peter found himself feral with desire. He began to harden at the thought of her looking at him with that predatory gaze in more private situations. She could eat him alive and he'd enjoy every last bite.

"Begin," Carter instructed.

Gabby remained at his side as the two began to spar.

"I'm assuming working for the royal army is a prestigious position." Peter’s words formed a statement more than a question.

Blair's quarterstaff blocked Mal's offensive swing, leaving him open for a fast whack to his back that made him lose his balance. He ran a few paces forward before turning to block Blair's next swing. Their staffs connected, the hardwood clacking together with intense verberation.

"Many of the royal guard positions at the palace are held by the best warriors. All of them are of Angel descent, a Half-demon has never been given the honour." Gabby pointed to Jules and Jackson. "Jackson is up for contention as well. All three of them are Angel-born, specifically Archangel descent. They are being scouted by the two Royal Guards Milo and Taron." Peter followed her finger to the two men stationed by the treeline, intensely watching the spar. He had seen the two guards around campus a few times, normally around Blair. The two of them together were a blend of dark and white chocolate with calculating eyes and strong forms.

With another whack of her quarterstaff, Blair manoeuvred Mal's out of his hands by twirling it and slamming her foot into his wrist. Blair kicked the staff out of his reach and landed the back of her elbow into his jaw. Mal fell onto the mat. Backing off, she let him get to his feet.

A few drops of blood stained underneath her nose as she wiped it. Her body appeared relaxed, unthreatened by Mal. She was in control.

Mal managed to regain his staff. As if the wind became his to command, Peter swore he saw the outline of wings behind Mal. Blair was ready for his air charged blow, raising her staff over her head to block it.

Snap!

Blair's quarterstaff snapped in two. She stared at the two pieces of splintered wood. Blair dodged Mal's next swing, rolling to the side. Lowered to the ground, Blair stepped up into her blow to block Mal's downward swing. Once they connected, she wasted no time jabbing his ribs. He exhaled from the force she kicked into his abdomen, then tumbled backwards, losing his grip on his weapon.

The son of Gabriel must have forgotten Blair’s specialty in dual wielding.

Blair jumped into the air, a height that would be unattainable by full humans. The sunlight wrapped around her, spreading wide and morphing into Angel wings. Peter's jaw was slack. She was beautiful. Powerful. Iridescent.

Blair dropped from above ten feet, using gravity to increase a ‘killing’ blow. Too fast for Mal to even process the amount of force that would soon

impede on his body. Blair dropped over him, jamming both ends of the quarterstaff around his head. A roar erupted from her. Her weight pushed Mal deeper into the padding of the ring. Mal tapped her thigh, accepting defeat.

"That's enough. Thank you, Blair."

Blair stood above Mal, the bits of wood tossed aside as if they had only been mere sticks.

Weightless.

Breakable.

No longer the steel that she wielded in her hands.

Blair extended a rough hand to Mal, the light shapely behind her. Her wings were otherworldly. It was the only word that Peter could conjure to mind. Blair was a force, but even knowing her a short while, she was kind. Kinder than any other people had been to him.

He swore his heart had begun to take flight.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Divine Focus

Blair Dawn made her way to the second floor after a much needed shower. Her thighs groaned with every step as she climbed the stone stairs.

I am definitely going to need to roll out my quads before we get called to the City of Enders.

Headmistress Penns had mentioned that she had reached out to the Dhampir, Detective Embris, at the Enders Police Precinct for anything that matched what she had seen in her dreaming. There was no news yet, which was a good but unsettling thing.

Blair reached up and knocked on the heavy wooden door that led into the small chapel office, arriving for her afternoon appointment. The scent of incense drifted through the crack, and faint candlelight flickered beneath the threshold.

"Come in."

She pushed the door open and stepped inside. Rows of pews stretched to her left, while Father Morgan's private study sat just beyond the altar rail. Snow was already there, rising from one of the pews near the front. Their weekly overlap had once unsettled Blair. Now, it felt routine in a way that never quite erased the unease.

The Half-demon's gift hovered close to Blair's own, though it twisted differently. Blair saw fragments of the future in dreams—clear, chilling glimpses she could neither summon nor stop. Snow, on the other hand, had once been swallowed by visions so violent they'd been dismissed as madness. It wasn't until one of her hallucinations foretold the death of an

orderly at Shadowbrook Sanatorium—an asylum for so-called ‘mad’ Half-demons—that anyone dared call them what they were; premonitions.

Blair offered her a small, careful smile. Snow returned it faintly, her pale eyes avoiding direct contact. Then she slipped past Blair, head lowered, and disappeared into the dim corridor beyond.

“Every soul bears its burden differently,” Father Morgan murmured, watching her go. His voice was quiet, steady. “Some carry theirs like a whisper. Others… like a storm.”

“Ready?” he asked, turning back to Blair, gesturing toward a cushioned kneeler set before the altar.

Blair nodded and lowered herself onto it. The worn velvet creaked faintly beneath her weight. She folded her hands in her lap clutching her rosary pearls and closed her eyes, focusing on the slow rhythm of her breathing.

Father Morgan moved behind her, the soft clink of a censer chain punctuating his steps. “You know the practice,” he said. “Still your body. Still your mind. Let what comes… come. And remember—visions are not commandments. They are warnings, or sometimes temptations.”

Blair exhaled slowly as he began counting down from ten, his voice layering over the steady tick of a small metronome set beside the altar. The scent of incense thickened. Her breathing slowed. Her limbs softened, one by one, until the world slipped from beneath her.

Cold water soaked through her shoes.

She stood in darkness, ankle-deep, the chill biting through her uniform. The void stretched endlessly in every direction.

“What do you see?” Father Morgan’s voice echoed, distant but clear.

“I’m… somewhere dark. It doesn’t end.” Blair turned slowly, her arms hugging her sides. “I hear something.”

A low, pulsing sound throbbed in the distance. It drew her forward, each step sending ripples across the shallow water.

“Do not fear the path,” he said gently. “Walk it, but do not let it claim you.”

The sound sharpened as she approached; music, loud and synthetic, pounding in a way that scraped at her senses. The darkness peeled away, replaced by flashing neon and bodies colliding around her.

Blair staggered as the environment shifted, her footing unsteady against the grime-slick floor.

“Stay anchored,” Father Morgan warned. “The mind will dress truth in distraction.”

She stopped pushing through the crowd and instead stood still, letting the chaos orbit her. A bar glowed red under LED strips. A stage held three silver poles.

“I’m in… a strip club,” she said, almost disbelieving.

There was a brief pause.

“Even the profane may conceal the sacred—or the wicked,” he replied calmly. “Look deeper.”

Blair took a steadying breath.

The crowd vanished.

The smell hit her next—sulphur and blood, thick and suffocating. It clung to her throat. Her gaze dropped to the floor.

A pentagram, identical to the one from her dreams, scorched into the concrete.

“*Where is he*?” a voice demanded.

Her head snapped up.

A Demon stood before her, eyes glowing like molten cadmium, dressed in an immaculate three-piece suit. In one hand, it held a heart. In the other, a liver—both dripping, impossibly fresh.

“Where is who?” Blair asked, her voice unsteady.

“The Mortal Prince of Hell,” the Demon growled. “I must find him. My king demands it.”

It lunged.

The impact drove Blair backward, her body slamming against the floor. The surface cracked beneath her, splintering open as darkness swallowed her whole.

Air tore from her lungs as images flashed behind her closed eyes—too quick, too sharp.

“Blair.” Father Morgan’s voice was faint.

“Blair, return. You are not of that place.”

Her body convulsed, the vision tightening its grip.

A hand, dark and unfamiliar, flickered into view, an onyx gem embedded in a ring on its pinkie finger.

Then another image—hands slick with blood, slicing open a small white rabbit, extracting its tiny heart and liver with careful precision.

“Blair. By the light, come back.”

The metronome stopped.

The silence snapped her free.

Her eyes flew open. Candlelight flooded her vision, too bright after the darkness. Pain throbbed behind her eyes as her breath came in sharp bursts.

“What did you see?” Father Morgan asked, kneeling beside her. He handed her a small cup of water, his gaze steady, searching.

Blair pushed damp strands of hair from her face, fingers pressing against her temple.

“A ring,” she said hoarsely. “Black gem. And a Demon… carrying a heart and a liver.” She swallowed, the memory lingering like ash.

“May I go? My head…” her fingers pressed into her temples.

Father Morgan studied her for a long moment, the lines around his eyes tightening.

“Visions such as yours are not curses,” he said quietly. “They are a calling from our Lord… though not always the one we choose. Be careful, Blair. Darkness does not only seek to be seen. It seeks to be followed.”

He nodded toward the door.

Blair didn’t hesitate. She gathered her things and hurried out of the chapel, the echo of her footsteps swallowed by stone and silence.

And as she crossed the threshold into the daylight, she found herself praying, not for understanding, but for a life untouched by visions of Demons and death

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Detention

Blair Dawn made her way to the library, stopping by the front desk where Kirian already had her materials gathered and held for her. She offered him a tired thank you before climbing the spiral metal staircase to the second floor. Her table was vacant and waiting for her.

The library was a sanctuary for silence.

Dancing shadows, bathed in the warm glow of afternoon sunlight, streamed through tall, arched stained glass windows. Rows upon rows of books stretched beyond, each one whispering stories of worlds past and futures yet to come. Blair settled into the rounded table, her nose buried in the Angel Codex that Merlin had requested from his connections in Italy. Being friends with the House of Uriel had its perks. The quiet hum of the space wrapped around her like a comforting blanket.

"Hi." Blair's head snapped up, eyes torn away from the Latin text to see Peter standing and holding out a paper cup from *The Brew Box*. "I got you a coffee." Blair immediately relaxed, her smile exposing her left dimple.

She took the small offering. "How did you sneak those in here?" she wondered aloud.

"I had an accomplice." He pointed over the railing to where Merlin was leaning over the front desk, flirting quite blatantly with Kirian. Blair giggled and took a large gulp of her oatmilk latte.

She reached into her bag and pulled out a red spiral notebook that had seen better days, the front cover warn from age and use. She held it out to him.

“Here is my notebook from my first year. It has most of my notes that I think will be helpful for your Demon and Angel history exams.”

Peter quickly flipped through the crinkling pages. He slowly abandoned the notebook to the table, already overwhelmed by the neat cursive inside. “What are you working on?”

“I am reading a story about Alchys. She was the one who predicted the return of Lucifer before she went mad. This translation though is… too vague and I fear there are a few mistranslations from the original scroll,” Blair rambled. Peter watched her lips move with unwavering concentration. “She experienced the dreaming herself, and I was hoping there would be notes or experiments inside that could help me orient myself to become lucid. Right now, I have trouble recognizing that I am asleep.”

She watched Peter take a sip of his own beverage before removing his blazer and loosening his tie. A quick steady hand unbuttoned the top button to expose the small bit of hair from his chest. Peter unbuttoned the ends of his cuffs and rolled them to just below his elbows.

Blair tried to just focus on her work, but found her eyes trailing the skin of his thick forearms. There were several jagged and small circular scars. Blair reached across the table and touched one of the small circles. “Where are these from?” she asked. Peter however jerked back and immediately stood. The chair scraped loudly, as he refused to look at her.

“I need to find a book for my history class.” He rubbed the back of his neck. She sighed and watched him bolt into the shelves to avoid talking about the subject.

Blair went back to the life of the Nephilim Alchys.

After a few moments, just a few feet away, Peter was pretending to be perusing the shelves and scanning titles with a furrowed brow. He was looking for a particular book—something he’d heard about but couldn’t quite remember the title. “Military Tactics,” he mumbled under his breath, glancing from shelf to shelf. Frustration flickered across his face as he reached for a book on a higher shelf and struggled to grab it.

Blair glanced up, noticing his difficulty, and hesitated for a moment before speaking softly.

“Need a hand?” She stood, walking over to him.

Peter looked down, surprised but grateful. “Yeah, actually. I’m looking for that first year history book… ‘Military Tactics of something, something’?”

Blair smiled gently and pointed toward a nearby shelf.

“It should be right here. This whole section focuses on the military history of the Covenant.”

Blair climbed onto her tiptoes, reaching for the book. As she did, Peter instinctively stepped closer to help her, and their shoulders brushed briefly. The moment lingered—an unspoken acknowledgment of something shared in that tiny space.

“Thanks,” Peter said, turning to face her with a shy smile. “Would you be okay if I joined you? Since we have to be here for detention tonight anyway?”

Blair responded with a soft smile of her own. “Of course. We can even study for a bit, as promised. You will ace that exam.”

They stood there for a beat, the quiet hum of the library filling the space between them. Blair watched as Peter flipped through the pages of the book, his brow furrowing in concentration.

“Are you into history?” she asked, breaking the silence.

He looked up, eyes brightening. “I wasn’t always. I love stories from the past. It sometimes feels like it's a little window into different worlds. I guess I find it fascinating how much we can learn from history—about ourselves, about others.”

Blair nodded, her gaze softening. “Exactly. It’s like discovering hidden parts of a story that’s still being written. I think that’s why I love reading about history. It’s alive, in a way.”

Peter chuckled softly, a nervous twinge in his voice, as they walked back to Blair’s table. A gentle silence settled over them, as if the library itself was holding its breath. Peter carefully packed the book into his bag, glancing back at Blair with a mixture of curiosity and something more tender.

“Thanks for helping me find it,” he said softly. “I think I was about to give up.”

“That’s what friends are for, right?” Blair replied, her voice gentle.

Peter’s smile lingered, a flicker of something silent passing between them. “Yeah. Friends.”

They exchanged a look—an unspoken promise, a quiet hope—while only the library’s quiet hum continued. As Blair returned to her book, and Peter to his thoughts, neither of them could ignore the feeling that this was just the beginning of something more.

After they studied for an hour, Blair returned to her personal project. Peter had been working on some assignments when her eyes started to drift close. It wasn't long before she was drooling, dangerously close to the Angel Codex.

Blair startled awake, wiping at her chin and glancing around to see Peter was no longer across from her, but his uniform blazer with silver thread was draped over her shoulders. She couldn't help herself, she brought the collar to her nose and inhaled. It smelled like him.

Blair folded it over the back of her chair and stretched her arms over her head before walking to the railing. Hands laid on the polished surface, she peered down at the students below. Checking the time on her wrist, they would be due for detention soon and Peter was nowhere to be seen.

A giggle came from a few shelves down that called to her curiosity. She carefully treaded on the toes of her feet to soften her steps. She peaked around the corner of the shelf to see Gabby leaning casually and Peter in front of her. They were standing unbelievably close to one another that made Blair's chest constrict with jealousy.

A book flew from the stacks behind them and whacked Peter in the back of the head.

"OW!"

Blair and Gabby burst into a fit of giggles as Peter rubbed the back of his neck.

"Blair," Gabby greeted cheekily, knowing full well that she had been watching them. There was a challenge in her gaze.

"Peter and I have to meet with Kirian soon." Blair pointed a thumb over her shoulder.

"Right. I forgot. Have fun, come find me tonight in the dorms later." The daughter of Lilith twirled the end of a section of her hair.

"Oh, I plan on it," Peter told her, watching the Half-demon swish away past Blair.

The Nephilim princess rolled her eyes. She turned in a huff and made her way to the front desk. Headmistress Penns had not clarified how long detention was going to be this evening, and she knew that being around Peter all night would make her self-conscious. It had been intense just sitting across the table from him.

The library always had a personality, a mind of its own. It was one of her closest associates, bringing her novel recommendations and contributing to her research. Kirian had told her long ago that the spirit's name was Vidya. The legend of Vidya stated that she was a knowledge seeker, an academic for the history and records of their people all the way to some of the first spellcasters, Angels, and Demons. She died protecting the knowledge. Her spirit blessed this place, but sometimes Blair knew Vidya was actually here. Still spreading fascinating information after all this time.

And throwing books at Half-demons.

Blair smiled and rested her palm on one of the bookshelves before descending down the steps. It warmed in response letting her know that she acknowledged her. This library was more than an associate, it was a friend in some mysterious way. Blair truly believed that Vidya had the will and heart of a saint, but she would never be recognized by the Church because she was in love with Alchys.

"Did you have a nice nap?"

She recognized his footsteps as he approached. Turning towards Peter’s sharp masculine features, and gave him a soft smile that buried her envy for Gabby. Blair hated to admit that she was jealous of Gabby’s ability to be sexually open within whomever she pleased.

And she’s gorgeous. Of course Peter would want to be with someone like her—like him.

“I didn’t mean to doze off on you like that.”

“It’s okay, it was rather cute to be honest.” Blair scoffed at him and rolled her eyes at his teasing remark.

"I meant to mention earlier that I saw you fight today. I must say that I was stunned. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen." Another compliment that was enforced through the fierceness of his heated gaze. Blair couldn't help her cheeks from turning a deep shade of mulberry. Many people revered her skills as a warrior, but it was different coming from Peter somehow.

"Thank you." That was all she could manage to get out. She tilted her head down, letting her messy curls cover her face slightly, hoping to mask her embarrassment.

Peter's finger touched the base of her chin, lifting her eyes to meet his oceanfront. She found her lips parting slightly as his sea roamed over her features. His hand brushed her soft waves behind her ear.

"You don't need to hide yourself from me." His voice was a mere whisper.

Blair felt her breath catch in her throat. Peter was a beautiful man. His nightly curls shaped the top of his skull, drawing more attention to his piercing gaze and hard jawline. Blair couldn't help the finger that lifted and grazed the underside of his jaw.

She watched his muscles clench beneath her finger, his adam's apple bobbing. His scent wafted towards her, the same that clung to the fabric of his blazer. Smoky rain and teakwood, it was distinctly and uniquely Peter. She knew the touch was more intimate than she had intended. She pulled back quickly, remembering her plan.

She was not supposed to let herself get entangled in her desire for him. If her dreams were any indication, Peter may be the very downfall of the academy. Peter searched her eyes looking for a reason for her sudden retracted hand, her sudden cold demeanour.

"I'm sorry," she muttered and took several paces back. "We should speak to Kirian."

Peter swallowed, nodded once, then motioned for her to lead them down the steps. Blair's heart was fuming in her ribcage; steady and hard. She tried to ignore the heat that pulled her closer to him.

Kirian was sitting at his desk, his glasses perched at the edge of his nose. Blair understood Merlin's attraction to his sexy queer librarian vibes. Kirian looked up with a smile as they approached.

"It's been a while since I've had the privilege of hosting detention for you, Ms. Dawn. Are the others coming?"

"It has been quite some time. My perfect record is ruined." She dramatically touched her forehead. "I'm assuming the others will be here soon, but where can we start?" Blair asked.

"I need a bunch of books reshelved. They are on the carts over," Kirian stepped over a few splayed novels. "Here."

Peter and Blair took in the five carts filled to the brim with various texts.

This could take a while.

"Are they organised by section? Or was everyone lazy and put them on randomly?" Blair knew the answer before she asked. Kirian just stared at her, giving her the answer she seeked.

Lazy, inconsiderate imbeciles.

She glanced at Peter. "It may be beneficial to organise them before we take them to their respective areas."

"Sounds fun," was all Peter muttered.

Once the others had joined them, late as expected, organising the carts only took forty minutes before they went off to their respective sections. Blair's cart belonged to the second floor from A to K. Vidya was helping her by jotting out books where they belonged, one of the many perks of being friends with the library.

Blair found her mind wandering to Peter working in the section after her. She watched him pop in and out of the aisles, smiling at his confused looks.

Blair placed her last book in the Kaur section and decided to make her way down the floor towards him. The library had gone into its evening mode, the lighting dimmed and the little balls of light floating their way through the space.

The princess knew that she could leave, her cart now empty, but something was drawing her to him. His cart was still fairly full, so she grabbed the next book and looked at the labels at the top of the shelves. Vidya jutted out the book for her as she stepped into the space.

"Thank you," her voice was soft as she expressed her gratitude.

"Did you just thank the shelf?" Peter asked. He leaned against the shelf with his arms slightly crossed, a red book still in his hands.

"I did. The library has been helping me."

"The library has been helping you?" he repeated. His brows drew together. She walked to the cart and grabbed the next book and he watched a book slide out of the spot to signal where it went. "Well, that's rigged. The library is not that nice to me."

"It takes a bit for her to warm up to you, but she truly loves scholars."

"It's a she, eh?"

Blair nodded at his question, placing another book in its proper place.

"Does she have a name?" Peter continued.

"Can I tell him?" The book in her hand flared its pages in excitement. "I'm taking that as a yes. Her name is Vidya. She was a powerful academic

during her time here. She blessed this library with her gifts to help students find the knowledge they seek. Just ask and she will assist you. Sometimes, she will do it without you even having asked."

Peter stared at the shelves with a crick in his neck and an arched brow. His lips were solid until a small smirk cracked them.

Blair noticed the silence that fell between them, the quietness of the library encasing them. She began to shift uncomfortably before finding a comfort in making her way to place the books on the shelf. Blair found herself walking past Peter, feeling his observant eyes. His warmth seeped into her skin, even without contact. His scent wrapped around her, her eyes closed as it enveloped her senses.

Her core began to beat along with her heart, the tight cord pulling them closer to each other. She willed her legs forward to place the book on the shelf. Peter stepped closer behind her as she couldn't quite reach the top of the shelf. He grabbed it from her fingers, making their skin brush.

Blair's breath hitched.

Peter placed the book on the shelf, mere inches away from her body. He didn't move as she turned. Her eyes lifted to his face, finding his were molten with desire. He too, looked like he was struggling to control his breathing.

"Blair," he whispered. There was desperation in his voice. She wanted to touch him. She wanted him to touch her. It had been a long time since anyone had.

Peter's hands were clenched at his side, as if fighting his own sense of control. Blair found her hand rising, her fingers grazing the material of his white fitted button-up. His chest heaved, but he remained frozen to the spot letting her fingers explore the strength that resided beneath.

"Peter, I—"

A book fell off the shelf making both of them jump from their close proximity. Before long, Willow Glory came around the corner.

Thank you for the warning, Vidya.

"I finished my section and wanted to come see you before I went to our room." Willow ran her fingers through her chestnut hair. "I just wanted to apologise for today. For not sticking up for both of you. Blair, you know I love you and see you as my best friend. I should have been better—you know how I feel about Jackson—it's hard to not let myself—"

"I know. Peter and I are friends. I know that Demon and Nephilim socialising is non-existent, but maybe we can change that. Make it easier for people like Arlie." Blair wasn't sure if Willow or Peter were aware of the history between Damon and Arlie. It didn't end well based on stigma and the Covenant making their relations illegal.

The thought of Arlie made Blair pause. Despite her desire for Peter, they would never be able to pursue a romantic or sexual relationship.

"I support this. I would like to offer my friendship as well to you, Peter. I'm sorry we got off on the wrong foot. We can be self-righteous pricks that get stuck in old ways. A lot of our parents, especially Jackson's and Jules', believe that the Covenant should have never permitted Half-demons to enter our society. I think that it's outdated and we need to change that."

"I look forward to our growing friendship, Willow."

Peter sounded honest in his response as a gleam in his eye caught Blair's attention. They wouldn't be alone in this. "I accept your apology, Will. We can talk more in private when I wrap up with Peter."

Willow nodded. "I'll wait for you." She gave Peter a smile before turning away from them to head towards the exit.

By the shuffling near the front, Blair assumed the other boys had wrapped up their work.

"We should finish this up." Blair motioned to the last ten books on his cart.

Before she got far from his reach his warm palm wrapped about her wrist spiking her heartbeat once more.

"Blair, can we talk about what just happened between us—"

"Nothing happened between us." She let her voice go cold and flat. She pulled from his touch despite her body's protest.

"Blair, you cannot deny what we feel—"

"What was felt was nothing. I feel nothing for you, other than friendship. I can't. We can't."

"What do you mean?"

"Has no one explained to you the rules of the Covenant? Demons and Nephilim are not allowed to procreate or be with each other romantically. We can never pursue something beyond friendship, no matter what we feel. I'm training to be a Seer and warrior. I am in line for the throne; to serve the royal family. I cannot risk that position by being with… Demons."

"Do you desire a family of your own some day?" Peter changed the subject. Blair felt her shoulders relax with appreciation, but did not miss the way he began to avert his gaze.

"Yes. I hope one day I will find someone to be my mate. Mother will be the one who dictates who I'll finally marry. My marriage will be a political ploy, I'm sure."

"Angels… mate?" The mating bond was a special connection, a rare intertwining of souls that transcended marriage. It was deeper and all consuming. It wasn't only uncommon for Half-demons and Half-angels to experience the tether, but unheard of between the two and of course, forbidden even if it did.

"Don't many creatures? Even humans experience biological attraction that chooses the best possible combinations for offspring, that's why they evolve and adapt to changing conditions. Sorry, that was nerdy. I find interest in magical procreation. There's fascinating research on how creatures choose the best mate, and how magical lines can strengthen over time."

"Or exploited. Arranged marriages from royal or rich families are quite common, yes?" Peter asked with a snarky remark as he placed another book in the aisle.

"Yes. Very much so. The Nephilim rule the Covenant, have since its creation. The rich marry the rich. Pure blood avocation is a thing. Angels have to have special permission to mate with other creatures. It's rare, the mating bond. Unheard of with non-angels, but it happens."

"Has it happened between Angels and Demons—this mating thing?"

"Not that I know. Most don't… *consummate*." Peter's head whipped to his left to watch her place the next book down.

"So mating requires consummation?"

Blair swallowed. "Yes. Mating doesn't truly happen unless it's consummated and with the right person. We can be with other people physically and never truly mate, but once one does they will never be with someone else. But like I said, the mating bond is rare." Blair recalled her childhood, endless nights praying to meet her mate.

"So you've been… with—"

Blair just gave him a look that answered what he was asking. Jules and her had been intimate with each other, but that's how she knew he wasn't the one. The mating bond never formed. She however, was not allowed to

discuss her sexual history with many. If word got out she was no longer pure, there could be damage to her reputation. Blair chewed on her lip.

"Where do you fit into all of this? I know your clique is all Archangel descendants and you're watched like a hawk by royal scouts," said Peter.

Blair eyed the lines of his back contract as he placed a volume on the top shelf above him. She thought to her body guards, Taron and Milo, that were lounging on the floor below. They reported all back to Adam and their respective house leaders; including Miranda Dawn.

"I am in contention for the throne because my father is Michael." She read the spine of the book in her hand, multi-tasking to take her eyes off the muscles of his shoulders and back. "As leaders we are expected to excel in everything. We are trained to be warriors from birth and educated in politics, law, and leadership." Her closest friends and family—Jackson, Jules, Arlie, Mal—were all fathered by Archangels around similar times. All of them were heirs to their respective houses and could potentially be named senators for the Great Council. An honourable position, to serve as a voice for the Covenant and participate in running behind-the-scenes.

"My friends have been training together privately since we were thirteen. We sometimes leave the school during the year for on-field training, or what humans call 'co-op'."

Blair sighed before thinking of her recent dream, one that quickly had her chest constricting with unease. "My father has high expectations for me and I don't want to disappoint him."

"So are you all," he paused to search for the right word, "related?"

"Yes and no. It's hard to explain Angel genetics. All Angels are technically siblings as they come from God, but they are made of their own unique essence." Blair could see that Peter was trying to process the potential incestuous line that could be created with Angel breeding. Blair continued to place the books on the shelf to where Vidya showed. She slowed down her movements to delay the inevitable end of their job. She was glad Peter was interested in these things.

"I am closely related to people who are a direct descendant from Michael. I have two real half-siblings, both much older than I. The queen, Leta Forne, is the mother of my two brothers Adam and Issac; Adam is currently the ruler of the Covenant. My other brother, Issac, hasn't been around too much in the last decade since Adam became Prime—it's not as bad as that may seem, he's basically the head chair. Each magical creature

species has their own chosen representative on the Council. Half-angels just have the most control." Blair grabbed the last book, turning it over in her hand. "I'm sorry this is probably boring you to death and really off topic."

Peter watched her put away the last book, it sliding into its place as if Vidya was behind the shelf pulling it in.

"We cannot be together, Peter. Even with this desire. That is all it is. Angels and Demons cannot mate." Blair turned towards him, placing her palms together in front of her.

"No one said that we couldn't. It's just illegal. You said it yourself, no one knows what the offspring would be or how powerful they could be. That's what the Angels are terrified of—being kicked off the throne by a bastard." Peter arched his brow as if to challenge her. She had no proof of the contrary, they were just taught that it was wrong and unnatural.

"I don't see you that way." The whispered lie barely moved Blair’s lips.

"Yes, you do. Part of you is sick that you're even attracted to me. You can't risk your future to even be associated with me."

Blair flinched. "Peter–" Blair could tell Peter was getting triggered, the air tinged with the smell of smoke. "I want to be your friend. I want to help you excel in school and find a place for yourself in this world that's new to you." She paused to swallow. "You deserve to find control and find who you are. In the human world, you were always different. Here your differences matter. They make you powerful, they give you purpose," Blair tried to encourage. Peter was not some evil being that her visions may have convinced her before. He was here for a reason, she was sure of that now.

"I want you, Blair." He sounded pained. “My whole being is calling to you. You may be able to resist it, but I can't."

Peter took a step.

Her heart began to race.

Another.

His name tumbling from her mouth in a whispered protest. He was only making this harder.

Another step.

Teakwood and fresh rain swirled her senses making her dizzy. She had tried to keep her distance, to avoid her body's response to him. She found herself squeezing her thighs together.

"You cannot deny that I drive you crazy. You want me to touch you so desperately." His voice was low, eyes half-lidded with desired intent.

She watched him lick his lips. His fingers grazed down her left arm. Gooseflesh rose, her skin reaching out for him.

Half-angels didn't mate with Half-demons.

Blair pulled away. "I'm sorry. I can't. I won't."

She turned, and never looked back.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Torched & Scorched

Peter Bronze didn't sleep well for the next few nights, plagued by dreams of flame. The vomit inducing fall from the sky had his magic flaring out to protect him. This morning, Crow had shaken him awake, his bedsheets utterly singed. He'd burned them for the second night in a row.

His roommate never said anything to anyone, they just went to student resources and picked up a new pair of sheets. Peter was grateful that the darkened sheets were never spoken about, as he was already interlaced with shame and fear of potentially burning their dorm to the ground. Crow's ability to keep secrets was making them Peter's closest companion.

Gabby walked beside Peter towards Friday's Herbology tutorial, chatting away like always. His mind was too focused on a certain dark-haired female that walked into the class with Merlin to hear anything Gabby had to say. Yet her chatter remained active and constant.

Peter's legs groaned beneath him as he made his way to his seat.

Carter's training has been kicking my ass.

It was rejuvenating to be sore, to know all the hard work he was doing would help hone his skills and body into lethal grace. And training had become a space for him to distract himself from trailing after the whims of his yearning. Since he had been using his magic more frequently, it was a strain to keep up with his increased appetite.

Peter crunched into an apple he had grabbed from the dining hall. The sweet juices of the honeycrisp exploded over his tongue.

He saw Blair turn her head in his direction at the sound. Her hair swept over her shoulder. Two small braids woven into her waves on either side of

her face stood out, decorated with gold wire and crystals. The yellow crystals accented her forest eyes.

"Good morning," he said, pausing between chews. "Would you like to grab coffee after class?"

Blair smiled but shook her head, ignoring the daggers from Gabby. "I have to meet with Father Morgan today as I have special training tomorrow for my premonition examination. I have to pass in order to be considered for my pilgrimage next semester."

Peter raised his eyebrow and took another bite.

Would she be leaving campus in a few months?

"There's a special collection of people with Sight called the Emissary," Merlin explained to him animatedly. “They take potential Seers to elevated celestial points to increase it. The princess has to pass to be granted permission to heighten her Sight. But she has to be deemed ready–” Blair hit his shoulder. “A fancy way to get out of attending another boring mass from Father Morgan if you ask me.”

"I am quite capable of explaining things myself." Blair's eyes found his. "It's important that I go, but I'll still see you at the bonfire tonight?"

Right. The bonfire.

Oaken Academy's fall tradition for the upper years. He vaguely remembered Gabby blabbing about it. The night would begin with a friendly game of Capture the Flag between all the dorm halls. Once one dorm rose victorious—most bets on the Nephilims—a bonfire would follow to celebrate the beginning of term and symbolically, the fiery downfall of Lucifer.

"Yeah, we will be there," Gabby interjected with a snarky remark. He'd forgotten he had accidentally agreed to go with her. Peter knew she was getting emotionally attached to him, clear from her possessive nature.

“Okay, I look forward to seeing you both. Merlin and Willow were up all night decorating our team shirts and I have a good feeling this is going to be an epic round of opening games.” Blair was trying to be polite, but Gabby sneered and rolled her eyes.

Blair’s eyes squinted in defiance and opened her mouth to say something else but the side door opened, letting in the harsh, cool air.

Osric popped into the tutorial with a huge box of poisonous plant samples. Peter watched Blair turn towards the front of the room.

If only I could create a potion to remove my awkwardness.

The seats of Auditorium Five were sparsely occupied, a contrast to their weekly magic lectures. This tutorial was part of the same course but focused on mastering the fundamentals of fire magic—an art both glorious and dangerous according to Professor Hope. For the next hour they would be wielding their magic.

Peter’s stomach clenched.

The air buzzed with anticipation as students dumped their things at their desks and gathered around the instructor. He brushed his long hair over his shoulder and scanned the room. He was a tall, stern figure with eyes that blazed like flickering flames.

“Good morning. My name is Loran Pudlane and I am one of the Graduate students here who has the honour of being your TA.” Master Loran bowed.

“And this,” he gestured to a muscular woman with deep brown skin and intense blue eyes, “is Judy Lane who is only here in case anything catches fire that is unintended.” The Water Caster gave a little wave.

“Today,” Loran began, voice steady and commanding, “we focus on control. Fire is unpredictable; it responds to your intent and your will. If you cannot command it, it will consume you—and everything around you.” The graduate's eyes landed on Peter in a way that made the Half-demon’s mouth go dry.

“Alright, up out of your seats and come join me down here in a circle.” Loran asked. He pushed the desk back against the wall under the whiteboards.

Peter got up with a sigh, and made his way to join the circle around Loran, who was directing people to stand around him. Once the students were spread out at the base of the auditorium, the woman next to Peter took a step away. Her rejection led to several giggles, his advanced hearing catching his name being ushered in whispers. It was gossip of his accident and the fight in the café. Their quiet words struck him like a gunshot—quiet only to the ones who weren’t the target. Heat pooled in his cheeks betraying his composure, but he cleared his throat and crossed his large arms over his chest.

He evaluated every student in the room as he took a wider stance. None of them had the same pale panic or perspiring palms as Peter.

Loran clicked a button on a small metal remote and the middle of the floor between the group split open. A metallic bowl with the Enochian symbols of the four elements rose on a wooden platform until it was at hip height. Peter recognized the elemental symbols crafted in the language of the Angels from his Covenant History tutor session with Mrs. T. The others symbols were beyond his comprehension. Inside the decorated iron were rough cut rocks that sparkled from the lights above, a special coal of some kind.

“This first lesson is simple. Ignite the coals and keep the flame steady without letting it grow out of control.” Loran grinned and flared out rapid jazz-hands. Judy rolled her eyes at him with a smile, taking a seat on top of the desk. She tucked her hands into the pockets of her Oaken Academy leather jacket.

“Who would like to go first?” Loran asked. Everyone but Peter raised their hands. The TA called on a redhead with freckles that were sprinkled over his entire face and neck.

Aiden Wate was eager. He approached the display with confidence. His shoulders were back, his chin was high. He spread his hands wide and took a deep breath before his dark brown eyes settled on the coals before him. His eye twitched and a small spark ignited with ease.

“Great job. I want you to manipulate the flame into an orb and have it elevate just above the bowl.” The Fire Caster reached his hands over the bowl, his fingers spread wide and tense. The flames gathered and formed a softball of light. It moved above the coals with the motion of his hands reaching towards the stone ceiling. Aiden’s brow broke out with sweat, the light from his magic catching and refracting over his moist skin.

“Describe to me what your magic feels like to you when you call it.” Loran asked him. The flame sputtered, losing shape and size as Aiden’s concentration wavered to think about the question. Aiden’s bushy brow furrowed, eyes glued to the coals to reshape it.

“What does your magic feel like?” Loran repeated. The ball wavered again. The nineteen-year-old’s hand began to tremble, the orb placing strain on his flexed fingers.

“It feels like a warmth that swims under and over my skin.” The orb diminished significantly in size. A few of his friends snickered behind him.

“Warmth—a great function for fire. Are there any others here who would use this word to describe what it feels like?”

Many nodded, including Peter. Though the Half-demon thought that the heat he felt from his magic was more searing and sharp. Similar but unique from Aiden's soft struggling spectre.

Peter shifted uncomfortably, keeping his arms crossed and fingers tucked under his sweaty pits.

"Hold it. Retain the shape, Aiden," Loran commanded. "Use your other senses to describe it."

"It's—it's—" Aiden groaned, the flame disappearing leaving the area cold.

"Thank you, Aiden. Sorry for picking on you, I wanted to demonstrate the element of concentration that is accompanied with any magic. When I asked Aiden to think, shifting his focus on other aspects, he struggled to maintain it and control it."

Aiden's pale face had turned cherry as he rejoined the edge of the circle. The embarrassment travelled down his neck, the pink disappearing behind his red threaded tie. He crossed his arms over his chest, looking stern.

"One of the few things we will develop this term is better magical discipline. To tame the magical beast that is *fire*." Loran gestured dramatically, igniting the coals to encase a mini fire tornado. Loran walked around the room,

"Each and every single one of you has what we call a Well inside of you." Loran gestured to the centre of his chest.

There was that stupid term from Monday.

"This might feel differently for each of you, but this is where you can store your magic." Though he was walking around the room and addressing them one-by-one, his funnel of fire continued to spin with ferocity towards the ceiling with vigorous dissolve. The heat burned ever stronger, changing the tornado from fiery burnt orange to a vicious admiral. Peter and the others winced as they were bathed in scorching blue.

"The more magic you use, the less power and access you will have to your specialized element." His flame continued, spiralling, spinning, scorching.

The room fell silent, as Loran's light extinguished.

Peter couldn't stop a shiver from travelling down his back as Loran's eyes landed on him.

"Mr. Bronze, can you approach the summoning bowl?"

The room was becoming unbearable, suffocating with humidity and heat.

At least I'm not the only one sweating now.

Peter walked towards the iron, his vision blurring and his heart palpitating. He placed his hands on the table and looked at the coals.

"All I want you to do is ignite it. I will instruct you once it has been summoned."

Peter took a deep shaky breath. He could produce a simple flame. As his focus sharpened, he felt the molecules shifting around him. He imagined the coals sparking to life before him, a perfect fuel for the flames to devour.

Peter felt a surge of intense heat radiating outward from his core. It purred inside of him like a cat awakening from a nap and needing to stretch. The sensation of prickling buzzed inside his palms, spreading up his arms. A sudden pressure burst at the centre of the bowl and an intense roaring fire erupted; warm, powerful, and vibrant. A few people flinched backwards while others squinted at the intensity.

Peter opened his eyes and sighed at the warmth that brazed his cheeks. He smiled in victory seeing the dancing flame before him.

I did it.

"Excellent, Peter." The smell of a campfire from a deep woodstove thread around the room. A few girls across from him were watching him intently, their eyes roaming over him with interest.

"Okay, I want you to create a ring of fire around the rim. Leave the middle open." Peter envisioned the flames bowing to his command. It moved like a serpent, coiling around the rim and settled into a small wall of sporadic flickering.

"Tell me what you feel?" Loran asked.

Peter let his eyes drift towards the instructor. "It feels alive." A few people around him snickered. His magic hissed at them, snaking around the rim in a slow circle.

"Yes, sometimes magic can have a mind of its own. Speak to us, demand of us, and react to us. Emotions and danger trigger our magic's presence." Loran watched Peter reach out and stroke the flames. They did not burn him, but embraced the tips of his fingers.

Mira Jennings, the short plump blonde behind him whispered, "I heard he killed people. He shouldn't be allowed in here with us."

“Yeah, what if he hurts someone?” Aiden muttered under his breath to Mira.

The fire grew, swaying wildly like a beast craving freedom from a tight cage. Peter clenched his jaw focusing on the magic as the whispers continued.

“Control it!” Loran’s voice cut through the chaos.

Peter’s eyes widened as he desperately tried to tame the flame. But in his panic, his memories resurfaced.

Peter blinked rapidly, seeing blistering, puckering flesh.

The fire leapt from the bowl growing to the size of a mighty python. It slithered dangerously close to the other students. Before Peter could react, the flaming snake shot toward Mira, who was standing too close.

“Watch out!” Peter shouted, but it was too late. He had lost control.

The fire serpent spit venomous heat towards Mira’s hair, igniting a few strands. Mira yelped in surprise and flailed her hands, trying to smother the flames. Judy was through the circle opening her water bottle to project it forward with haste; a curve of water arched through the air and doused Mira’s hair flat and dripping.

Mira panted, shaky hands rising to her right scalp. A chunk on the right side of her hair was gone, but her skin was not severely burned. Still, her eyes widened in shock.

“Ah! My hair!” Mira exclaimed, brushing at her head in disbelief.

Peter’s face turned more pale as his fire encircled around his feet protectively.

“I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to—”

Judy strode forward, her expression stern but not unkind. Her hands were stretched, the water coming off Mira and pooling at the Caster’s feet.

“You must learn to control your magic, not let it control you,” Judy said calmly. “Fire is a tool, not a toy.”

Shame made Peter cold. His snake vanished, as his eyes cast downward towards his dress shoes.

Mira, still a bit shaken, managed a nervous grin. “Well, I guess I’ll have a new hairstyle tonight.”

Peter muttered a string of apologies, feeling the weight of his mishap. He looked down at his hands, which still tingled with residual heat.

“Focus,” Loran instructed, “and remember, the fire responds to your will. Practice makes perfect. Next time, try to picture the flame as a gentle

ember, not a roaring beast.”

Peter nodded, his mouth dry. He returned to the collection of students. It took every ounce of willpower to remain in the class. Everyone was staring, gawking at the dangerous Half-demon.

As the lesson continued, Peter resolved to hone his control. Fire was dangerous, yes, but with patience and discipline, it could be mastered.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Church Bells

Church bells rang loud and proud as Oaken students filed into the sacred space for afternoon Mass. Peter Bronze had never stepped into a church his entire life. Now, knowing he was a Half-demon, it felt sacrilegious to be in a space dedicated to the Almighty Lord.

He used to be an atheist, never believing in that sort of thing. His life had always been so harsh, filled with so much bitterness and pain that he felt cursed. God had always been absent from his life. Over the course of the week, he bore witness to the maltreatment of his kind. They were secondary, an afterthought, and unwelcome in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The inside of the cathedral, dedicated to the Seven Holy Archangels and God, was a sight to behold. Upon entering, Peter was greeted by the soft glow of stained glass windows, filtering in vibrant hues of blues, purples, and golds. The coloured patterns brought to life scenes of Michael's defeat of Lucifer, the stages of the Crucifixion of Jesus, and the lives of the Archangels. Each panel didn't just depict their triumphs, but the quieter moments that shaped them—the duties they carried out among mortals, like the Archangel Gabriel delivering God's message to Mary. Peter caught a glimpse of the rituals of their daily existence as he followed his friends to their pew. The artist depicted the Archangels with the burdens they shouldered in silence, and the fragments of personality that made each of them more than a title or a legend.

Peter's eyes endlessly travelled over the place of worship. He took in the architecture of the church that encapsulated Oaken's stunning Gothic elements, with soaring ceilings and elegant arches that added a sense of

verticality and majesty. The tall grand archways reaching for the Heavens. Music from the organ piano rose as the bells fell silent. The church acoustics were exceptional, allowing the ethereal sounds of the choir and the thunderous organ to resonate through its vast space, reverberating with spiritual harmony.

Peter, with Gabby's hand on his arm, walked to the first pew, the farthest away from the intricately crafted altar. They shuffled into a richly carved wooden pew, taking a seat beside Damon, Crow, and Snow.

As Peter settled onto the bench, he took in the ornate statues of the Archangels lining the nave and candles lined either side of the stone building. The statues rose with a kind of solemn radiance, as if carved from the memory of starlight rather than stone. Their forms looked both impossibly ancient and eternally new—as some had wings unfurling in sweeping arcs, each feather rendered with such delicate precision it seemed a single breath might set them trembling. Their robes fell around them in cascading folds like frozen waterfalls, catching the light in soft, opalescent ripples.

Michael stood out with his blade lowered, not in triumph but in quiet vigilance, his expression carved with the gravity of someone who has seen the first dawn and every battle since. Gabriel's statue tilted slightly forward, as though still listening for the echo of divine messages, his lips parted in the hint of a word never meant for mortal ears. Raphael was shown with one hand extended, palm open, the gesture so gentle it softens the entire hall around him.

A feeling of reverence and spirituality permeated the air around them, encouraging a connection with the divine. Peter's skin crawled seeing all the statues and holy symbols. He didn't belong here, as a spawn of Hell. A Hellion, like Jules had called him. The Archangels were treated and worshipped like gods themselves as the creators of the royal lines and the leaders of the Great Council.

The room tilted before him, sending his stomach into a tumble.

Peter strained his neck as Gabby and Damon talked about meeting up afterwards to introduce him to some of their other friends. All that was offered in reply was a nod, as speaking would have sent his apple upward. Peter tried to focus on the high vaulted ceilings painted with professional frescoes and beautiful murals depicting Heavenly battles.

It made the Half-demon feel small, insignificant. His eyes were particularly drawn to a ball of fire made of acrylic detail—Lucifer's fall from grace.

It looks just like my nightmares.

Peter's nose burned with the scent of incense. He choked, his eyes watering as a cough escaped him.

"You will get used to the smell. I swear they try to choke us out." Damon's grey eyes were just as moist as his.

"I am surprised they welcome us here at all," Peter added with sarcasm.

Students continued to find their way to their pews, each of their distinct uniforms signifying their magic or species. The Half-demons were all piled into the back, furthest away from the altar.

"It's part of their conversion to having Demons in society. They hope we can find holiness to avoid the temptation our dirty and corrupt blood offers." Gabby dramatically chuckled, knowing full well that it was a bunch of political hogwash. That the church would somehow 'purify' the Demon ancestry that ran through each of them.

No wonder Demons go mad. We are never allowed to celebrate anything about ourselves or be proud of our powers, our heritage.

Father Morgan walked across the altar with the servers. His robes were a decadent green. A gold cross was stitched into the centre that caught the light as he walked. A large ruby-encrusted cross hung from his thick neck.

One of the servers, a Dhampir, grabbed a large carriable cross and they proceeded to walk down the aisle towards the back.

Peter caught sight of raven curls in his peripheral, his head snapping. He watched Blair take a seat next to Arlie in the Nephilim section near the front. The air left his lungs as the coloured light from the stained glass poured over her.

Blair kneeled, a pearl necklace clutched between her fingers. She didn't look in his direction, but he knew that she could sense his gaze. She always knew when his eyes trailed over her.

The music paused, silence falling over the room, before another hymn flowed in a language that Peter did not recognize. Gooseflesh rose like someone's hand had run their fingers over his skin. Everyone stood to their feet. Peter jumped to join, unaccustomed to the rituals.

He couldn't stop his eyes from wandering to the back of Blair's head. Wanting to capture her gaze.

Father Morgan followed behind the two servers, one holding the old wooden cross and the other with a large worn leather bible that had seen better days. His Half-demon classmates tensed as the relic passed. Peter felt the power brush over him, calling him rather than repelling him.

“Good morning, beautiful children of God,” Father Morgan welcomed, putting the mass officially into session.

“Good morning, Father,” the crowd responded.

Many of those around him didn’t bother responding, the look of disdain clear on their features. He wasn’t the only one that felt completely out of place and targeted. Damon gave him a reassuring arm bump, signalling that they would talk about it later.

“It is very lovely to be here on this beautiful autumn morning. To see God and the Archangels gifting us another sunny day.” Blair kept her eyes forward, respectfully listening and responding to each phrase.

“Let us pray in the words brought to us by the Archangels,” Father Morgan added before bowing his head in prayer.

The crowd of Oaken spoke the words, “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven, Hell, and Earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.”

“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. I believe in the Archangels and their holy divinity, that grants us our gifts and divine purpose.” The Dhampir server yawned behind the priest who raised his hands into the air.

“We pray to St. Michael the Archangel, may he defend us in our battles, be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the devil. May God rebuke him as we humbly pray; and do thou, O Prince of the Heavenly host, by the power of God, cast into Hell Lucifer and all the evil spirits who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.”

The ceremony continued and Peter awaited the Heavenly smiting he was due for. One that would surely cast away his wickedness as green eyes finally met him.

God, I could get lost in her gaze for eternity. Finding peace and Heaven in such a perfect shade of green.

The shades of cyan and lavender branded through her hair, striking her hard and feminine features. Neither of them looked away, the prayer of the crowd encircling them.

Blair mouthed amen, turning her attention back to the altar, but his gaze remained upon her.

The crowd sat down as Father proceeded. An Earth Caster walked to the front to do the first reading from a printed sheet of paper.

“That bible looks ancient,” Peter mumbled to Gabby.

“It’s one of the oldest bibles in the world. Unaltered by the humans. The text was gifted to the clergy centuries ago from Archangel Michael himself,” Gabby whispered.

“The bible is heavily protected by the Covenant as a Holy Relic they possess. Father Morgan is one of the few select Nephilim priests from the Order of Saints that is allowed to touch and protect it,” Damon added while picking at his nails.

“What’s so special about it? To make it a Relic?”

“Did you not feel it when it passed? It contains remnants of Archangel power. Only the chosen priests and holy people are allowed to gaze upon the pages.” Gabby rolled her eyes with her words laced in sarcasm. “No Demon can step within five feet of it without feeling sick. Trust me, it’s legit.”

Maybe that’s why the Demon pews were positioned so far from the main altar.

Snow was fiddling with her bracelet as she whispered, “It’s rumoured to contain pages about Lucifer. The prophecy about him returning, but it’s kept from the public eye.”

“I never mess with any of this religious BS.” Damon's spiteful words had Crow, Snow, and Gabby nodding in agreement. “God has never been kind to us Half-demons. I only come because it’s mandatory. I cannot worship assholes who would smite us if they had the chance.”

“What do you worship then?” Peter asked, finding his eyes wandering over to where Blair sat. She was deeply engrossed, but her eyes moved deeper into her peripheral vision.

“Lucifer. The Princes of Hell. We don’t get our gifts from God. We get them from the ‘evil’ they are so Hell-bent on destroying,” Gabby told him

sternly. “If you would like to know more, we can take you to a meeting sometime. We have to be very careful. If we got caught we would be expelled.”

They stood up again, Father Morgan rose from his seat to approach the bible to read a passage. The altar servers carried candle sticks to either side of the podium. The room fell utterly silent as the old bible was opened.

A whoosh of air moved through the room causing the candle flames to dance. There was a weight to the air Peter breathed in, as though opening the bible had somehow summoned a holy presence.

“A reading from the Book of Revelations. I saw in the right hand of him who sat on a throne surrounded by seven Angels, a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty Angel proclaiming in a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?’ But no one in Heaven or on Earth or under the Earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the Great Elders proclaimed, ‘Do not weep! I have seen the Light of the tribe, Michael, opening the seven seals with the help of mighty warriors. Then I saw a lamb, looking as though it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the seven Archangels and the Elders. The lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which are guided by the seven spirits God sent out into earth. He took the scroll from the right hand and broke the seals, revealing the hidden truth of the Lord. The word of our Lord’.” Father Morgan kissed the bible after raising the worn pages into the air.

He placed it back onto the podium with great care before letting his eyes scan the sea of supernatural students. He motioned for them to sit.

“This passage of Revelation is told from the infamous Seer Alchys, predicting that the long lost scroll of the Covenant will be found, perhaps from someone in this very room, in the moment it is needed most.”

A few faint whispers scattered through the room at the promise of quest and glory.

“This scroll contains knowledge of our future and what we must do to end all wars and find peace. Each of you, are the future of the Covenant. A great weight to live up to these expectations brought to you by our society and from the Lord, but He will give you strength. He will be the one to provide you with the tools to avoid temptation of your darkest hidden

desires. Regardless of your ancestry, you have the ability to bring forth good if you follow the path of the Lord and the Archangels."

What a load of shit.

Peter's eyes travelled back to Blair, who listened intently to the priest's nonsense about avoiding evil and eating lamb this weekend to celebrate the banishment of Lucifer. All things to make sure the Half-demons at the back of the chapel knew their place on the food chain.

Nothing but the gum on the bottom of the Lord's shoe. It didn't matter what politically correct way Father put it, they were spawns of Hell. The very place was created to contain the one thing they feared; Lucifer and anything they deemed a threat to their 'perfect' view of the Covenant's divine purpose.

"So, how was mass?" Snow asked as they walked to the dining hall for lunch.

"Honestly, I thought I was going to catch fire." Damon snorted at Peter's response.

"We all feel that way. All it would take is one lighting bolt straight through the ceiling and we would be toast." Gabby wrapped her hand around the inside of Peter's bicep as she spoke. He resisted the urge to remove himself from her claiming grip.

"Peter, in all seriousness, there are things about the Covenant that you need to understand." Damon had stopped walking in order to face him. Snow motioned her head to a window alcove. The group of Half-demons crammed inside, Crow and Snow leaning on the exterior support beams to make sure they were not overheard.

"I'm listening."

Gabby gave him a quick squeeze.

Damon's grey eyes sharpened towards Peter as he lowered his voice to a hushed tone. "You may think that things between the Nephilim and our kind are bad inside of this academy, but they are ten times worse outside of it. Anything between police brutality to convicting us of crimes that we are innocent of, just to kill us and send us to Hell. We are not as free and as

accepted as the headmistress would like you to believe." Damon looked around a few times to see if anyone was eavesdropping,

"They locked up Crow's parents and tortured them for information on them following their birth because they displayed gifts that hadn't been seen for centuries. The Nephilim tortured their mother to discover that Crow was a direct child of Asmodeus. One of three in existence. They only let Crow live on the promise of their 'civilization'. Demon Blade Academy, where they transferred from, is a segregation school, because originally Demonic students were not allowed to attend prestigious institutions like Oaken until a couple decades ago."

Snow gave Crow a squeeze as Damon finished explaining.

"In the eyes of the Covenant, Oaken is progressive for allowing all creatures to enroll here. That's just the face they put on for publicity and to control us. They allow a lot of things to go unpunished," Snow added while around the stone pillar before returning to her position of guard. She continued, pushing white platinum hair behind her pointed ear,

"In the nineties there was a secret club of Nephilim that had organized to hunt and torture Half-demon students underneath the academy. The Covenant covered it up, and those Angels got to walk off and join society." Snow wiped at her eye to catch a stray tear.

"How do you know about it?" Peter wondered out loud.

"My mother was one of the few Half-demons who happened to escape them. She left the academy soon after," Snow told him, her white eyes filled with sorrow. "My mother begged me not to go here, but I had to. I want to be part of the change that comes for our people. This school is the fastest way to do that. The headmistress has tried to change things for us, by pushing us. Regardless of the BS face she must hold." Crow gave her a supporting nod, reaching their fingers to graze hers across the alcove.

"That's not all, we could go on for hours but," Damon lowered his voice more, "when we graduate from the academy we are Cuffed. We have our powers inhibited in order to keep us under control. We are cut off from our powers and from accessing Hell because they know that we are a serious threat to them. We may be considered free, but we aren't."

"*If you want some advice from us, keep your powers hidden.*" Crow told him, "*It's the only way you may survive.*"

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

An Olive Branch

Damon and Snow hung back for a few moments, Snow too emotional following their conversation about what her mother and Crow's parents had to endure. The others took their respective spots at their table, leaving a couple seats open for them when they were ready to rejoin. Traitorous secrets had been shared between them, only heard by the glass and stone of the alcove. It bonded them together, their shared experience of oppression driving them together.

Peter Bronze was having difficulty with becoming more attached to the Half-demon clique. His inescapable dismay about hurting those who got too close to him, blocking him from forming true closeness to the others. Even if they readily accepted him and did not baulk at his abilities, he tried to keep himself distant and detached.

Peter was grateful that they were honest with him, giving him the reality check he needed. The Half-demons warned him about his friendship with Blair, as the self-righteous feathered rats—as Damon called them—would not so easily change their beliefs.

After the fight in *The Brew Box*, Blair was treated as an outsider from her usual possé. Though that day had begun to fade into old news, except in the minds of Jackson and Jules. Blair and Jackson consistently got into disagreements with one another.

Thursday morning during breakfast, there was an instance where Peter had gotten close to being involved. Blair told Jules she did not wish to attend a date with him. Jules didn't take the rejection well, but Peter knew

that she could handle herself and restrained his magic with great effort. Jules had just stormed off, not eating a single thing.

The Nephilim were beginning to be more open towards him, but he did not see the courtesy extended to the other Half-demons. Nephilim and Half-demons still kept apart, just no longer vocal about their friendship. They were an anomaly.

As if she had read his thoughts, Blair sat down next to him at the Demon table.

Damon had swallowed his tongue choking on his salad.

"Hi, Blair?" Snow greeted, arching a white eyebrow.

"What a mass today, eh? Are you guys ready for the game tonight? I'm thinking things will be close this year." Blair's hands found rest on her chin after adjusting dark curls. Peter stopped himself from reaching out to play with the little crystals dangling from the small braids.

"You guys win every year." Damon rolled his eyes, taking her question as mere mockery.

"We have, but last year you guys were really close. We were seconds apart and I know you guys trained all summer. I am certainly up for the challenge," Blair teased in a friendly fashion.

"So this game tonight? Does everyone compete, or are people selected?" Peter pondered the rules of tonight's festivities. He had never been one to express and participate in school spirit.

"I believe it's those who are selected? At least that's what we do. We pick our best candidates." Blair bumped into his shoulder with a smile. Peter realized Blair was trying her best to be friendly, to bridge the gap, and extend an olive branch of peace. Even with the laser pointer eyes from her friends that were burning into the back of Peter's skull, that were increasingly becoming harder to ignore.

"Hi, guys." The Half-angel Arlie stood above Blair, cheeks stained red. Peter glanced at Damon in his peripheral vision. The Half-demon looked like he was going to combust.

Subtle. Very subtle.

"Would you like to join us?" Blair asked her, shifting over close enough that Peter and her pressed together. His body screamed in pleasure at her proximity and he choked down his groan. Her scent surrounded him, making his jaw clench firmly shut. Her warmth seeped straight through his skin. The wood protested under the pressure of his grip on their bench.

He closed his eyes briefly, ignoring the exchange between Blair and Arlie as she took a seat on the crowded bench. Peter could feel his body responding to Blair. His pants were beginning to be restricted. Confining.

Apple green eyes glanced over him, the blue sea of his clashing against them. Daring her to realise the effect she had on him.

Peter broke their intense eye contact to focus on his breathing, tuning back into the exchange.

"So, it's tradition after the games to go swimming in Silver Lake. Bathing suits optional. Goody two shoes always goes to bed," Arlie mocked Blair while addressing Peter. He could not stop his eyebrows from rising.

Swimming. Naked. Holy Hell, he did not need assistance in imagining Blair without clothes.

"I don't know why any of you desire to be in cold lake water at the beginning of September." Blair held up her hands, gathering a few chuckles from the Half-demons.

"I agree with Blair. It's always too cold," Snow injected.

"*Girl, your name is Snow and you hate the cold. Make that make sense*." Crow's voice bounced against everyone’s thoughts.

"I agree with Crow. Make that make sense," Damon said to her while stealing glances at Arlie, it was clear to Peter that there was history between them.

"Just because I'm named after the white shit that flutters from the sky when it's cold outside, does not mean that I particularly enjoy it."

"Maybe your dad should have named you ghost, more fitting," Damon suggested while raising his hand.

Peter was not sure how long he could endure this. His groin was demanding his attention. He was going to have to leave to relieve himself.

Gabby had remained quiet during the entire exchange. Peter thought that she may shrivel away from the lack of attention but, as he caught her eyes, there was nothing but a black void.

Gabby was not happy.

Peter kicked Damon's shin, startling him. The table jumped. An ow escaped, but his attention was directed to the attacker. Peter flickered his eyes towards Gabby, Damon followed his gaze. His grey eyes widened.

"Gabby." Damon's hand found its way to the top of her thigh. He hissed, pulling it back. The tips of his fingers were burned with frost. "Fuck." Damon flicked his hand in the air.

"Gabby," Peter warned.

The aggression in her darkened gaze intensified. The air in the room had changed. Closed in. She was going to strike, like a starving snake after prey. The lights throughout the space flickered, struggling to remain on. Peter felt his magic flare in response, just like it had in the gymnasium. He would do anything to protect Blair.

Peter calmed himself with a breath, reminding himself that he was in control. His magic did not control him. He repeated the thought a few times in his mind, making his magic obey him. It nipped at him with heat, desiring to be released.

Blair pressed a hand to Peter's forearm.

"Keep your hands off him, bitch," Gabby snapped. The air tightened like a boa constrictor.

"Gabby," Peter warned her a second time. Black eyes landed on him. "You do not have ownership over me."

"And she does? You know the Covenant forbids it." Her voice was morphing, her skin shedding into a hue of deep lavender. She was going to shift, something Peter had not seen.

Peter noted the exchanged glance between Damon and Arlie at the mention of the Covenant. They knew, first hand, the struggle of one's desire for someone they couldn't have.

"They are friends, Gabby. Nothing more," Damon tried to reason.

"Blair is not my friend. She belongs with her *own kind*, at her *own table*," Gabby spit out, making the line she was drawing in the sand between the two species clear.

“You heard Father Morgan today. We are the scum of the Earth that needs to be wiped out by them. We have no place in this society because *they* deem it so.” Gabby’s orbs of darkness focused on Blair after she spoke, standing her ground against the Nephilim.

Arlie and Blair stood from the bench. Peter's body instantly chilled.

"We know when we are not wanted. We are trying to do something about the segregation between our people, Gabby. Something that you may want to consider. I have done nothing to warrant this hatred." Blair placed a hand on Peter's shoulder, giving it a squeeze.

Just like that, the gap between Demons and Angels widened—that was the power of outdated tradition.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Light-bringer

"Again, Peter. My grandmother can move faster than that," Carter called, “and she’s dead.”

Peter Bronze's chest heaved with effort. He danced through the obstacle course, dodging the spears as they were fired. Sweat trickled down his forehead and burned his eyes making it harder to perceive depth. He had already improved from his first several attempts, scaling the thirty foot wall had been his first great challenge this week.

His first day on the course had resulted in several bruises to his shin. His ribs. His everything. Now it was getting easier, his body naturally responded to the training. He was meant to move like this, with the grace of Demonic energy.

Peter's magic was becoming more attuned with his instincts. Lecture with Professor Hope had resulted in conjuring a flame within his palm and despite the unfortunate haircut in tutorial, he was gaining confidence. He could summon a shield around his body, though it was still weak. His magic could pick up the slight changes in the air around him like it had with Gabby. However, he was still working on not burning his sheets in his sleep.

"Again, Peter. That was sloppy. Tighten your core."

Peter lined up to the wall and scaled it again, using flame to disintegrate the spear launched in his direction. He was strained with effort, finding it difficult to maintain his balance. He pushed on, tightening his core.

"Nice. Remember to be loose. Let your body, your magic guide you." Peter did as he was told, swinging his body in a steady rhythm across the

metal handlebars. He twisted his body with the grace of a dancer, a spear narrowingly missing his left side. The sharpened tip slashed against onyx, hard enough to leave a groove.

"That was too close. Up your reaction time," Carter demanded. Peter agreed that the spear had gotten too close. It would have wounded him had his breastplate not been there.

His magic triggered behind him as he continued to oscillate forward. He launched his legs forward, pressing his toes into the next bar to let the spear soar past under him.

"Good!"

Peter continued to swing, getting to the platform.

"That's enough for today."

Peter's knees buckled beneath him. His breathing ragged, his lungs burning. He wiped his brow as Carter halted in front of him, blocking the sun.

"Great work today. I think you can do better." Peter grabbed Carter's outstretched hand. A hand clapped his back, nearly knocking him over again.

Carter and Peter walked towards the academy in silence as Peter chugged the water offered to him.

"So how long were you in the army?" Peter asked him as they neared campus.

"Over thirty years. I'm currently on leave to teach, but that's the excuse they use to keep me from questioning their methods and beliefs. It’s more like a forced retirement. The royal family is scared of a rebellion.”

"A rebellion?" Peter’s stomach dropped slightly. He was unaware of anything that took place outside of these walls.

"Rumours of Lucifer's return are making people anxious."

Peter stopped walking. "*The* Lucifer?" The mention of the lightbringer reminded Peter of Damon’s words about the bible containing a hidden prophecy.

Carter nodded, his dark eyes finding Peter’s. "The last time had resulted in the Great War. The Nephilim are worried people like us will side with the devil." The sun glittered off the Half-demon’s horns.

"Would you?"

"Lucifer has not been the one to fight our battles. Us Demons have been fighting for our own rights. He was not here to do that. My loyalty is to the

Covenant. I will not betray that." Peter had a lot of respect for Carter's loyalty. A true soldier and warrior. Peter experienced admiration for the Half-demon who rose the ranks on sheer talent. It was unfortunate that Angelic political views still cast him as an outsider.

"What do I have to do to join the army?" Peter found himself asking.

"Are you interested in being a Warrior of the Blessed?" Carter's midnight eyes shimmered.

"What can I say? You're inspiring when you're kicking the crap out of my body."

Carter chuckled at his remark."We will have to change your training and you'll have to pass your exams, but I think it's possible. You are powerful and have a natural talent. You just have to hone it. You're a little behind, but that's why you're here. If you want to try this, I will recommend you."

"And if I fail?"

"You won't. Not if you truly want it." Carter looked onto Peter as a father would his own.

"I heard mentions of something that happens after graduation called the 'Cuffing'. What is it?" Peter wiped the sweat from his brow, his breathing finally returning to normal.

Carter's eyebrows rose in surprise, like the question was something that was not often asked.

"After graduation there is a ritual where Half-demons are inked with magically-infused inhibitors." Carter pulled back his sleeve to reveal the black circles that encased both of his arms just below the elbow. The tattoo had intricate designs that spiralled down his forearms and encased his wrist. "They do it to dampen our powers, or limit our connection to Hell. I am not exactly sure, but we don't have full access to our magic." Peter couldn't stop his face from scrunching in disdain. It seemed unfair that they were not allowed to have full access to their magic.

"So it doesn't matter if I graduate, I will just be trading one prison for another."

Carter pulled down his sleeves. "Don't think like that, you're not a prisoner here. It is a privilege to go to this academy. There are still things that I agree need to change, but they will not happen overnight and they will not happen through violence. Violence just inspires more violence. If we want change, then we must change the hearts of those around us."

Spoken like a true believer in the Covenant.

“Like Blair.” Peter’s favourite colour of green flashed through his mind.

“She’s the future of her royal house, even with her brother on the throne. Once she steps into her destiny—maybe with a skilled Half-demon like yourself—maybe our people may not have to be Cuffed. Maybe we can celebrate what we are.” Carter scratched the base of his left ebony horn.

“Spoken like a true dreamer, Carter.”

“We all have hopes for our children. Now go shower."

"Hey, Peter," Merlin greeted as the Half-demon stepped through the large frame of the library entrance.

"Hey. Is–"

"Second floor. She always sits at the same table," he answered, before Peter could even get a word out.

The Half-demon gave a grateful smile and proceeded to the spiral stairs. Peter's mind wandered to the last time they were in this enclosed space. How Blair had touched his chest. How her fingers burned his skin through his t-shirt. How he was prepared to take her right against the bookshelf, library spirit witnesses or not. He recalled how he told her about his desire, how she rejected him.

A firmness settled in his jaw.

Friends. That's all we are. All we can be.

Blair was buried in a book, her ebony curls restrained in a messy bun, the two braids from earlier dangling behind her ears. There were small wisps of hair that had sprung free, framing her beautiful concentrated face. She had glasses perched on the tip of her nose as she verbally read the aged manuscript.

"Hi," Peter found himself saying as he approached her table.

The Nephilim jumped slightly, too hyperfocused on the Latin before her to hear him approach. Blair pushed her glasses on top of her head, the sleeves of her Oaken crewneck falling to her elbow. She pressed her fingers into her eyes, sighing with exhaustion.

"I'm sorry I interrupted," Peter uttered.

She sighed. "It's okay. I'm starting to see double with the effort it requires to read this."

"What is it?"

"It's a manuscript about Stolas and Gregory from the middle ages. The Demon had similar abilities to my own, but I am struggling with a few words. Correct translation and context is everything in academia." Peter knew Blair was trying to understand her own power, but unfortunately there were only a few records of people dreaming. With no record of tools or advice on how to navigate them, she was left to figure it out on her own. "I am trying to find ways for people to dreamwalk—to control their vision." There was an urgency behind her tired eyes. Something intense was motivating her search.

"And dreamwalking would—?"

"It would help me navigate my dreams. Let me take control. I have been having the same one over and over again, but I cannot see the features of the second person in the vision. All I see is you—" She halted, her green apple gaze snapping to him. "Shit."

"You've seen me in your dreams?" Peter cocked his to the side.

"Yes. I dreamed about you before you arrived at the academy." Blair searched his face. Trying to evaluate his reaction to her slip up.

"So that explains your fascination with me. I'm a project." Peter scoffed. Now he knew why she had been hanging out with him, willing to go above and beyond, breaking tradition even to be around him. She was trying to see why he had appeared in her dreams.

Betrayal was a bitter bite.

This is why I distance myself.

"Peter that's not—I have never thought of you as a project. What I see is something that's going to happen. Part of my ability is to figure out the meaning. I can't help that it happens to be about you. My friendship with you is real." Blair stood from her chair and took a few paces towards him.

He looked down at her, keeping any expression from his face. The way her eyebrows furrowed together with concern made his chest ache.

"We were meant to meet, Peter. Please tell me you know that. I'm not sure what role either of us play in this—"

"What do you see in this dream?" Peter closed his eyes. He was sure he wasn't going to like the answer.

"Peter—"

"What do you *see?*" His eyes snapped open, swirling with blue flame. He took a step forward, towering over her. Blair shrank back.

She was right to be afraid.

The shadows from the shelves grew in size, reaching and closing in around them. He could feel the anger he had kept so tightly locked within himself crack open, the pressure slowly coming through the lid and threatening to explode.

"I can't tell you. I'm sorry."

"Bullshit."

Blair flinched.

"Peter, please." Her fingers grazed the outside of his own. He jerked back. Blair flinched again as if she had been burned, hurt splashed across her face.

"*Stay away from me*," he growled.

Blair’s face paled.

The words bounced through the silence between them, echoing off the walls and creating a chasm of distance. Each word he had spoken seemed to push them further apart, like a physical barrier separating their hearts. As if the more they spoke, the wider the gap would become. The emptiness of the space between them was deafening, drowning out any hope of reconciliation or understanding.

"Peter, you know I can't do that." Blair tried to step towards him again, letting her words build a shaky bridge suspended between their souls.

"It's better if we just stay apart." He shut her down, lighting a match between them.

"Peter–" she pleaded with moist eyes.

"No! Don't Peter me. This—between us—is a product of whatever fascination you have with me as part of your future seeing bullshit. While you– while you may be able to control your desire for me but I– I cannot. You have no idea how hard it is to not touch you. To not have my way with you." He dropped his voice to a violent, desperate whisper. He knew he had to be careful of who overheard.

"Peter, please. I want to be friends with you. How I feel about you has nothing to do with my visions."

"Then tell me."

"I can't—"

He wouldn’t let her use that excuse. "No, you won't. There's a difference. What is so bad about it that you're trying to hide it?" His magic was burning, prickling underneath his skin. There was an anxious tide

swelling through the chasm of his arteries, threatening to tsunami the very relationship he desperately craved.

"Peter—"

"Do I hurt someone?" he pressed.

"I–I'm not sure. It's a small snippet." Blair glanced away, avoiding the intense stare of his inflamed gaze.

"Is there fire?"

She opened her mouth and closed it. Confirming every suspicious thought that coursed through him.

"Are you scared of me?" His voice was barely audible.

The heat that ran through him steamed into a void of cold. His magic faded, diminished by his self-image.

I'm a monster.

The thought left behind bitter frostbite.

"No. I've never been afraid of you." She reached out again and took his fingers in hers. He didn't pull back this time. "I need you to understand that the future is blurry, ever-changing, and sometimes unclear how events unfold to the points that I see." She ran her thumb over the back of his hand.

"I will confess, my initial draw to you was the curiosity to see if you were the one I was seeing. Everything else, everything I feel when I am near you is real. We are tied together by the cords of fate. We are meant to be in each other's lives. This desire, it will fade, when you understand that we cannot mate. You deserve someone who can." She squeezed his fingers before letting go.

Peter refused to let her get far. He bundled her hands and held them up to his chest. Her eyes widened, her fingers pressing into his.

"You have power over me. Like no other ever has," he whispered to her. He inhaled deeply, searching her eyes for any sign of reciprocal desire.

She pressed her thighs together.

Does she like having power over me? Does she want me to worship her?

"I don't want you in that way," stumbled out. Peter tracked the shape of her tongue over her bottom lip. The way it jutted out. Plump. Kissable.

"Liar." He watched her cheeks redden, her pupils dilating in response to the close proximity. Her lips parted, grabbing his attention once more. Impure thoughts encircled his brain. Hardening him. His pants enclosed around him painfully as he continued to breathe her in.

Blair jerked back, her hands falling to her sides. She crossed her arms over her chest refusing to make eye contact with him.

"Peter, I can't be with a *Demon*." She still would not look him in the eye.

Peter felt his jaw clench, at her refusal to acknowledge her arousal. He saw how her body reacted to him. How her fingers inched for his. How she didn't want to let go of him.

Despite all of this, he was a *thing* to her. A lesser being.

They would never be able to be together. Even if he rose to be captain of the *bloody* guard, he was not royal. Blair would marry for power, for money, whatever her father and mother desired.

He was just a Demon. A product of evil. A product of flame, just like her vision. His stomach dropped at the thought of losing her. The thought of hurting her.

He had to put his desire to the side, to be her friend.

That will have to be enough.

He would learn to love her from afar. He would watch her fall for her Nephilim mate. He would fight by her side in the battle to come. He would kill himself to get where he needed to be. To protect her. To be there for her always.

As a friend. And hopefully, with time and trust she will tell me about her vision.

"Well, if you change your mind, you'll know where I'll be tonight." Peter flexed his fingers as he turned away from her to exit the library. Leaving with a shred of hope that she would change her mind, but it had to be her decision.

Peter could feel his heart strings strain at pushing away his feelings. He ignored the bile in his throat. The lack of ability to breathe.

A loud bang sounded from the isle next to him as he approached the library entrance. Peter found a book lying on the stone tiles flipping pages frantically.

"Vidya? Is this for me?" The pages fluttered in response. He cautiously approached the book, crouching down lower to pick up the small, dusted tome.

‘Light-bringer’ was the title of the chapter.

Peter recalled Blair saying to him that Lucifer was elided in history, meaning this book came from somewhere he wasn’t supposed to have

access to. He turned the page carefully to see a yellowed note inside.

All will make sense when you realise who you are.

The handwriting was delicate, the paper worn from ages as if waiting to be found by him. He closed the text carefully and tucked the book into the underside of his shirt. He had a feeling Kirian would stop him from taking it.

Curiosity had the better of him.

Vidya was trying to tell him something. And he welcomed the distraction away from his aching heart.

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Games of Celebration

Willow Glory was curling her chestnut hair in the reflection of Blair Dawn's vanity. Blair frozen in place with a distant gaze, ruminated on the internal conflict raging within. Peter had been vulnerable and open about his physical desire for her. A desire she had denied experiencing herself, even though he had seen right through her.

Her eyes fell to the crystal vase of flowers that had been delivered earlier, an assortment of mapira and purple prince lilies with a card from Jules. Her ex didn’t know when to give up the chase.

"What's wrong?" Through the mirror, Blair's eyes met Willow's. The curling iron sizzled another helpless strand.

"I am just dealing with a lot right now. Classes, training, and a sprinkle of everything else." Blair's shoulders sagged a little more thinking about her upcoming assignments, the demanding papers resting on her desk.

"By everything else you mean Peter, right?" She shook then took off the cap of her hairspray with a pop. A loud hiss presented a cloud of sculpting vapour.

"Not just him, but he's part of it, yes." There was no sense in lying to her roommate about it. Everyone in the entire academy was aware of her sudden interest and friendship with Peter. It was abnormal for a Nephilim and Half-demons to interact with each other outside of communal spaces and classes.

Not that I can blame the Half-demons. We have quite the reputation in the lower parts of the capital for the maltreatment that they face daily. I want to change that. Build a better world for people like Peter.

She chewed on the end of her makeup brush while in contemplation. Her mind wandered to lunch period recalling Gabby’s reaction to her and Peter, one that caused her to shift into her Demonic form. Blair felt a stab of jealousy for the daughter of Lilith, knowing she and Peter had been intimate with one another.

Blair grimaced at the thought of them in bed together.

"Do you have feelings for him?" Blair felt Willow’s magic brush over her skin, compelling Blair to be truthful. One of Willow’s gifts was seeing through lies and getting people to confess the truth.

It didn’t stop the denial from rolling off Blair’s tongue, "No–"

Willow gave her a 'really' look through the reflection.

"Bullshit. You wouldn't have bothered stirring up this spicy hot pocket of a school without a reason and I don't think it's just about your visions of him. It may have been at the start, but not now." Willow had a talent for bluntness.

"I feel a lot of… physical things for him, but I don't really know him enough for it to be anything beyond that quite yet."

Yet the pull to him was undeniable–cosmic even.

"You're attracted to him? I mean, I don't blame you. He's incredibly hot—especially those blue eyes—but you know how Arlie and Damon ended, Blair. It was messy and they are still a mess over it. You and Peter will be no different."

The sigh that was pulled from Blair was one of defeat,

"You don't think I know that. I haven't pursued any of these feelings. Trust me, he's feeling things more than I am."

Liar. Liar. Liar.

Willow seemed to have bought it with a stern nod of her head, continuing about her routine.

Blair thought about Peter's offer as she dabbed blush over her high cheekbones. *'You'll know where to find me'*. While the words were a temptation, they were paired with the spiteful words from her vision.

'Stay away from me’.

"I mean, you could still probably fuck him if you wanted to as long as it didn't go farther than that. If you're safe about it and don't get involved romantically, I don't see why it would matter."

"Are you suggesting I become friends with benefits with Peter?” Blair’s surprise had her whipping towards her roommate, “You know the only

person I have ever been with was Jules, and we dated for two years before that even happened!" The thought of casual sex brought unease.

"I'm suggesting you fuck him. Maybe it will sort out the intensity of what you're feeling? It could be the anticipation of it that's causing all of this to be so–all over?"

Blair simply laughed through the discomfort. She turned back towards the mirror to grab her black liquid eyeliner. She drew one precise line, arching it at the corner of her eye.

Blair paused drawing her eyeliner to contemplate sleeping with Peter. How it could, in theory, help both of them get past their physical attraction to one another. It could also have the opposite effect. *What if it pulled us more into each other making it hard to separate and be friends? Or worse, what if the mating bond slipped into place?*

"I– I don't think it's a good idea that we…*couple*." Her body purred and awoke at the impure thoughts. Her fear however, over the potential that Peter was her mate, held her back from even considering the possibility.

She couldn't possibly be mated to a Half-demon, Michael would not allow it. Her mother would probably combust. Cords of fate or not, Blair decided it was best to keep her distance from Peter.

She needed to focus on her premonition examination and figure out what role Peter played in her visions. Maybe it could explain their pull to one another.

But that would come later.

She had a game to win.

Capture the Flag was played in a series of rounds in order to create a process of elimination. Demons had beaten the Casters; Damon captured the flag for their victory holding it overhead with a violent war cry.

Blair had heard that the Half-demons had replaced Gabby with Peter at the last minute due to illness. There was an inkling it had to do with her shift in the dining hall, where her horns had shot out of her head and her skin had turned the shade of lavender in full bloom. Only a few children of the High Tier Demons could completely shift into other beastly forms,

making Gabby a formidable opponent, but unfortunately, Blair wouldn't get that challenge this year. While Gabby had been nasty, she still felt sympathy for her circumstances.

The forest of Titan Pine surrounded the academy, its various trunks driven to the darkening sky. Oaken used the area for special events and mock combat games, such as capture the flag. There were wooden bridges that were strung between the trees that afforded Blair her current vantage point above the playing field.

The Nephilim princess had been impressed by Peter's wave of fire that allowed Damon to capture their victory. Even the fire elementals couldn't break through, his fire so different from their own.

Blair admired the grace of Peter’s body; like a dancer, a lethal blade. Peter was picking up his training quickly, naturally even, as if he was meant to do it his whole life.

"Stalker alert." Willow nudged her arm, her hair now a cascade of curls pulled tightly into a ponytail. Blair wondered why she had even bothered to do her hair with the potential of it getting ruined.

"I am simply watching the enemy. Peter, Damon, and Crow will be tough to get around this year." Damon and Crow had used the fading light to their advantage, slinking into the shadows in ways that even the Casters couldn't detect. Each of these males were strong, skilled. It would be hard for them to break their formation, unless–

"When we go up against the Demons, I will distract Peter. Without his fire, the others won't be able to get through most of our defences." Willow arched her brow, but nodded. As their leader, Blair’s orders were to be followed.

The bridge swayed slightly as Jules and Jackson joined the Nephilim above the games. Jackson was already decked out in his armour from the previous round where they had won against the Shifters, placing them in first. Jules had just gotten here.

"Look who finally decided to show up," Willow spit at Jules. He avoided eye contact with Blair as she turned her head towards him.

"I know. I'm sorry–"

"Maybe if you stopped smoking all the damn time, you would be here when we need you. Jules, you went from being one of the best warriors this school has ever seen–" Blair held her hand up to stop Willow's rant.

"Jules," Blair made him turn towards her, "go get your gear on." Jules nodded and went off to get his gear, the bridge wobbling from his retreat.

"You're too easy on him, Blair," Willow mumbled.

"I know. But as his friend, we need to be supportive of him. He will crawl out of this hole, eventually." Blair had faith that Jules was capable of saving himself, he just wasn’t quite there yet.

"I'm not so sure of that." Jackson then added, "He lost his spot. His mom called him yesterday. She might pull him out of school."

"What?" Blair and Willow said in unison.

"Apparently, he is wasting her money and feels as though she has lost both of her children." Jackson’s hard-cut features were streaked with sorrow and guilt. His emotional tether to Jules ran deeper than platonic attachment, for they had always been close since they were children. More like brothers than friends.

"Pulling him out of Oaken isn't going to help. He's still grieving Amanda," Jackson agreed with Willow’s comment while Blair went back to watching the game. They all knew that removing him from here would do more harm than good.

Blair felt her mind wander to Amanda, who had been her friend. She had been a kind soul, but she was murdered a few years ago during a pilgrimage to New Zealand. Her body was found mutilated by some type of Demonic creature.

Blair had requested the investigation report to look at the crime scene photos, to the best of her knowledge it was probably a Hellhound. Why someone had tried to kill her was still an open case. Demons were blamed, that’s why Jules had a bitter distaste for Half-demons and anything to do with Hell.

"So, what's the game plan?" Jackson motioned to the field. The Air Caster, Megan Fletcher, blasted back two Werewolves from their flag.

"Bets are on Casters this round." Willow wiggled her eyebrows at Jackson.

"Twenty bucks. You're on." Jackson shook hands with Willow behind Blair.

"Casters will be easy to beat out if they win. They are draining their magic left and right." Blair closed her eyes and opened herself to the celestial forces. Two images filled her mind, one was of a Dhampir with burns and the other was of a Werewolf coated in ruddied mud.

"What do you see?" Willow whispered to her, once she realized what Blair was attempting to do.

"One of the Dhampirs will be burned, disqualifying one of the Casters. And a Werewolf—I think—is covered in bloody mud. I'm not sure what that means, but the Shifters will be outnumbered."

The three Nephilim watched as the events unfolded. The Fire Caster Evan Floren, who was not strong enough to break Peter's wall, accidently burned Sybil Westbrook. In the rulebook for these annual games forbid the use of fire against creatures it was fatal to. While Dhampirs were not fully vampires and fire didn't harm them as much, it could still be deadly to them. Evan was disqualified and Sybil was rushed to medical.

"I think one of the plays should be to distract Peter," Blair stated again.

Jackson looked dumbfounded. "And I suppose you are going to do that."

"Yes. You've seen what he can do. We need him away from Damon and Crow. I will distract Peter, lead him away from his defensive position, opening up the field to target the west side."

"I think we can take them, Blair. There's no need to change the plan now," Jackson complained.

"I think we need to adapt. This plan was designed with the expectation that Gabby would be on that field, not Peter."

Her banshee scream is wildly different to flame and shadow.

"But then you are off the battlefield. We need you." Jackson's persuasion was lackluster. Blair knew Peter's magic would be an obstacle that would slow them all down, leaving their flag unprotected.

"No you don't. " Blair was convinced that this plan would work. The Half-demons were stronger together than they would be apart.

"Jules isn't going to be much help." Willow's voice was forced through clenched teeth.

"Mal will make up for it. He is just as strong as me," Blair reasoned.

Jackson rubbed his face. "Fine. I'll take out Damon."

The Casters were immediately disqualified after their victory was announced. The Shifters would have moved onto the finals, but were forced to forfeit based on their numbers.

As the sun dipped below the treeline the two finalist teams, Demon and Nephilim Hall, gathered on opposite sides of a densely wooded area. The light had faded from the sky, leaving the forest in darkness. The only light coming from the occasional parting of the clouds.

The chill in the air was thick with excitement and anticipation as each team strategized their plan of attack for the upcoming epic match.

Students who had the ability to see through the night, gathered on the outer barriers and through the bridged trees, all ready to watch the Nephilim fight the Half-demons. Blair made sure the boundaries were set and the flag was placed in her team's territory. Green colour illuminated from the material as it billowed in the evening air. Mal and Jules were placed on the defensive, set strategically on either side and hidden from plain view.

Jackson, Willow, and Arlie were placed in the offensive with Blair. They would charge into the brush using the shadows as cover. Jackson planned to take out Damon, Willow was on Crow, and Blair was after Peter. Three deadly Nephilim against three deadly Half-demons. All Blair needed was to give her Nephilim teammates time to get their opponents flag.

She could feel the need to win consume every thought. The desire to prove her worth was insatiable and failing was not an option when it came to these games. Though they were meant as friendly sports, she knew that the professors would be watching and so would the royal representatives, Taron and Milo. Her team would not lose, she would make sure of that.

As the game was about to begin, all Blair could hear was the pounding of her own heart racing in her ears.

The whistle blew and both teams sprinted towards the centre, dodging trees, leaping over logs, and manoeuvring through thick underbrush. The crowd's cheers were pushed into the background while she reached inside of herself, feeling the cord strung tightly from her chest. Peter was coming towards her with impressive speed.

Is he searching for me too?

Blair halted, coming out of the shadows and resting her shoulder on the rough bark of a nearby oak. She endeavored to come across as cool, collected, and unthreatened.

Peter was a few paces in front of her, still covered in shadow, but she could sense him. Blair twirled her dagger in her hand, waiting.

"I know you're there, Peter." He materialized out of the brush with an eyebrow arched.

"I think you're missing the point of being on opposing sides." Peter had a cheeky grin on his face.

Adorable…

"I wanted to talk to you." Blair levelled out her heartbeat, maintaining a calm and smooth demeanour. She would not let him see the desperation to distract him.

Peter lowered his sword, before placing it back in its hilt strapped across his hip. "Well, even though we are in a match that determines the social outcome of my people in this academy, you know that you will always have my attention, Angel."

Blair's stomach fluttered in response to the nickname. He had only used the pet name for her a few times now, yet it did not stop her body from reacting to it. "I know you told me to come meet you tonight at the bonfire, but this couldn't wait."

Peter took a step towards her, uncertainty drawn across his face in anticipation of both hope and despair. "Blair–"

She held up her hand to stop him, then took a step towards him, closing the distance further. In the almost moonlight, Peter's hair looked streaked with blue, like the feathers of a clever crow. She reached up, brushing a strand away from his sweaty forehead. He swallowed audibly, a blush now cascading over his cheeks. Their hot breath intermingled, swirling together as steam in the cool air.

"I know that you and I… feel things for each other. Call it lust—call it what you'd like—but we feel it." Peter stayed silent. Still. Even as the game raged around them."I need you to understand that with Michael being my father I am as close to royalty as our world can get. I cannot just be with whomever I want, regardless of how I feel. You and I can never be more than friends. But…"

Blair enclosed the space further knowing that Arlie should be on her way to the flag by now.

"But?" His blue eyes held her gaze intensely before dipping to her mouth.

"But, Willow made a suggestion that may help us get past these… feelings." She let his mind wander to the less innocent places. His pupils dilated wider, his lips parting.

Her entire body was burning for him. Her palm rested on his chest, his own heart attempting to burst through the onyx breastplate and leap into the

palm of her hand. She knew deep down that if she let him, his heart would belong to her and only her.

Her lips brushed over his. He went completely still. His eyes wide with slight panic and arousal.

The whistle blew. Victory of the Nephilim was announced. Blair stepped back.

Confusion crossed Peter's features. "You *played* me. Took me off the board."

Blair nodded. Peter's features contorted with anger, his eyes ablaze. She swore that flames encircled his pupils.

"That's all I am to you? A *game*?"

"Peter, no that's not it– I–"

He shook his head. "Don't. I heard you loud and clear. You and I can only be friends. I'm sorry that I– That I thought we could be more."

"Peter! Where were you?! We called for you," Damon cried out while running towards them.

"Sorry, I got distracted." The Half-demon gestured to Blair, who knew her face was cast with shame.

"Nice play, B. Didn't think you had it in you to manipulate the feelings of men, but here you are."

Blair felt her gut clench. The sound of the crowds filled her ears as her teammates came into her view waving the flag towards her. They smiled in victory, another year to add to their streak.

But it still feels like I lost…

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Dancing Flame

"LIGHT IT UP, PETER!" Damon shouted.

With ease, Peter Bronze summoned the heat beneath his skin allowing his magic to slither through him. The wood in the pit ignited, burning a hot blue before simmering into a careful orange. The crowd cheered as the flames licked at the night sky.

Peter felt numb as he downed soapy beer. He wondered why anyone ever bothered to drink the stuff.

His lips still tingled from where Blair's had brushed. His finger traced along them. Over the last few years, Peter thought he had felt every pain that he could, until he had met Blair. The ache that had bloomed in his chest had faded with the alcohol, as disgusting as it was.

"*Hey*." Crow creeped up beside Peter, who was completely lost in the flames he had summoned. *"You okay?"*

Peter just gave Crow a look, they knew the answer.

"I am sorry that Blair did that to you, but you have to admit it was a good strategy." Crow took a seat on the log that Peter had taken as his front row seat to the large pit.

"I suppose," Peter muttered before downing the last of his beer. "Want another drink?"

Crow nodded. Peter felt their gaze follow, soft and unyielding, as he made his way to the drink station, where hoppy dread awaited in every can.

"Hey."

Peter closed his fist tightly around the cans. Aluminum creaked, splitting open and cutting into his palm.

"What do you want, Blair?" He didn't even bother to look at her. He willed himself to release his grip, noticing the blood that had leaked from his flesh. He tossed the cans into the trash, grabbing two more lagers.

"I know you're upset with me, but I managed to forgive you, can't you find it within yourself to forgive me?" He turned to see her curls had been released from the tight braid from earlier. She wore eyeliner that was smudged around the corners, somehow making her green eyes stand out more than he could have imagined.

"Blair, you have no idea the kind of power you have to cripple me. I know we cannot be together, I wouldn't want to drag you down to the dark. You and I will be friends, but I need time to let the idea of us go."

"I understand." Just like that, she didn’t bother fighting him.

"You're still going to help me pass my exams right? Because I am not sure if I can do it on my own." Peter made himself chuckle, covering up his disappointment through the change of subject. If she looked closely at his hands she would spot the restraint.

"Of course. What are friends for?" Her smile was weak. It didn't reach her emerald eyes.

"I promised Crow I would bring them a beer, care to join?" He was hopeful she would say yes.

"I am probably going to head to bed soon. I never stay here that long since I have training on Saturdays."

Peter felt disappointment in his chest bloom further. His mind wandered back to the brush of their lips. The magnetism that drew them together was present, tugging him towards her.

He shrugged. "Well, then I hope you get some sleep. Goodnight, Blair." His lips pressed against the soft, yet salty skin of her cheek. She froze beneath his quick touch, her chest halting with a gasp. He stepped around her to head back to the bonfire.

Crow accepted the outstretched beer, observing the fingerprint sized dents. Their eyebrow cocked. *"So, it's official then? You are just friends."* Crow's words echoed through his skull as they brushed a chunk of blonde hair from their face.

"Yeah, it was doomed anyway." He cracked open his lager, the distinct hiss from the carbonation filling his ears.

"Maybe." The two cans clinked together.

Peter drew in a slow, steady breath, the cool night air sharp in his lungs, then chased it with a soapy swish that clung unpleasantly to his tongue. Damon and Snow joined them—Snow wrapped in a green blanket, its fabric rustling softly as she settled between Crow’s legs, while Damon dropped beside Peter, the faint scent of leather and smoke trailing him as he pulled a blunt from his jacket.

Peter summoned a spark of magic to his fingertip, a flicker of warmth against the chill, and lit it. The grey-eyed Half-demon inhaled deeply, ember flaring bright, the scent of burning cannabis thick and skunky. His body slackened instantly before he passed it along. Peter took it with cold-stiff fingers, brought it to his lips, and was met with harsh, bitter smoke that clawed down his throat—he doubled over coughing, striking his chest as Crow’s quiet laughter crackled alongside the fire.

The blunt moved on. A slow, hazy warmth unfurled through Peter’s mind, softening the edges of his thoughts, loosening the tight coil of longing for the woman he couldn’t have.

A cool breeze slipped through the trees, brushing his cheeks and carrying the mingled scents of smoke, damp earth, and melting sugar. The fire drew his gaze—the steady crackle, the sharp pops, embers drifting upward like tiny, dying stars. Amber light flickered across the gathered faces, familiar and strange—Dhampirs, Casters, even a Siren, her presence humming faintly beneath the noise.

The sweetness of roasting marshmallows hung thick, golden and sticky, threading through the woodsmoke and pulling him back to summer nights with his mom—the heat of the flames, the hum of insects, the simple comfort of being known. He wasn’t sure she would recognize him now.

Laughter rose and fell around him, overlapping voices carrying stories and inside jokes, the easy rhythm of people who belonged. Peter watched, listened, absorbing it all—but when his gaze caught on couples tucked close beneath blankets, sharing warmth, whispers, and quiet touches, a soft, aching envy settled deep in his chest.

While his closest companions around him had their feet up on logs enjoying the heat from the fire, he found himself drifting farther away.

A warm hand clapped on his shoulder. "Great work today, champ."

Peter just closed his eyes."Listen, Jackson, I am not in the mood." Peter took a sip of his beer, hoping to numb the burning in his throat. He could

feel his body buzzing from the alcohol and weed. With the right push, he wouldn’t be able to control himself.

"Stay away from Blair," Jules added. Peter couldn’t contain his eye roll.

"Peter, don't bother," Crow tried to reason. The other Half-demons eyed him carefully, but remained relaxed around him.

"I can't do that, Jules. We are friends, nothing more. I am not pursuing her." He needed to hear himself say it out loud.

"Good. Because she would never lower herself to be with Demon scum." Peter found himself suddenly staring into Jules’ eyes. Standing up, he became aware of his inebriation.

Furious eyes clashed with the Nephilim’s. Intimidation contorted Jules’ hazed gaze, realizing who he was up against.

"Yeah, Heaven forbid she would ever lower her standards. Since she would need to, to ever be with you again." Peter realized he was just stirring the pot. He would blame the alcohol tomorrow.

The crowd died down, taking in the two males that stared at each other.

Damon held up the blunt to Jules. He hesitantly took it and inhaled deeply,

"You're right. She deserves way better than either of us could ever offer. Cheers, mate. I hope you enjoy the bonfire." Their cans clinked together before he and Jackson took off to a group of females.

Peter blinked a few times from shock. In fact, he was rather disappointed.

"Well, that went better than I expected."

"Couldn't agree more," Snow added to Crow’s telepathic surprise, pulling her blanket tighter around her.

It feels like a trap. Peter found himself thinking, watching Jules saunter over to Gabby who looked unbelievably happy to see him.

I thought she was ill.

Everyone went back to their business, conversations and chatter resuming. Several expressed their disappointment that Jules and Peter hadn’t engaged in a spat.

After returning to his seat, Peter couldn’t stop himself from trailing after the males. Gabby was supposed to be his date, yet she and Jules wandered off into the forest. As they disappeared into the night, he returned his focus to the celebration.

He now understood why this had become a tradition, a gathering of future generations. This place, away from the academy, was a space where they could just be themselves; the people they weren't allowed to be inside of the academy.

Peter was absolutely wasted by the time students were launching themselves into Silver Lake. A tradition of freezing ones nutsack off.

Before Damon and the other Half-demons tried to pull him to the lake, he managed to sneak off. He wandered before stumbling upon the academy.

Oaken was lit on the outside by a few torches that marked his path forward. He tumbled to the floor as the side door fell open faster than he expected.

“Fuck.” Peter's swear echoed off the walls, as he gave the floor the middle finger.

A couple giggles drew his attention. "I don't think I’ve ever seen someone pick a fight with the floor."

"First time fer everythin." Peter tried to look for the person the voice belonged to. His eyes fell on a certain redhead now tinged in a slight purple hue. Jules was leaning on the stone behind her, trying to hold his laughter in.

"I fought yeu were sick." Gabby bent down and helped him to his feet.

"Let's get you to bed. Jules, mind giving me a hand?" Jules groaned, but proceeded to support his other side.

The trio stumbled towards the western side of the academy, both of them trying to support his swaying weight.

Peter found it extremely difficult to walk in a straight line. The floor he could have sworn was uneven, but Gabby and Jules managed to get him to climb the stairs and eventually into his bed.

“Why is he so important?” Jules asked from the doorway.

Her midnight gaze fell to the Nephilim. “He’s going to change the world.” Her head turned back to Peter, who felt the room sway beneath him.

Gabby's skin, in the moonlight that poured in through the window, was now a fully, dominant purple. He took in her black eyes and jagged horns that decorated the crown of her forehead.

"Yeu look differant." He giggled lightly brushing a finger over one of her horns.

"Get some sleep, Heylel." Peter didn't even pause before swimming beneath the sheets and letting sleep consume him.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

Demon Summonings Pt

Jackson Norman looked like he was going to be sick in the back of the combat vehicle. Every bump turned his face a dangerous shade green. Blair Dawn did not shy from gloating about the wicked hangover her companions had collected from their night of drinking.

Headmistress Penns had rushed into the Nephilim dorm this morning for a mission that required their team to dispatch from Oaken immediately. Detective Embris, a Dhampir at the precinct they were heading to, had called the minute Blair's message had landed on his desk. Her Dreaming of hearts and livers was a little too close to a case that had been ongoing for the last week.

If Blair hadn't been connected to the case through her Dreaming, she and her legion would not have been granted permission to join this mission. Missing organs were currently special operations, and better handled by the Warriors of the Blessed; the professional Demon slayers.

There was a reason God needed her on this mission. Penns had been hesitant at first but called Father Morgan from his bed to bless them before they went straight into danger.

Arlie, Willow, Malakai, Jackson, Jules, and the Dawn Princess had grabbed their armour and their weapons, and were on the road within the hour. Now crammed in the back of the combat vehicle, three on either side and close enough their knees brushed, they went through their pre-mission rituals.

All of them had been training and working together since they were little kids. Being the same age made it convenient for all of their parents to

feel righteously privileged for them to be fit to be members of their respective houses.

Arlie rubbed her temple, pressing her other hand into the side of the vehicle to kill the jazz music from the radio. The driver looked at them in the rearview that had the princess smiling apologetically.

Jackson gave her a grateful moan. Mal rolled his eyes at his cousin, disappointed Jackson had shown little restraint at the bonfire.

“I swear if you throw up on me, I am going to throw up on you back,” Willow told Jackson as he burped again.

Willow had her head on Arlie’s shoulder, trying to catch a few more minutes of sleep. Arlie stared out the window in quiet contemplation watching the trees blur by. She was often quiet before a mission.

Jules Orson was asleep with his mouth open and sunglasses over his eyes. Blair was grateful he was able to come, though she worried he was still inebriated. If he was, his increased senses would be useless to them. Before Blair and Jules broke up, he had told her that he was hearing voices and having nightmares about Amanda’s death. When she was murdered, he had collapsed in class from severe agony.

He once told me it felt like his abdomen was being shred to pieces. Blair grimaced at the images of mutilated bodies between her hands carefully organized in a folder. Their bodies slashed beyond recognition, similar to how Amanda had been found.

After Jules’ public collapse, he had an episode where he kept telling the doctors that he could see spirits. From that point on, Jules could sense death and communicate with the dead. In his grief, his magic became a burden to him, and he turned towards weed. That was the beginning of the end of their relationship.

Blair read the case report between her fingers to pull herself from her thoughts of her and Jules. A Werewolf couple had been slaughtered violently inside of their home. Their bodies slashed apart through the abdomen, several organs found missing including the heart and the liver. Common organs to summon Demons or complete other satanic rituals.

According to the notes, the Werewolf couple had not been the first. Down in the Nightward District another couple had been slashed similarly, heart and liver missing. And again three couples in the Elemental Quarters, each a male and female.

Five couples had been killed.

So far, police and other investigators of the Covenant had been unable to find what had killed them.

Blair let a shiver roll over her body.

This is some serious shit. Something or someone is using Demons to hunt and kill each of these couples, then harvesting their organs.

“Well?” Mal looked at Blair for a summary. His golden brown eyes held hers with serious contemplation.

“Demon attack, at least that’s how it looks. Serious slashing to the bodies near the abdomen. In all cases, the heart and liver are missing from both male and female victims. This creature has been reported to have killed at least six couples.”

“And this is what you saw in your Dreaming?” Mal arched his brow.

Another bump in the road. Another pained groan from Jackson.

“Not exactly. I saw the pentagram and the organs that were taken, but I didn’t see any other specifics.” Blair watched Arlie flip through the file. “I don’t think this will be an easy mission. We will have to go to the precinct first. I want to look at the other case files before we head to the crime scene from last night.”

“I am just hoping they will at least have some coffee,” Mal muttered, getting a confirming grunt from Willow.

Arlie closed the folder. The colour was drained from her face as she handed it to Jackson.

He held up his hand. “I don’t think my hangover can handle that right now. I will deal with it at the crime scene.”

The inside of the Enders Police Precinct was a chaotic yet organized mess. The bustling detective floor was filled with the sounds of phone calls, keyboards, and radios crackling with urgent messages. Officers of various species moved quickly around the room, their expressions ranging from focused to frazzled.

The walls were lined with cork boards covered in crime scene photos, suspect profiles, and wanted posters for creatures that most humans couldn't even imagine. Blair took note of the information in regards to their own case.

Detective Emris, the well-known Dhampir, was on the phone when the squad arrived. He held up a finger, letting them know he would be with them shortly.

Since they had a few moments, the Nephilim children scanned the chaotic area. The desks were cluttered with stacks of paperwork, coffee cups, and half-eaten snacks. Computer screens flickered with reports and surveillance footage, highlighting the technological advancements that have been integrated into the precinct. There were shelves secured behind iron bars filled with jars containing various supernatural artifacts as evidence from ongoing cases.

In one corner, a group of Werewolves pored over a map, planning their next patrol. Blair caught wind of their orders; the city was increasing patrols until the Demon was brought in or killed.

At one of the detective's desks, a female Water Caster took a witness statement from an older Werewolf male. His wrinkled features were laced with sorrow. From what Blair could ascertain, the male was a neighbour of the couple that had been killed. Their Alpha, Heath Courts from the Thorn and Rose Pack, was beside himself that they had gotten past the pack patrols.

This thing must have been quite powerful to avoid the keen senses of the Werewolves patrols.

Despite the hectic nature of the precinct, there was a strong sense of camaraderie among the officers. The way they spoke to each other with respect and relied on each other, and their unique abilities, to solve the most baffling supernatural crimes. Blair respected their line of work, for all the things they had to do to keep this city safe from Demons and other threatening creatures.

Mal took it upon himself to take coffee from the communal pot, offering Willow a paper cup. Jackson sat down to place his head in his hands. His face was still pale from the hangover.

This investigation wasn’t going to go well with the condition of her team.

“Sorry about that, guys.” Emris’ voice was deep. He towered over Blair, butch with muscle. He offered a small smile which allowed his fangs to stand out.

“It’s okay, detective. We are still recovering from last night,” Mal told him over the noise of the room.

“Ah yes, the bonfire was last night. That is giving me some flashbacks from my time there.” Emris stared behind them as if caught in the memories of his time at the academy. He quickly shook his head to clear his thoughts.

His smile fell. “Let’s get down to business. Come with me into the conference room.”

Jackson trailed the rest as the students filed behind the glass room. A large white table sat in the middle, surrounded by high-back rolling chairs.

Emris used a small key to unlock the top drawer of a filing cabinet in the corner. He then withdrew five cases, each were coloured in varying shades, each corresponding to the district they dealt with; three blue, one red, one black.

“I know you have already seen the contents from the Werewolf district.” He slid the red folder down the table in front of them. Mal took another sip of his coffee and exhaled to psyche himself up before picking up the folder.

“This should cover the notes from the other crime scenes. All of them were the same. All slashed through the abdomen, the liver and heart carefully removed as though it needed to be intact. No sign of forced entry. Nothing else was found at the crime scene. Each of them involved a couple that was expecting.” Blair opened the black folder to see the crime photos from the Dhampir murder. The bodies were found in similar positions, bodies mutilated in the middle.

“The females were pregnant?” Willow looked shocked.

“Yes. Within the second trimester. But the fetus was taken,” Emris confirmed.

Blair felt another shudder pass over her spine. They were stumbling into something dark and twisted. “Is there anything connecting the victims?”

She looked towards Emris’ red eyes. The detective pulled down a map of the city over the white board. He marked each death by a large red dot.

“This first location was in the Elemental District, both were Earth Casters. The second was a few blocks over, both Water Casters. The third was a few weeks later, a few blocks east in the district. One Fire and one Air Caster.” Blair looked at the first three dots. Each of them was an equal distance apart, the east and the west points diagonal from the original point on the map. Enough to form a large obtuse triangle.

“The next victims were the Dhampir and a few days later the Werewolf couple. Both were expecting their first child.” Mal pushed the folder away

from him as Emris finished adding the last two spots. Mal looked sick, grimacing at the images he had seen.

"Detective–" Blair stood to her feet and practically pushed the Dhampir police officer out of her way. She took a dry erase marker and connected the dots together, the five points connecting into the perfect five pointed star.

The death locations had created the perfect pentagram.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

Demon Summonings P2

The police escorted Blair and her squad to the crime scene of the Werewolf murder. A simple townhouse was covered in police tape, the forensic team still going over the area in their bright yellow suits.

Nosey eyes of their neighbours, many Werewolves themselves, scanned over the Nephilim group as they walked into the scene. Their agitation from the full moon tonight had them more territorial, questioning why they had come.

“Why are novices on the case? Are the Blessed too busy to bother?” a male grumbled with a growl in his throat.

“Isn’t that Princess Blair?” a child asked while pointing.

Blair tried not to let it bother her when her name passed several of their lips. She wished she had the time to put their minds at ease, and express to them that God had brought her here. She kept her eyes on Emris’ broad shoulders, pretending as though she could not hear their uncertainty.

Emris flashed his badge to a few of the other officers in the front yard. Blair showed the temporary badge that had been gifted from the precinct, before stepping under the tape Emris held up for them.

Walking through the front door, there was nothing amiss that Blair could see. Everything was in perfect order, the door still intact with no signs that it had been tampered with. Mal walked through the living room, checking under the tables and by the window sill. The window was locked, no damage to the inside.

Emris motioned his head upstairs for Blair to follow. Arlie stayed close behind her as Jackson and Willow continued to investigate downstairs with

Mal.

Nausea choked its way into Blair’s throat as they walked into the bedroom. The bodies hadn’t been moved.

The Werewolf couple laid on the floor, their arms twisted at abnormal angles and their mouths agape, leaking red onto the off-white carpet. Blood had splattered onto the walls and the backside of their bed frame from the slash of claws back and forth.

Arlie held her sleeve to her nose, trying to avoid gagging on the smell.

Blair felt a little nauseous herself. You would think after four years on the field seeing people’s bodies torn to shreds wouldn't bother her so much.

God, help me find what did this. Help me bring this thing to justice for the souls that were handed to you too soon. Amen.

Emris handed both of them a pair of disposable gloves. Blair slid them on one at a time, the latex smacking into place. Arlie started searching the room.

Blair approached the male Werewolf, crouching closer to his body. The way his dead eyes were open unsettled her. Blair pulled back his shredded shirt, checking his body for anything carved or wedged into his body.

The liver and the heart had been taken, but they had been removed with precision. This was mostly likely at the hands of a Mid-to-High Tier Demon. Yet a creature that powerful would have left a trace behind like sulphur or ectoplasm, something like a fingerprint of the Demon's presence.

“Are there any Demons you can recall that don’t leave traces behind?” Blair asked Emris who was crouched beside her looking at the female.

“Not ones that we have documented. Unless someone had time to scrub the place clean.”

“Or someone let them walk through the front door,” Arlie added, digging through their garbage finding nothing abnormal.

Blair looked into the mouth of the male. Her brows knitted together. She took a deep breath and reached her fingers down his throat feeling fabric. She pinched it between her fingers and pulled.

There was a little black pouch shoved into his throat, a small string holding in the contents. She placed the pouch into her palm and opened it. Dark powder and small bones skittered about in her hand over the cotton fabric.

Emris similarly pulled one from the female Werewolf.

“Have you seen this before?” Emris asked Blair.

“No, but it certainly confirms the theory that these deaths were ritualistic. This is Dark magic.” The Dhampir sucked on his teeth.

Arlie asked to see the pouch, looking at the contents herself.

“I should call the precinct. See if the other bodies had pouches inside their mouths…”

“Let’s get these to the labs. See what they are used for.” Emris pulled off his gloves. He dialled a quick number and walked from the room.

Arlie came over to her looking at the little pouch. “I think I have seen that before.” She poked around the dirt, seeing the number of bones.

Arlie had a special interest in the arcane, studying the pagan practices and Dark magic seen throughout history. She, like Blair, thought that it was unfair that Half-demons were not able to learn their own magic. When she fell in love with Damon, her compulsive nature for absorbing knowledge on the subject grew. A secret the Nephilim carried because it made her a traitor in the eyes of the Church and the Covenant.

“What do you think it is?” Blair asked her friend.

“I think it’s used for mind control.”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Research

Practice with the Half-demon General had made Peter Bronze throw up right onto his mentor's shoes. He had been seriously hungover when he showed up for training and Carter made sure he regretted it. The general had him run drills until he had blisters on his feet and his whole body ached with the force of a thousand suns. Peter swore he would never drink that heavily again if it meant doing any more suicide runs until he threw up.

He stumbled back into his dorm to find Crow buried in a history textbook, studying for their test next week.

Peter tossed his soaked long sleeve into the laundry on the barren side of the room. Peter grabbed everything he needed for his shower, feeling a sense of emptiness.

"Thank Hell you are finally showering. You reek like booze and sweat."

"Thanks, Crow." Peter let out a few chuckles before smelling his armpit. He almost gagged at his own scent.

"Anytime, brother."

"Want to study in the library when I am done cleansing myself of this vile stench?"

Crow raised their eyebrows at him. *"Are you hoping a certain Half-angel will be present?"*

"No, I need to do some research," he half-lied. He really wanted to do more research on Lucifer, already blown through most of the book Vidya had given him.

"Surrrre." Crow wiggled their eyebrows. *"Now shower, please. You're stinking up the room."*

The library was a little busy this weekend, students spread throughout the three floors. Some chatted quietly, while others studied. Kirian, the librarian, was helping a few students check out the books they needed for a project. Crow and Peter wandered past textbooks and notebooks in hand with full intent of studying. Peter pointed to the second floor, at one of the vacant tables near the balcony. Crow nodded towards him and followed him to where they both set themselves up for the afternoon.

Peter couldn't help his mind from wandering to Blair. He secretly hoped she would be here, nose deep in a book. Her regular table was a few down from this one.

"I'll be right back. I need to find a few books I am looking for." Crow gave Peter a look that they did not buy into his bullshit, then started studying.

Peter left the table, hands deep into the pockets of his stone-washed jeans. The Lucifer book was tucked into the back of his waistband. He hoped Blair may be able to help him find more books on the fallen Archangel. He did a quick sniff test on himself before walking to Blair's usual seat.

Merlin was perched at the rounded desk, deep into the manuscript set before him. Blair was nowhere to be seen. Peter scratched the back of his neck.

"Hey, Merlin," Peter choked out awkwardly.

"She's not here." Merlin didn't even look up from the pages. Just kept translating and writing the text into a notebook beside him.

"I'm sorry?"

"Blair. She's not here."

"Is she somewhere–"

Merlin quickly turned with a huff. "She's not on campus. The headmistress sent her and her squad to the Capitol for some mission regarding some murders. She may be back later today or tomorrow. Depends on how long it takes for them to find the Demon and kill it."

Peter blinked a few times at his words.

"Oh. Well, maybe you can help me then?" Peter changed the subject to cover his disappointment.

"With what?" Merlin fiddled with his nose ring impatiently.

“I want to do more research on Lucifer. I have been reading this and just didn’t know where to go from here.” Merlin took the book from his fingers and scanned the first few pages.

“Where did you get this?”

“The library gave it to me.” Peter started to feel uneasy under Merlin’s gaze.

“Do you realize how rare this book is? What would happen if it was discovered?” Merlin whispered at him. “This is an outlawed text. All of Lucifer’s stories were wiped out of history by Michael and his descendants centuries ago.”

“Why?”

“Because Michael wants to make sure that Lucifer remains in Hell and never wants anyone to question him.” Merlin fell into his chair and removed his glasses to rub his eyes.

Peter walked around the table and took a seat across from Merlin. “Look, I have no idea why Vidya gave me the text but it has to mean something right? She wouldn’t give it to me otherwise.” The breeze passed them both, Vidya summoned from the call of her name.

Merlin looked up, putting his glasses down before opening the pages for himself.

The text, at least from the pages he had read, outlined in detail Lucifer’s reign in Hell and the major territories under his command. It went into detail about his major abilities, some that sat deep with Peter. It also described the war between Lucifer and Asmodeus that allowed Lucifer to gain enough strength during the Great Rebellion. That’s as far as Peter had got.

“Peter, you realize that this text explains Lucifer and his rise to power…”

“Yes. What about it?”

“If the Half-demons got ahold of this text, they would idolize him. Throughout history, Michael and the Covenant have Demonized or marginalized your kind because of their own beliefs and values. Lucifer, as a Fallen Angel, is associated with rebellion and evil, something that threatens the Covenant. Lucifer was intentionally omitted or vilified in most religious texts to reinforce certain moral codes and discourage questioning of Michael’s authority. But this– This gives Lucifer power. It recognizes that Lucifer is a formidable creature and something that Demons may

celebrate.” Peter knew that Merlin had an appetite for research and illegal history.

“What if we want to celebrate our powers and where we come from?” Peter leaned forward placing his elbows on the table.

“Don’t say that so loud. They will kill you for less.”

Peter knew that to be true.

Merlin shoved the book at him. “Hide this. Or give it back to Vidya. If you get caught with this… I don’t know what they will do to you.”

“Will you help me find more information?” Peter manipulated his voice, letting his charm wash over Merlin. The Half-demon was worried he had scared off the Half-angel.

There were a few beats of silent contemplation as Merlin weighed the risk and the reward.

“Of course I will. Blair and you will owe me big time.” The son of Uriel lowered his voice. “She loves information on the Light-bringer as much as you do. I’ll see what I can dig up. In the meantime, finish that.”

Oh, I plan on it.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Possession

"I'm telling you, there was no forced entry," Blair said, pacing the length of the bullpen, her hands moving faster than her thoughts could organize. "Nothing broken, nothing picked. They *let* whatever did this inside."

Mal let out a brittle laugh. "Yeah, because people just open the door for a home invasion."

"They might," Arlie cut in, leaning forward over the table, eyes sharp. "If it wasn't a stranger."

Blair stopped pacing. "Or if it wasn't *them* at all."

A silence followed—the kind that settled in and dared someone to break it.

Mal shook his head. "Okay, you're losing me. What does that even mean?"

Blair exchanged a look with Arlie, then reached into the evidence box and held up the sealed bag of sparkly raven-coloured powder.

"The lab results came back. Graveyard dirt. Black salt." Arlie hesitated, then added, quieter, "Animal bone fragments. Cat paws from their shape and size."

Mal's face twisted. "That's… disgusting. What does that have to do with anything?"

Blair answered this time. "It was part of a hex bag. Old magic. Control-based."

"Control?" Mal echoed. "Like—what—mind control?"

Blair nodded slowly.

“Not exactly mind control. More like… opening the door from the inside.” She swallowed. “Something could ride along. Take over. Temporarily.” It didn’t explain how the hex bags got into the mouths of the victims.

Mal stared at her. “You’re saying a Demon just—what—walked in and used them like puppets?”

Detective Emris, who had been silent until now, finally spoke. “It’s consistent with the evidence.”

Mal blinked. “You cannot be serious.”

“There’s no sign of struggle,” Emris continued evenly. “No defensive wounds. The cuts—precise, controlled. Almost surgical.” He glanced at Blair. “That doesn’t read like panic. It reads like compliance.”

“Or compulsion,” Arlie said.

Mal pushed away from the table, running a hand through his dark chocolate hair.

“No. No, I don’t buy that. People don’t just carve themselves up because a bag of… dirt told them to.”

Blair’s voice softened, but it didn’t waver. “Not dirt. A doorway.”

Another beat of silence cut around them.

Jackson’s gaze flicked between them. “So, what—you think they invited something in, and it killed them?”

Blair shook her head. “That’s the best-case scenario.”

Jules froze, unable to keep his features from contorting. “Best case?”

Arlie exhaled slowly. “Worst case?” she said, eyes distant. “The Demon didn’t kill them.”

Blair’s grip tightened on the evidence bag. “It made them do it themselves.”

The words seemed to drop like a stone.

“No,” Mal said immediately, though his voice lacked conviction.

“They open the door,” Blair continued, almost as if she couldn’t stop now. “They let it in, it shoved the hex down their throats. The magic took control. And then…” She gestured helplessly. “It has time. Privacy. No resistance.”

“To remove the organs,” Emris finished quietly.

Jackson looked like he might be sick. “You’re saying they just… stood there? While it—”

“Or they *helped*,” Arlie said.

That did it. Jackson turned away, bracing himself near the garbage can in case his stomach overflowed.

“Who would do this?” he demanded, voice strained. “Why?”

Blair’s eyes dropped to the bag in her hands. “Because someone needed their organs,” she said. “And they knew exactly how to make sure they got them.”

Who knew a simple hex bag could take away someone's free will.

“But we still don’t have a motive,” a grumbling Werewolf officer, Frank, commented. His uniform was about to burst at the seams from weight gain.

“From what Princess Dawn has discovered, the final location of the bodies have formed a pentagram. At the centre sits the western Demons District.” Emris pointed to the map of the city as he informed the precinct of what had been found.

“That’s a lot of ground to cover…” the female Water Caster mumbled.

“We are trying to pinpoint the location of the dead centre. This location will be the most powerful place for whatever is doing this,” Arlie added, then continued towards the Caster, “They have a limited window of opportunity with the full-moon tonight.” The unfortunate recurrence of the full-moon would mean many of their Shifter officers would be off the ground. Only those who possessed extreme control over their shifting would be able to assist them.

“Once we have the location, we will be posting heavy patrols around the area. We need to stop whoever is doing this!” Emris dismissed the room, handing out jobs to his team.

“And what do you want us to do?” Jackson was looking a little better now with food into his system, but his fingers were pressed into his temples. When he had seen the bodies earlier he had hurled so hard, Blair was worried he would give himself a hernia.

“I think you guys have done enough. Go back to the academy,” Emris grumbled. His face was stern and serious.

He’s afraid.

“You can’t be serious!” Mal shouted. “Tonight is a full-moon, a perfect opportunity for this thing to do what it’s been planning to do for weeks. We are not leaving. You wouldn’t have this information if it wasn’t for us.”

“I agree with Mal, detective. God sent me the Dreaming of this creature for a reason and you could use all the help you can get. Let us complete our

mission.” Blair stood by Mal, placing a hand on her friend’s shoulder.

“Let’s just hope we can get the exact coordinates soon. We’re running out of time,” Willow muttered to herself.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Dancing with Demons

The underground City of Enders, bustled to life with the approaching evening. Filled with laughter and cars passing by the busy streets. They were filled with creatures left, right, and centre. Wandering their way home from work or making their way to dinner at some of the restaurants in the area. The Capitol was infamous for its nightlife in every district for every appetite. Blair had never been on the streets of the city outside of work, let alone the Demon Districts.

The City of Enders was a pocket dimension connected to Earth. It was powered by the magic of the seven Royal Houses, which was channeled into their wardstone regularly. The dimension mimicked the same conditions and natural phenomenon as Earth, displaying the sky above as cloudy, and though Blair could not see the full-moon through the cover, it permeated.

Blair couldn't help but be a little thrilled. She was always either stuck behind the walls of the academy or behind the walls of the Royal Palace. The princess never went anywhere without being heavily guarded. She knew that her shadows would be trailing behind her following her half-brother's orders to keep a close watch on her every move. Blair had caught sight of her royal guard dogs, Taron and Milo, earlier when they had left the precinct to head to the coordinates. Their presence enforced her lack of freedom from the clutches of her responsibilities and expected duties.

Her friends were silent in the police van, exhaustion lining their faces. They had been running on no sleep and poor over-bitter coffee, searching endlessly for a space that could be used for a spell as large as this. Though

Willow was now leaning on Blair’s shoulder, her brown eyes were wide. Mal was mouthing a prayer on Blair’s left, his purple pearl rosary clutched between trembling hands.

Jackson, Jules, and Arlie sat across from Blair. Arlie was playing with the end of her ruddy braid in nervous tendrils. She was staring out the back window. A few other cruisers trailed closely behind them.

Blair felt her eyes travel to the night sky, the moon would soon be full and at its peak.

The radio buzzed at the front of the vehicle, getting their attention forward. “We have made contact with the mole. Over,” Emris said. The static returned.

“Copy that, Fangs.” Their driver, Deliah Swan, answered, raising her arm to click the walkie. On her right arm was a police badge with a swirl of water in the centre. She was one of the Casters. The talkative blonde who had been interviewing the witness upon their arrival.

Detective Emris, when they pinned the coordinates to an infamous strip club in the Demon District, had hopped from his desk and contacted someone who was already inside the den of sin. The mole that the codename ‘Fangs’ referred to, would allow them access through the back of the club upon their arrival. For a handsome payment of course.

Blair was going over the game plan in her mind, only having a look at the layout of the club briefly. They would have to be smart, strategic about this. Blair reached into her shirt and pulled out her pearl rosary.

God, protect us. Give us strength. Help us deliver justice. Amen.

Blair felt tiredness settle into her bones from the weight of this case. Ten innocent people had been possessed and killed in the span of a few weeks. She prayed for their souls to find their way into Heaven.

Blair remembered her Dream, when she had been inside a dance club and stuck within the panicked crowd. They were on the right path, but that meant that the Demon she had seen was coming and bringing something far more dangerous from the Nine Realms.

“I’ve seen what’s coming,” Blair said softly, red and blue bouncing over the side of her face. Everyone turned their gazes to her, waiting expectantly.

“I had a dream, similar to the one I’ve been experiencing about the library. There was a yellow-eyed Demon inside of a club and they said they were looking for the Prince to deliver to their king.”

Mal gripped his rosary a little tighter.

“They are trying to summon something from Hell. Something I fear we are not ready to face.”

“You’re right, Blair.” Jules took off his sunglasses, his blue eyes cold. He looked at each of them one at a time. “One of us is barely getting out of this alive.”

Dread caught in her throat, impossible to swallow away as they approached their destination.

Delilah killed the lights and sirens as they came into the Demon District. Two cruisers behind them to take a street parallel to the main strip.

Solid white teeth chewed at the corner of her fingernail. The pain doing little to ease her anxiety. A pit had settled in the bottom of her abdomen, making a home of uncertainty.

A hiss escaped her lips. Blood pooled at the edge of her thumb. She pushed it, watching the red liquid bubble. Arlie grabbed her fingers and held Blair’s fist in her lap. Her friend’s brows were furrowed with concern. Arlie’s onyx armour hugged her chest where her plain gold cross sat. Her dark red hair was pulled tightly into a braid, just like Blair’s ravenesque curls. They had always woven each other's hair before battle. Another ritual they shared.

“Everything is going to be okay. We are going to stop this thing,” Arlie said softly. Blair instincts told her something was going to happen. She was too anxious to tap into her abilities, to see if her premonitions may be able to give her a hint about what lay ahead for her and her squad.

The police van came to a stop outside the Shrieking Succubus, the club at the centre of the pentagram.

The Western Demon District was full of vibrant energy. It buzzed through the chatter in the air and the flickering of neon signs. Streets were crowded with Half-demons of all shapes and sizes from towering behemoths to tiny imps, all going about their daily business.

Sounds of roaring laughter, hissing whispers, and the occasional shriek of delight filled the van as Arlie pulled the latch open. The smell of exotic spices and sizzling meats wafted from the numerous food stalls and restaurants lining the street that made Blair’s stomach growl. She hadn’t eaten much today, thanks to the gore at the crime scene, and the spices from the meat stalls next to the club were calling her name.

Her combat boot hit the dirty concrete. Half-demons were beginning to take notice of the police cruisers.

Blair began sheathing her weapons discreetly, making sure they were sharp before hiding them away. She took in the brightly coloured banners and signs hung from the buildings, advertising everything from magical trinkets to dark rituals. Neon lights flickered and flashed, casting an otherworldly glow over the chaos below.

The streets were nothing like the crystalline spaces of the Nephilim courts or the outside of the Royal Palace. Buildings were underkept. Cracks damaged the foundations. Many of the windows were covered with boards. Barely a touch of wall without graffiti of satanic symbols and gang tags. The streets were filled with garbage and dirt. Sewage and sulphur softly intermingled with the glorious smell of food.

Jules couldn't stop the wrinkle that formed on his face. He looked down at the Half-demons milling about the street.

The stereotypes of Half-demons being nasty and unwelcoming was broken by the smiles and greetings shared between the half-breeds. The Nephilim watched while they greeted each other with nods and smiles, exchanging gossip and news as they went about their way. Merchants haggled over prices with customers for everything between books to spell artifacts laid in the stands.

Arlie bumped Blair's shoulder, then motioned to the street musicians. A strange and haunting melody, one that caused Blair's skin to rise with gooseflesh. Beside the musicians were a few Half-demon street performers. Dazzling passersby with their feats of magic.

One female, her eyes like a snake, twisted her body in unfathomable ways as neon lights sent sparkles over her leotard. Blair watched her blow fire into the air, morphing the flame into dragons that flew overhead. Corners of the Nephilim's faces turned up as the animated flames soared above.

Then there were whispers. The energy faded along with the smiles of the Nephilim legion.

Yellow, red, blue; some eyes serpentine and jet black settled on the group wearingly. Realizing there were outsiders on their streets. Not just any, but Half-angels.

God's Pets. A few hissed.

Emris cleared his throat. Many of the detectives and officers had already started patrolling the area.

Blair felt her cheeks warm. She was embarrassed and ashamed of the weary gazes. To see the uncertainty and fear fill the Half-demon's eyes.

Blair swallowed the dryness in her throat and joined beside the detective stationed at the front of a police cruiser. He spread a blueprint over the hood. The same from the precinct.

"This is the layout of the club. There are three exits here, here, and here. We will monitor anyone coming in and out." Embris pointed. Blair and Mal were to meet the mole at the back through the alley at the right side. They would go in a scope out for anything suspicious.

Jules and Jackson leaned on the side of the vehicle as they went over the plan. Their teeth flared into snares at the dirty looks from pedestrians and bikers. Arlie rolled her eyes at the two of them, trying to appear unbothered from the stares.

The heavier set Werewolf from earlier, Officer Frank Pent from the Pack of The White Rose, whispered into Emris' ear. The Dhampir gave a firm nod.

"You lot ready?"

Mal nodded at Emris' question. Each of the Nephilim did their final weapons check. Each of them were loaded with holy water, salt rigs, and pistols loaded with silver attached to various spots on their armour. Only to use in an emergency.

Blair unsheathed her two blades, resting carefully and loosely held in her grip. She warmed up her shoulders and wrists with a few twirls and twists.

She watched a Half-demon couple shrink back and turn to walk the way they had come. Blair frowned at herself before returning her blades to her hips.

"Let's head out. Take this walkie. Radio if you hear or see anything suspicious."

Blair took the radio, clipping it to her shoulder before pulling her white trench coat over to disguise her weapons. Her holy symbol hung from her neck to ward off possession.

Emris dismissed them and the group broke into pairs.

Willow and Jackson were to monitor the front with the bouncer, check for any weapons or questionable symbols before people entered the club. Arlie and Jules scaled the building through the alley, using the walls of the club and the store to reach the roof to watch from above. Emris had a few

born Werewolves officers, who had control over their shift during all phases of the moon, stationed a few places down the street and at the side entrance by the garbage in the alleyway. Blair and Mal walked down the alleyway to meet the mole at the staff entrance. Blair looked towards the Heavens, letting her nerves calm and accepting that whatever laid beyond the door was part of God's plan for her.

The door to the club opened with a dull shriek, metal groaning and scraping across the asphalt. A beautiful Succubus stepped through, wearing dark shiny fabric that barely covered her exposed bits.

Mal blushed and diverted his gaze awkwardly. Nephilim were always trained to deny themselves of lust.

"Are you Blair?" the female asked, her voice soft and sultry. Mal cleared his throat and fully turned, placing his hands behind his back.

"Yes. Emris sent us. Are you Chastity?" The irony of her stage name rolled off Blair's tongue before the Succubus nodded and opened the metal door wider for them to enter. She glanced through the door a few times before closing it firmly behind her. The door was heavily warded against all sorts of creatures. Numerous runic symbols Blair recognized. Protection from unwanted guests.

"Follow me."

Mal motioned Blair to go first, blotches of red still staining his cheeks. The Nephilim princess nodded before radioing in, "We are on the move."

Blair felt pulsating beats fill her chest as they got closer to the dance area. She followed Chastity through the narrow hall, stacks of alcohol crates on both sides. Mal had to walk sideways to fit his broad shoulders past, his sable trench coat catching a few times.

Blair smelled the scent of sandalwood and myrrh wafting through the dimly lit hallway, making her grimace. Chastity stopped in front of another metal door, this one vacant of any symbols. The music pounded through it.

"I have heard rumours from some of the gentlemen that a big shot is coming to the club tonight. Some regulars in connection to the Black Eyes have rented the whole VIP area. No one is allowed back there without being checked in." Chastity's Spanish accent was thick, her heritage most likely from the Succubus clans in South America.

Mal made eye contact with Blair at the mention of the notorious Half-demon separatist group. Well-known for its views on the Covenant and

taking extreme measures for their cause. If the Black Eyes were here, they were involved.

“Thank you, Chastity.” Blair handed her the envelope Emris gave her. She quickly accepted the bills, stuffing them into her bra.

The Succubus bowed her head, purple eyes flickering back to Mal. She turned towards him and lifted his chin to her. “If you ever feel like losing that virginity of yours, Nephilim, please come find me. I am a sucker for a handsome Angelic face.” Blair didn’t know Mal could turn a darker shade of red.

Chastity returned the way they came, making sure to rub her ass over Mal’s crotch as she passed due to the tight space. Mal clenched his jaw a few times, his eyes closed. Blair pinched her lips together to avoid the laugh building.

“Don’t say anything,” Mal warned.

Blair held up her hands. “I didn’t say a thing.”

“You didn’t have to, it's all over your face. Ugh I feel dirty.” Mal was more faithful to their oath than she was. He had been celibate his whole life, while she was no longer pure.

“You can pray and repent later. We have a job to do.” Blair pulled the walkie to her lips. “Fangs, you there? Over.”

The static hummed and cleared.

“Here, Daylight. Over,” Emris confirmed. She struggled to hear him over the thrumming music.

“Spoke to the operative. The Black Eyes are here. Rented the VIP area. Rumours of something big going on. About to head in, over.”

“Heard loud and clear. In position. Over.” The walkie went silent.

Mal gave Blair a nod before she opened the door. Music washed over their senses, the metal barrier no longer deafening the noise. The walls of the Shrieking Succubus were splashed with neon signs. There was a light machine suspended from the ceiling casting coloured light over the dancing sea, making silhouettes dance along the walls.

The stage was alive with exotic Succubi dancers, their seductive movements captivating the audience's attention. Male and female creatures, some Half-demons, others belonging to the Dhampir and Sirens.

The Succubi swayed compellingly to the music. Their long, flowing hair and shimmering outfits accentuated their alluring beauty, as they moved with an otherworldly grace that mesmerised their onlookers. Mal looked

like he was frozen, unable to move his eyes from the stage. He mirrored the primal hunger of the other audience members as they watched the dancers perform. The air crackled with an undercurrent of danger and desire, as the patrons revelled in the forbidden thrill of being in the presence of such enchanting creatures. Blair could feel Mal's magic surge, the air tightening around them.

She pulled on Mal's arm, his eyes flickering to hers. He was shaking, a ring of gold surrounding his pupil. A manifestation of his magic and Angelic heritage.

The princess stared into his golden brown eyes deeply as she inhaled. Incense and desire clogged her nose, but she forced breath into her lungs. He mimicked her, his chest rising and falling. They repeated a few times and his concentration returned. He gave her a stern nod.

Blair walked over to the bar, a beefy serpentine Shifter was pouring a couple tequila shots.

A forked tongue jutted past his lips as he asked, "What can I get for you?"

"Something sweet," Blair yelled over the music.

Mal looked at her funny. She shrugged.

Did he have a better idea on how to blend into a club? I have never been inside one my entire life!

"I got you, Princess."

Blair jumped at the title. Relief washed over her as the bartender used the term with the next female.

The Shifter gracefully placed a bright pink cocktail in front of her. "Called Sex in the City. Let me know if you like it."

Blair took the martini glass and placed a ten on the bar for him.

"Drinking on the job?" Mal muttered.

Blair spun to lean on the bar, making sure her trench coat remained closed to hide her weapons.

"I am trying to blend in, dummy. If you haven't noticed, we stand out like a whore in church." She took a small sip, delighted by the fruity and tart notes. Cranberry, orange, and lime.

The front entrance welcomed a group of rowdy Half-demons. Decked out head to toe in shiny black leather, Blair watched the twirling lights reflect off sterling on the right pinkie of a darker skinned Half-demon. A

ring with an obsidian gem in the centre sat on the digit, the very same from her Dream.

The horned Demon was a member of the Black Eyes.

She watched him scan the crowd. His eyes fell on her. Blair dropped her lashes and sipped from the cocktail. Sweetness, followed by tang entered onto her tongue. The liquid slightly burned her throat, but the Half-demon dismissed her.

The possé moved through the crowd, towards the deep red curtains.

The VIP area.

“We have to follow them.” Blair’s adrenaline surged as certainty flooded her. A divine pull towards the danger.

The energy in the club only intensified as they strolled through the crowd. The dancers became more captivating and the music grew louder. This was certainly the place where inhibitions were shed and primal instincts were embraced like the rumours had expressed. Blair couldn’t help but want to get lost amongst the heady atmosphere of darkness and sensuality. It was both thrilling and intoxicating. Or maybe that was just the drink she had a single sip of.

Mal and her moved through the crowd of sweaty bodies, following the pull of fate.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Worship the Devil

Crow Morpheus was kicking Peter Bronze's ass at chess in front of the fireplace in the Demon Hall common room. Crow gave their roommate a look as he moved his knight into an open position. Peter knew he was going to lose anyway, so he decided not to delay the inevitable. Crow moved their rook forward three paces. Peter's king couldn't move anywhere to avoid it, their queen ready to take him out if he tried.

"Checkmate, bitch," echoed through Peter's skull.

"Yeah, yeah." Peter flicked over his own king. The piece clinking on the board.

"Rematch?" Crow arched their eyebrow in question. They started resetting the board.

The commons was ablaze with the soft glow of the fireplace and the candle chandeliers that suspended from the stone ceilings. The sun had set over the horizon, leaving the sky in a darkened overcast. Damon and Snow were curled up on the couch. Damon reading the weekly newspaper. The front article talking about a murder investigation in the City of Enders. Snow, curled into the crook of his legs, was buried in a new book since she had rampantly consumed the last. Her white eyes scanned the pages rapidly, as if she couldn't read it fast enough.

Luca Morgan, the son of Azazel, was laid out right in front of the fire like a cat. The healer's tan skin slick with sweat. His eyes were closed, earbuds drowning out the world, tapping his foot to the rhythm.

The door to the Hall opened with haste, Gabby charging through. The firelight casted a glow over her lavender skin, her black eyes wide with

purpose.

“You guys need to come quick. Something is going down in the city.”

The Half-demons slinked their way through the halls to the underbelly of the school. The cool dark hallways cast with cobwebs and dust. Gabby led the group to a pile of wooden skids in a storage room. A nasty looking tarp was thrown over top with little care. She tossed the dirty and shredded fabric to the side and slid the skids over one at a time. A round metal door sat underneath.

A broken piece of chalk was pulled from Gabby’s pants and she drew a sideways hourglass inside a pentagram.

A metallic click followed. The trapdoor popped open.

Gabby swung it wide and they descended one at a time down a rusted ladder. Peter brushed his palms on his hands when he hit the uneven ground. He stared at his palms as Luca pulled the metal door firmly shut, the light abandoning them above.

“Peter, do you mind lighting the candles?” Damon asked in the darkness. The fire user couldn’t see a few feet in front of him.

How am I supposed to light something I can’t see?

The fire user took a deep breath, his magic heating underneath his skin in response. He summoned flame to the inside of his palm, extending it in front of him. He blinked a few times, eyes adjusting to the darkened space. There was a hollowed cavern just below. Several stone steps descended farther into the space.

Peter followed after Damon their steps echoing off the carved walls.

His magic gave off an impressive heat, filling the alcove with warmth and the light flickered over his other Half-demon companions. The fire illuminated the candles that lined the outside of the floor of the circular room. Peter honed in his flame letting it licked the wicks greedily. Simultaneously, the candles lit one after the other on either side of Peter, joining in the centre farthest from him.

The Half-demon let his magic sizzle to a dull stream, taking in the area. The stone walls had been chiselled to form an uneven pocket. Peter’s eyes settled on a statue that sat atop a graphite-coloured altar. A horned goat sat

on a throne, holding a staff with a large golden pentagram. His stomach bottomed out.

“What is this place?” Peter asked as the others took a seat, joining Gabby in the middle of the room. An ebony box sat next to the stone stool that Gabby had claimed. She opened the box with a small key that she always hung around her neck.

“We call this the Cavern of Secrets. When Half-demons were first introduced to Oaken, they created this unholy pocket for worship. A space where we can summon and talk to our parents. Practice our own rituals and beliefs. Away from the eyes of the academy.” Gabby didn’t look at him as she spoke. The lid to the box creaked, inside contained vials, black candles, and other things Peter did not recognize.

“Every generation, nine are chosen to take up the mantle and continue the unholy work of our forefathers.” Gabby looked proud while she took out her chalk and began drawing a large pentagram in the space between them.

“Take a seat, Peter,” Damon told him. He hadn’t realized he was still standing, while the rest of them had claimed one of the nine seats. Nine seats for the nine Realms of Hell.

The trap door groaned open, two more Half-demons jumped in, slamming to the ground and disturbing the dirt in a cloud. The third was a female gracefully lifted down by the biggest of the three. All three looked at Peter with confusion. His attendance had not been expected.

Peter had seen the two males before. One by the name of Bow Davenport. A large horned and darker skinned male with huge midnight eyes, no white to be seen. Bow was a child of the Demon Oriens and had displayed impressive feats of strength in combat class. The other male was small, a golden brown hue to his skin. Peter recalled his name as Umbra Patel, son of Beelzebub who had a thing for bees and other insects. The last musketeer was a female, small in frame and unnervingly skinny. Her collarbones jutted from her neck in jagged points below the three gills on her neck. The siren and captain of the swim team was a descendant of Lord Paimon; it was clear in her intelligent gaze.

“Bow, Isa, Umbra, take a seat. We need to talk.” Gabby flicked a match, lighting a black candle and centering it in the dark dust she sprinkled.

“Why is he here?” Isa Neale questioned. Her dark slitted eyes narrowed in on Peter. The three didn’t move away from the entrance, as if refusing to

share the same air as Peter until his presence was explained.

“He is a friend, we are welcoming him to the council,” Gabby told them. Isa’s eyes turned into slits, offended he would be offered the last vacant seat in their little club.

“How can he be trusted?” The ‘S’ hissed off Isa’s tongue. “He hangs with a *godchild*.”

“Trust me. The Dark One gave me orders that he was to be initiated.” Gabby reasoned with the boney Half-demon. Isa huffed, the air moving past the gills on her neck.

The three took their seats, Bow handing Gabby a dark carbon book. A golden pentagram was embedded in the front. The whole thing reeked of blood as it passed by Peter’s face. The Dark magic inside called to him, brushing over his skin and telling him he needed to peer upon its pages. Promising him knowledge and power.

“I got a call from one of my sisters. Apparently, those murders in the Capitol are connected to form a spell. A summoning spell.” Gabby opened the book to a marked page.

“What murders?” Peter felt his cheeks burn as all their eyes landed on him.

“I’m surprised you don’t know considering your *Holy Pet* is there right now with her squad.” Isa hissed.

So this was about the murders that Merlin mentioned earlier and the ones on the front of the weekly newspaper.

“No, she said nothing to me.” Peter was hit with disappointment.

“I’m surprised since you guys are so *tight.*” Gabby sneered at him, pulling her lips back to expose her fangs.

“Gabby!” Damon spit at her. A simple warning, but it was enough. The daughter of Lilith returned to the black tome.

“There have been a few murders in the City of Enders. A couple killed each time. I heard a rumour that Blair had seen the ritual in her Dreams. That’s why she was dispatched,” Damon filled in for him.

“How are the murders connected?” Snow questioned, her white eyes flickering back to Gabby. Bow had yet to take his eyes off of Peter. His fire magic flared in response to the potential threat knowing he would be no match for Bow’s super strength.

“According to Juno, Blair is the one who put it all together. Their deaths formed a pentagram, the Shrieking Succubus Club at the centre. The Black

Eyes are there."

"The Asmodeus worshippers? Are they active again?" Umbra was making the bugs in the cave circle around the wall behind them. Crow shifted in their seat uncomfortably at the mention of their father. The other Half-demons in the room stilled.

"So we will call upon the Dark Bishop, see if he has any news." Gabby said as Isa handed her a decorative blade.

Gabby ran an iron blade over her palm, blood pouring from the wound into a golden goblet. She handed it to Snow, who did the same. Around the circle it went counterclockwise.

Peter took the blade between his fingers and slid the sharp edge over his left, just as the others had done. They all watched him intently as he hissed. He squeezed his palm over the goblet, blood dripping into the pool below. They all released the breath they had been holding, like they were expecting the viscous liquid to explode or catch flame.

He handed the blade to Luca next who continued.

Around the goblet went, collecting their bodily essence before it was handed back to Gabby. She dipped two of her fingers into their blood, drew three lines forming a small triangle, overlapping on her forehead.

"Te patrem vocamus tenebris. Offerimus sanguinem nostrum." The candles flickered with a breeze that caressed their skin, "Scientiam tuam et benedictionem petimus. O tenebris. Exaudi orationem nostram." The flame of the black candles exploded upwards, climbing towards the ceiling of the cave. The smell of sulphur singed their nostrils.

The pentagram began to glow a deadly crimson along with the mixture of their blood. A large shadow-like cloud pooled from the goblet, climbing higher and higher into the air. A figure materialised from the smoke.

A Dark Bishop. Peter sat a little straighter.

Peter had done little research on the Dark Bishops, an order of unholy priests that dwelled in the underworld. They possessed the power to commune with the forces of darkness and can call upon Demonic entities to do their bidding. Their rituals were evil and arcane, involving sacrifices and offerings of blood. Just as they had done to summon him here. The Dark Bishops revelled in spreading chaos and corruption, according to what Hell demanded of them.

The chills of Hell pooled off of the Demon and siphoned the heat from the small underground cavern.

The Bishop was cloaked in shadow and smoke. Adorned upon his neck was a symbol that Peter did not know. An infinity symbol with a double armed cross extending from the middle. Above it sat a pentagram, hung from the second golden chain. Amongst the smoke stood two large red lights, a malevolent gaze to their piercing crimson eyes as they scanned the students before him.

“Hello, children of the dark.” The Bishop's voice was a chilling whisper, raspy and cold.

“Dark One, we have heard some rumours,” Gabby told him. The blood from her forehead dripped down her nose, onto her cheeks.

“Ask your question, daughter of Lilith,” the Demon hissed.

“Do you have any information on the summoning happening at the Shrieking Succubus?” The smoke watched her carefully.

“I have been told about the ritual, yes. The worshippers of the false king will always scheme and ploy against our work. Why worry yourselves with the plans of the Dark Lords? You should be focused on your studies and practicing the spells offered to you in Lucifer’s Grimoire, rather than poking your noses where they do not belong. Hell requires you to succeed.”

A shiver ran over Peter. Peter’s eyes fell to the book that was laid open on Gabby’s lap. *Was that what she was doing in the woods that day? With the rabbit?*

“Yes, Dark One. But we believe that the Nephilim are going to interfere. We wish only to serve you and the Lords, but we cannot if we do not know what is coming,” Damon told the shadow.

“The ritual is to summon and bring forth a Prince from the depths of the Seventh Realm. We are unsure what the motive is, but have faith in the Dark.”

A Prince of Hell was a nightmare to behold. An immortal being gifted with the corrupt powers of Hell. They possessed superhuman strength, access to dark magic that could let them control minds and move objects at their will. Peter had read about a few of them, but could not recall the Princes from the Seventh Realm.

A High Tier Demon being let loose topside was something even Peter didn’t think was a good idea. Half-demon or not, these Demons were not to be fucked with. Whatever Asmodeus and his fanatics had planned was not something that Peter wanted to get involved in.

The Dark Bishop’s beady red eyes landed on him. They widened.

“Peter Bronze.” His name wormed from the Dark One.

“You know me?”

“Of course, child. Your birth was celebrated in Hell for over a week. My, you have grown into a young man. Your father will be pleased with your health.” Peter’s body went as still as the very stones in the room at the mention of his father. A recognition of his connection and place in Hell.

“You know my father?” The other Half-demons in the room watched the exchange. The Dark Bishop leaned forward, the smoke billowing to manifest an outstretched arm, as if the Bishop wanted to touch Peter’s face. The red eyes gazed with such hope and longing. None of them could truly understand the fascination with Peter.

“Of course I do. We Bishops are the ones who spread the malevolent words of Hell. You are very important to us.” The Dark One’s raspy, Demonic voice hissed.

“What role do I have to play in this? I don’t want to be involved,” Peter confessed. He had barely been immersed into this world, now he had some dark destiny to fulfill?

What a load of bull.

“Some of us have no choice.” The Bishop paused, the ‘S’s slithering over Peter’s skin. “The destiny, the prophecy that is laid before us. Your path will come soon, Heylel. He will reveal it all in time.”

How fucking vague. Peter felt the sudden urge to rip his own hair out.

“What about the Prince of Hell?” Gabby changed the subject. The black smoke swirled to face her.

“Again, that is not of your concern, Daughter of Lilith.” The clouds flickered like an annoyed cat's tail.

“Princess Blair and the other Archangel descendants are there. If there is anyone that can stop it, it's them–” Gabby looked at the Dark Bishop with concern.

The Demon’s lips pressed together in disinterest. “The *Godspawns* are of no concern. This is not our work, but the desperate attempts of Asmodeus to stop the coming of the end. We will be relieved when the Nephilim serve their purpose.”

Peter’s stomach dropped. Blair was walking into a situation the Demons were anticipating. *She was in danger. They all were.*

The coming of the end. Is he talking about the apocalypse?

“Yes, Dark One. I apologize for questioning your judgement.” Gabby bowed her head in submission, her protests falling silent.

“As you should, Gabrielle. Have faith in the Dark, young ones. Everything is going according to his plan.” The smoke vanished along with the candlelight.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The Daughter of Lilith

Peter Bronze fled from the chamber at a speed that would be undetectable by human eyes. Gabby was trailing after him in the basement corridor beneath the front hall. She was calling his name over and over like a curse, trying to make him halt his fleeing.

His mind was racing, spiralling, igniting. Fire purred in pleasure, begging to be set free. He reached the base of the stairs and climbed them to the main floor, taking two at a time. Peter burst through the door, the top bracket snapping loose.

It was after curfew, the halls dark and illuminated by the soft glow of a few light fixtures. The shadows were writhing towards him, calling to him to claim them. He ignored their whispers bolting for the dorms where he could have a few minutes shielded from the eyes of others.

Who is my father? What monster spawned me?

"PETER!" Gabby's scream was a piercing cry. The banshee's sonic sound had Peter falling to his knees and covering his ears. His sweats tore on the stone floor.

When he pulled his shaky hands away from his ears there was blood. Peter chuckled, finally pushed over the edge he had been teetering on.

He rose to his feet and turned towards Gabby. Her face faltered seeing a side of Peter no one had seen. He was going to detonate and he would take her with him.

"There you are," she purred. She approached him, not taking his stature as the warning it was.

“I want the truth. About me. About that book. About Blair’s damn vision.” Peter was sick of playing these games.

“You and your *fucking obsession* with *her*,” Gabby spit at him with a floundering of her hands.

“Gabby. Tell me.” He spread out his magic, the compelling octave of his lower tones making her soften.

“I don’t know about Blair’s vision. You’ll have to ask her. As for you–” She took a step closer. “I was chosen to help you ascend. My mother helped me get my hands on the Dark Bible, which I have been using to increase our power.” She had left the grimoire behind with Bow. The descendant of Oriens had been storing the unholy relic in his dorm room.

“And my father?” His fiery blue gaze was piercing her black orbs with intensity. He subconsciously took another step towards her, towering over her.

“I was not told. Mother said it would put both of us in danger. We will know when the time is right.” Her faith in the Dark forces had Peter grabbing at his hair and tugging. How could she place her trust in something that didn’t have their best intentions at heart?

Peter started laughing, his control slipping with every silent tick of time.

Gabby reached up and wiped the blood from under his ears. “I’m sorry I don’t have more answers for you. What I do have, is the ability to enhance your magic and prepare you for what is to come.” Temptation, right before him. Her sultry eyes roamed over his vibrating torso that heaved with rapid breath.

“You mean the end of the world?” Peter tilted his head to the side, watched her avoid his gaze.

Was that my destiny? To destroy everything I touch?

“Don’t you want to see it burnt to the ground? For everything they have done and will do to our people?” Gabby’s traitorous whisper was deafening. His magic purred in agreement, it sizzled in the Well inside of his chest.

“The Covenant needs to be punished for their crimes and their injustice towards Half-demons. We will never be equal, Peter.” Gabby preached the truth and there was no sense in him denying it.

She laid a lavender hand covered in gold rings on his chest over his heart. “You are meant for greater things.” Gabby truly believed in the path that was set before him.

Peter was not sure whether or not to buy into her propaganda, his untrusting nature halting him from full devotion of the Dark. He couldn't stop his body from responding to her seductions. He hardened, his body ready to be used and his mind in desperate need of a distraction.

He didn't stop her from standing on her tippy toes in the moonlight of the empty corridor. Gabby brushed her eggplant lips over his.

Fuck it.

He caved into his desire, his mouth catalytic, crashing and claiming. He roughly pushed her against the stone. Gabby moaned as he picked her up and let her legs wrap around his hips. His erection pressed against her centre between her legs. Gabby ground herself forward with delicious friction that had him aching.

He licked the inside of her throat all the way upwards to pinch her earlobe between his teeth.

"As much as I would love you to fuck me in this hallway, I think we should head back to our dorm," Gabby said breathlessly.

Peter groaned in agreement and they began stumbling and rushing to the second floor. The Hall door opened for the lovers, the heat in the fireplace burst from Peter's presence.

The room was filled with a heavy silence, broken only by their ragged breaths and the pounding of their hearts. After holding back for so long, Peter surrendered to the storm inside of him. Their eyes met, a fiery mix of anticipation and need, and in that instant, everything else dissolved.

He reached out, fingertips trembling slightly as they traced the line of Gabby's jaw, pulling her closer. Her skin was warm and silken beneath his touch, and she responded with a shiver that ran down her spine. Their bodies pressed together, aching to be closer, to feel every inch of each other.

He captured her lips in a fierce, desperate kiss—an explosion of passion that left no room for hesitation. Her hands found their way into his hair, pulling him closer as if she could drown in his touch. He responded instinctively, his hands sliding down her back, grasping her tightly as they moved in perfect, primal rhythm.

They kicked off their shoes, moving down the hallway that connected to the dorm rooms. Peter took her to his room knowing Crow would be vacant.

Gabby paused, taking off one of her stockings to put it on the outside doorknob. She kicked the door shut and rejoined him.

Clothes fell away like whispers, revealing bare skin that gleamed in the dim light. The sensation of cool air against heated flesh only heightened Peter's need. He pressed her against the wall, their bodies locking in a wild dance of desire. Every touch was urgent—fingers exploring, mouths claiming, bodies seeking connection.

He entered into her slick heat, the head of his cock teasing her entrance. Gabby grabbed his ass and encouraged him deeper. He obliged, pleasure swelling in his spine.

Their breaths mingled in heavy gasps, and the world outside faded into irrelevance. They were consumed by raw, unfiltered passion—an intense, almost feral need to be one. Hands gripped and caressed with fierce tenderness, muscles tense with anticipation, as they surrendered to the overwhelming tide of desire.

His arms were getting tired, his balls on the verge of spilling. He dropped her down to her feet and let her guide him to his bed. She straddled him, guiding the head of his cock back into her core.

"God, you are so wet," Peter praised, feeling his eyes roll into the back of his head.

Time seemed to stand still as she ground her hips in waves. Peter could feel her tighten around him, pulling him deeper and deeper into ecstasy. Together, lost in the heat of their union, their cries and whispers blended into a symphony of longing.

It was raw and rough and ragged, as Gabby chased after her release. Peter grabbed onto her hips feeling himself getting closer to the edge.

"Fuck," Peter moaned. "I'm going to cum if you keep at this pace." The idea of him spilling into her made her pussy clench and her hips move quicker.

He could feel his orgasm creating tension through his entire body. Coiling tighter and tighter. His abs were clenching as she ran her hands over the hard muscle. She grabbed a hold of his chest for support.

Peter saw stars and she bounced him into oblivion.

Gabby cried out, head falling back and she convulsed. Her clenching wetness had him spilling deep inside of her. Peter grabbed her hips and held her letting her feel every pulse of his climax.

Gabby collapsed against him. He ran smooth strokes over her freckled back that made her purr.

“*Are you guys done? I want to go to bed.*” Crow’s voice echoed through their minds. They both burst into a fit of giggles knowing they had been the opposite of quiet.

Gabby gave one more kiss before grabbing her clothes and heading to her own dorm. Peter took the sheet and threw it over his softening erection.

Crow watched Gabby disappear into her own room before shutting the door. Crow shook their head, but was grinning ear to ear.

“Don’t say anything,” Peter warned, shame already nestling inside of him.

Crow just held up their hands in innocence and climbed into their own bed on the other side of the dorm.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

A Prince of Hell

Blair Dawn and Malakai Green made their way through the dancing crowd towards the crimson curtains following the member of the Black Eyes. Sweat and incense was heavy in Blair's heaving lungs. Her heart thrummed in her chest cavity pumping adrenaline through her veins. Her magic spiked under her skin at the threat that laid in the VIP area beyond.

They would have to get past the two guards at the front, the masculine one clinched the golden rope loose and opened it for the coffee skinned Half-demon in tight leather. He was followed by other members, a male with a tragic blonde mohawk and the second a small woman with green hair.

"Keep watch. I need to concentrate," she whispered to Mal.

Blair's back pressed into the wall next to the curtains. Neon light spread over her dark hair as the cool stone seeped through her palms. The bouncer eyed them, but went about his business when Blair fanned herself a few times. He bought that she simply longed for a rest after all her dancing. She closed her eyes and let her senses expand. Her sight offered her a few moments into the future laid before them.

Let's get a glimpse behind the curtain.

Blair focused her breathing using the repetitive notes of pop music to lull into a trance. The music faded into the background and she left the present.

The Nephilim saw a flash of red, Demonic eyes. Heard the click of a brief case popping open. Nausea had her brow clenching as she saw inside; ice packs and red-brown organ tissue of livers.

Blair snapped back into her body and hastily grabbed for the walkie.

She clicked the button. "*Fangs*. Fangs you there? Over."

Nothing but static responded. Something was wrong.

"*Fangs*?" she asked again. Her voice trembled with her fingertips. Mal's honey-brown eyes connected with hers.

"Try the emergency frequency," Mal suggested.

Blair turned the dial quickly and asked into the radio once more.

Radio silence.

A yelp escaped her lips as a slender white hand wrapped around her braid at the base of her skull. The other hand was centimetres from the flesh of her throat. A deadly and precise claw. The yellow-eyed Demon from her Dreaming stared down at her behind aviators.

"Aren't you a *pretty* little thing," he hissed.

The possessed human snapped his fingers and the mohawk guy stepped forward to restrain Mal.

"My master will be delighted he is being greeted with such an honoured guest as the esteemed Princess of the Covenant," he whispered into her ear. Blair flinched away, but the hand on her hair held her steady. "Now, you and I are going to walk arm in arm into the back area. If you draw attention to us, I will slit his throat and you will watch him bleed to death." The yellow-eyed monster pointed to Mal.

"Fine," Blair bit out. The Demon smiled and released her hair. He held his arm out like a gentleman. She resisted the urge to rub its ache, taking his arm. Mal and Blair were escorted to the entrance, the bouncer opening the golden rope for them.

The VIP area of the Demonic club was a luxurious and decadent space, both enticing and sultry. Red and black décor, lush velvet furnishings, and dim, flickering soft light casted sultry shadows across the rooms.

Blair focused on one booth, the dark chocolate Half-demon from earlier sitting at the table. She was sure now that it was his hand that she had seen in her Dreaming. She watched him twirl the ring around his pinkie as he watched their private dancers twirl upon metallic poles.

Demonic servants and Succubi attend to the needs of the guests. She watched Chastity serving exotic and intoxicating beverages. The male Half-demons looked at her with lust and hunger, desiring more than a beverage to quench their thirst.

A few more dancers entered the room, standing near the booth for a private dance. Paid for by their leader, Blair was sure. The air was heavy with the scent of incense and sulphur, just like the dance floor, but Blair picked up a hint of oregano and mint.

The tall, slender possessed guided her to the same room as the man from her vision. He and the green haired Half-demon sat straight.

The possessed's white hair was maintained with care, a fresh purple suit covering his slender figure. It spoke of his wealth and power, obtained by dark and vicious means if he was the Demon behind these crimes.

"Gentlemen, I enjoy a good show as much as the next, but we are here for a reason. Let's not keep him waiting. Ladies, please excuse us." The Succubi took the hint and quickly vacated the space.

The white hair male, clicked open the case. Blair almost vomited, bile rising in her already burning throat.

Inside were the missing organs from the victims.

After Blair and Mal were bound at the wrists, the Demon sat them on the booth next to people of the Black Eyes. Blair gagged as the smell of pruning flesh and formaldehyde hit her senses. He pointed to the case, and the green-haired female clicked it shut and took it from their booth with the accompaniment of the male from her Dream.

"We have found more of them outside," Mohawk said as Jackson and the others were thrown onto the floor, hands and feet bound together. A lump formed in her throat, praying that the Blessed had been called to aid them.

Jules was unconscious. Arlie was bruised at the temple, a splot of blood pouring from the wound. Her braid was soaked with her own blood and Arlie's gaze was filled with rage, a simmering storm.

Willow suffered similar wounds, her lip split at the side with a bruise manifesting slowly over her chin.

"So many delicious Nephilim. The Prince will be pleased by our offering." Mohawk sneered in approval.

The yellow-eyed Demon pinched Blair's chin between his long fingernails. Jackson twisted in his restraints, trying to rise. A leathered male with pointed ears and thick nose shoved him back. The Demon's vice grip remained on Blair's face.

Cadmium eyes roamed over her bruising features. "Such a pretty thing." A long fingernail stroked down her face, cutting her skin lightly open. He

shuddered a breath, after inhaling her scent. The white haired Demon licked his pointed finger clean. A moan passed his lips. “I forgot how sweet Nephilim blood tastes on the tongue. The closest I will ever get to tasting Heaven from which I was cast out.”

The yellow-eyed Demon was one of the Fallen. An Angel who fell and became a creature of the Dark. Blair flinched from his touch as he went to stroke her face again with the backside of his hand.

“Keep your hands off of her!” Jackson spit. He fought against the stone-white male, who pressed him into the floor. Arlie’s eyes daggered towards the hand she wished to cut from the possessed, but she remained still as steel. The lights flickered above them.

“My Lord.” The male from her vision reentered the booth bowing before scanning the scattered and bound Half-angels. “The preparations are ready. The moon will be high enough soon.” He gestured to the back of the club.

“My time with you will have to wait. I cannot wait to devour you. It has been a long time since I bed one of the Archangel’s precious children.”

Blair watched his tongue swipe across his pale lips.

“Keep an eye on them. Kill them if you need to,” the lanky Demon ordered. The leader of the group grabbed Blair’s arm and sat her down on the plush cushions of the booth. He pulled a blade from the back of his leather pants.

Blair felt a single tear pour down her cheek. The male wiped it away with the tip of his blade. “It is an honour to be chosen by one of the Fallen. You should be grateful.”

Blair shuddered away from his breath. “Go to *Hell.*” She spit on his face, making him blink in surprise.

He wiped away her saliva. “We all wish to enter the great Realms. But my time here is not complete,” he said. The dim light flickered over his complexion, reflecting in his void-like eyes.

The Half-demon jumped from the booth to stand with his other companions. A small, built female with beady red eyes stood blocking their exit from the area. Two more males were positioned on either side of the group.

We have no weapons. No way out. No way to call for help.

The club had been sealed shut, warding off any creature from entering with the symbols that had been posted along the doors and walls. The police

or the Blessed Warriors would be unable to enter unless someone let them in.

She could try praying, but was positive the space would be warded against that as well. Blair huffed, leaning back against the booth. She closed her eyes feeling depleted.

Blair opened her eyes and addressed the male who had pinned Jackson to the floor earlier with a brutal punch. “What’s your name?” she asked.

He raised a brow, but Willow’s magic flooded the room around them, compelling the truth to come forward.

“Gregory.” Sweat had beaded on his forehead from him trying to fight Willow’s influence.

“What is your group trying to achieve?” tumbled out of the princess.

The female was the one to crack. “We are summoning a Prince of Hell to hunt and kill the only surviving child of Lucifer Morningstar.” The Half-demon’s red eyes blinked rapidly. Wrath was on the faces of her fellow worshippers of Asmodeus.

“Shut up!” Gregory spit at her. She had spilled a precious secret. That a child of the Devil lived.

“Why? Why do you want to kill them?” Blair pushed further.

The female was fighting, her face turning red from strain. She turned and left their booth to stop the truth from pouring out of her.

Gregory grabbed Blair’s chin and hoisted her to her feet. “Stop with the questions, bitch.”

“After you tell me why,” she challenged him, her unwavering gaze drilling into him. Willow closed her eyes and concentrated on their enclosed space.

Gregory trembled. “To stop him from beginning the apocalypse."

“I thought Hellion’s would want the apocalypse.” Jackson sneered.

Gregory laughed. “We don’t want the world to end. We want our father on the throne. Lucifer’s support is threading apart because he promised that he would free sinners from Hell. Without his offspring, the false king will be unable to achieve this–and it will expose his inability to rule.”

The Nephilim were stunned into silence. Asmodeus’ worshippers wanted to foil Lucifer’s plan to bring the apocalypse. It was convoluted and backwards, against the assumptions the group had already made.

The ground shook beneath them.

“They started.” The desperation in her voice was clear. *We are running out of time.*

The crimson curtained billowed back, one of the males from the room grabbed her. Jules had slowly come back into consciousness, thrashing against his restraints. Willow placed a palm on his arm to calm him.

“The Fallen One has requested her presence at the ritual.” Gregory dismissed him with a hand. A hard held grip pulled her away from the group.

Jackson and Jules screamed after her.

The hallway was still dim. The beefy Half-demon led her to the stairwell.

Blair began to pray as the ground shook again with violence.

There was a chill that crept over Blair’s flesh with each step. Hands bound behind her back, she glanced down to see her guard had multiple blades strapped along his thigh.

Very carefully, Blair removed the knife from the side of the Half-demon’s thigh as they descended down the stairs. It was too narrow for them to walk side by side, Blair trailing behind him. She pushed the blade up her sleeve. She hoped he wouldn’t notice the absence of its weight.

The Demon stood in the centre of the dimly lit chamber, surrounded by the flickering candles that Blair had seen in her Dreaming. The light had the shadows danced along the upside down pentagram.

“Here is the female you requested.” He shoved Blair forward. She stumbled slightly, sending a glare towards the thick male.

“Thank you, Grotor.” The Half-demon Grotor, bowed before returning to his post.

St. Michael provide protection.

The white-haired Demon held a dusty old parchment in one hand and a feathered quill in the other, as he recited ancient words of power under his breath. As the incantation grew in intensity, the bloody pentagram glowed to life on the floor before them. Its lines burned with arcane energy. The possessed stepped back, his face protruding with excitement and anticipation, as he waited for the arrival of his master.

A cold, sulphurous wind began to blow, stirring the candles around them and causing the Demon's purple suit to billow at the bottom. Then, from out of the darkness beyond the circle, a pair of glowing red eyes appeared, scanning the chamber for its summoner.

"You dare summon me, lower being?" a deep, rasping voice hissed from the shadows.

Blair watched several Lesser Demons manifest through the smoke beside the Prince. She started sawing at her bound wrists now that Grotor and the others were entranced by the summoning.

The Demon knelt before the circle, his yellow eyes fixed on the Prince of Hell before him. "My Lord, it is I, Xalrok. Your loyal and trusted servant. I have offered you my allegiance, and we have completed the ritual for you to walk upon the Earth as planned. We have been gathering you the flesh of the unborn for you to feast upon to build your strength," he said, his voice trembling with reverence and fear. "I offered my soul to you, in exchange for power and knowledge beyond my wildest dreams. This is how I repay you. You may now complete your mission to find the child of the false king."

The Prince of Hell stepped forward. His massive, horned form towering above the slender white-haired Demon as he studied him with a cold, calculating gaze.

“You may take this body. It is a strong and impure vessel.”

Xalrok bowed his head.

Then, with a flick of his clawed hand, the Prince spoke a word of acceptance and the pentagram flared with blinding light. The Prince pressed his glowing palm to the vessel’s forehead.

A surge of power exploded through the room as the Prince and Xalrok became nothing but smoke as they exchanged places.

Xalrok’s smoke entered one of the Half-demons from the Black Eyes across the room. The one from her Dream. His yellow eyes replaced the once blackened gaze.

She watched the Demon twist in the leather clothes. Disgust over his face at the texture.

The Prince’s reddened essence entered into the host through its mouth. The vessel bowed his head, limp.

The Demon gasped, jet black veins expanding over his face. Red eyes replaced the yellow that had dwelled before. A dark symbol burned into the crown of his forehead.

His eyes fell onto Blair, as if seeing her for the first time. The Prince sniffed the air like a hound.

“A Nephilim,” he groaned. “What a treat.”

The Lesser Demons turned on her, the Prince rising to his feet. Blair's blood hummed at the danger, her magic preparing itself. Her heart pounded. She prayed help would arrive soon before the Prince blipped her from existence.

"I am going to enjoy this. Your sacrifice will give me strength." It licked its lips at her.

Oh, God.

"Blair! Duck!" Jackson bellowed. Blair crouched, breaking free from her bonds.

"Fuck! How did they escape?" Xalrok roared from his new meat suit.

Jackson jumped over her, sword raised in the air. The outline of his wings glowing behind him, as he summoned his magic. Ice shot from Jackson's sword towards the Prince. Icicles penetrated the chest of the vessel with a hard thud.

"Cold does little to me, mutt." The Prince chuckled, the ice melting immediately.

"THAT'S A NEW SUIT!" Xalrok hissed.

Mal reached her side, sliding her duel blades into her hands.

"How did you get out?" she asked.

"Chastity and the Sirens. Knocked them out cold. She's on her way to open the doors. The Warriors of the Blessed and police will be here soon," Mal told her.

"I guess we are to hold him off then."

Arlie, Jules, and Willow joined her side.

Lightning shot down her arms, flicking over the silver blade as an extension of her.

Xalrok and Blair connected eyes.

She charged forward. She felt the glow of her wings manifest as she dug deeper into her magic. *Let's see what kind of damage lightning will do.*

Xalrok and Blair clashed, the chamber crackled with energy as the two beings locked with each other, their gazes filled with determination. Blair's lightning travelled over the Demon's arms, burning the flesh of the host he possessed. Xalrok roared in agony, but held firm, letting his vessel char and decay.

Blair pushed back and raised her dagger, its blade shining with ethereal light, while Xalrok conjured shadows around him, ready to strike. The dying candlelight blasted his silhouette onto the back wall. The shadow's

outline projecting decaying Angel wings splayed behind him. He was a Fallen Angel.

With a fierce battle cry they clashed again, their weapons meeting in a shower of sparks and energy.

Arlie cried as a Lesser Demon slashed into her arm, its venom seeping into her skin. Her sword fell to the floor with a clang. Willow raced to her side, quickly sending her blade through the skull of the attacker. The Lesser Demon slumped to the ground, its body dematerialising.

Willow quickly bandaged Arlie's arm, returning the blade to it. It would not be long before the venom spread and Arlie would be incapacitated.

Blair heard a large crash behind her as she continued to fight off the Fallen. The Prince sent Jackson's body into the stonewall. It cracked from the force. Pieces of discarded, damaged concrete deteriorated into dust. Blood poured from the back of Jackson's skull from the impact. It oozed down the wall, pooling at the base of his slumped form.

The Nephilim princess fought with what grace she had left, her movements still nimble but growing sluggish at the edges, each dodge costing her more than the last. The Fallen's claws sliced through the air, missing her by inches, yet every near-miss felt heavier, as if the world itself were pressing down on her shoulders. Her lightning flickered with each strike she cast, the once-steady current now sputtering like a candle drowning in its own wax.

Across from her, the yellow-eyed Demon only grew stronger. He fought with a ferocity sharpened by betrayal, every blow fueled by years of festering rage. His darkness surged and swelled, meeting her weakening magic with brutal ease. Where her light once carved through shadows, now it barely held them back.

Blair's breath hitched. Her arms trembled. The Well of power inside her —usually deep, steady, reliable—was draining too fast. She felt it; the terrifying tilt of the battle, the moment when instinct whispered the truth she didn't want to hear.

We're losing. And the Demons knew it.

The Fallen's grin widened as her next blast of magic sputtered out halfway between them, dissolving into useless sparks. Her knees buckled under the weight of her own exhaustion, and for the first time, the possessed advanced without hesitation, confident she wouldn't be able to stop him.

A white light exploded through the room.

Blair closed her eyes from the sudden assault of brightness. High pitched ringing impacting her ears.

The Warriors of the Blessed, adorned in their crystalline white armour, charged into the ritual room. Holy water grenades exploded. The Demons in the space hissed and screamed as their skin sizzled under the liquid.

Blair watched the Fallen burst through the vessel's mouth, leaving the Black Eyes member to slump to the ground. His eyes dead. The shadowed smoke of the Fallen escaped through the nearby vent.

“Don’t let him leave the host!” One of the Nephilim warriors called. Emris rushed to her side, pulling Blair to her feet.

“We need to get you out of here. They can handle it.”

Jackson’s unconscious body was being carried up the stairs before her by Mal. Dark crimson dripped from the back of his head right onto the stone steps. Fear rose in her throat for her friend. The wound looked fatal.

Emris held her shoulders as they rushed up the steps. The Demons hissed and screamed in pain behind them.

Entering into the dim hallway the ground shook with force sending the group stumbling for their footing. They were trying to send the Prince back to Hell. Not an easy feat, something that the young Nephilim would not have been incapable of doing themselves. Blair caught the wall. A sharp intake filled her lungs at the pain that shot down her arm. Emris steadied her on her feet as her vision darkened around the edges, obscuring her friends from view.

The club was abandoned, not a single creature in sight. The music still blared through the dance floor thrumming through Blair’s hollow chest cavity. They ran through the front doors of the club, stumbling into the dirty streets of the Demon District. The dark armoured vehicles of the Blessed surrounded the street. Several cops had set up a border, reporters trying to get past the barriers. Blue and red lights danced over the scene.

Jackson was rushed into the arms of a paramedic, the Nephilim channelling her healing magic the minute he hit the stretcher.

Headmistress Penns was speaking to an officer. Her arms wrapped around her torso in worry. Her eyes settled on her students. Relief washed over her face. Her heels frantically clicked against the pavement. Her hands cupped Blair’s face, brushing stray hairs that had escaped her braid.

“Thank the Heavens, you are alright. I would not have sent you on this mission knowing a Prince would be involved. You could have died. I

portalled here as soon as I got word."

Blair was stunned for words. Shock overtaking her senses. Arlie collapsed to the ground. Mal barely had enough time to catch her. He ripped back her sleeve, the Demonic venom spreading purple veins over her skin. Arlie had lost all colour to her face. She couldn't keep her eyes open. Mal screamed for a medic, the sound muffled in Blair's ringing ears.

"Are you injured? Are you okay?" Penns asked her.

"Okay?" Blair's eyebrows drew together. *What kind of question is that?*

"Are you hurt? Let's get you to a medic." Penns and Emris pushed her towards an ambulance. She was forced into the back, a light running over her pupils that she barely recognized.

"She's in shock." The medic's voice was distant.

"Blair, can you tell him if you feel any pain?"

Careful, calculated hands ran over her. A wince manifesting over her arm.

"There's a large gash here, you will need stitches."

Blair just nodded. They stitched the wound closed, her body numb to any pain.

"Where is she? Where is Blair?" Taron rushed through the crowd of medics to the back of the ambulance. Relief was clear on his features as Blair looked up at him. He held out a phone. "It's your mother."

She held the device to her ear. "Mother." Her voice didn't sound like it belonged to her.

"Thanks the Heavens you are alright! How foolish of you to stumble into something so dangerous! You are the future leader of the Covenant, you can't just keep playing the hero–" Blair ended the call and handed it to Taron.

"I– I can't deal with her right now. If she calls back, tell her I passed out or something." Taron nodded, concern etched on his perfect Angelic features.

A dull throb pulsated in her arm, beating rhythmically with her palpitating heart. The headmistress was talking with Willow and Jules. The two of them looked alright aside from a few scrapes and bruises. Jules touched the headmistress' arm before bounding towards her.

"How badly are you hurt?" Jules looked at the bandage over her bicep and tilted her head to look closely at the bruise that blossomed over her chin. "When they took you down there… I couldn't take it. If it wasn't for

Chastity, I don't think we would have made it down there in time. He threatened to *rape you*… and we almost didn't get there in time." Jules was shaking violently. Trembling hands smoothing her hair. Their foreheads pressed together.

"I can't lose you too–" He choked. "I– I can't–"

She shushed him, grabbing onto his wrists for comfort.

"We are alright. We are going to be alright," Blair assured him.

"Jackson looks pretty bad." Jules' bottom lip quivered.

"Princess Dawn, do you mind making a statement?" Emris asked. Jules pulled back from her, wiping the tears from his face. He smeared oil-like blood over his cheeks along with it.

"Of course."

She told them everything she had seen as the Warriors of the Blessed emerged from the club. The Prince had been banished back to the Hellscape he came from, but Blair's gut told her this was just the beginning.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Fearful Sorrow

Peter Bronze found no rest. His mind raced along the events of the day. His destiny, as the Dark Bishop had foretold, sat at the forefront of Peter's mind. He never believed in chords of fate, but here they were choking around his neck like a noose. He was balancing on the stool of life, one shift and it could end everything. Peter's place in this world was so unsure, yet a path had already been laid for him that guided him straight to Hell. One that he had no control over.

Part of him relished in the idea, a darker part of him calling to the power it offered and promised. The other shunned away from it, desiring a path of good and glory.

He left Crow snoring softly in their dorm to wander the abandoned halls of the academy. The full-moon peaked through the clouds, shining through stained glass. Peter's footsteps echoed off the stone chasms, his hands in the pocket of his recently stitched sweats.

He stopped in front of a transparent alcove, looking down towards the front entrance of the school. This very window was the first time he had ever felt Blair's gaze. He was worried about her. An uneasy beast that took homage in his chest, crushing his heart with nervous pressure. The Dark Bishop had little care for the influence of the young Nephilim. A hubris that would result in their downfall; underestimating the power of the next generation.

Three large black armoured cars pulled through the gate and sped down the gravel entrance. Dust billowed upwards from the tires. Peter's heart beat rapidly inside of his chest. Hoping, praying Blair was unharmed inside.

Royal guards stepped out of the front of the vehicles. Their white armour reflected bits of moonlight, their capes whooshing behind them as they rushed to the rear to open the back doors. Peter watched the headmistress, dressed in her usually business formal attire, open the oak doors with her air magic. Penns' heels clicked and snuck into the gravel of the driveway.

Jules and Arlie were the first to exit, Arlie holding onto Jules as she walked to ease the limp that inhibited her steps.

Mal and Blair stepped out. They both stood tall on their feet, but even from this distance Peter could see the invisible weight of exhaustion pressing down their shoulders. Relief washed through his veins smoldering the fire that had been boiling within him.

Blair rushed to the back of the third vehicle in distress. Jackson was pulled out on a stretcher. His body was limp and immobile as the guards carried him towards the large oak doors. A neckbrace had been strapped over his neck. A bandage wrapped around his skull, right over his eyes.

Something horrible had happened.

Peter found himself moving down the steps towards the front entrance to greet them at inhuman speeds. He knew he was probably the last person that they wanted to see, but he couldn't help but gravitate forward.

"Peter, what are you doing out of bed? It's past curfew." The headmistress' heels echoed off the marble floors. The dim lighting did little to cover the pale and worried look on her face. Or the slight annoyance at the student out of bed.

"I couldn't sleep, I'm sorry. I was on a walk, and saw you guys drive in," he told her truthfully.

Arlie and Jules walked through and Jules sneered towards the Half-demon.

"What are *you* doing here?" Jules stepped forward, leaving Arlie to balance herself abruptly. A blood covered finger pointed into his face. Peter smacked it away. Heat thrummed beneath the Half-demon's skin. Their magic was ready to stir together in a whirlwind of chaos.

"Take a look at us, Hellion." Jules gestured to the others who had passed the threshold. *Jackson's unconscious body…* "This is what your kind does. Loyal lap dogs to *evil*. We could have died."

"Jules!" the headmistress warned. The gold around his pupil faded into light blue. "Take Arlie to the dorms. Take a shower, all of you, then go to

bed. You included, Mr. Bronze."

Professor Osric had joined them still in his sleepwear, taking Jackson towards medical. He looked between Peter and Jules and shook his head, taking the stretcher to roll it down the darkened marble hallway.

Jules' eyes were filled with cold hatred. But he nodded and returned to Arlie's side to take her to the dorms. Mal and Willow followed behind the son of Zachariah.

"You shouldn't be here, Peter," Blair said as she stepped in front of him, blades clipped to her sides. Her beautiful face was covered in Demon blood. Speckled and splattered.

"I couldn't sleep. I was worried about you and… I felt panic and fear that was not my own," he whispered. The headmistress was talking to the royal guards nearby. He didn't want her to hear the desperation and need in his voice.

"Listen. We have had a really tough night. I can't play this game with you right now."

"It's not a game to me. I haven't been able to think straight knowing you were in danger. You're hurt." He touched the underside of her bicep below the bandage. His skin prickled at the contact.

She looked down at her arm as if remembering it was there.

"Yeah, got slashed by a Fallen. Barely felt the stitches." Her green eyes looked back towards him. As the stained glass sent colours over her face, she looked like a living mosaic, too beautiful to belong to the ordinary world.

"A Fallen?" he asked, not dropping his hand from her skin.

"A Fallen Angel. Called himself Xalrok. I think I read about him a while ago but he didn't go by that name then. He was one of the few who fell alongside Lucifer. Used to be one of his loyal followers, now it seems he serves Asmodeus. They had intentions to raise the Prince to hunt a rumour. A child of the Devil that somehow managed to survive." She had faced a Demon Prince and a Fallen in one night. Blair pulled back from him, the memories of the night coming back to her. Her back faced him.

He reached out, grabbing her uninjured arm and pulled her to him. His arms wrapped around her. She was still against him at first, before she melted into his warmth. They fit perfectly together, her head fitting under his chin.

“I’m glad you guys are alright.” Peter caught the headmistress looking at the two of them. Peter pulled back quickly, her scent lingering. A new combination of her natural perfume, sweat, and blood.

“Let me walk you to your room,” he suggested, not wanting to be parted from her just yet. She nodded, a blush spread over her cheeks.

“Wait.”

They both turned towards the headmistress. The royal guards bowed towards Blair before leaving the way they came. Taron and Milo remained, both of them watching Peter like a hawk.

“Yes, Headmistress,” Blair said with calm impatience.

“I would like to see you for a report.” Penns hands were folded in front of her.

She wanted a debrief now?

“Can it wait until tomorrow? I am very tired, Headmistress. I mean no disrespect, but my team went through Hell tonight. We almost lost Jackson. I need some time to recover.” Blair bowed before the headmistress could answer.

Peter shrugged towards Penns and followed after the princess. Blair was silent the entire way to the Nephilim dorm. Peter respected her need for silence, even if his entire being was itching for more information.

The Angel Commons doors had wings carved into the wooden surface. Another piece of artwork that Peter found his fingers running over. The wood was smooth to the touch.

“This is my stop. I need to shower this Demon blood off of me.” Green eyes met his, her lips parted as if there was more she wanted to say, but she turned to the doors and pushed them open.

“Goodnight, Angel.”

“Goodnight, Peter.”

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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Blistered Skin

Flames licked the walls of the library.

"Peter!" A scream escaped Blair Dawn's lips. Her limbs refused to move. Frozen to the spot. Unable to reach him. She had to get to him. Stop him.

Peter's eyes were cold, but a distance of sadness echoed through the everlasting sea that they displayed within. The second figure emerged from the flames, still hazy from her view. Blair willed herself to move. She had to get to him. Save him from himself.

"Peter!" Blair found herself calling again.

"You have to stay away from me, Blair." She willed herself from the spot, finally taking a step towards him in the burning chasm. The bookshelves began to crumble around them. The paint on the walls was peeling, bubbling from the heat. As the flames grew higher, the smoke filled her nostrils and flooded her lungs with a pungent scorch.

"What happened to you training to come with me? To be by my side always?" Her throat was parched from the smoke. A particular hand of loss choking her alongside the fumes, crackling her voice.

"I love you, Blair. I always will, but I need to know who I am. He can help me." Peter was standing in front of a portal to another realm, it looked unlike the portals she had come to know.

"Who?" she asked.

"My father."

"Please don't go," she begged. If she could drop to her knees, she would have.

Peter turned towards the silhouetted figure. She reached out, catching a sleeve of his singed uniform.

"Blair!! Wake up! You're Dreaming!" Willow shook Blair's screaming figure, bringing the princess into her arms. Blair found herself awake, no longer engulfed in fire. Tears stained her cheeks that were flushed with heat.

"Shhh. You're okay, Blair." Willow rocked her back and forth, letting Blair’s tears soak into her strawberry covered PJs.

A loud knock sounded at their dorm, giving way to the headmistress and Father Morgan. Blair buried her head into Willow's chest, afraid of the concern that was no doubt making home on their faces.

Blair hissed at the throbbing of her skin. It burned for her attention.

There, on her once smooth arm, was a burn mark in the shape of a hand on her forearm. A delicate finger of the headmistress traced over the pattern. Other Nephilim students had gathered just outside the room, gawking at the sudden commotion. Headmistress Penns spoke softly to the priest.

I just want Peter. I wanted him to come to my bed and chase away the Demons from yesterday.

"Get her to my office, call Osric from bed. Tell him we have severe burns, possibly magical in nature," the headmistress ordered.

"Peter," Blair whispered to Willow. "I need–" Her voice was so coarse she found herself keeling over to cough.

"Is she going to be alright?" Jules was fighting his way through Blair's audience. His bruises still buttered over his face.

"Get back to bed, all of you!" Father Morgan demanded as Blair shrank herself smaller in Willow's grasp. The holy man pushed her curls back from Blair's face, finding wild, sad eyes.

"Blair," he kept his voice low, "was it the same Dream?" She gave a single shake of her head looking at the burn marks.

"It was different." She watched his brows shoot upward. "It was clearer. More dialogue." She forced herself to swallow to mellow the pain that was building in her throat. It felt as though she had really breathed in smoke.

"We need to get you to the headmistress' office. We have called help from the Emissary." Father Morgan knew this was beyond his expertise. Shipping her off to the order of seers would be the best course of action going forward, though she hadn’t passed her premonitions exam yet.

No. She wasn't ready to see the Emissary of Secrets.

Blair shook her head violently. A small plea.

"I'm sorry, Blair. Your Dreaming is getting too dangerous for you to not seek professional help. Your gifts are special, but I cannot help you anymore."

Blair knew that the priest had so many questions that she would refuse to answer. She still hadn't told him that Peter was the one from her Dreaming. This time when her new friend had spoken to her, his voice was more clear. His conviction relevant to their budding friendship, his feelings. How they would develop over time.

"I am not," she paused to ease the ache in her throat, "ready."

"I know, but you will be," he promised her.

Blair convinced the priest and the headmistress to allow her to wash and dress herself. She would not be facing the Emissary representative looking like a sweaty rat. She made sure to braid back her curls, keeping them from her face. She knew the bags under her eyes would be present and accounted for. Along with the bruises across her jaw from the Fallen’s fist.

The burn remained tucked away beneath the sleeves of her ebony gown, one that she had not worn for some time. She had always tried to keep her status as a princess from the forefront. She didn't want to be treated any differently, even though everyone knew who her father was.

As she had walked through the halls of the academy, only a few students found themselves awake to watch her. She heard them whisper to one another as she passed, looking like the princess she was.

"Blair!" She stopped, her dress billowing at the bottom.

The creature that had swarmed her intestines and chest dissipated at the sight of Peter. His footsteps echoed off the stone walls. The bags under his eyes might have put hers to shame if they made comparisons. He was still in his pajamas, his hair dishevelled from sleep.

"Willow came to get me. Are you okay?" he asked her, trying to tame his hair.

Blair shook her head, a frown forming.

No, I am not alright. My arm is on fire and my throat feels like I have swallowed glass. Not to mention the room is beginning to spin from my chest constricting.

Her hands shook when she didn't hold them together. This was the worst Dreaming she had ever had. She had never been physically inflicted, until now.

Peter's fingers pried Blair's stiff ones apart. His big calloused palms encased them. "What happened? What can I do?"

Blair cleared her throat. "I had a bad Dream last night. I was burned." Her voice was scratchy. Peter made a face at the way she sounded.

"The one about me?"

She gave a nod.

"Show me."

Blair found herself rolling the sleeve of her dress to show him the handprint that branded her skin.

"Did I– …did I do that to you? In the Dream?"

Another nod came.

Peter placed his hand over top of the mark, a perfect overlay. He went sickly pale. Blair's other hand found its way to his cheek and she offered him a smile.

"I'll be okay." She wanted to tell him that Osric would help her, but her throat closed with effort.

"Blair, what kind of monster am I? How could I ever hurt you?" He looked so disgusted with himself. She dropped her hand back to her side.

"I don't know." She felt tears swell. It was an honest answer. Her Dreaming still didn't reveal who was in the room with them. How the library caught fire. Who his father was. She needed to learn these things in order to give him an answer.

“You need to tell me what happens in this Dream,” Peter demanded.

"I can’t yet. I have to go. The Emissary is coming." A cough escaped following her rough, scratchy voice. Peter let her go, but he stood there until she was obscured from his view.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The Emissary's Ambassador

Professor Osric covered Blair Dawn's burn in a slimy aloe concoction that did little to ease the ache. She did however, express her gratitude with a grateful moan at the drink that coated the inside of her throat. It made it much easier to speak. To breathe.

The Emissary representative, Arsinoe Williams—a well-renowned Nephilim oracle—would be arriving by portal any moment now to assist the academy with the 'incident'. The Emissary stationed in Aoraki Mountain had their own naturally occurring portal. This was because of the mountain's connection to the celestial magic and energy that pulsed through the Earth. It was one of the few portals that had unfiltered access to Oaken Academy.

Blair had a feeling she would be leaving Oaken for her premonitions training sooner than she anticipated. And only God knew how long she would be gone and if she was actually worthy of an increase of power.

Her heart thrummed in her chest with fear. Fear of failure. Fear of the future. She was scared of what that may mean for her. Would she receive more burns?

The portal blared open, the sudden rush of energy calling attention of all within the headmistress' office. A maroon robed female stepped through, her blond hair chopped at the shoulders. Her brown eyes scanned the space until they landed on Blair. Blair bowed her head in respect, Arsinoe returning it.

The portal closed behind her, leaving the air empty, quiet.

"Princess Blair, it is an honour to make your acquaintance. I am sure this is not the circumstances you were hoping for, but from what I understand you require our assistance," Arsinoe greeted the headmistress as if they were old friends. A tight embrace formed between the two. Osric was next to embrace her. All Blair got was a firm nod.

Blair remained seated on the leather couch, waiting to be addressed by the Elder Seer once more. She rubbed her hands nervously, playing with the ring on her forefinger. Arsinoe made her way to the fireplace and took a seat on the armchair adjacent.

"I think it's best if we have some privacy to talk freely. Please vacate the room." Arsinoe's voice was filled with authority. Blair found her back straightening even more. Blair glanced at the headmistress, who nodded respectfully. Father Morgan was the most reluctant to go.

The oak doors to the office closed leaving the two women facing each other. Flame and the ticking of the grandfather clock filling the silence between them.

"In order for me to help you, I need to know what happens in this Dreaming and how it has changed. Father Morgan's notes are riddled with biblical symbolisms, but they are lacking in detail, which tells me you are withholding information to protect someone."

"I– I–"

Arsinoe held up her hand. "Blair, I am someone who experiences the Dreaming. I understand more than anyone why we withhold information, especially when things are unclear. Do not apologize for not delivering information to holy men who may misinterpret God’s messages."

Damn. Blair shut her mouth and let her shoulders relax slightly.

"If you have read his notes then you know that I see two figures inside of the library here. The space is on fire and crumbling." Blair paused to see if she had anything to say,

"They changed when I met the student who was in my Dreaming. Since that moment and as our relationship has developed, there has been more dialogue." Blair also noticed that the image had become sharper once the Prince had been sent back to Hell.

"Like what?" Arsinoe asked.

"They have told me to stay away from them, that they need to know who they are and that their father is the only person who can do that. I am suspicious that the second figure may be the Demon father."

"Is this student Peter Bronze?"

Blair found herself nodding. Arsinoe leaned back in the armchair with a puzzled expression.

Does she see the end coming as I do?

"Do you know what happened the night of his accident?" Blair wondered aloud.

"I am not sure if it is my place to tell you, but perhaps I can show you how he can let you see," Arsinoe suggested.

"Let me see?"

"We are capable of more than just Dreaming. While Dreaming is stronger than most forms of premonitions as our subconscious is open to the celestial forces of the Heavens, but we can recreate those conditions."

"Like sensory tanks or meditation?"

"Yes, but another way to see within someone's mind is to take an opening through connection and trust." Blair knew what she was hinting at. "Peter and you have a connection that may make it easier to channel yourself into his mind, but he has to be open and willing. It may take some practice, but let me show you the steps."

Arsinoe rolled up her sleeves and motioned for Blair to do the same. They connected palms on each other's forearms.

“I want you to reach through me, peer into my mind using our physical connection. I will not fight you.”

Blair’s eyes naturally closed feeling their magic spark to life and thrum beneath their skin. She felt herself leave her body and transport into a nonphysical space.

Blair and Arsinoe were inside of a library.

“This is my mind.” Arsinoe gestured to the mindscape.

Her mind was neatly organised. A library of her life. A collection of coloured volumes.

“Each book is a memory of mine. You can take them off the shelf and open it, to see what it contains. But each person is different. Peter’s mind may be more chaotic and disorganized, as trauma can leave the mind a labyrinth. He has to be the one to lead you the night of his accident. It is highly likely that he keeps those memories buried.” Arsinoe ran her hand over the spines.

The warning from Arsinoe of what Blair could in Peter’s mind was as clean and clear as the library before her.

“How do we leave this space?” Blair asked the Seer.

“Break the connection.”

Blair forced herself to feel her physical body and lifted her palms. The disconnection snapped her back into her body. The two women were no longer in Arsinoe’s mind, but the office of the headmistress.

“I have to warn you, Blair. Going too far can leave you stranded, trapped in the mind of another. You must be careful when you perform this magic.” Blair swallowed, wincing at her throat and reaching to take another sip of Osric’s special tea.

“The mind is a delicate thing. You must respect it to avoid hurting the other person.” Blair could imagine the type of damage that could be done, leaving the person she was exploring mentally damaged from roaming too far or forcing herself into spaces she did not belong.

“Peter’s accident was a catalyst for his path here. I do believe it will offer you further insight.”

“Can I ask you something off record?” Blair placed her cold beverage on the coffee table.

“Of course.” Arisnoe’s hands were folded neatly in her lap, waiting for Blair to seek answers.

“The rumours of Lucifer's child surviving–is there any truth to it?”

Arisone looked towards the flames in the golden fireplace. “The Emissary has been searching for the answer to that question. It is currently unclear if a child survived. If they did, it would have taken great magic to keep them hidden from the Covenant. Why do you ask?”

“The Black Eyes who summoned the Prince of Hell confessed that they were doing so for the Demon to hunt down Lucifer’s offspring.” This was the first person Blair had revealed that information to.

“Then it is crucial that you join us in New Zealand. With the help of the other Elders, I have faith we can find an answer to this.” Arsinoe was silent for a few seconds. “I will give you some time to gather your things and see Mr. Bronze, but we will need to return soon.”

Blair wandered aimlessly to Nephilim Hall. She was dreading packing her things, knowing she would be the topic of gossip.

I’m becoming something stronger than I ever imagined—and my power will only grow the longer I’m away, sharpening my sight, changing me. Part of me is terrified of what that means… of what I’ll have to leave behind. I don’t know if I’m strong enough to say goodbye—to my friends, to Peter—when my chest already feels like it’s made of iron, heavy and burning no matter how tightly I hold it.

Willow and the others of her squad were waiting for her in the common area of their dorm. Jules was already stoned out of his mind, sunglasses doing little to hide his zoned out expression.

She made a note to visit Jackson in medical before she left. He had yet to wake up from his injuries.

"You look exhausted," Arlie commented. Blair took in the bandage over her temple and the split lip as Arlie spoke. Blair just nodded her head a few times, fumbling with the sleeve of her gown.

"Are they sending you to Mount Aoraki?" Willow's eyes were filled with worry.

"Yes. I'm to pack some of my things. I'm not sure how long I’ll be gone."

Arlie stood from the couch, limping over to pull Blair into her embrace. "I'm sorry Blair. I wish you luck on your journey." Her eyes searched Blair’s.

"I’ll miss you all, but I'm hoping to be back in a couple of weeks. This is just to–hone my skills. I do not believe the Emissary deems me ready for my 'graduation'." Blair’s hand ran absentmindedly over her burn.

"Is it because you were burned by Peter in your vision? I don't know why you bother caring about the Hellion. He should be put down."

Blair’s eyes snapped to her ex, heat spreading over her skin. How he knew that Peter had burned her skin was beyond her. Unless Willow was incapable of shutting her mouth. The lack of eye contact from her roommate suggested to Blair that her lips had been less than sealed.

"He's not some animal, Jules. He's a person," Blair said firmly.

"He is a Demon, they are all animals. They all go off the deep end eventually. You saw what Demons are capable of last night. Summoning Princes for mere fun."

Jules was getting on her last nerve. His thinking was so narrow, so black and white.

Blair felt her power surge beneath her fingertips. Lightning crackled between the digits. She was going to smite him for his intolerance for those who were Other.

Mal stepped between them placing his hands on either side of her arms. "Easy, Blair. We don't need any lightning strikes in here."

Blair slightly shoved Mal out of her way to look down at Jules. He looked at her with boredom and his unwavering opinion.

"Let me remind you, Jules, that your prehistoric ideals will leave you behind while the rest of us proceed into the future. We are at a brink of war between the Angels and Demons because Nephilim like you refuse to see a better path. I would refrain from using slurs in my presence again, or I will make you regret it." Blair's eyes swirled with electric defiance.

"Intimidation is not your strong suit, Blair." Jules stood from the couch, inches from Blair's face. His saliva projecting on her face as he spoke.

"Jules," Mal warned.

Jules just scoffed at Mal. "Just remember that Jackson was on his deathbed because of *them*. But whatever, have fun with your mutant of a pet." He spit at Blair's feet before leaving the dorm in a huff.

The other Nephilim students were staring at the commotion. Their eyes burned her skin as deeply as her blistered skin.

Great. Just Great.

"Blair, you know he doesn't really mean it. He's just jealous of Peter and worried about his best friend. He feels insecure." Blair didn't want to hear Willow's defences.

"His behaviour is unacceptable," Blair said plainly.

"You have to remember that we were raised to hate Demons, B," Mal added before admitting, "I am having a hard time coming to terms with it too."

"Do you really think we are going to war?" Willow asked from her seat.

"Yes. Yes, I do."

Alongside the murders that were used to summon a Prince, I have a feeling things are going to become more chaotic as word gets out.

"We will be by your side every step of the way, B. We have been training our whole lives for this."

Blair recognized the honour and courage in Mal's conviction. She would be privileged to have a warrior like him by her side.

"I know, Mal. I should get packing. I don't want to be late."

Blair stopped in the medical wing before making her way to Demon Hall. The front nurse, a Dhampir student named Maxine, smiled at Blair as she entered and pointed to the tenth cubical. Blair nodded her head with gratitude and made her way to Jackson's recovery area.

The hospital wing was a single, spacious floor with a long, wide layout. Along one side of the room, a continuous row of simple, metal-framed cots that extended from one end to the other. Each cot was equipped with a thin mattress, a plain sheet, and a small pillow, arranged neatly and evenly spaced. Each cubicle was framed with hospital curtains that provided privacy.

The lighting was dimmed but functional, with fluorescent lights overhead that casted a bright, clinical glow. The walls were painted in a neutral tone, a light beige and were mostly bare, emphasizing its utilitarian purpose.

Only three beds were occupied. A Water Caster who had been complaining about abdominal pain. The Dhampir who was injured during Capture the Flag, whose flesh was still puckered from the fire magic damage. And Jackson, who was in a coma.

Jules was next to Jackson, holding his limp hand in his.

Jackson's breathing was even beneath the oxygen mask. A good sign that the impact from the Prince hadn't damaged his lungs.

Blair watched Jules wipe at his eyes as she approached.

"What are you doing here?" Jules asked defensively.

"I wanted to check on him before I left. He's going to be okay, Jules. He's tough." She had faith he would be back on his feet in no time.

Jules began sobbing. "Why do I keep losing everyone?" He leaned forward catching his tears in his hands.

Blair felt herself soften and placed her arm on Jules' shoulder to give one firm and caring squeeze. "You haven't lost us yet."

"Yes, I have. Amanda's gone. You broke up with me, and now Jackson is in a coma." His crying made his face blotchy. Snot trailed out the bottom of his nose that he wiped with the sleeve of his sweater.

"I am still your friend, Jules. That is never going to change, I promise."

He scoffed, his emotions not allowing him to see reason. "Just leave, Blair. Go to the Emissary and hurry back. We need you here. I need you

here.”

Blair kissed the top of Jules’ head and squeezed Jackson’s hand before leaving the medical wing to find the Half-demon she dreamed of.

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CHAPTER THIRTY

The Doors of Memory

Violent trembles shook Peter Bronze's core. The contents of his stomach were reduced to bile and the water he had tried to sip to alleviate his nausea. Shaky hands ran across his sweaty forehead, smearing the strains of wet hair that clung with a vice grip.

The handprint on Blair's skin repeated its appearance in his mind. The repetitive internal mantra calling him a monster was an insistent beast.

Monster.

I'm a monster. I will hurt Blair. She has seen it in her visions.

How could I ever hurt the one person who made it possible for me to feel again?

Peter had seen the darker parts of humanity, but that was why he was reaching and trying to hold onto the light.

The events with Thomas erupted from the seal he tightly placed over his memories that kept them buried. Burning flesh strobed through his mind. That night was superimposed with Blair's burn.

"Peter, you in here?" Damon's voice came through the door. Peter let out a groan in response. "Blair's here. She's looking for you."

Blair?

His stomach clenched in response, his anxiety rising. Nausea flowed through him once more. White knuckled fingers held on to the ceramic porcelain for balance.

"Peter?" Blair's voice sounded with a light knock. "Can I come in? Are you okay?"

"Go. Away," he grinded out, more like a moaning sea whale than a person.

"Peter, let me help you."

He ignored her. Maybe she would go away.

A few hushed and frantic whispers followed, before the door handle was singed off with a snap. The smell of burning metal wafted towards him as he refused to look towards Blair. He knew his appearance would be in shambles. Pale and clammy didn't exactly entice attraction.

He heard her footsteps shuffle behind him, his head still buried in the bowl waiting for the next round of dry heaving that was on its way.

She hugged him. Crouching low to the ground she wrapped her whole body around his hobbled form. She didn't stiffen at the wetness through his shirt or the smell of vomit. She just held him.

Peter slouched beneath her touch, feeling the knots unfold in his abdomen. The nausea slowly faded. His senses filled with strawberry rosé, no longer plagued with the putrid stench of Demon blood. It wrapped around him, bringing him a sense of comfort.

"You're going to be okay." Her voice was soft and low. His hand found a way to her arm, a thumb offering a small caress of appreciation.

"I think my stomach has settled."

Blair peeled herself off of him and let him lean up against the bathroom wall. Delicate hands removed the hair that clung to his face, concern cast over her features.

She shouldn't be worried about a Demon. She shouldn't be worried about me. I’m a monster.

Anger rose. Peter swatted her hand away from him.

"Why are you even here?" He made sure to sound bitter.

"I care about you, Peter."

"You shouldn't. Especially if I'm going to hurt you. I'm a Demon, Blair. We are evil. I'm sure your ex boy-toy would agree with me."

"You’re a Half-demon and I don't think you're evil. In fact, I've seen a lot of good. Your loyalty, your work ethic, and the way that you stand up for yourself and others."

"You have no idea what I've done." He knew that the rumours of his accident had circulated like the plague, a virus that mutated from person to person. Twisting its DNA into something unrecognisable from the real story.

"Then tell me," she demanded.

Tears stung his eyes. "I can't. You don't understand—I'm a monster."

"Peter–"

He cut her off, pushing up the sleeve of her dress aggressively. A hiss escaped her lips. He held the burn up for emphasis.

"No. You don't understand, I've *hurt* people."

"I know," she whispered. His fingers relaxed releasing the tension on her arm. Blair didn't drop it immediately.

His skin responded to the slight touch to his jaw. His lips parted in total trance.

"I am not sure if I can tell you–" He was worried his darkness would corrupt her, seep into her purity like a deadly disease and drag her down from grace.

"You can show me the memory of that night rather than tell me. I was visited by the Emissary today—I've never attempted it other than, like thirty minutes ago." Peter's brows knitted together forming a perfect knot of confusion.

The Emissary had been mentioned once during his Angel-focused session with Mrs. T. It was an organisation that surrounded the Celestial Sight. Those who were blessed or cursed, depending on how one saw it, were sent to special places where their powers could be elevated. Peter knew that eventually Blair would be sent to work with them considering her gifts.

"Why was the Emissary here?" He already knew the answer, the evidence branded into her forearm.

"They've come to offer me assistance with my Dreaming. The headmistress and my mother believe it is for the best that I have more experienced people to work with. I was too open, too invested in the vision I was experiencing, that is why I was burned."

"You're leaving." It was a statement that escaped his lips. There was no question about it. Blair was going to leave with the Emissary. "Even after what happened last night?" Her forest eyes turned glassy before she nodded.

"I need to go, but before I do, I need to see what happened the night your magic broke free, I think it may have some clues about why I dreamed about you before you arrived here."

"Show me how I can show you– Show you what happened that night at my high school."

Blair rolled up their sleeves and joined their forearms together, Peter’s hand filling the shape of her blister.

Peter found himself in a dirty house. He knew this house. It still smelled the same with its dark cornflower wallpaper peeling at almost every edge that his mother could never afford to fix. He remembered how angered she had been when his curiosity got the best of him and found the symbols hiding behind the peeling decorations. Symbols that he still didn't know the meaning of.

Peter hadn't been home in years and the sweltering feeling of loss filled his chest. He hoped Sandre Bronze was okay with both himself and Thomas out of her life. Part of him imagined she was healthy and happy, but he knew the likelihood of that was unlikely.

He reached forward, his fingers running along the lifted edge as if the pressure would somehow make it stick. The walls were jagged with cracks and watermarks that gave off the smell of mildew, but still felt like home.

"Where is this?" He turned to find Blair.

Why is she in this house? She can't be in this house.

Panic filled him, knowing the danger that could be lurking around any corner.

"What are you doing here?! It's not safe, we have to go." He shook her shoulders, still confused as to how or why she was in this space. His childhood home.

On cue a booming voice sounded behind one of the doors, "WHERE IS THAT UNGRATEFUL RAT YOU CALL A SON. PETER! COME HERE, YOU BASTARD."

"Peter, who is that?" Blair's eyes, constantly scanned for signs of discomfort or distress. Remaining alert, ready to intervene and offer comfort if needed.

"Thomas." Was all he could manage to say. His eyes scanned the area, looking for a safe place for him to retreat to. Blair's touch was gentle and assuring. "Who is Thomas?"

Before he could answer her the floor shook violently. Thomas began banging on the doorway, rattling the frame in dramatic pulses. Thomas yelled behind the door, a rage that transformed men into a violent animal. Peter heard his mother crying out for him to stop.

A slap ran through the hallway.

Peter stopped. He couldn't breathe. His vision began to blur around the edges.

"Peter. Look at me."

"Look. At. Me," Blair repeated and turned his face towards her with a gentle pair of hands. Their eyes met and his focus sharpened to take in her features. Standing on her toes she brought her lips to his with a tender brush.

The banging stopped. Thomas' angry voice was no longer a blaring siren. He slowly remembered how they had gotten here. Blair was inside of his mind and somehow it had manifested as his childhood home, with all of its imperfections.

The man he had heard had been a memory, not something that could actually hurt him anymore.

Blair's concern for his safety did not smother or suffocate him, but brought him to a headspace of strength. He knew that he could be vulnerable with her, that her love was a testament to her selflessness and unconditional loyalty. He knew that she would respect this space, pay attention to the delicate details that made him who he was today. Peter found shame in what she might discover the farther they go.

"Thomas was my mother’s… partner, I guess. It seems like the wrong term, but whatever."

"Did he hurt you and your mom?" Blair already knew the answer, but she wanted to hear it from him. He lifted his sleeves to show the burn marks from cigarettes and scars that decorated his arms.

Peter nodded. "He was a very angry man. My mother and I just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time when those things happened."

Blair pulled him into her embrace. Tears burned in his eyes from the sudden wave of affection. Her warm body pressing into his reminded him of the safety he so desperately craved when he was a child.

"Show me everything." Her voice was steady in the darkened hallway. "Only you know where the memory is. You need to be my guide. I cannot

do this without you, I will get lost."

He took her hand and led her down the hallway. It no longer reminisced of his late childhood home. The hall elongated, appearing to extend on forever. The wallpaper was the same, the watermarks and scratches consistent with his mom's home, but closed doors lined either side.

His fingers were firm around hers. Her touch and scent kept him grounded in their mission. Blair inspected the doors as they passed, their surfaces polished and untouched. New and undamaged.

Peter paused abruptly, curiosity getting the best of him. Turning to the left he looked at the door and reached out his free hand.

"Is this the door?"

Before he could answer, Blair and Peter stepped back into the academy. The library to be exact, the door manifesting through one of the bookshelves on the second floor. Blair blushed knowing exactly what this memory entailed.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Their First Encounter

Blair had not seen Peter for the rest of the day. Even at dinner, he was a no show. What she did, however, receive at supper was a nice side dish of eye daggers from Gabby. Not that it bothered her. Gabby was always a jealous brat. The entitled daughter of Lilith had always been a class A mean girl.

The library was quiet at this hour, a place of refuge for her ever-spinning mind. Magical light orbs floated around the space, illuminating the pages in front of her. Her breath came easier in the solitude of the stacks. At the present moment, the silence granted great focus on the Angelica Magica. Her current read was a text centralized on the Seer Alchys, the prophet who foretold the coming of Revelation.

She ran her fingers under her tired eyes, pushing her reading glasses to the top of her head. The text was beginning to blur, so it was probably time to give up the translating and head to bed. She was satisfied with her progress on the first few chapters. Anticipation coiled around her abdomen as she closed its leather bound cover. Going to sleep meant revisiting her vision.

Would Peter's presence create more clarity?

Blair decided she would pray before sleep, to ask the Heavens for answers. To show her why Peter was important.

She paused packing her things, feeling a particular set of eyes descend on her. Her skin tingled in Peter's presence, feeling the heat radiate from his body.

"Hello, Peter."

"You know my name."

She hated the butterflies that had entered her stomach when he spoke.

Why is he here?

"Of course I know your name, you are the famous new student here at the academy after all." Blair continued stacking her notebooks, to be placed into her messenger bag, while keeping her back to him to hide the blush that budded across her cheeks.

"Not many students are here at the library this late," he noted. Blair hadn't turned around to him, still looking over the balcony to see that many of the students had left for the night. Kirian was at the desk, starting to pack his things.

"Yeah, well, I am not most students and I am working on a personal research project that requires a lot of my time. Why are you here, Peter?" Blair asked, finally turning around to look at him once her bag was carefully rested on the surface of the table.

He was leaning against one of the carved bookshelves, hair messy atop his head from constant fiddling. She forced herself to look away, finding his gaze intense. Peter had only really seen her in the school's mandatory Nephilim uniform. She was suddenly grateful for the nice white turtleneck she had put on earlier. She found herself praying that the dimmed lighting would cover her heated cheeks.

"I had to come find you," he whispered. She sensed the slight desperation in his voice.

Why did he have to come find me? Blair found herself wound with curiosity.

"And why is that? Aren't you aware that Nephilim and Demons aren't normally friends." She crossed her arms over her chest and leaned against the edge of the table.

He kept his voice low, never breaking eye contact. "Everyone keeps saying that, but there is something about you that is driving me crazy. I can't seem to keep my mind off of you. I want– I need to know you."

I need to know you too. Yet she could not speak of it, not when the shelves had eyes.

"Have you felt this… tug?" he asked, gesturing between the two of them. She had, there was no denying that, and there clearly was something tethering them to one another.

"I know that you have limited experience within this world, Peter, but there are certain rules and expectations that you simply do not understand." Blair didn't have the mental energy to explain it to him.

"Then help me understand." He looked smaller, younger.

"Why don't you ask Gabby?" she spit out. She didn't intend to come off as bitchy, but for some reason his presence wedged itself under her skin and jumbled her usual composure.

He just smiled and tilted his head to the side. "I've really ruffled your feathers. Haven't I, Blair?" Her name rolled off his tongue making her pinch her thighs together. There was something about the way he changed his octave that produced an aura of enticement around him. It beckoned her closer, promised her passion and pleasure with a hint of danger. The perfect recipe of a bad boy.

"Let me make this clear. You will never get a taste of me, understand?" The Laws aside, she was a princess and would be expected to marry nobility.

His tongue darted out and licked his lips. Peter pushed on the wood of the bookshelf and stood straight before taking a single step towards her. Blair tensed, reaching behind her for the knife she kept in the outside pocket of her bag. When you go to school with supernatural beings, one must always be prepared. Always.

"You want me, Blair. I can see the effect I have on you. Don't be ashamed if you want to play with the dark side."

The dark side. Was this guy for real? Blair couldn't believe the cockiness that oozed off of him. He must be used to getting his way with women and she was not going to make it easy, because she was far from that.

"Get over yourself. You are not that big of a hot shot. If you want my friendship, then earn it." Blair made sure to hold the hilt of her blade firmly, ready to strike if he made any sudden movements.

"It's not your friendship that I want."

Blair pressed her thighs harder together to stop the throbbing that became more prominent from her core. The way he looked at her was igniting her skin with heat. She wanted him to touch her. Take her. An unfamiliar sensation, one that wove and stitched its way into her. Blair bit her lip before continuing their conversation. "Well, it's the only thing that I am offering. Take it or leave it."

She watched him process her words and then nodded once.

"Okay, then I look forward to making your acquaintance, Ms. Dawn. I'll see you in class tomorrow." Blair found herself blinking repetitively. "Goodnight, Angel."

"Goodnight, Peter."

He smiled. Fading into the shadows of the library shelves.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

The Accident

"You have no idea how badly I wanted to shove you up against one of these shelves and take you until we couldn't see straight." Peter Bronze let out a laugh when he saw how pink Blair's face had gotten. "I promise I won't do such a thing, until you ask."

She's so cute when she blushes.

Peter led them back into the hallway, closing the doorway to the library. He was beginning to understand how this place worked, how his memories were organised.

"We are going to have to go deeper to find what we are looking for." Peter told her.

Fingers intertwined, they continued down the hall. He couldn't stop his heart from fluttering as their digits merged into one. It felt so natural to hold her.

The farther Peter and Blair went the walls seemed to decay, their wood supporting patterns of water damage. The light overhead darkened, flickering with a quick beat every so often. The smell of mildew grew stronger before it was joined by a scent he would never forget.

Peter stopped in front of the door. This one was not damaged like the others. The surface was scorched, singed. The smell that wafted under the door frame was that of burnt flesh. Blair reached out, the flaking paint chipping away from the gentlest of touches.

Blair looked upwards to him, trying to read the expression that was moulded to his face. Peter forced himself to swallow the bile that rose in his esophagus.

"This is it." Peter motioned to the door. A sick feeling settled in the base of his abdomen. He didn't want Blair to know what was behind the door frame. Shame and fear itched under his skin.

Blair squeezed his hand. "I am with you all the way."

Peter found himself squeezing his eyes shut as trembling fingers reached out for the rusted and charred doorknob. There was no going back once he showed her this part of himself. Having the academy’s officials know about what happened was one thing, but to have this woman—the one that he was falling in love with—was something else entirely.

The door creaked open as Peter opened his eyes and saw the shiny gymnasium floor.

Their footsteps echoed off the walls as they entered the empty space. Peter knew he would find himself here momentarily, chased by the demons of his past. On cue the sound of glass shattering rang through the halls. Laughter trailing quickly behind.

Peter saw himself run through the doors, making them slam into the walls with extreme force. He never noticed how the hinges slightly broke.

Peter could see the panic that was all over his face as he ran to the eastern side, but he knew that he would find the doors chained shut.

Chained shut. Someone had chained them shut.

Peter's stomach dropped. *Was this planned?*

The doors slammed open and Thomas walked in carrying the baseball bat that would shatter his ribs.

"There you are, freak." Peter watched them surround him, cutting off any chance of his escape. He couldn't see their faces from where Blair and him stood, but he vividly remembered their evil grins.

"Stay away from my mother!" Peter shouted, making his voice echo. Blair tugged at his hand to move them closer to see the details distance would distort. His feet were frozen at first, but he moved once he saw the need in her gaze. She had to see this up close.

"You are gonna pay, freak." Thomas spat, the light from the upper floor displaying his newly developing bruises.

"I punched him after he hit my mother. He followed me to the school afterwards. I spent most of my nights here, sleeping in a janitor's closet," he told Blair.

It wasn't long before Peter was backed into a corner and Thomas swung the bat into his shoulder. The Half-demon could feel the ghost sensations of

that impact even now. He hunched his shoulder to try and clear away the feeling. Peter watched himself fall to the ground, the second swing found its way to his ribs. He looked so weak, so pathetic.

Peter watched his body contort, his veins glowing orange and red as if ignited with molten lava. Peter screamed out, releasing his power, something he had not been able to do since. Thomas and his friends screamed, their bodies enveloped in flame as Peter stood to his feet. The cold look on his face was testimony to what he didn't want Blair to see.

Peter had wanted them to die, wanted to watch them suffer. Red and orange swirled around his pupils, determined and deadly. Their bodies burned to ash, that smell of burning flesh wafted into the air. That fucking smell that he hated but loved so much.

Thomas screamed out, his body contorting in pain and anguish. Each of them shrivelled and burned into the ground. Peter found his eyebrows knitted together, shadowesque smoke channelling downward.

They weren't human.

Peter's hands were cold from where he had once held Blair. Their arms disconnecting as they came back into the academy, back into the bathroom that Peter had been throwing up in. Sweat covered her forehead from the strain of entering into his mind. She was pale and looked ill from the exertion, the concentration.

"Are you okay?" he asked her.

She nodded while trying to wipe her forehead. "I am sure it will get easier the more I practice. Arsinoe said it wasn't for the weak." She groaned, leaning back onto her hands.

Peter shifted forward brushing her hair from her eyes.

"Peter, what happened wasn't your fault. They drove you to use your powers. They were–"

"Demons, I know. I didn't notice it the first time because I was in a trance, but the way the doors were locked and the way they went through the floor… I think this was a set up from the start. A way to awaken my powers."

"Did you use– have any powers before this moment?"

Peter shook his head. "Besides my charm, no. They didn't really make an appearance until I was older and under threat. If they were Demons, does that mean that they were sent after me because they knew what I was?" Peter was still so confused. There was a mystery afoot, buried deep within his past. Something that only his mother could answer.

Blair's face looked blank as if she was processing all the information that had been revealed through his memories.

"You don't just have the ability to conjure fire, Peter, it's Hellfire. One of the few things that can banish Demons. It's a rare gift. A gift I didn't think Half-demons had access to."

"Gift? It's a curse. It always has been for me."

Blair flinched. "Peter, you were under attack and you conjured Hellfire in response to them beating you. Part of you knew what they were." She shuffled closer towards him and placed her hands in his, even as he tried to pull away.

"Don't. Peter, don't be afraid of who and what you are. Thank you for showing me this part of you."

Peter wanted to pull her closer to him. Blair had been the first person he had let in since… well, forever. He knew this bond between them was there for a reason and he wanted to stop denying it. His eyes dropped to her lips, feeling the pang of desire and grief.

"When do you leave?" he whispered.

"As soon as I get back to the headmistress' office. I am not sure how long I will be gone, but I'll be back as soon as I can. Just keep up with your studies, your Demon Exam is first and you should talk to Professor Hope about getting someone with a speciality in Hellfire." Blair offered him a sad, but reassuring smile.

"I guess this is goodbye," he said.

"I'll see you soon, Peter."

His hands became cold once more as she pulled her fingers from his.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Floating Water

Blair Dawn submerged herself under the calming surface of the heated salt pools that laid deep within the Aoraki mountain of New Zealand. The Emissary, with the guidance of Arsinoe after witnessing Blair's burns from her Dreaming, had travelled with her through the Emissary's personal portal. They promised to enhance her connection with the celestial gifts given to her by the Heavens. The crystalline structure and assortment of geodes was one of the few places on Earth that's God's magic and touch could be felt.

So far all it had offered was headaches and a bruised ego.

Over the last week there had been little success, but Blair had refused to give up. There was a newfound clarity to her sense of self as she pushed her magic to limits she didn't know existed. This place, while far from her home, made her more connected to the natural and supernatural world. Like buzzes of energy that she could reach out and touch.

The salt pools had become a space of relaxation and escape. Here in the quiet she could nurse her wounds, both physical and mental. Though in tranquil silence her mind constantly wandered back to Peter. There was a deep pang in her chest at any thought of him. She hated to admit that she didn't like being away from him.

Blair released the strain from her lungs as she broke above the water surface. Her hair was flat, weighed down by the water. She brushed her hands over her face, clearing the warm liquid from her eyes and nose. The water droplets echoed off the stone walls, reminding her of her isolated status.

Blair's neck rested against the edge of the salt pool. Her eyes studied the crystals that formed at the roof of the cave dwelling. They cast small coloured sparkles when the light orbs floated behind them. Those magical spheres brought her mind to the library, a space she missed so dearly. But like most thoughts, it also brought her mind to Peter and the night in the library that he cherished.

Part of her relished in the allure of the forbidden nature of her desire. She knew wanting him was wrong, against everything she had grown up believing. That was part of his appeal–the temptation. The apple in the garden. A groan escaped, echoing through the space. Her mind concocted several 'what if' scenarios. All disturbingly dirty. Her skin grew hot and concentrated between her legs.

"Intrusive thoughts?" Blair peeked open one eye to see Arsinoe standing at the edge of the pool, still wearing the regal robes she had worn the first time she met her. Maroon for the colour of her position as Elder.

"You could say that," Blair confessed. They were, truly, intrusive thoughts. They plagued her every waking moment. "Have you ever… desired something that you know is wrong?"

Arsinoe studied her for a moment and nodded. "At one time or another we are faced with many challenges, but sometimes things we desire take control of us. This is not always a bad thing."

"I've come to gather that you tend to say things very vaguely. It's very Seer-esque." Blair's comment brought a small grin to Arsinoe's face. The Elder pulled up the ends of her robes and removed her sandals to dip her legs into the hot water.

"There is no telling if your feelings are necessarily bad or wrong, especially since you have not acted on them despite your feelings." Blair found it hard to believe that Arsinoe had once been a naive student at Oaken Academy. She always had an air of sophistication, as many Seers did. A maturity that was forced by knowledge.

"Do you agree with the Covenant Laws?" Blair asked her mentor.

"I understand why the Covenant Laws were put in place, but with the changes in society lately, they may find it outdated." Blair was surprised by this answer, knowing that most Seers, especially Elders, stood firm with The Laws.

"Has there ever been offspring between Nephilim and Half-demons?" Blair was curious. A curiosity that she couldn't shake. The Covenant Laws

stipulated that coupling between Nephilim and Half-demons was outlawed to prevent offspring, as children from the two species could be dangerous. It was branded as impure. Dirty. If there was no evidence to state either way, then it could be challenged. Arsinoe looked at the princess with a perplexed expression.

"I am not sure, but I will dig in the archives to see if there is something that was eluded in history."

A better way to say it was probably covered up. The same thing had been done with Lucifer and his children. Who knows what the Nephilim had decided to do with the knowledge if it existed. Blair's gut told her that the history existed and Arsinoe confirmed her suspicions. There would have been at least one birth to have this law put in place.

"I will see what I can do. I'll see you later in the main chamber to work on your Dreaming." Blair didn't bother saying goodbye to Arsinoe as she slowly took off. Blair appreciated the return of silence. Nothing but the drops hitting the water. Blair let out a breath and sunk beneath the surface.

She opened herself to the elements. Celestial energy danced off her skin, pulling her deeper. A knowing calm washed over her as she opened her eyes. She was no longer in the hot springs, she was in a dark empty space. A room, a place that went on infinitely.

Blair had crossed over to the other plane.

She let the spirits guide her, moving towards the right as it gave her the strongest pull.

Blair's bare feet padded in the shallow, dark water for a few moments before it morphed into stone. She was hit with a cold, bone chilling wind. She trudged on, the blackness fading to give way to the interior of a grand building. Gothic architecture lined either side with huge stained glass windows.

The obsidian arches extended to an unbelievable height, straining Blair's neck. It was so detailed, intricately carved designs lined the stone.

Blair halted when she saw the figure standing near what appeared to be an altar. Her vision was too fuzzy to make it out clearly. Blair was unsure if she was inside a temple or a castle.

There he was, the person she was looking for. The second person from her vision.

The figure closed the book they were holding and turned to face her as if they were expecting her. From this distance Blair could not make out

their features.

"Blair Dawn, I knew you would come searching for me eventually. Considering how close you have become to my son."

Blair said nothing as she took a few more steps forward. From what she could tell this person was a Demon, and at the mention of Peter– *Was this his father?*

Blair didn't recognize this Demon. Their features were wrong, every time she tilted her head they seemed to morph and change. Whomever he was, he was blocking her gift to hide his identity. They were powerful. Blair could feel his power radiate towards her. There was some familiarity in it. Something that reminded her of the academy.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Hmmm, little pet. You know I cannot tell you." The Demon began to walk towards her, his hands placed gracefully behind his back. He walked with grace, stature.

"How is Peter? It's ironic that he was given such a biblical name, all things considered." The Demon gestured to himself and laughed. "Maybe his mother thought it would somehow tip him towards the moral and just. But truly, how is my son?"

Blair opened her mouth and shut it immediately, unsure of what information she could trust this Demon with.

"He's adjusting. He hasn't been part of this world long, but he's finding himself. Dealing with what he can do."

"Ah. The accident. I forgot about Thomas' unfortunate banishment. It was quite the shock to find him down here, but trust me, he is paying for what he did to my family." There was a ruthless coldness in his everchanging eyes that unsettled the Nephilim.

"Were they your orders?"

"To awaken Peter's gifts? No. I wanted them to come out naturally, but it is not uncommon for our kind to get emotional. Thomas has always been unstable and violent. He got greedy, wanting Peter’s mother as she had once been mine. He took advantage and filled her head with empty promises, that I had been the one to send him. I had no idea what he had done, that he had laid a hand on–" The Demon took a few more paces forward, causing Blair's heart to increase. She was fearful of him. Wary.

The Demon seemed to collect himself from the wrath that had encased his face when talking about Peter’s mother. He seemed truly bothered by

the abuse that Thomas had inflicted, even if the words had never escaped his lips.

"Are there other people with the gifts of Hellfire that can teach him to use it?" Blair asked to change the subject.

He shook his head at her. "His gift is rare. Not many people can contain the gift without it consuming them. Peter is not most people. There are only two creatures that I know of who are topside that have the ability, but they are not people to mess with."

Blair studied him for a moment hoping he would give her the names of the creatures blessed with Hellfire. No answers escaped his lips. He stared at her blankly, tilting his head to the side.

"I know you do not care about his gifts, not really." While knowing someone who could teach Peter how to control and use his gifts was beneficial. That wasn't why she was here.

"My son and I are tied together by fate. I am the only person who will truly accept him for what and who he is. The Covenant will never value his talent if they know who I am." Blair channelled her energy into refocusing her sight, to try and see past his glamour. All she could make out was the same colour found in Peter's eyes.

“Were you behind the summoning of the Prince?”

The Demon’s brow arched in defiance. “The fanatics who worship Asmodeus are not of my domain.”

That crossed the Sixth Lord of Hell off the list. Blair had a thousand more questions that sought resolution, but they jumbled together incoherently.

The Demon studied her and smiled. It was shark-like, predatory.

“You mortals love to blame everything on us, when all you need to do is look in the mirror. Darkness is coming, Princess. Prepare your light.”

Blair found a huge pressure building in her chest, signalling she had been underwater for too long. A cough racked through her body.

"You have a big role in this, Blair. So play the game. Otherwise, I will make sure you stay out of his way so he can reach his true potential."

A huge gasp echoed off the walls as Blair broke the surface of the water. She felt as if she couldn't catch her breath. Her lungs refused to fill to their full capacity.

Holy shit, that was Peter's father. His actual father.

Teeth chewed into her salt covered lip. If her heart beat any harder she swore it would burst out of her ribcage. It was struggling to contain the sporadic rhythm.

Blair knew in her gut that she had to tell someone about seeing Peter's father.

Would those words ever escape her lips? Or would they be buried in the closet with the other secrets she carried?

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

The Beginning of Chaos

"I can't believe this." Damon Kurne tossed his half-eaten muffin onto the plate before him. The poor chocolate chip pastry didn't deserve the mistreatment, considering they were absolutely delicious with their crunchy sugar crust. Damon aggressively folded the newspaper and tossed in front of the others with a huff.

Snow reached out, taking the slightly crinkled paper between her white fingers. She flipped to the article Damon had been reading. From his expression, Peter could tell something was off.

The Heavenly Oracle was plastered at the top of the page followed by the featured article heading in big bold letters;

"MURDER IN THE CAPITOL: DEMONS REBEL".

"Oh boy. This isn't good." Luca looked over Snow's shoulder and the son of Azazael's eyes widened.

"Albin Wist was murdered," Luca whispered.

Peter looked back and forth between the two of them but he was lost when it came to the politics of the Covenant.

"Albin Wist is—sorry—*was* a major Half-demon activist and politician. He gained a lot of favour from the Half-demon population in the Covenant because of his beliefs that the Nephilim had too much control over the centralization of our society. He was in contention to run against Adam." Luca filled in after catching Peter's lost expression. Damon continued to pick at his muffin in distaste. There was a storm brewing in his grey eyes, directed towards a certain table.

“Damon was a fan of Wist,” Snow whispered, holding the paper between her face and Damon’s next to her. The pages did little to create privacy for her comment.

“Who wouldn’t be?” Damon added, his tone laced with poison. “He was actually trying to get something done about the conditions of the slums. Peter, did you know that statistically our kind is more likely to fall through the cracks and end up unemployed and driven to madness? There are no resources for people like us because the Nephilim cannot be bothered to care about the conditions of our livelihood. If they had it their way, the Demons like us would be sent back to Hell. Look at Carter for example, he was forced to teach here for the interim because of all this political debacle.”

“Looks like it made him some enemies…” Luca responded.

“Wist was murdered. My fingers point to the Royal Houses,” Damon spit.

“It has to be connected to what happened at The Shrieking Succubus. *They* are punishing us,” Snow hissed, then paused. “The police are doing an investigation according to the article,” she tried to play devil's advocate, “so we cannot just put blame where it isn’t warranted. It makes us just as bad as them.”

“You mean the police who are most likely paid off by Adam himself? I wouldn’t put it past him to order an assassin to take Wist off the board.” Damon’s shoulders shook violently as he spoke.

“It says here that the Demon population is rebelling through protests. They were met with severe hostility from police last evening. A lot of people were sent to the hospital.” Snow looked incredibly sad, handing the paper to Peter as she stood from the table. Her whole white body was shaking as she stood. Peter wasn’t aware that she could get any more pale.

Peter turned to the article, his eyes skimming through the information.

“Adam will be making a statement today on the CDB according to the web. Maybe we should get together in the dorm to listen,” Luca suggested looking down at his phone.

“What time is the broadcast?” Damon’s eyes had become stormy, the striking grey becoming an eternal void.

“Two in the afternoon.”

“I am willing to skip fifth for this. I want to hear what that fuckwad has to say about this mysterious murder of his biggest competition.” Damon

stood from the table to follow after Snow, his fragmented muffin discarded.

Thirty Half-demons were killed onsite, their bodies left on the steps of the House of Angels as a statement. Their families were to be notified of their passing.

The picture at the end of the article showed their bodies on the steps with a note.

Wist away our Saints. Bring the Wrath of your Hubris.

The air outside was laced with a bitter chill that welcomed the gathering of dark clouds, but a menacing, heated energy pulsated through the air of the Demon Commons. The entire Half-demon student body, including other students from the Casters, Charmers, and Shifters had even joined to listen to the Covenant Daily Broadcast, skipping fifth period to do so. Not a single chair was vacant, leaving barely enough standing room.

Prime Minister Adam was going to make a statement in regards to the events of last evening, followed by a speech from Albin's daughter.

Peter stood with Crow near the large wall of windows, watching the clouds swirl angrily overhead. The two of them in silent conversation.

"I sent a letter to my grandmother today. I hope everyone is alright. My stepfather was in the city that night, but he wasn't injured from what I know." Crow's shoulder length blonde hair was brushed out of their eyes, their tongue stud being twirled between their teeth.

"I hope for your sake that your family is alright." Peter was suddenly grateful his mother was not dwelling in the world of the Covenant. He would be beside himself if anything ever happened to her. Guilt spread through him like a blade.

"Part of me worries that the Black Eyes may have been responsible for Albin's death. Think about it, they needed a martyr to stir up the Covenant. Who better than the 'saint' of our people. Especially after their summoning ritual was interrupted." Crow ran a shaky hand through their light waves.

Peter didn't think about it, as all Half-demon fingers had pointed towards the Nephilim. But that was what the neo-nazi group would have wanted if they were responsible.

I wonder if any of my classmates are part of this group.

“Why were all the children of Lucifer slaughtered?” Peter found himself asking. Since Vidya had given the book on Lucifer, it had consumed an applicable amount of his daily thoughts.

“They were believed to be too dangerous according to The Great Council. The children of Lucifer were often gifted with abilities of both Demons and Nephilim. Michael and his children were worried they would be too powerful and would tip the balance. Mainly, I think they were fearful that they would someday help Lucifer rise from Hell because of the Prophecy.”

Peter arched his eyebrow in silent question.

“The Prophecy came from the lover of Vidya. A powerful female Nephilim by the name of Achlys that was gifted with the Sight, much like Blair. She envisioned the return of Lucifer with a son. The sky would crack open and it would rain Hellfire from above, leaving chaos and destruction. Very classic impending doom type vision. Achlys went mad after she received it.”

Thunder cracked across the sky startling the two of them.

“Perfect timing,” Peter muttered with a chuckle.

“SHHH! Everyone, it's starting,” Luca shouted. Silence fell over the room as the student turned up the volume.

“Good afternoon, I am Maraline Owens and we are reporting live from the House of Angels where the unfortunate incident of last night had occurred. As you can see behind me, the bodies have been removed from the steps, but the pieces of Michael’s statue remain scattered over the courtyard. Police and other enforcements have been placed outside of the perimeter to block outside protestors, many of whom carry signs with messages against Adam and the Nephilim.” The camera panned over to the protestors blocked by various fences, chanting and waving signs.

Adam Forne’s Ignorance = Divine Comedy.

This is Angelic Leadership?

Adam Forne is the Covenant’s match made in Hell.

The reporter continued to discuss the statement that Adam was expected to deliver, as the doors to the House of Angels opened. The crowd booed loudly through the television. Flashing cameras clicked rapidly as Adam made his way to the podium at the top of the very steps where countless bodies of Half-demons had been. There were several people who followed in behind; one woman Peter recognized as Queen Leta with her bedazzled

crown that he saw at the dining hall daily. The others were various officials that Peter didn't know. He made note that he should catch up on the major political influencers in the Covenant. He had never been one to care about politics until now.

"Prime Minister Adam Forne," a small fragile woman announced.

"Hello, good people of the Covenant." Though the television was extremely weak in quality, obviously not upgraded in quite some time considering modern technology, Peter could make out Adam's features. He was a tall broad chested man, same dark hair he had grown to love on Blair. However, he had a huge unflattering nose that looked like it had been broken a few times, the pixels on the TV distorting it further.

"There are not any words that can truly offer my deep regret for the events that unfolded on these very steps last evening. The loss of so many lives leaves a deep scar on the already wounded heart of this society. With the loss of Albin Wist, a brilliant politician, and now several Half-demons that have called the City of Enders their home, is devastating to all of us on the Great Council."

The room was an auditorium of whispers and eyerolls. A general distaste for the generic apology, flat and empty as many politicians were experts in giving.

"We are doing everything we can to find those responsible for the murder of Albin Wist and the other perpetrators who were responsible for ruining our blessed statue." The crowd around the area erupted.

"WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO KILLED INNOCENT PEOPLE!? YOUR OWN OFFICERS!"

"THIS IS BULLSHIT! YOU ONLY PROTECT THE NEPHILIM! YOUR OWN ASS!"

"FUCK YOU, PRIME MINISTER!!"

"GET OUT OF OFFICE!"

"I understand that many of you are angry, and rightfully so, as we are too. What happened here last night was the opposition to righteousness and honour we stand for." Peter felt his own eyes rolling. *Is this man capable of making a straightforward statement?*

"Thank you for your time. I would like to welcome our guest of honour to speak on behalf of this incident and as an official welcome to our new council member." Adam hadn't said anything of worth, but backed off to let a lavender woman come forward. From her tightly curled hair and darker

purple tone of her skin, Peter swore she looked just like Albin from the front cover of the Heavenly Oracle.

“My name is Hesperia Wist, daughter of the late Albin Wist. The events of the most recent protest bring me sorrow. Sorrow for those whose families have been impacted from the violence that has occurred following the death of my father. My father was a peaceful man, who believed that violence and intolerance would divide our people. He believed that we as a society must stand together in order to progress forward. He would be ashamed of the events that took place. He would be ashamed of the hostility of the Capitol, the hostility of his own people.” Hesperia paused, eyes scanning the crowd before her, “While I experience pain from the loss of my father, and I do pray that the people who were responsible pay for what they have done, I know it would be within his wishes that we do not dwell on this pain of loss, but find strength within it. I have been offered the extraordinary ability to follow in my fathers footsteps, as I have been nominated to take his seat on the Great Council. I will be leading his campaign in his honour, continuing forward to the title of Prime Minister.”

The room went silent. Hesperia Wist would be continuing a campaign against Adam.

“Not only to have a Half-demon in a position of power, but a woman… It’s never been heard of in the entire history of the Covenant. It would shake the very foundation of our lives.” Peter had never seen shock upon the features of Crow.

Adam and his mother in the background did not look pleased at this announcement.

“I cannot condone the actions of the Black Eyes, a notorious neo-nazi Demonic activist group. While I understand the pain and reasoning behind their beliefs, their methods and extremist measures is not something that I can support. Their vandalization of the Michael statue that led to the responsive violence from the police and army, is not something I wish to be associated with. My condolences are again, with the family members of those whose lives were caught in the crossfire.”

Hesperia continued her speech, words filled with conviction and compassion. Peter found himself moved by her grace and his understanding of the risk she would be carrying by picking up the mantle that had almost snuffed out.

“I agree with my father that it is time for us to consider new leadership outside the realms and power of the Nephilim. They retain too much control over our society that impacts each faction greatly, not just that of the Half-demons. Their violent response that resulted in the numerous deaths is unacceptable, considering the nature of the peaceful protest. There was no evidence that magic had been used against any of the respectable officers, they had been the ones who fired first following the vandalization of the statue. Again, a shameful show of force from the Black Eyes, but it did not warrant the loss of thirty lives. I ask you, Prime Minister Forne, when will you begin to see us? Will any of these officers who fired their lethal weapons be held responsible for the innocent lives that were taken?”

“YEAH!! WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, FORNE?!” The crowd was extremely responsive towards Hesperia. Her questions made valid by the holes left in Adam’s lacklustre statement. Adam had placed himself in a poor position.

Hesperia continued to discuss statistics, using the events of last night to support her beliefs and standing firm with Albin’s politics. She wanted better access to education, more resources for mental health, less discrimination in the workforce including equal pay, and other basic fundamental needs that would allow Half-demons to be treated as equal citizens. The crowd present at the conference were cheering, hollering in response to Hesperia’s points.

The polls were tipping in her favour.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

The Elders

Another restless night accompanied Blair Dawn during her visit in New Zealand. Dreams of flames reminding her of her mission, her purpose here. She was scheduled to meet the Elders this morning, to dive into her Dreaming to see if their combined power could unveil the magic preventing her sight. Blair suspected that Peter's Demon father may have influence over her Dreaming, just as he had blocked her from seeing his true form when she submerged beneath the salt pools. Not that she had told anybody about that visit.

Blair padded barefoot to the main conjuring chamber. The modest white dress she was forced to wear, like every junior Seer in this stupid mountain, fluttered behind her with each step. Other Seers meandered about, sending her nothing but a quick glance and quick whisper here and there. She was still a celebrity within these walls. A member of the royal family.

An acute pressure settled onto her shoulders. The members within these caves were meant to be people like her, yet she stuck out like a sore thumb recently hit by a misjudged hammer.

Will I always be an outcast in every group?

Blair made her way to the main entryway; a large alcove balcony created in one of the mountain's cave mouths. She leaned over the rail placing her elbows on the stone surface. It was cool to the touch, gooseflesh raising all over her arms.

As she gazed towards the distant horizon, she noticed an ominous sight unfolding before her. Angry clouds were rapidly forming over the mountains, gathering force and intensity with each passing moment. The

wind blew with force. A low rumble could be heard in the distance, signalling the approach of an impending storm. The clouds began to swirl and twist, with flashes of lightning illuminating the sky and thunder echoing through the valley.

Blair smiled, feeling the electricity and magic flow through her.

The sky continued to turn dark as though nighttime approached, the wind howling relentlessly. Blair could see the rain begin to fall, feeling several drops on her skin. Vibrations spread through her chest at the rumble, the explosive booms of thunder that grew closer. The storm seemed to roar with fury unleashed by God Himself, she couldn't help but be awed by the sheer power of nature. Humbled by the might of this storm as it raged on like an untamed beast, coming towards her with speed.

"Blair!" Arsinoe called over the roar of the storm. Blair was pulled from her thoughts as her mentor approached. Arsinoe took her place to Blair's right, admiring the storm clouds that threatened relentless force, "That looks… gloomy." Arsinoe let the rain fall delicately on her own skin.

"Really brings out the 'impending doom' of the Elders meeting. It's quite fitting." Blair tried to lighten her anxiety with a sprinkle of humour.

Meeting the infamous Elders is not something one did on a daily basis. They had all agreed to gather to help her, knowing that Peter was connected to something bigger than burning down the school.

The pit in her stomach told her she was right.

I don't want to be right.

In the distance a bright light appeared, slowly growing brighter until it illuminated the entire sky, different from the lightning that flashed above. As the illumination drew closer, the unmistakable figure of an Angel came into view. Blair could tell who it was even from this distance. Why he had decided to even bother himself with visiting her, was beyond the bitter Nephilim. The Archangel descended from the Heavens with majestic grace, his powerful dark wings beating slowly and his radiant eyes surveying all around him.

The Archangel Michael slammed into the stone of the cave opening, causing cracks to scatter in various directions. *Dramatic much?*

Michael's presence filled the air around him and all who were present could feel the sense of awe and reverence wash over them. Blair tried not to roll her eyes as the other seers gathered. Many bowed their heads or lowered to their knees. Even Arsinoe knelt to the ground.

Blair didn't budge.

Michael scanned the worshippers with cocky arrogance, he loved being the centre of attention. Getting off on how their eyes filled with tears of joy and gratitude. One thing that Angels had in spades was ego. And her father carried the brightest torch, being a celebrity and the father of the royal line.

Michael greeted them with a warm smile, his voice like the sound of a thousand trumpets. "It is good to see you, my children. You who have worshipped me throughout the ages. Your faith has given me strength, and it is my honour to serve you in return." Michael moved among the crowd, offering words of comfort and hope to those who were struggling, and encouragement to those who were strong.

"Why are you here, Michael?" Michael's sea green eyes fell to his daughter. Her disapproval of his presence was clear as day, unlike the storm clouds that followed after him.

"Like I need a reason to see my daughter." He spoke as though the answer was obvious.

"You always need a reason, Michael. You've already graced me with your yearly visit this year. Why are you here?" Michael's face turned expressionless. The cold exterior of a warrior and otherworldly being removing any ounce of fatherly love. *There was the Michael she knew.*

It wasn't long before the performative expression returned to his face as he turned towards the other Seers.

"Remember," he said, "that I am always with you. I will never leave you, and my love will be with you throughout your journey. So have faith, my children, and know that you are never alone."

That's rich coming from the being that never bothered to ever show up other than to order her around.

"I have business with my daughter, you will have to excuse us."

Blair rolled her eyes and returned to the main entry hall, leaving the raging sky behind. Her feet felt colder against the stone the deeper they went. She followed behind Michael, his charcoal wings still floundering behind him. Michael had never changed in her entire life. He was still tall and muscular, with dark black hair and the same cold sea green eyes. He had gifted her those same handsome looks, making many passersby stutter in their steps. Many bowed as he passed, reaching out to touch him like somehow a simple touch could grant them a miracle. You would think that over time people would be less shocked to see an Archangel.

Michael took Blair to the eastern wing of the mountain, where little people spent their time unless they were meditating. Its large jagged walls were soaked with moisture. The sounds of dripping water echoed slowly from the stalactites that hung high over the salt pool in the centre of the wing. The water and its rhythmic sound was helpful for meditation. Blair loved coming here later in the evening when all the torches had been put out, so the glow worms could illuminate creating a mock night sky.

"Let's get on with it," Blair spit at his back.

Michael halted, his body ridged. He slowly spun, his feathers wrapping around him slightly from the motion. Her father towered over her, even from the distance they stood apart.

"I am disappointed with your progress."

"When are you not?" she retorted, unfazed by the statement. Ten-year-old Blair would have been devastated hearing her father speak with such harshness.

"Do you understand the severity of this?" When Blair didn't respond he continued, "You are my descendant and that means you are in line for the throne. Your idiot half-brother Adam, is not designed to rule. You are. And you are letting some *Demon* you have known for less than a few weeks, defile you and distract you."

"Excuse me?"

"Don't play dumb, Blair. Peter has been nothing but a distraction. One that *your* visions have been trying to warn you of the danger he poses! And instead, you go running into his life and *befriending* him. I will not stand for this embarrassment." Blair could feel her power building at the blatant disrespect that was being dished out. The mountain shook with thunder.

"I was getting closer to him, hoping that it would help me see the future more clearly. I tried to treat him as nothing more than a mere curiosity and duty to the Heavens. Instead, I found a person. One who displays this goodness that I didn't expect to see because I too had already labelled him as a problem. Maybe it is us that causes that fire, for we turn our backs too quickly on those who frighten us."

"We never turn our backs to the enemy, Blair. War will teach you that."

"War?"

"Demons are organising themselves. We have heard rebellions far across the Realms in retaliation. That summoning ritual was just the beginning. The Princes of Hell are itching to be topside."

"To what?"

"You haven't heard?" Michael made a newspaper appear at the snap of a finger. Blair reluctantly reached for the worn pages. She had been so disconnected from the outside world.

The front of The Heavenly Oracle read; “MURDER IN THE CAPITAL: DEMONS REBEL”.

Blair’s hand shook slightly, Albin Wist had been murdered in cold blood. He had become a martyr, a saint to the Half-demons. This would mean severe political unrest if it wasn’t handled properly.

“Your idiot brother made an inferior attempt at an apology speech that was followed by Hesperia Wist. She is now continuing her father’s campaign against Adam. The polls are in her favour because of the people who were killed during the protest at the House of Angels.” Blair scanned the article. It was a gruesome scene, one that swayed her already small appetite into vacating.

“And what do you want me to do about it?” There had to be a point to Michael coming to tell her about this.

“You are going to leave here, go back to the academy, and then you are going to be by Adam’s side during his campaign.”

Blair’s mouth fell open and closed. *What the actual fuck.*

“I can’t just leave here, Michael. My Dreaming is becoming seriously harmful to my physical and mental well-being. I didn’t choose to take a vacation here!”

“You can and you will,” he commanded.

“Do you seriously not care about my well-being in the slightest?! I am your daughter for God’s Sake!”

“YOU WILL NOT USE THEIR NAME IN VAIN IN MY PRESENCE!” Michael’s voice shook the very foundation of the cave, the stalactites swaying back and forth threatening to plunge into the pool below.

Blair was paralyzed with fear. Michael had never spoken to her in such a manner.

“Get out,” she whispered.

“Blair–” The illusion of regret was over his features.

“Get. Out.” Thunder cracked across the sky.

“My decision remains firm, along with your mothers. You will meet with the Elders, and then you will return to the academy.”

Michael blipped from existence.

Tears fell to the stone cold floor.

The council of Elders sat calmly in the dimly-lit chamber, spaced out in a half-moon before Blair. The flames of the candles flickered across the marble surfaces of the space, making the shadows of the wise dance on the wall behind them. They were a diverse group with various ages, genders, and backgrounds, but they all shared one thing in common; the ability to see beyond the limits of ordinary perception. The Elders gathered to help Blair, who sat cross-legged on the ground before them, her eyes closed in concentration.

"We may begin." The Confessor's booming voice echoed through the silence that had clung to their skin. The Confessor served as the primary Elder, blinded through initiation, their Sight was magnified by the process and their sole purpose was to offer great wisdom to the world of the Covenant. It was one of the highest honours a Seer could ever obtain, but also one that came with a great burden.

One by one, the Elders lowered their heads in concentration. Each time, Blair could feel their energy wash over her, as if they had reached out and touched her very being. The chanting began in Old Latin, words that Blair could not make out fully.

"Intrare in regnum veritatis." *Enter the Realm of Truth*, something Blair could understand, was repeated after each phase.

The energy of the council members seeped into her, the ancient power of their collective knowledge.

Blair was suddenly looking down at her kneeling form, the voices in the chamber now muffled as though she was no longer capable of hearing it as she separated from her reality, entering the Dreaming without being asleep.

The vision began with a deep sense of unease, an oppressive darkness that seemed to permeate every corner of the world. Stationed at the balcony alcove, the white dress whipped around her. The sky turned a threatening shade of crimson before her eyes. The ground cracked open in every direction, sending forth plumes of smoke and fire. In the midst of the chaos stood a figure, a man with crow coloured hair and sapphire eyes that she knew too well. His towering figure with horns and a cruel, mocking smile

on his face as if he enjoyed the destruction he was creating. He held in his hands a fiery sword and with every stroke, he sent forth waves of destruction that consumed everything in his path. Angels, Demons, Humans, Shifters, and everything in-between. The earth shook beneath his feet and the very air seemed to be on fire with the force of his presence.

As the vision unfolded, Peter laid waste to everything; destroying cities, forests, and oceans. He seemed invincible, his strength and power increasing with each passing moment. The world was plunged into utter darkness, with only the crackling flames and the screams of the dying filling the air.

A tear slipped down a lover's face. Blair stood helplessly victim to the horror that had been unleashed. The man—the man she was falling for—was to bring forth the end of the world.

There was no shred of hope. No group of heroes coming to the rescue.

Love would not save the day.

Peter would leave her, just as her Dreaming had predicted before their paths had ever crossed.

She would not be able to change his mind.

Blair let out a banshee wail as she snapped into her corporeal form. Pressure crushed her chest, her ribs metaphorically snapping beneath the weight. The candles in the room snuffed to a whisper of smoke, the eyes of the Elders piercing through her. Sweat coated her skin with a malice vice reminding her of the strain on her physical form.

Her head felt split open, like twisted fingers had meandered their way through her skull. A pathetic sob escaped through shaky, sweaty lips.

“This is unexpected.” The Confessor’s second spoke, a Nephilim by the name of Carnage. The Elders around Carnage nodded in agreement.

“Blair Dawn, you have revealed to us the truth, the comings of this man. Peter Bronze must be stopped at any cost.”

“Wait–” Blair choked out.

Another spoke, the voice old and worn. “We cannot sit idle as this boy is allowed to mature into his powers.”

“But the future is ever changing, you old crone. We cannot possibly justify killing a twenty-two year old boy over something that *may* come to pass,” a younger, more agile voice said. The young Half-demon stared down at Blair with sympathy, understanding the burden of loving someone. She recognized the severe loss of love in the young Elder’s eyes. So young, yet so old from the Sight.

“What do you say, Blair?” Arsinoe was the one to speak this time, her voice offering comfort in the array of darkness.

“I say we look again.”

“The effort may kill you, child. You are still so young in the gift of Sight,” the crone tried to protest.

“We have to do it again. Michael has ordered that I return to the academy. I must look again now. There must be another path, another critical moment to prevent this.” The strain of speaking out more sweat upon her brow.

“The Archangel may be in high regard to our society, but he cannot dictate the course of your life young one. We shall go again, but you must understand that we will stop when your body becomes too strained. You are too important to us and this world, to let you ruin your mind before you have even lived.” Carnage leaned forward, swiping her hands through the air. The candles reignited rapidly. Blair squinted at the sudden change.

“Let us begin, again.”

Intrare in regnum veritatis.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Demonic Pleasures

Peter Bronze had spent most of his recent time training and studying. It had consumed his life, an obsession of being the best. His body had begun to change, holding on to the lean muscle through Carter’s vigorous training.

When Peter wasn't caught between training his mind and body, he thought only of Blair.

He missed her with every fibre of his being. He never imagined a person could completely envelope his entire existence, but here he was, being a love sick puppy over a woman he could never have.

Peter made his way to lunch with Gabby, a headache brewing in the front of his skull. *They have been happening more frequently.*

Gabby was feeling better after some adjustment. The fight between her and Blair a couple weeks ago had caused an inability to control her shift into her Demonic persona. The daughter of Lilith wore her new purple hue with pride, unsure if she would ever have a 'normal' skin colour. It suited her, making her even more beautiful.

Gabby had been dropping hints of her continued desire for Peter, especially after their night of bliss in his dorm room. Yet he had no desire to jump on that ride again, even with his increased sex drive. Tapping into his magic and physical strength had awoken something feral in him. He was trying to manage it himself, with little luck.

Peter took a seat next to Damon, who offered a cheeky grin that could send women to their knees. Gabby predictably took the seat next to Peter.

"Heard you passed your Demon Exam. Congrats, man." Damon patted his forearm before opening his mouth for Crow's next shot. The projectile fruit was missed by a landslide, catching Damon's nose. The grape rolled under the table, never to be seen again.

"You're a terrible shot," Damon teased. Crow just shrugged, opening their own mouth.

Peter scanned the lunch room, feeling the eyes of certain Nephilim jackasses. Jules and Jackson were casting side eyes in his direction, snickering under their breath. Peter found his eyes rolling at the immaturity.

Jackson had made a rough recovery, waking a few days after Blair had left for the Emissary. His skull had been broken, cracked open from being slammed into a stone wall from the Demon Prince. How he survived was beyond Peter. Thanks to Osric and his treatment, the descendant of Gabriel was back on his feet and training again.

Jules looked rough, wearing a uniform that hadn't been washed in days. His shoulder-length hair was matted, and he looked like he had lost even more weight. The sunglasses were disguising the hazy look that filled his gaze.

Peter honestly felt bad for the guy. He was letting his life slip by him.

Peter continued to look past them and froze. A familiar green gaze met him. *No, she couldn't be here. She was away in New Zealand with the Emissary.*

Blair offered him a small and tilted her head as if daring him to come get a closer look. He put pressure on his jaw, feeling the muscle flex. His blood began to boil. There was a mix of desire and anger swirling under the layers of his skin.

The Blair impersonator sat at the Charmers table, most likely projecting his internal cravings. A Succubus was his best bet. What they wanted he was unsure, but they were trying to get his attention.

He turned his attention away from temptation and asked Snow what the book was about. A blush spread over her cheeks.

"It's a romance novel between an immortal fae prince and a human." She didn't even bother looking up from the pages as she spoke.

"It's a smut book," Gabby told him. Snow sent a warning glare towards the Lilith spawn.

"Ah. Is it kinky?" Damon grabbed the book from her fingers. Snow let out an inhuman screech. "Romero placed a firm hand on his enlarged cock,

trying to ease the aching desire that pulsed through him at the sight of her exposed body. His eyes were heated with intention–hey, I was reading that!" The book returned to Snow's possession. She looked pissed, her face beet red. Her white skin was never able to cover the crimson when she was embarrassed.

"I like it. There's nothing wrong with book porn," Snow spit out with a tongue following. She put her book mark between the pages.

"I'm surprised you can sit here and read that with a straight face," Peter commented, mind in the gutter again thanks to the live reading gifted by Damon. Not that it was hard to get his mind on sex.

God, I am a weak, horny male.

He was aware of the woman in the corner of his eyes. He couldn't help but be pulled towards her, another gaze landing on the Succubus. She was still looking in his direction. Blair's eyes met his and his inhibitions dropped. He wanted her. Badly. She knew what she was doing.

Gabby slapped his chest, "Peter, who are you looking at?"

Peter felt his own cheeks heat at being caught, but the woman was gone when he looked up. Deep within his body was this feral need to chase. To hunt. To find the object of his desire.

The muscle in Peter's jaw clenched again. Heated desire remained, leaving him hot and definitely bothered.

"You good?" Crow's voice filled Peter's mind. Peter sent them a look, clearly not having any of this cordial lunch, *"Want to go blow off some steam?"*

Crow and Peter found themselves on the running trails for the second time that day. Peter's heart beat rhythmically, his breathing steady as he pumped his legs forward. It was getting easier to keep pace with Crow now that the two of them were training regularly.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"You know, you have it easier," Peter inhaled, "since you don't talk out loud." Crow slowed to a stop and placed their ringed hands on their hips and motioned for him to do the same.

Peter stopped running, inhaling and exhaling in a controlled manner to slow his heart.

"When you... use magic do you find it increases certain... desires?"

"You mean being horny all of the time." Peter nodded at their blunt statement. *"It's quite common, especially for males. Angels, Demons, Casters; it doesn't matter. It's hard to manage it, but most of us have been trying since we were teens. You have just started using magic."*

"I had these urges when I was a teen, but it's been heightened. I swear if I touch myself anymore, my dick is going to chaff." Crow let out a laugh, throwing their head back. It was a wondrous sound, something that a lot of people didn't hear often.

"Well, I can't necessarily recommend sleeping with a Succubus but it could help manage the symptoms." Peter felt himself blush. Crow had noticed the looks between the two of them. *"There's nothing to be embarrassed about. I'm sure she senses your need and she craves sexual energy. It would be mutually beneficial."*

"It feels wrong." Peter couldn't shake the feeling like he was being a pervert. Knowing that this Charmer was showing him what he truly wanted. Who he truly wanted to be buried inside. He wasn't sure how Blair would react to this relation.

"It doesn't have to be. I'm sure having your dick hard at lunch isn't very fun either. Vivian is a nice person, a daughter of Lilith, too." Crow had even noticed his predicament.

Peter ran a hand over his sweaty forehead, trying to figure his shit out. He sighed and started running back towards the academy. He had to be back soon for his tutor session on Angels. His Angel Exam was scheduled for next month. Another thing for him to pass in order to graduate and choose his specialisation.

As the academy came into view through the break in the trees, so did a familiar figure. Blair… Well, Vivian was leaning against the side of the eastern corridor entrance, waiting for him.

Knots formed in his stomach as he slowed to a walk, planning on moving right past her. Vivian stepped in front of him, blocking his way into the school.

"Hello, Peter. Can we talk?" Vivian, who resembled the very woman he desired, was creating an uncanny effect. Peter knew that she was not Blair. Even with strawberry rosé wafting around him, there was an underlying

scent that had to belong to Vivian. Yet, everything about Vivian was pulling him in, undoing him.

"I suppose, since you have no plan to let me pass. What do you want?" Peter's voice was basically a growl, his impatience and desire clouding his senses.

"I'm sure Crow," her eyes found their way behind him where Crow observed from the treeline, "has told you what I am."

Peter gave her a nod, his arms folding over his chest. He widened his stand looking down at her to communicate his growing impatience.

"I'm a Succubus and I have noticed during Combat Training that you are projecting a strong sexual energy. I was wondering if I could offer you some assistance in… clearing your head?" Vivian tilted her head to the side making Blair's perfect curls slide off her shoulder.

"Why do you look like her?" spilled from his mouth.

"I look like whomever you desire, and I'm assuming that's Blair Dawn. It's not a secret that you and her have a connection. It must be hard to want someone you cannot have, but with me you can have her."

Peter's mind was plagued with graphic images. Images that would make any grandmother blush for the things he wanted to do to Blair. Here Vivian was, offering him a reality to the fantasies he could not have with the Nephilim princess. Ever.

"What do you get out of it?" Peter knew deep down that he shouldn't be considering any of this but his desire for Blair continued to build staring into her green eyes. They made him weak.

"Like I said, I'm a Succubi. We feed off of sexual energy. I would take some of your energy every time we fuck. I think it would help manage some of your more feral impulses, make you less ready to rage–give you control. I think it would be mutually beneficial." Apparently, she knew more than Peter thought. Vivian's talents drove a large curiosity within him. He wanted to explore her.

"I will have to think about it," he admitted, knowing he fully intended to. As he stared into Blair's eyes, her scent surrounding him, he began to lose control. Peter's gaze heated, replaying the images of Blair wrapped in the pleasure he wanted to create. His skin felt tight, his cock responding to Vivian's deceit. Peter wanted to dive into the illusion.

"I know you want to. I can feel it. The need that drives you closer to me because of your feelings for Blair." *She was right. Oh, God, she was so*

right. His cock twitched in response.

Peter forced his eyes shut and inhaled a deep calming breath. He released his balled fists and dropped his arms to the side.

Blue eyes returned to a familiar green gaze. "Find me tonight. I suggest you wear something skimpy. I like the colour red."

Classes had been hard to focus on after the interaction between the Half-demon and Succubi. Peter's mind had been foggy, graphically creating every little detail for what was about to go down tonight. He wasn't going to hold back, as he needed the release that he couldn't give himself. Peter had definitely tried.

Peter's hand found its way to the bulge in his sweats, giving a light squeeze. It didn't alleviate any of the pressure that was boiling within him. If Vivian didn't find him soon, he was going on a hunt.

A soft knock patterned on the door, driving him away from his thoughts. Peter jumped from the mattress, adjusting himself to hide his noticeable appendage. Peter found Damon outside the door holding a note.

"This is for you. Was given to me at the end of fifth." Peter took the note, folding it open to see the message inside.

Vivian had started a game.

Vivian's instructions had led him to the lower levels of the academy, a range of places he had yet to explore in this castle of a school. He knew if he turned left a few paces up, he would find the metal door to the Cavern of Secrets. Hidden under debris of the storage room.

Peter was growing impatient trying to find the object of his desire.

The lower levels of the castle were dark, damp, and musty, a smell wafting towards Peter with force. Empty classrooms from previous years were now being used for storage, items lost and discarded. The walls were lined with thick stone blocks that were uneven and cold to the touch, moss and mildew coating the edges. The flooring was rough-hewn stone caked with dirt from years of neglect, cracks and pits carved into the surface from

centuries of use. Dimly lit oil lamps illuminated the rooms, but they did little to dispel the gloom, the emptiness. Peter imagined that these classrooms had once bustled with life, now it was a ghost town, only the whispers of the dead held a place here.

Peter’s curiosity led him to one of the abandoned classrooms. The classrooms themselves were large and open, with low ceilings and long windows that had long since been covered or boarded up. The desks and chairs were present, coated in dust, undisturbed from their rest. Walls were lined with shelves that once held books, but now only contained cobwebs and dust, with the odd box left for storage. Peter shut the door, continuing on his mission.

The note told him to find the last door on the left past a creepy statue. Peter observed the decaying Angel that sat decoratively on an enclosed alcove in the corridor. From the moss and chunks missing from the carved stone, it did look like something you'd see spawn from the gates of Hell.

Peter's footsteps echoed off the walls, his hands digging into his pockets to ooze a charming and calm demeanour. He opened the door to the boiler room and found himself frozen to the spot.

The room was lit by a dozen tiny candles setting a perfect atmosphere, contrasting the dark hall Peter had just come from. In the centre of the space was Blair, laying on a mattress in a black robe made of silk that refracted the candlelight.

Peter's eyes dilated at the sight, wanting to unwrap the gift in front of him. Wondering if she was wearing anything or nothing underneath.

"I see you got my note," she teased. Peter watched her bare leg lift up and spread just enough. Red panties coming into view.

Peter growled. His cock became unbearably hard at the meal on display.

"Are you just going to stand there or are you going to fuck me?"

Peter's body heated at those words, thawing his muscles. He slowly shut the door behind him and kneeled before the goddess. His fingers delicately lifted the ankle of Blair's bent leg, bringing it to his lips. His tongue jutted out, licking near the ankle bone and trailed higher. A moan escaped her lips as his tongue coated the underside of her knee.

The sounds that escaped her, the way she twitched underneath his touch, it was making him a mad man. His heated gaze met hers; emeralds lit by desire. He melted into the illusion of Blair's eyes, losing the control he had.

Peter reached for the tie around the silk robe and pulled slightly. The fabric gave way to her sides, revealing the skimpy red lingerie he requested. It looked so beautiful against her skin, so beautiful he had to touch her.

Her skin was soft, softer than he imagined it to be, and Blair smelled as she always did, the strawberry rosé that he wanted branded in his nostrils always. He placed himself between her legs, giving him access to her skin. His lips pressed into her lower abdomen just above the band of her panties, as his hands lined her ribs, edging for the clasp of her bra. Blair gasped as he trailed his tongue over her navel, making his cock respond with a rageful ache.

God, I want her so bad, but I have to take my time. Enjoy the moment.

The bra gave way with a simple click. Blair sat up slightly to allow Peter to remove the silk, the lace bra falling along with it. Peter's tongue found its way to the underside of her breast, before trailing over one of her nipples. It hardened at the attention, dragging a moan from Blair's throat.

"You have too many clothes on," she protested. Peter had to agree. Blair reached out to pull his shirt over his head, exposing his hard chest and stomach. The sweatpants hung low, showcasing the V and the patch of hair that travelled below the waistline. Blair licked her lips hungrily at the sight of him. Her hands ran over his abs, past his chest to grip the back of his neck. She tugged, pulling him on top of her, encapsulating his lips with hers.

Their tongues danced greedily over each other, devouring and consuming. He pressed himself into her core, still separated through the fabric of his pants. He groaned at the sensation, his cock demanding friction.

Peter kissed the underside of her jaw continuing up to her ear, grabbing her earlobe between his teeth. Blair's fingernails dug into his shoulders in response to the tickling feeling. Peter continued to kiss down her chest, stopping to diligently lick and suck each cemented nipple.

Removing the lace panties, Blair was fully on display before him. His breath caught in his throat at the sight. She was beautiful in a way that he could never describe through words. Only poetry and art could come close to things he could compare her to.

"God, you're beautiful," he muttered, his lips trailing the underside of her thigh before settling his head between her legs. He exhaled, his hot

breath moving over her. A whimper sounded as her hips buckled, begging to be licked and touched.

He ran his tongue on the outside of her core in agonisingly slow movements before moving in closer and closer to her clit. Refusing to touch the very place he knew she desperately wanted.

"Please," she begged, her green eyes pleading with desperation and need.

With a quick slow flick, he ran his tongue over her clit once, completely removing himself before repeating the motion. He watched Blair's eyes close, pushing her hips up into his mouth. Peter applied more pressure, moving side to side over the sensitive area still going as slow as possible. He kissed her, licking up the wetness that had pooled between her legs. He groaned at the sweet taste of her, making him greedily pick up the pace.

Noises escaped her as Blair's hands began gripping the sheets and his hand placed on her lower abdomen. He applied more pressure, moving his hand upwards. Peter paused briefly, making Blair's eyes open, noticing the finger placed before her mouth. Peter watched Blair's face flare with understanding.

Blair took the finger into her mouth. The candle light reflected upon the surface of his finger as he moved it towards her entrance. Slowly entering into her, Blair's head fell back onto the pillow, as he returned his mouth to her clitoris. Moving in and out of her, as his tongue moved slowly over her. Her core clenched around his finger in response, her orgasm building.

Peter inserted a second finger. Blair gasped, her hand shooting into his hair. Her hips buckled into his face, grinding into his tongue to edge herself along. She continued to tighten, her chest rising and falling quickly. He quickened his pace, allowing her to control the rhythm.

She went over the edge, a cry escaping her lips. Peter felt her walls clench repeatedly over his fingers as she orgasmed. Her body spasming underneath him in waves. He slowed, touching her slowly and lightly as she fell out of her climax. Peter pulled back, running a hand over his face.

"Good girl."

He lifted his wet fingers to her mouth to allow her to taste herself. She accepted it greedily, sucking it off of his fingers.

"I want you," she confessed to him, unleashing his self control. He wanted her too, as desperately as she wanted him.

His sweats were discarded along the floor, his boxers following quickly after. His member sprung upward, finally free from its confines. The head already soaked with pre-cum. Blair moved forward gripping his cock softly, pulling down the foreskin before running her tongue over the head. Peter moaned, falling forward slightly at the pleasure that rocked through him. Who knew a single lick would almost undo him.

Satisfied with his reaction, Blair took him into her mouth. Slowly, she moved down the shaft, pulling the foreskin back to expose more of his head.

"Fuck." Peter's eyes closed, his hand burying into her curls. He gathered her hair into his palm to make sure he could see her beautiful eyes as she sucked him off. Her grip tightened, her pace building, never breaking eye contact with him. God, he was going to lose it.

If she continued he was going to explode. Peter grabbed the underside of her chin and lifted her to her knees. Peter's lips greedily devoured Blair, tasting himself on her tongue. She returned his kiss, running her hands over his biceps to his shoulders. Peter grabbed under her ass cheeks, lifting her around his waist. He could feel her wetness coat over his hardened member.

Peter lowered her to the mattress, breaking the kiss to place a pillow beneath her hips. Blair reached to the left, grabbing one of the condoms she had brought. Peter tore the corner with his teeth before wrapping the condom over himself.

He began to trail kisses over her lower abdomen, up to her breast, her collarbone, neck. Blair's fingers dug into his arms, little breaths passing through her lips. Peter kissed her lips softly, directing himself into her core.

He entered carefully, Blair gasping. He inched in slowly, letting her adjust to the size of him.

Soon enough, she was wrapped around all of him. Both of their eyes closed at the feeling, their breath intermingling. He didn't dare move but felt himself pulse inside of her. She was so wet and warm, he could have cum in that moment.

Blair's hand found its way to his jaw, bringing him into a kiss. He remained frozen, running his hand over the outside of her thigh to push himself deeper. He needed to be completely buried inside of her. Their kiss grew more intense, Blair's hand cupped his ass begging him to move. He pulled out slowly, a moan escaping him.

"Fuck," he whispered against her lips. He felt her clench around his cock, her hips matching his thrusts to build her own orgasm.

Greedy little thing. God, she is so beautiful in this light.

Peter watched her face contort the closer she was to her release. She continued to get tighter, edging him along with her. He focused on his breathing to delay his climax, he wasn't done with her yet.

"I'm gonna–" Blair cried out. Her walls slammed around him as he ground his hips into her. Peter grit his teeth, pleasure shooting through him as she came undone. He wanted to follow her but refused himself the satisfaction. He remained buried as she stopped spasming. Her cheeks were flushed, her skin glowing in the light.

Her green eyes opened, finding the feral heated gaze that swirled in his eyes.

"I want you to ride me," he demanded. He kissed her once before he took position on the mattress, missing her warmth as they parted.

He groaned as she settled over top of him. His hands dug in her thighs as pleasure shot through his abdomen. He pulsed inside of her before she began grinding over him. God, she felt incredible.

Blair leaned forward, slowly moving her hips. Their lips encased each other once more. Peter's hands explored the flesh of her back, encouraging her to move over him. He had to break the kiss feeling himself getting too close to the edge.

"Easy," he warned. "Focus on yourself. I'll follow you after. I want you to cum all over my cock like the good girl you are." Blair slowed down, grinding into him to stimulate her clitoris and hit her G-spot.

Peter took one of her nipples into his mouth, licked and sucking the bud while his hands held her onto him. She began to tighten around him, her wetness covering him. He gave a satisfying groan of approval. Peter moved his attention to her other nipple, licking and teasing it just the same. Blair picked up the pace. *Fuck, I’m going to cum if she continues this speed.*

He could feel how close she was, her face contorting with pleasure.

"That's it, baby." Blair grabbed his face to kiss him hungrily, whimpering into him as she rode herself to the edge. She clamped around him, not being able to control the wetness that poured out of her. It soaked down over his hips and between his legs as her body twitched with each wave.

"Good girl. You look so beautiful when you cum all over my cock."

Blair fell forward into his shoulder, her breathing erratic.

"Oh. My. God," she whispered into his neck.

"I'm not done with you yet." Peter lifted her off of him, spinning her to her hands and knees. He aligned himself behind her, burying himself so quickly she gasped.

He couldn't control himself anymore, he needed to fill her. "Lay your shoulders down." She did as she was told, allowing him the perfect angle. He pounded into her more roughly than he had at the start, letting himself build his own climax. His cock ached for release. One hand on her shoulder, the other gripping her hip he watched himself pump in and out of her core. His cock glistened with her moisture, driving him crazy.

"Touch yourself, baby. Let's see if you can cum again." Peter watched her fingers find their way to her clit. Fuck she looked so beautiful at this angle. Her back muscles from years of training looked immaculate, bite-able.

He could feel his load building, just as she began to tighten around him. *Fuck, fuck, fuck.*

"God, baby, you feel so good. I'm not going to make it much longer." He made sure to bury into her deeply with each thrust. His climax built, he was going to fill her.

"You want me to fill you, baby?"

"Yes. Fill me," she begged. She looked back towards him and it completely undid him. Peter roared out as he came. He buried himself as far as he could, his cock pulsing as his seed released into her. He felt her clench around him with her fourth orgasm as he came inside her.

"Fuck." A breath escaped him as his orgasm subsided. He tried to slow his breathing, feeling weak. His legs were shaking from how much pleasure he had just experienced. He collapsed on top of her, still buried inside her, unable to hold himself upright.

"You okay?" he asked, brushing her hair from her face.

"Absolutely. That felt amazing."

Peter pulled himself from her, discarding the used condom before laying on his back. Blair flipped over cuddling into his shoulder.

Peter's vision went a little fuzzy, a sudden wave of nausea washing over him. He felt tingles spread over his whole body.

"The nausea is normal during our first couple times together. It's a side effect of me taking the sexual energy from you. You may feel a little tired at

first too, but it will get easier." Peter nodded and glanced towards Blair. Her image was blurry, her hair changing from raven black to an auburn, reminding him that he hadn't been with the real Blair.

A pang filled his chest at the realisation. He would never be able to be intimate with Blair in this manner. At that moment, he had convinced himself it was her. It had meant something to him, but this wasn't her.

Vivian ran her hand over his chest. He was grateful for the release he had so desperately needed these past weeks.

What would Blair think?

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CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Return of the Prodigal Daughter

There was a weakness that settled into the bones of the female Nephilim. It latched onto a dwelling sense of dread, at the images of a destroyed future and the loss of a friend. Blair Dawn did not think the weight on her shoulders could get any heavier. This was an unbearable weight, one that crushed her from the inside out. She had to go back to the academy pretending as though everything was normal, that everything was fine.

The bags that clung to the underside of her eyes and the few lost pounds the mountain had stolen from her, made it hard to deny the toll that had been endured. The Elders had completed their task, rushed by the urgency of Michael's command. Blair was more in control of her Dreaming, but at the cost of pieces of herself. Pieces that may never be reclaimed.

Blair returned to her clothes, finding them slightly bigger than they had when she arrived. A couple weeks was all it had taken to strip her of health. A tremor ran through fingertips, the steady hand of an artist vanished amongst the weight of the future. Blair would do as her father commanded, if only to survive to the end of the week and to return home.

Sadness swirled within the eyes of Arsinoe standing by the portal, readying herself for the goodbye to her new found friend. Blair felt sorrow for a visit cut short, for a process rushed beyond her body's physical capability. Arsinoe had been the one to nurse her wounds, to bathe the soreness in Blair's body, and to calm away distant nightmares.

Nightmares of the storm coming for the entire world.

Blair found no peace within the Dreaming, just haunted and desolate cruelty. The Dreaming planted a rotting seed within the carcass of Blair's

body, slowly poisoning child-filled joy, leaving behind a numb exterior.

“I wish our time together was not cut short, Blair. It has been an honour to know you.”

“You sound as though we shall never see one another again.” Blair’s voice fell flat.

“I do not see that in our future, Blair, especially if you continue on this path of self destruction. You must ease yourself from the obsession of your Dreaming. It’s killing you.” The look of a concerned friend hugged the facial features of the Seer. A sigh escaped Blair, one pained with effort.

“I know. I just feel *powerless*. I was given this gift of Sight from God, yet I still have no power to control the fate that has been laid before someone I care for deeply.” Boney shoulders falling forward, the weight crushing Blair further.

“Live your life with love, Blair. Love can do a lot in a world devoid of compassion. Your gift may not allow you to control fate, but it can give you a clearer path on what matters in the present.” Blair contemplated the words diligently. Arsinoe still had wisdom to display before the young woman.

“Thank you for taking care of me during my time here, Arsinoe. It has been an honour to be within your company, however short lived it may have been.”

“Be safe, Blair.” Arsinoe’s arms encompassed the fragile frame of Blair Dawn for the last time, before returning to the mouth of the mountain.

The Elder, Carnage, stepped forward bathed in robes of red and black. Her face was worn with age, but soft and welcoming as she offered Blair a small velvet box. The lid slid open with ease revealing a small titanium ring, the sigil of the Seers’ Eye appearing up at Blair. Her initiation was complete, an official junior member of the Emissary.

“Though this had not been designed to be your graduation test, you have shown great strength and talent with the gift you have been given. We look forward to seeing you progress, my lady. Please be wary of this increase in power as Arsinoe is correct. Your body is a sign in itself that you have pushed yourself too far. You must be careful and rest, Blair. May the truth be revealed.” Carnage bowed towards the princess and hastily retreated, leaving Blair to place the ring on her pinkie finger of her dominant hand and proceed into the swirls of purple hues.

The academy felt the same. The same smells wafted through the air, filling her with nostalgia. The same chatter echoed throughout as students milled throughout the space in between classes. The same architecture that dwarfed its inhabitants with decorative superiority stood tall and unwavering. Yet, Blair felt segregated from her home as her toes touched inside the office of the headmistress. *Time had the power of moulding someone into something unrecognisable.*

The headmistress' face contorted with concern at the sight of one of her star pupils. The way Blair’s name fell off of her tongue in a hushed, disquieting tone.

Blair had muttered several reassurances, claiming how rest was needed.

Her dorm room had been found empty, Willow was probably at her classes or joking around with the boys. Blair was grateful for the silence and isolation. Her lead filled body fell to the bed with underestimated force, bouncing from the impact. Blair buried herself in the handmade quilt and let a sleepless coma drag her into the abyss.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Reunited

The aroma of freshly cooked bacon had Peter Bronze's stomach clenching in the dining hall as people chattered excitedly, eagerly making their way through the bustling area. The sound of clinking glasses, silverware, and laughter filled the room, and the servers hurrying to serve the meals to the starving adults.

Peter could feel his stomach trying to eat itself. Every corner of the dining hall was buzzing with activity with different groups of people sitting down, chatting, and laughing over their shared meals.

"Look who decided to show up for breakfast," Snow muttered between the pages of her book. Peter blinked his eyes a few times, feeling attacked somehow as he sat down. He innocently batted his eyelashes.

"Well, you know he was eating something this morning." Damon chuckled at the muffin that impacted his face from Peter's not so subtle throw.

"What can I say, Snow, I have many appetites that need satiating." There was a cheeky grin spread on Peter's face. He started scarfing down eggs with a smile.

"Holy shit," Damon muttered, eyes wide with surprise.

Peter looked towards the entrance of the dining hall and the food in his mouth literally dropped to the table along with his jaw. Blair walked down the walkway, Nephilim uniform swinging with her stride. She looked utterly exhausted, dark smudges beneath her eyes. Peter took in that her uniform did not seem to hug her body like it used to.

Their eyes locked. Guilt clenched his stomach, ridding him of his appetite. His recent activities with a certain Succubus swirling shame. Regret grew as a fungus when her features softened with relief. *If only she knew*.

Peter stood from the table, hands shaking from nerves. Blair picked up her pace, almost running into his arms. Her head buried into his chest, her scent encircling around him. Peter understood that while Vivian had been able to mimic Blair's scent, there was something unique about Blair that could not be replicated. Something that had been missing; a hint of lilac.

He lowered his nose to her hair, inhaling deeply. His arms encased her in his embrace, feeling the sense of loss he had been experiencing without her. He had missed her, a deep resonance in his soul. This was the first time they had hugged since the night she came back from the city. Blair's arms pressed into his back with force, like she needed to be closer to him.

She feels so thin. More fragile.

"What the fuck."

Blair and Peter pulled apart, the muttering around them coming into focus. They had made a scene and Jules made sure to be vocal about his distaste.

Rage bellowed from somewhere deep inside Peter for ruining their moment. His body ached for her, now cold from the lack of contact.

"Hi, Jules. I'm surprised you managed to put pants on this morning," Peter found himself muttering, his tone just as distasteful as Jules' had been.

Jules sneered at Peter, looking like he was going to spring over the Nephilim table.

Who would have thought the clinking of beer meant so little to him.

"Blair!" Arlie's voice called over the chatter. The two Nephilim women embraced. Arlie's face pinched together. "You feel like you've lost weight. Blair, what happened? Are you okay?" Arlie confirmed Peter's suspicions.

"Yeah, I'm okay. Just had a rough go with the Elders and my father." A tired sigh escaped her lungs.

"Your father, Michael, came to see you?" Arlie's face looked like she just smelt something foul. Jules and Arlie looked between each other briefly.

"Yeah, he ordered my return to the academy, so I am here." Peter found his hand subconsciously placed at the base of her back. Blair looked up at

him, in recognition of the gentle touch. Her eyes spoke of wounds, of burden.

“Does Father Morgan know you’re back?” Arlie asked. Blair shook her head slightly. She had no desire to see the professor from her scrunched brow.

The bells rang throughout Oaken, their large chimes drawing students from the Dining Hall towards their classes and drowning out the conversation that had just happened.

Peter looked back at Jules, watching him roll his eyes before standing from the white and gold table to storm off.

“We will talk later,” was all Blair told Arlie before turning towards Peter. Now facing her, he saw the way her cheeks had sunk in, a darkness shrouding the light that had once illuminated her features.

“I’ll go talk to Jules. Be careful, Blair. They can’t get suspicious about you two.” The daughter of Raphael’s hands were tumbling over each other.

“We will be careful, Arlie. I promise,” Blair tried to reassure her. Peter was lost on the context until Arlie’s eyes moved towards Damon. A subtle gesture that spoke a thousand words. Arlie turned away, red staining her cheeks to follow after Jules.

“Would you like to skip first with me?” Her voice was quiet amongst the bells, but Peter nodded intently. He would let this woman lead him anywhere.

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CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

The Loveseat

The Brew Box was relatively empty at this hour. The autumn sun glared through the panes of the old greenhouse, creating a warmth throughout the coffee shop. Taylor worked quickly behind the barista bar to make the lattes. The Air Caster infused the steamed milk with his own elemental magic, adding a wondrous flavour that couldn't be found anywhere else.

Their loveseat vacant, Blair sat down and silently asked Peter to join her.

"Do you want to talk about what happened while you were away? You look ill." Peter's mind wandered to his own sick behaviour. His perverted attempt at being with Blair, while she was away clearly suffering from whatever Seer training that had impacted her physical well-being. He shifted uncomfortably knowing he had a pair of panties in his back pocket. They were a hot coal of shame.

"I had to rush the process of my enhancement. Michael needed me to return to Oaken, so I pushed myself too hard. I'll be alright." Blair brought her latte to her lips and frowned at the cup.

"Blair, you don't have to be alright." Forest clashed with his stormy sea, as Peter took her hand in his. Her eyes widened but she boldly held his gaze. The intimate action brought pink to her cheeks. She pulled her hand away, aware of the people who surrounded them. Peter glanced around, no one was paying them any attention.

Blair lifted her hand, brushing a strand of hair from his face. "Your hair has gotten longer."

Peter chuckled, playing with a few of the longer strands. Getting his hair cut had been the last thing on his mind throughout his examination period. “I know, I should cut it.”

“No, I like it. It suits you.”

Peter smirked at the compliment. Her lips parted slightly, looking at his mouth.

“I missed you, while I was away.” Her finger trailed along his jaw before it dropped to her coffee lid. His jaw burned where the brief touch scorched him. *A nervous tendency, her fiddling*.

“I missed you, too. It was weird not having you around to bully me.” He was honest, mind again drifting to his activities with Vivian. Phantom claws pierced and slashed through his abdomen.

“Anything exciting happen?” *Tons.* He counted them off mentally.

Sleeping with Gabby. Sleeping with Vivian. The secret underground rituals I have been attending. The Dark magic books I was currently studying.

Peter let out an awkward chuckle, rubbing the back of his neck and shifting uncomfortably at the involuntary confessional.

“Not really. I passed my Demon Examinations, Angelic is booked for next week. I am stressed, but c’est la vie.” Blair looked like she was disassociating,

“Blair?” She jumped slightly, now looking towards him.

“Sorry.”

“Blair what happened to you?” Concern warped his sense of calm. He was worried about her. “Please tell me. We have always tried to be honest with each other.” Hypocrisy was stitched into every syllable.

Blair looked like she debated telling him, her eyes darting over the space of *The Brew Box*. “I had a vision. Not a good one, and the deeper I look into it, the more it becomes clear. It has left an iron-like taste in my mouth and it's crushing me.”

Peter’s lungs deflated harshly, his heart pounding and rushing in his ears. *Was this the vision about me?*

“What did you see?” Peter knew the vision entailed him, just by the look on her face. Images of Blair’s blistered skin flashed across his vision. He pulled away from her, creating physical distance between the two of them.

“You. Destroying the world.” Her whisper shot out like a bullet.

Peter’s blood turned frigid.

A tear slid down her statuesque face. “There’s nothing that I can do to stop it—to save you from becoming that. Because I don’t want you to,you’re too capable of good and I don’t want to lose you.” Blair sobbed.

How she managed to look beautiful as she cried was beyond him. He wiped her tears with a rough thumb and tilted her chin upwards. Peter missed the sparkle of hope that glimmered in her beautiful eyes.

“I don’t want that either, Blair. I want– I need you in my life. The future can always change, right?” She nodded. “Then we can do everything in our power to make sure that never comes to pass. I do not have a strong urge to destroy the world currently, but maybe I’ll talk to Jules for a bit and I’ll change my mind.” Blair found no humour in his comment.

“That’s the thing about fate, Peter. The farther you run, the closer you get.”

He hushed her. Peter pulled her into his chest, resting his head on the top of hers. Her scent, her warmth, melted him into the cushions. His eyelids fell, letting himself get lost in the feeling of her closeness. Blair snuggled into his chest, legs swinging onto the couch to get closer. He took in a deep breath, his anxiety dissipating.

Home. She feels like home.

His soul reached toward her, hoping to find its likeness.

“Blair.” He tried to pull back from her, to calm the feelings that were swelling inside of his chest. Fearful he was submitting to her.

A soft snore escaped her. She had fallen asleep against him, curled into him like a cat. Peter carefully grabbed her barely consumed coffee before he wore it.

The Half-demon felt himself stumble over that line, into a realm there was no return from. Peter knew at this moment, looking at her soft features as she found peace against him, that there wasn’t anything he would not do for her. He brushed a tangled strand from her face, adoration clear on his features.

“Peter,” a hushed voice whispered. Peter’s head jumped up and scanned the room to find the source of the voice. No one in the café was paying either of them attention, except for a few glances from a few Half-demon classmates, whom he recognized from the commons. There was no aggression or distaste indicated in their body language.

His name passed by his ears with a breeze. Beckoning him, calling to him.

Taylor came around the bar and shuffled up to the pair slowly.

“Hey, Peter. I know it’s not my place,” he kept his voice low, “but I would be careful of your relations with Blair. I just don’t want it to end badly for you guys.”

“We are just friends, Tay.”

“No one looks at a friend like that. It’s just that there are consequences to Nephilim and Demon coupling…” The Air Caster trailed off, worry lining his mouth. Peter’s mind drifted towards Arlie and Damon.

“I know. Thank you. I will be more careful.” Taylor nodded and returned to serve the Charmer’s that walked in.

Peter nudged Blair awake, her safety more important to him than anything. Her eyes flared wide, wiping the drool from her chin.

“I’m so sorry.” She looked like a deer in headlights, looking for escape.

“Blair, wait.” He grabbed her wrist to stop her from leaving.

“I’m sorry, I need to go. I just thought of something.” Blair wouldn’t look at him.

“Let me come with you.” He tried to hide the need to be around her. He held onto her firmly, hoping she would change her mind.

“No. I need to go to the library. I’ll see you later.” She couldn’t have run out of there faster.

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CHAPTER FORTY

Summoned by the Headmistress

The combat training field was packed, formal group drills taking Peter Bronze from his thoughts of Blair, despite her close proximity. Training brought him focus, grounded him. The Half-demon channelled his breathing, moving it in and out of him with each precise movement. He could feel the strength in the tautness of his muscles contracting. Lethal even without the speed.

“Again, as one!” Carter called. The students merged into one entity, moving with complete unison through the drill. Swords jabbed forward, swung over shoulders, sounds exiting them in mass.

“That was great! Again.” They fell into the rhythm of the drill until Mrs. T, crazy coloured hair and all, came bounding forward towards Carter with a note.

Peter’s eyes were sternly on the pair as he went through the motions of the drill. Carter’s eyes landed directly on him. Carter let the drill complete, before telling them to be at ease.

“Bronze!”

“Yes, sir.”

“You are wanted by the headmistress.” Peter saluted and jogged up to the pair. Mrs. T smiled at him with her usual warmth. She was one of his greatest mentors, as she took the time to help him catch up. She never made him feel stupid and encouraged him to do well in his studies.

“Well, hello, oh wise one.” Peter mocked a bow.

“Hi, Peter. Come on. Let’s not keep the dragon waiting.” But Mrs. T couldn't stop the grin that grew over her face.

The hallway of the castle-like academy was lit through the large windows, the rays that peaked through the clouds spread over the walls and floors.

Peter and Mrs. T walked along the cold stones. Their footsteps echoed throughout the corridor mingling with the chatter of students. Portraits of past headmasters watched on with stern gazes as they made their way towards the headmistress' office.

The wooden door at the end of the hallway was intricately carved with the school crest and the brass handles shone brightly in the light. As they approached the door, Peter’s heart raced with anticipation, unsure of what the headmistress wanted to speak to them about. She never met him on good terms it seemed.

Peter's hand shook slightly as he knocked on the door, three times, before it creaked open. The headmistress sat at her oak desk, her eyes flitting upwards as she acknowledged the visitor's presence.

"Ah, come in," the headmistress said in a voice that was both stern and warm. "Please have a seat."

Peter sat down in front of the lion fireplace, fidgeting uncharacteristically with his hands. The headmistress' eyes narrowed slightly, causing Peter to feel even more nervous than before.

"You are aware of the nature of your visit here today, I presume?" the headmistress said.

“Mrs. T nor Carter told me why you have summoned me, Headmistress. Am I in trouble?” Peter’s mind wandered to the café, wondering if his moments with Blair were already gathering suspicion.

“You are not in trouble, Peter. In fact, I have seen your test results and your grades from your courses. Not to mention a long letter of appraisal from General Carter asking to nominate you for the tournament this year.”

The headmistress continued to speak, her tone firm yet compassionate. As she spoke, Peter felt a sense of relief wash over him. He knew he had made mistakes but felt grateful that his hard work was being recognized. “I am proud of your progress, but your grades are not why I called you here.”

Peter watched her stand from her desk and open the door to an adjacent room.

“There’s someone here to see you.”

Peter felt his mouth go dry, his heart leaping into his throat. A figure he longed to see so desperately since the accident walked through the door looking sheepish, with tears already staining their cheeks.

“Mom?”

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CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Motherly Concern

Sandre Bronze looked the same, yet didn't. Her skin clung to her bones with vigorous need, desperate to keep its host alive like food had been scarce for too long or Sandre had willed herself to death. Depression was just as deadly as any disease. Her dark brown hair was shorter than Peter remembered and there were wrinkles by her eyes when she smiled. A sadness clung to her aura, her soul, but hope sparkled behind her teary eyes.

Peter found himself stepping back, his muscles tense and his fists rising with heat. Guilt was a double edged blade through his gut. Ashamed at his actions against her, for leaving her behind. Yet there was hate towards her.

The last five years came flooding back. *The accident, Thomas, being homeless.*

"Hi, baby. You've grown so much." Her face was soft and welcoming, motherly concern painted along her aging features. Her furrowed brow and tears were a true testament of her loss. Her grief over her lost child.

As the son approached his mother, Peter felt something fracture inside him—relief rising sharp and sudden at the sight of her, only to be tangled immediately with the dull, aching weight of years she hadn't been there. His eyes burned, tears threatening despite his effort to hold them back, as if even that small surrender would mean too much.

When they closed the distance, Sandre opened her arms without hesitation and drew him in, her embrace warm, familiar in a way that unsettled him. She felt smaller than he remembered, fragile beneath his hands—as though time had worn her down while he'd been left to grow without her.

He faltered for a breath, caught between longing and anger, before wrapping his arms around her at last. The moment he did, it all surged up at once—love, grief, resentment—until he could hardly separate one from another, standing there in her arms, overwhelmed.

“I thought you were dead.” Sandre sobbed against him.

“I’m so sorry, Mom. I should have come home to you. I– I was so scared. Thomas–” The floodgate that Peter had withheld opened. Tears streamed down his face, his face buried in her neck. A tender hand stroked his hair with a hushed shush.

“The headmistress told me what happened. I heard about the vandalization in the gym and thought, what are the chances… Then you never came home. I– I thought the worst.” A heart string struck, plucked by the painful fingers of the person who had brought him into this world.

“Sandre and I have been in communication for the last few days. I figured it was time that she came back into your life, Peter.” Mother and son pulled apart, the headmistress drawing their attention.

“I should have contacted you sooner. I’ve just been adjusting to my new life.” Peter realised that within the chaos of his life, being tossed into the abyss of the supernatural world, none of it compared to the loss of his mother.

“I should have told you what you were. Your father told me to keep it from you to protect you.” His mother cast her eyes downward as she spoke.

“My father.”

Sandre nodded. “Let’s sit. I’m sure you have questions.” She chuckled, wiping her blotchy face.

The lion fireplace was ablaze with crackling wood, the smoke filling up the chimney and spreading warmth towards them.

“I will give you two some privacy. I have a class to attend, I will be back in fifteen to twenty minutes.” Headmistress Penns talked through the large oak doors, leaving them in isolation.

“So, how have you been, my son? You look so strong and healthy. Except for the bags that smudge your eyes. Have you been having nightmares again?” Her warm hand found the side of his face, brushing her thumb over his skin. He couldn’t stop himself from leaning into it.

“Yes, I still have nightmares.” Her face looked so sad, as though she understood the power of a sleepless night. He recognized the tiredness that had nestled deep within the lines of her face.

“Are you okay, Mom? You look unwell.”

“It’s been hard to be on my own. Having Thomas and you leave my life at the same time, it was hard to cope with it at the start and my drinking got worse, but I am attending meetings for my addiction now. I’m still learning to live with it, but do not worry about me. Knowing you are alive has given me back so much strength to move forward.” Her eyes told the truth. She was truly happy that they had finally reunited. She was not angry like he had expected her to be. There was nothing but love and compassion.

“Why didn’t you tell me what I was or take me to one of the academies?”

“I am sure your adjustment here has been challenging, being tossed into this world. I wanted to tell you so many times, but I wanted you to be old enough to understand why. You displayed a lot of abilities as a child, it made me paranoid that the Covenant would find you.” She paused, eyes finding their way to the flames that raged within the golden lion's mouth.

“Your father told me you would be unsafe growing up at the academies. He told me your powers, as a child, would have been too easy to detect. He said that they would kill you for who he was and what you were. That they would never understand the power that would come from you, because they have always been afraid of what it meant to all the things the Covenant and the Great Council believe in. How they label us Demons.” Fear was sketched, the artist of distress moulding her features into a smaller version of herself.

“Do you know who he is?” Peter was eager to know more, perched on the edge of his seat.

“He went by the name of Jacob. He never told me his true name, he said that knowing would give me too much power over him and put me in more danger than he ever wanted to subject me to.”

“Did he love you?” Peter felt silly for asking. *Would his father give a damn about him now?*

“Yes. I believe he did. He promised he would find a way for me to be with him. But then Thomas–” Her eyes glazed over.

“What about Thomas?” Peter felt his anger simmer beneath his skin. Magic boiled, bubbled in response, even the thought of Thomas conjured the rage. One that had become harder to cap. Vivian had become a good release for it, but it was always temporary and the guilt he experienced, the

self-hatred that followed added aqueous liquid to his already bubbling cauldron.

“You know he was a Demon right? He possessed the poor man who he appeared as.”

“I knew what he was, Peter. I am Half-demon too. My mother is Lilith.”

Peter scoffed. How had he never known she was like him?

“So, you– You lived in– You were part of the Covenant?” Peter was confused. Frustrated. Angry.

Peter's eyes floated shut, a deep breath expanding his chest to calm his inner storm. His magic grumbled in response, not appreciating suppression. The flames in the fireplace sparked higher and hotter.

“Yes. Until I fell in love with your father in this very academy.” *She had gone to Oaken. No wonder Headmistress Penns and her had looked at each other with such familiarity,*

“I know– I know Thomas hurt you–”

“He hurt you too, Mom. How could you ever stay with him?” Peter was standing now, staring down at the woman.

“Thomas helped me hide you. The symbols behind the wallpaper, the rituals, everything; to suppress your magic.”

A smile spread over Peter, one of disbelief and madness. “You suppressed my magic?”

“I did it to protect you. When you were a kid, you almost convinced your bully to jump off a bridge before Thomas found you and stopped you. You could tell anyone to do anything you wanted if their will allowed it. I was scared of what you could do. I had never seen any Half-demon capable of those things without mastery. I was scared the Covenant would come find you.”

“And that would have been a bad thing? I was always meant to be here, at this academy, learning to control my power before I hurt people. I killed him, Mom. I killed Thomas and his friends. I sent them back to Hell for everything they did to us. Then I ran.” Peter felt tears sting his eyes.

Her face fell slightly. “I know you did.” Sandre stood, rubbing her hands over Peter’s arm. “I do not blame you for that. There were times I wished he was dead, but your father sent him to us. To protect us, to keep other Demons from finding us. I am so sorry I put you through his cruelty.”

Peter felt his anger dissipate. It fizzled into a light rain inside of him, calm but teetering on rageful flooding.

“I have moved back into the City of Enders with support from the headmistress and Professor Osric. They were once good friends of mine before I had to run. So, I will be more accessible and closer. I will come visit here when I can.”

A sense of relief settled over him. He would have his mother back in his life, even though it would be limited by the visitation of the academy. At least there would be an effort made. A support system that returned, someone who would love him unconditionally regardless of the blood on his hands.

“I love you, Mom.” Peter sat back on the couch feeling more stable than he had in a long time.

“I love you, my sweet boy.” She tousled the top of his head. His lips turned into a smile involuntarily, feeling like a kid again.

“I’ve heard about your grades and your combat training with Carter. Have you thought about what you want to do?”

Peter’s mind travelled to Blair and his plan to never part from her.

“I think I want to be part of the royal guard, a Warrior of the Blessed.” Her eyes widened. “I know it’s a long shot, but Carter is training me and he was able to do it. Why can’t I? I am powerful, Mom, stronger than I ever thought.”

The large oak doors swung open, cutting their conversation short. Professor Osric walked through with the headmistress, his eyes wide behind his glasses.

“Sandre.”

“Morrigan.” Peter watched his mother leap into Professor Osric’s arms.

“It’s been too long, Audre,” Osric muttered, a nickname floating through the air with adoration and nostalgia. “I kept all of your letters. You never put a return address, but I was glad you were alive. The first time I saw your son, I knew he was yours.” Osric looked in Peter’s direction, warmth on his features.

“Why didn’t you tell me you knew my mom?” Peter found himself asking.

“We were told to keep our distance from you.” The Earth Caster adjusted his shirt and tie.

“Why?”

“Because, if we treated you like every other student you wouldn’t stand out as much. Your safety has been our biggest priority.” The headmistress

stood the tallest. Her authority was clear in her posture.

“Safe from what?” Peter demanded. *What more could be out there?*

“The Covenant. They are already suspicious of you. Your natural talent, your excelling grades. You have become our very own Percival. Years behind, but now reaching the top of the class.” The headmistress perched on the edge of her desk.

“I don’t understand. Why would the Covenant be after me?” Peter was on his feet again, flames dancing over his knuckles.

“You’re powerful. That threatens the Great Council and the Church. With the increased political unrest, the Nephilim will be looking for anything or anyone else to blame. All while making sure Half-demons remain in their place.” Sandre flinched as Osric finished. She walked towards the window.

The bottom of Peter’s stomach was a void. His throat was too dry to swallow.

“Some fanatics believe Revelation is coming for us.” Penns’ decanter popped open and she poured four tumblers with a helpful shot of Forty Creek. She downed hers, a pleased and much needed sigh followed.

Sandre let out a sob realizing the danger her baby was in. How she had failed to protect him.

The headmistress handed him the patterned crystal tumbler.

Peter lifted it to his nose and he got hints of smoky maple. *This is the good stuff.*

Whiskey burned down his throat, and his breath that followed had maple syrup flourishing in his mouth.

Helena Penns handed her old friend a glass, but Sandre refused. The headmistress cheered the air and had it in her honour. Osric walked over to the alcohol cart to grab his own. He slammed it back and down before he began to rub the stubble over his jaw. The crystal slapped into the metal with a little more force than expected, Sandre jumping from the sudden noise.

The silence that fell was deafening.

“Has your father tried contacting you? Or Blair?” Peter looked at the headmistress, wondering what Blair had anything to do with this. He played with the tumbler between his fingers, watching the fire refract through the edges of the cup.

“Is this because of Blair’s vision?” Peter’s vision went hazy as the question spilled.

Flashes of Blair’s blistered skin. Flames. Falling.

“We worry that your father will try to find you. He’s dangerous and it’s best to not fall for anything he says.” The question was dodged by Osric, who was over by the window now. He took Penns’ place to offer comfort. He was rubbing circles into his mothers back, slow and steady. The sight made him slightly sick, thoughts of Thomas reminding him of the men his mother was addicted to the company off.

“You said my father loved you,” Peter muttered, looking directly at his mother.

“He does– *did*.” Sandre reached for her chest, as she turned. “You are more important to me than he ever was. I– We worry he will use you to help him return from the Nine Realms.” Peter found himself rolling his eyes. His father had not bothered to contact him, ever. He had a feeling his father was never going to.

“Look, I will keep my mind open to anything I deem suspicious and let you know if my father tries to contact me. He hasn’t and from what I know, he hasn’t contacted Blair either. At least, she has never mentioned anything of the sort.”

Headmistress Penns face stretched with contemplation.

“I really should get back to class.”

His mother looked disappointed at his sudden cold demeanour.

What was she expecting? I’m not the person that she remembers. I’m Peter the warrior, the Demon, not the human boy that ran away from home.

“Peter–”

“Look, Mom, it was good to see you, truly.” He paused wondering what he could say to the woman. “I just have a project that I need to work on. We can catch up another time, without all the *prying* eyes.” Osric and the headmistress exchanged a glance, Peter’s bitter tone not going unmissed. He placed the tumbler on the coffee table.

He gave Sandre one quick squeeze before running out of the office. His body itched with skittering insects that had his movements jerky. His heart pounded inside of his chest, too fast and too slow.

I feel suffocated, like I can’t catch my breath. He leaned against the stone of the academy, the roughness offering support as the hallway tilted before him.

His mother had found him, and by the sounds of it, his father would too.

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CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Feathered Evidence

The Nephilim Common Room was quiet, all the students in their beds after curfew. One room in particular, the light still shining beneath the door, was filled with hushed giggles and gossip.

Willow Glory, Arlie Cascade, and Blair Dawn sat beneath the twinkling lights of the girl's dorm room wearing fuzzy pajamas and face masks. They were in need of some serious catching up. Blair felt as though she had returned to her teenage self, talking about none other than boys.

"Alright, I need a full rundown of this situation with you and Peter, girl," Willow demanded. "I heard he got called into the office."

"We are just friends." Blair tried to brush them off, her pink tinged cheeks betraying her self denial.

"Says the psycho who ran into his already available arms in the dining hall this morning," Willow muttered with a dramatic hand to the forehead. The room fell silent before unstoppable laughter racked through the group.

"Okay! Okay! Yes, I had a moment of weakness. I spent three weeks away from the academy *only* thinking about him and seeing him in my visions. I can't help it." She played it off with a false smile, praying they wouldn't pry too hard. She did not want to burden her friends, nor did she wish to share the sinful thoughts she had when it came to Peter's darkness. He was a temptation, one that washed her with shame.

"So there is something going on?" Willow wiggled her eyebrows.

"I wouldn't say there is. We have established that we can't be together. My feelings for him mean nothing in the eyes of the Covenant *and* my position as princess. My father would sooner smite me, then ever see me

with anyone he didn't deem 'acceptable' by his extremely high standards, let alone a Half-demon." Blair fiddled with the ends of her hair.

"There's something pulling us together and my Dreaming has made it clear that it will end in tragedy with the whole end of the world, which is why I keep denying myself. I also need to find a way to save him. Stop him from becoming that. No one deserves to become that." *Monsters are not born, they are made.*

"I literally fell asleep on him this morning and I felt actual peace." Blair laughed as if she'd imagined it. "I didn't even slip into my Dreaming. I just slept for a few moments. It scared me, to know that he could make me feel safe." Blair would have scrunched her face if she could, but the mask had cemented. She was grateful the clay hid her suddenly heated face. She was embarrassed by her reaction to it. To him.

God, he must think I'm an idiot.

"My body just reacts to him. Being near him, feeling his warmth, smelling his scent, it turns me into something with no inhibitions. I know it's wrong, but there's this deep *need* that I can't quite describe. I fear what will become of us if I cave. My father has already warned me away from him." Blair slumped against Willow's bed frame closing her eyes, feeling Willow's head lean into hers, brown hair tumbling over Blair's shoulder. There was a single beat of silence.

"I have to get this fucking shit off my face before I claw it off." Willow jumped from her bed, grabbing her nicotine pen that was cotton candy scented.

The girls walked to the communal woman's washroom in the Nephilim dorms where the water never got hot enough. They quickly scrubbed their faces bare, using the same towel to dry. Blair's thoughts were on the sense of familiarity with Peter that came naturally, as she washed.

Blair stared into her reflection, looking at her thin cheeks and chapped lips. She knew she was getting closer and closer to the boundary line of their relationship. She hated to admit how easily she was ready to jump over it.

They walked back into Willow and Blair's room and got into their second round of masks, these intended for hydration. It was slimy and cool against the Nephilim's faces.

"I understand where you are coming from." Arlie's voice was a whisper.

“I have never gotten the full details about that by the way. About what happened between you and Damon.” Willow flipped onto her stomach on her mattress to look at Arlie, hoping to get the tea surrounding those two.

Blair had heard most of the story, but was sure some of the details had been missing. Arlie and her agreed that it would be safer for the couple to not say anything. No one could tell if no one knew. Blair and Arlie exchanged a look, a silent conversation spread between them.

“Damon and I… We were in a secret relationship for a couple of years,” she admitted.

“*Years*?” The shock could not be hidden from Willow’s face. “You’re serious. Years? How did no one notice?”

“We were very secretive. We found time to escape from the academy grounds during the summer. Amongst the humans, no one knew what we were. There was no Covenant to get in the way of us.” Arlie bit her bottom lip.

“Damon is so kind. I know he comes off as an ass, but he is so loyal and hilarious. He makes me feel incredibly beautiful.” Arlie’s face held adoration. Her eyes landed on her hands that sat in her lap.

“You love him,” Willow stated.

Arlie nodded, dabbing the corner of her eye as best she could with the mask. “There are secrets and moments we have shared that have only been witnessed by the walls of the school. We promised each other that we would never, you know,” her hands fluttered in the air nervously, “but after two years there came a moment where we didn’t want to stop—we couldn’t stop. I needed him in a way that I couldn’t describe.”

“Did you sleep with him?” Blair already knew the answer to Willow’s question.

“Yes. That’s when I knew that he was– That he is *my mate*.”

Blair felt her mouth go dry. *They were mates*.

“You never told me–”

“I couldn’t. I was in denial about it, because if it was true then I would be breaking the laws of the Covenant. I would be outcasted, or killed… or worse.” Her tears came down faster. “If I allowed it to be true, it meant that I would never be with my true mate. *Ever*.” Pain sat deep within Blair’s heart for her friend. The amount of agony and torture they both must have experienced, forced to be apart for as long as they were both alive.

“So, why did you end it?” Willow asked. “If he’s your mate then– Then how have you managed to stay apart?”

Arlie shrugged. They had all been taught how strong and rare these connections were. On a cosmic and spiritual level that not many got to truly experience when they partnered with the wrong person.

“It’s torture for us to stay apart. I hate seeing him and knowing I cannot be with him. We stayed together, until Blair had a vision of us getting caught. She saw Damon dragged from the grounds and tortured by the Great Council… led by my mother.” Silence followed. Her face contorted in anguish. “I never wanted to see him hurt. So I ended it.”

Blair squeezed her friend's shoulder.

“Holy shit.” Willow rubbed her forehead processing the information.

It was a lot to take in.

Her curiosity about the mating potential between Half-demons and Half-angels was confirmed by someone close to her.

“I am so sorry, Arlie. I can’t imagine the pain you are going through.” There was no comfort that Blair knew she could offer. She had watched them stare at each other with longing and misery for the past couple of years. The same fate that seemed entangled around her and Peter. Her feelings for Peter had developed rapidly, similarly to Arlie and Damon. It terrified her.

A portal opened rapidly in the room, blowing paper and books in various directions. Willow jumped, grabbing her nearby weapon, ready to engage the unknown visitor.

Arsinoe stepped through with a glowing portal stone in hand and looked directly at Blair, her robes blaring at the base from the force of the portal.

“Sorry for the interruption, my lady. I need to give this to you before I am found with them.” Arsinoe handed Blair a large folder, that she almost dropped from the weight. The folder was bound together with leather that threatened to burst.

“It contains evidence of what you asked for. I fear my transgression in the archives may lead to my execution. You must make change, Blair. Do not try to contact me. You must have no connection to this. It was a pleasure to know you.”

The portal closed, leaving the three Nephilim in shock. Arsinoe’s name spilled from Blair’s mouth, too late to reach the ears of the Nephilim Seer.

A tremble shot through her hands making the folder almost tumble from the shiver, the shutter, the shake.

“What is that, Blair?” Arlie’s voice was steady, but wariness was present in the octaves.

Blair returned to her position on the floor and undid the leather holding together the contents. Several texts spilled out, cases of coupling between Nephilim and Half-demons. More evidence of the potential of mating bonds between the two species. All of them covered up by the Covenant.

Blair felt nausea course through her while viewing the police files, images of mutilated Half-demons splayed upon operation tables. Graphic images and descriptions of the torture procedures endured by them. Cut, slashed, and put back together through magic to get them to confess. Betray themselves and claim that they had taken advantage of the Nephilim. That there had been no consent.

Tears stung Blair’s eyes.

Their Nephilim partners were forced to watch.

Arlie picked up one of the case files.

“Blair, *what is this*?” she demanded from the princess.

“Cases of coupling between Nephilim and Half-demons. Cases that were covered up by the Great Council to deny that it’s possible…”

“I think I’m going to be sick.” Arlie jumped to her feet and ran over to the garbage, her breathing unsteady. Blair immediately shut the folder, returning the graphic pages to their disorganised place.

Blair shuffled over to the garbage and rubbed Arlie’s back. “I’m sorry, Arlie. I should have kept that from you.”

“You’d think, with the amount of monsters we have killed while on placement, would somehow make me less responsive to gore and violence.” Arlie tried to laugh. Her face was grey, sweat breaking out over her forehead.

“This is different, this has a personal trigger for you because of Damon.”

“Blair, why did you ask for this? Why is it so important to you?” Willow had reopened the folder, reading one of the cases.

“I– I had a suspicion that the mating bond was possible between us. I was worried that Peter and I… that we might be mates because of the tug I feel towards him, even from before we met. I asked Arsinoe if there had

been any cases that had been elided in history.” Blair looked down at Arlie. “I had no idea that all I’d have to do is ask one of my best friends.”

Arsinoe came to Blair’s thoughts as Arlie fought her nausea. She was worried that she had put the Nephilim Seer in danger asking for this information. A life was on her hands, but this was the evidence she needed to try and make a change.

To fight the Covenant.

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CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Princess Duties

“Blair, wake up.” Willow Glory shook the shoulders of the princess. Willow was kneeling over Blair Dawn, who was curled up in the nest of blankets and pillows the girls had formed to sleep in. Arlie Cascade stirred beside Blair, removing her arm from Blair’s waist to put it over her eyes.

“Willow, it's too early,” Arlie groaned.

Blair grunted in agreement, groggy from a sleepless night of chatter.

“Classes don’t start for at least a couple hours.” Blair peeked open a singular eyelid as she spoke. The morning light was coming in through the top of their curtained window.

“I know. Your mother is here,” Willow whispered.

Blair sat straight up. Her hair was a tangled mess, stuck in awkward angles. “What do you mean, my mother is here?” The words hissed through Blair’s chapped lips. Arlie rested on her elbows, waking slowly at the mention of the princess’ mother, Miranda Dawn.

“I went for a run this morning because I couldn’t sleep. When I came off the trails a royal limo pulled into the courtyard.”

“Fuck.” The curse spewed from Blair’s mouth. She launched to her feet, throwing the blankets on top of half-conscious Arlie.

Michael had warned her that she would be expected to make an appearance in the city next to Adam’s side. It was now her job to fake a full and welcoming family for the political hogwash that was raining onto Adam after his embarrassing statement.

She hadn’t anticipated the departure to happen so soon. She just got back for goodness sake.

Blair froze in frustration, her thoughts tumbling together incoherently. She had to shower. Put on make-up. Dress the part of the put-together princess for her heartless life-giver. She had to look perfect.

“Go shower. I’ll delay her,” Willow promised.

“Arlie?” Blair asked the pile of blankets. The blankets murmured in response.

“I need you to get Peter for me. Tell him to wear something nice. I am bringing him with me.”

Blair became the perfect image of Michael’s offspring. A regal silver gown clung to her body, flowing with each step of her heels. Arlie had done a number trying to get the corset closed tight enough to fit. Her lack of weight caused most of her clothes to hang loosely off her figure.

Miranda had summoned her to the office of the headmistress. She made her way there as slowly as she could. Blair knew that her mother would grow impatient every second she was made to wait. Blair took smaller and slower steps.

Peter leaned against the wall in front of the office. His chiselled chin tilted upwards, eyes closed in contemplation. Blair stuttered a step, her heel scraping against the stone floor. Peter looked towards her and offered a smile. Blue eyes trapped her in place as they roamed over her body.

He was wearing a black button down and dress pants. He pushed off the wall, standing tall with his hands stuffed into the tight pockets. Dark hair curled over his forehead.

God, he is beautiful. Blair willed herself to move towards him.

He did a little twirl with a bow. “Does this suit your needs, your majesty?” His icy blue gaze peered up to her. Her breath caught in her throat.

“Yes. You look very nice.” Her voice was unsteady with attraction. Peter was making her heart race like a bird ready to fly free from its boney cage.

“Unfortunately, Damon didn’t have a nice gown like that in his closet. We could have matched.” Blair snorted at the thought of Peter in a dress.

The oak doors to the headmistress' office opened, splitting the academy crest in two. Miranda stood in the passage, disappointment in her gaze; her stance.

All joy faded with Blair's smile. She stood a little straighter under her mother's piercing gaze.

"You must revel in the idea of making me wait. My patience grows thin, daughter. Get in here, now." Blair did not miss the sneer directed towards Peter.

Peter's fingers grazed Blair's as she passed him. Reassurance in the gentle touch, too subtle for anyone else to notice.

The headmistress' fingertips were pressed into her forehead. A headache clanging through her skull, inflicted by Blair's mother. Miranda tended to have that effect on people.

The oak doors closed, leaving Peter in the hallway to diligently wait for their departure into the city. They would be gone for the entire weekend, returning to Oaken on Monday. It was non-negotiable. Blair was already behind having to miss three weeks. She desperately wanted to be back and safe within these walls.

"The Half-demon stays here." Miranda was cold. Stone shouldered.

"He is coming with me. Otherwise, you and Michael can fuck right off."

"*Language*. Why him? Why not bring one of your other friends? Willow, perhaps," her mother tried to reason.

"No. Peter will be coming with me. He's new to the Covenant, and what a better way for him to get a first glance into the city, than through us. We will be seen as good samaritans, helping Half-demons by befriending them. We need to have the Half-demons on our side for this election, no?" Blair placed her hands behind her back, chin lifting a little higher in defiance.

Miranda's lips pressed together into a thin line. Almost as thin as the line Blair was standing on.

"He's coming. Otherwise, you will leave this academy without me." Stubbornness laced each of her words, as tight as the laces of her corset.

"Fine." Miranda glanced at her watch. "I'll be in the car. I already sent up guards to grab your bags. Tell the half-breed to grab his own." Miranda broke through the office doors, heels clicking in violent retreat.

"We will be back on Monday, Headmistress. I will make sure we get our assignments done and keep up with our training."

The headmistress flicked her fingers in a dismissive wave, eyes still closed in pain. Blair bowed her head and returned to the stone hallway.

Peter's eyes scanned over the princess, then glanced back at Miranda's retreating form.

"She seems like… a lot." His eyes were wide with a huge smile on his face in utter disbelief.

Blair couldn't help but smile as she chuckled. "You have no idea."

Peter softened as she laughed. As if the sound was everything to him.

"Remember before I left, you showed me a piece of yourself that no one else has seen?" she asked him softly.

Peter nodded, his eyes searching hers.

"Now, you will get to see a piece of me."

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CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

The World of Royalty

Peter Bronze could not keep his eyes off of her. The silver stars that swung on her earlobes, the sparkle of her gown that hugged her slender form, the smokiness of her eyelids; all of it pulling him deeper into a territory he shouldn't cross.

Blair Dawn was ripping his heart from his chest. Violently wrapping her fingers around his arteries, his organs. She was the very air he breathed and the light that drove away the darkness.

She's radiant. Beautiful.

Emeralds flickered towards him, entering the gaze he dared her to recognize. The admiration, adoration, affection.

Blood rose over her cheeks. Eyes dropping to his lips. The space between the back of the limo crushed around him, a single seat separating the two.

Peter leaned in, just to be a fraction closer.

Hell, Blair will be my undoing. I'd lay waste to the world for her. I'd worship the ground beneath her feet. All she'd have to do is give the word.

"We are five minutes out, my lady," Milo told them, his brown eyes looking between the two of them through the rearview. The sun kissed his chocolate skin through the windshield, highlighting his Angelic heritage. Taron was in the passenger seat, eyes closed and trying to get some rest from his late night. Taron had stayed up late watching over Blair.

Peter's jaw dropped looking through the tinted windows as the palace came into view.

The Palace of Angels was everything he imagined it to be. Carved from marble like the statues of Michaelangelo. The magnificent palace stood as a testament to the power and prestige of the royal Nephilim who called it home. Its grand facade was resplendent with intricate carvings, shimmering marble columns, and towering spires that reached towards the Heavens. It was surrounded by lush gardens filled with dying flowers and exotic plants, creating a tranquil oasis in the midst of the bustling city.

It was another world inside of the dimension of the City of Enders.

The palace was the calm inside of chaos.

Excluded. Solitary.

A garden of Eden.

The limo pulled in front of grand front steps. Guards, decorated in the beautiful white armour of the Blessed Warriors, carrying the symbol of the Archangels on the breast, lined each step.

Taron and Milo got out and joined them.

Peter’s chest constricted.

Blair’s fingers interlaced his. “You okay?”

“Oh, yeah. I’m just a Half-demon about to enter the royal house of the Archangel Michael. Nothing out of the ordinary.” His heart pounded knowing now that he was involved in something far bigger than himself. Something that Blair still hadn’t told him.

I shouldn’t be here.

Small fingers squeezed his. She had the most beautiful green eyes. A vibrant emerald hue, with flecks of gold and hazel that always seemed to shimmer in the light. Blair's eyes were large and expressive, framed by long, dark lashes that enhanced their depth and intensity. These eyes held a captivating sparkle that drew Peter in, exuding a sense of mystery and allure. His favourite colour, he realised.

In the softness of her gaze was reassurement. She promised him that she would capture a glimpse into her world. And here it was, behind the marble walls. Her childhood home.

Blair had seen the peeling walls of his mother’s home, a vulnerable space of violence and mistreatment. Her opulent glass cage was her peeling walls.

“I’m glad you’re here. This weekend would be unbearable without you.”

Taron approached the vehicle and broke open the seal of the limo. Blair pulled her hand out of his violently. Peter flexed his fingers at the abandonment. She offered him an apologetic smile, but he knew that within these walls, any touch or caress would be looked into under an Angelic microscope.

Peter followed Blair up the steps, the guards bowing their heads as she passed. The princess had returned home.

Miranda was at the top, looking at the pair of them with clear, unfiltered disdain. A butler stood beside her, black and white suit adorning the Half-demon's sun-warmed earthy skin. His fully obsidian eyes were an indication of his heritage.

The Half-demon bowed. "Princess Blair. Welcome home. We have set up your rooms. We made sure everything was exactly the same as last time."

"Thank you, Oggith. This is my friend, Peter Bronze. I would like him to stay in the April Suite next to mine." The Half-demon, Oggith, scanned over Peter.

"Absolutely not," Miranda interjected.

Blair straightened her shoulders looking at her mother with intensity. "It is no different than having any of my other friends staying in the April Suite is it? Peter is a friend. And why should it matter to you? You will be on the other side of the palace, as always."

Miranda took a deep and calming breath. A fake, forced grin was drawn over the Duchess' aging features. Blair's mother nodded once, then proceeded into the marble structure.

Blair turned back to the butler expectantly.

"Yes, my lady." The Half-demon bowed and retreated into the marble mansion.

Peter took a deep, settling breath. His eyes gave Blair a look as he huffed out. They grinned at each other, ready to plunge into the chaos.

Upon entering the palace, Peter was immediately struck by the splendour and magnificence of the interior, even more beautiful than the inside of the academy. He had never been inside somewhere so beautiful.

Floors were made of gleaming white marble, polished to perfection, reflecting the light that streamed in through stained glass windows. *These Angels and their obsession with tinted coloured glass.* The walls were detailed with carvings of celestial beings and ethereal landscapes, all done

in exquisite detail. An artist’s hand had diligently crafted every inch of the place.

Ceilings were high with ornate chandeliers hanging from above, casting a warm and inviting glow throughout the vast halls. The furniture of the entry room made of rich, dark wood, accented with gold trimmings, adding a touch of luxury to the already lavish surroundings.

As Peter moved through the palace following Blair and the butler, he caught glimpses of the inhabitants. Half-angels and servants meandered about, their eyes seeming to hold the wisdom of the ages. These beings moved with grace and poise, just like the beautiful silvered princess he trailed behind. The Nephilim’s presence added to the ethereal beauty of the palace.

All of them stopped what they were doing to take a quick glance at Peter. Recognising that he was touched by Hell; the realm they feared and hated.

Peter tried to hold his head high, but the trembling hands that he kept trapped in his pockets gave away his anxious stupor.

Blair and Peter continued until she stopped in front of a golden brown doorway. “This is my room. We can hide in here for a bit while Oggith sets up the room next door.”

The Nephilim princess' bedroom was her sanctuary of tranquillity and elegance within the palace walls. The room was cast in shades of soft pastels, with walls painted a delicate shade of celestial blue and trimmed with intricate gold leaf designs. The floor was covered in plush carpets woven from the finest silk, with patterns of swirling clouds and silver stars spread over the surfaces.

At the centre of the room sat a grand four-poster bed, its frame carved from white marble and adorned with delicate carvings of Angelic figures. White fabric strung between the posts, falling gracefully towards the floor. The bedding was made from luxurious silk of pale purple and cream. Peter imagined Blair spending time in this space, reading or researching.

Large windows lined one wall of the room, allowing soft, filtered light to pour in and illuminate the space. Sheer curtains of gossamer fabric billowed in the gentle autumn breeze, blowing in a dream-like quality. Peter stared through the panes, seeing the orange and red leaves of the trees that lined the yards; the gardens slowly fading into their dormant winter forms.

Peter continued to walk around her space, Blair’s eyes trailing after him as he took in her childhood bedroom. The furnishings in the room were just as elegant and ornate with delicate gold accents. A vanity table stood in one corner, stationed with silver mirrors and crystal perfume bottles. Peter opened the top of one of the bottles and inhaled.

Lilac and strawberry. Blair, trapped inside a fragrant glass bottle.

On the walls hung portraits of the Angels, their serene faces gazing down upon the room with a sense of quiet pride. Protecting and standing guard over Blair.

“I painted those.”

Peter opened his eyes wide, getting closer to the frames. He looked at them with a different light, knowing the artist's hands belonged to the ones he dreamed about wrapping around his own. The oil painting that had caught his attention had light, delicate strokes crafting the faces of vengeful Angels. Charging towards Earth with their blades. Peter had no idea Blair had such talent in capturing beauty within violence.

“I would love to paint you sometime.”

He gave her a smile, his cheekiness rising. “Naked, I hope.”

Blair snorted at the Half-demon’s playful speculation. “Absolutely not.” She sat on the edge of her fluffy bed.

Peter tilted his head to the side. “Not even a little tempted, Angel?”

Her throat bobbed.

Peter continued to pick up her trinkets, letting the subject drop. He hoped her mind had wandered into impure places.

In another corner of the room, a towering bookcase was filled with leather-bound volumes and ancient scrolls, each containing knowledge and wisdom passed down through generations of Angelic beings. Here was the evidence of the beautiful scholar he admired. Images crossed his mind of a younger Blair pulling together information late at night. He smiled looking at her watchful gaze.

A small crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling, casting a soft, warm glow throughout the room. The air was scented with the fragrance of blooming flowers and exotic incense from the burning candles. For some reason the room felt absent from the real version of her—the Blair he knew from the walls inside the academy. Maybe she wasn’t allowed to be that person here.

Blair’s behaviour had changed upon entering. She held herself differently. Talked differently. Posed as the facade of Michael’s blessed daughter.

Peter had to admit that the Nephilim princess' bedroom was a place of beauty and grace, a reflection of her divine heritage and regal demeanour.

A knock sounded at the door. “The April Suite is ready, my Lady.” Oggith motioned for Peter to follow.

Peter was left to look at his own apartment. Similarly, a four posted queen sat in the centre of the room, facing towards Blair’s next door. The entire space was cast in soft greens and golds with windows spreading light over the carpets and sheets. The wallpaper was decorated with vines. He felt like he was inside a supernatural garden.

Peter flopped onto the thick green duvet. He had never laid on something so soft. A Half-demon caught inside the soft space of the Heavens, next door to the subject of all of his desires.

And, boy, he was ready to burn from the sacrilege.

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CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Temptation

Blair Dawn couldn't sit still. She paced back and forth in front of her windows. She flopped on the mattress, just to stand and pace some more. Her bare feet padded across the carpet in violent thuds.

Peter being inside the palace, in the very room next hers that had a secret panel that conjoined the two, was driving her mad. Her skin was burning beneath her dress. Burning to be touched by him.

God, if anyone knew about the spaces my mind travelled to when I'm thinking about him, I would be sent straight into the depths of Hell. Crucified for the impurity my lust desires.

Images of tortured, mutilated bodies filled her mind. The lovers of Nephilim cut open and stitched together over and over was one of the few things that kept her from entering the April Suite and having her way with the man she craved. She never wanted the same fate to happen to Peter.

They would be expected at dinner this evening, expected to play the part of loyal subjects of the Covenant. The queen and Blair's half-brother, Adam Forne, would be in attendance along with the few members of the royal families that were staying here to aid in Adam's campaign. Sons and daughters of the Archangels and lower Angels occupied many of the rooms inside the palace. All of them would be watching.

Violent fingers pulled out the hair pins that held Blair's hair in a tight braid. The waves were now freed from their twisted prison, allowed to fall free and thick over her shoulders and back.

The corset was crushing.

The whole bloody palace is crushing me. God, I hated it here. I hate all of its perfect furniture placements. All the perfect statues and perfect columns.

Blair found her hand against the wall. One push and the passage would click open, leading her towards the April Suite.

Would Peter be pacing inside just as I had? Was she consuming his thoughts like he was mine?

The door clicked open, the wallpaper separating. Blair held her breath. One step. Two steps.

Peter was laying on the bed, his legs draped over the side. Blair walked over to him, bare feet soft as a mouse. Peter's eyes were closed shut, his chest rising and falling slowly.

He was asleep, soft breaths passing his opened lips. He was striking even when he slept. Dark curls splayed around his head, delicately over his brow. Deep bruises clung to the underside of his eyes. He always looked like he never got enough sleep. Nightmares plagued him as her Dreaming did hers. Never fully getting the rest they both desperately needed.

A slender finger brushed his hair from his forehead, over his temple, over his jaw.

Blue eyes opened with alarm. A hand of iron wrapped around the Nephilim's tiny wrist.

Recognition flared in Peter's gaze. He relaxed, his vice grip loosening but not abandoning her bare skin. She watched his pupils expand, their faces were so close together in the candlelight.

"Watching me sleep, Angel?" His voice was low, groggy.

"And what if I was?" she whispered.

"I would say you're playing a *very* dangerous game. I already have a hard enough time controlling myself around you." Silence fell between them, his confession a promise, an assurance of his desires towards her. As unwavering as the first time he had told her in the walls of the library.

"We can't cross that line, Peter." Blair was losing sight of her reason. His scent, his ungodly scent, was wrapping around her making her hungry for more. Rain and smokey mahogany.

Peter knew that she was right. It didn't matter how the air charged around them when they stood close to each other. It didn't matter the tug that wrapped around them, a steady rope ready to constrict the two of them like a snake. The Covenant forbid it.

Peter’s throat bobbed before he let her wrist go.

Blair’s skin felt cold at the loss of his touch. She stood to her full height as he pulled himself into a sitting position.

“I don’t remember even laying down,” Peter grumbled, running a hand through his hair. “I can’t believe it’s already getting dark outside.”

“We will be expected at dinner soon. I am sure the servants will be in to help us prepare.”

“Prepare?” Peter was a deer in headlights.

“Yes. We will be expected in formal attire. The queen and my mother demand nothing less.”

On cue, a soft knock sounded at his doorway. Peter jumped to his feet opening the door to Oggith. Oggith held a suit over his arm.

“Mr. Bronze. The queen sent this suit over for you, personally, to wear to dinner this evening. I will help you get dressed.” Oggith looked at Blair with a concerned look, wondering why she was in the room with the Half-demon.

Blair dipped into a curtsey. “I am sure Madeline will be waiting for me in my rooms to prepare myself as well. I will escort you to the dining hall when you are ready, Peter.” Blair almost walked through the closed passage, but corrected her path through the entryway.

Taron and Milo sat on either side of the door, surprised that she was not within the room behind them. She passed them without a word.

Madeline was inside the room, tending to the licorice gown for this evening.

Madeline Collins had been her personal maid since she was a child. Someone who always gave her the recent gossip in the servant quarters when she brushed out Blair’s hair. The Earth Caster had green vines sprouting from her skull sporadically amongst her chestnut hair. It decorated her like a garden flourishing to life. Madeline was short in stature, but was not someone to get on the bad side of. She was one of the most stubborn people Blair knew.

Madeline put her hands on her wide hips to give the princess a disapproving look. One that Madeline was infamous for.

“It’s good to see you, Madeline.”

“As it is for me, but you really like making yourself late don’t you.” Madeline’s voice flowed with a thick accent.

“This princess always arrives when she intends to,” Blair sarcastically added towards the Caster.

“Not with hair like that you won’t.”

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CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

A 'Heavenly' Meal

Peter Bronze couldn't help but pull at the collar of his get-up. Oggith flipped his dreads aggressively when Peter refused to sit still during his dressing, void-like eyes filled with annoyance. Peter was not used to being dressed and attended to like some barbie doll.

The queen was making him wear a jet black shirt and a suit jacket with felt swirls licking across the raven fabric. The collar, however, stuck straight up past his neck, mimicking the beautiful feathers of a crow. They tickled and itched his neck with every slight movement. Even brushing his earlobes.

"Stop playing with it," Oggith hissed at him.

"You try wearing this then." Peter sneered at the Half-demon.

The door to Blair's bedroom opened.

Peter immediately stopped pulling at the collar, frozen in awe.

Blair had changed her silver gown for an ebony ballgown. The jewel shaped collar of the dress wrapped her throat in golden jewels, leaving the space between her clavicle and breast bare. Just enough to drive Peter's thoughts into the lustful depths of Hell. The dress hugged her torso, the same felt swirls were a waterfall on the skirt. On top of her head was a simple silver crown, her waves pooling from the tiara in carefully shaped curls.

"God, you're beautiful."

They stared into each other with intensity.

Then Blair curtseyed before him. "You clean up well, yourself. Looking like a dark regal prince."

Blair joined her arm in the crook of his elbow and the two of them walked towards the dining hall. Taron and Milo's armour clinked along as they trailed behind them.

"I am going to give you a warning about the lion's den we are about to descend into," Blair said in a low, stern voice.

"These are the elite in society, all the leaders of the seven noble houses or at least a representative of them. Each is as entitled as the next, their eyes on Leta's throne and the seat that my half-brother occupies. They are ruthless and will interrogate you. Give them as little as possible. They hate your kind. The summoning of the Demon Prince, the murders, the riot; all of it has solidified their view of your people."

Peter's throat was dry. She continued to describe the members that were present for the dinner.

"We have an opportunity to present a united front. To let Half-demons know they aren't alone."

Blair halted just outside the door. Her smokey eyes were serious. "When we enter this room, I am no longer Blair. I am Princess Dawn. You will address me by my title and nothing less. My Lady is the correct title. No nicknames. Please. Leta is referred to as Your Grace. Adam is Your Highness."

"I will try to be on my best behaviour, My Angel."

Her elbow pointed into the ribs of her friend.

The dining room was as expected. Opulently adorned with gilded chandeliers hanging from the intricately painted ceiling. Angels and heavenly clouds covered the surface by well-crafted hands.

The walls were decorated with rich purple tapestries depicting scenes of feasting and revelry of the Archangels. Other expensive art splade over the walls, all related to Angels and the Heavenly divine. A darker painting caught the eye of the Half-demon, its art showing a Demon claiming the body of a naked woman. *Classy*.

Blair gave his elbow a reassuring squeeze as the eyes on the room fell to them.

Two identical blonde twins—Rachel and Rebecca Norman—sat together, their golden hair and blue eyes mirroring each other. Daughters of Gabriel, and, Blair had noted, notorious gossips.

Dr. Joanne Teal represented the House of Raphael in her half-brother's absence. Gifted with healing, she oversaw the city's medical care.

From the House of Uriel came Hoàng Hieu, a slight Vietnamese man in amber silk, his sharp, thoughtful gaze betraying the cunning mind Blair had praised.

Ailsa Gibson, a heavyset Scottish daughter of Zachariah, was said to speak to plants—an environmental zealot with more greenery than sense.

At the table's center sat Leatrix and Cullen Bell of Jophiel's House, a wealthy Nephilim pair in muted greys. Her jewels gleamed; his boredom showed. Blair had said the art on the walls were their selections.

Last was Emmett Bortrain of the warrior House of Chamuel—a graying man marked by a vicious scar, his stare a quiet promise of death. He had earned his rule through blood.

Despite such tensions among the houses, Michael's line still held the throne of the Covenant—unchallenged since Lucifer's fall, their authority rooted in sacred relics guarded within the Palace of Angels.

The table, vacant at the head and the right seat, was reserved for the queen and Adam. Two seats remained at the left of the table next to the Gabriel twins. Blair led the two of them to the vacant space. She moved with the grace expected of a royal. Chin held high, ignoring the sneers towards her. Her face unwavering, unbothered.

The guests were all dressed in sumptuous silks and velvets, their jewellery sparkling. Nothing but old wealth and pretentiousness, with a hint of aged wine in the air.

Peter was going to choke his way through this dinner.

"You okay?" Blair asked him, her welcoming eyes steadied him.

"I'm in a room with people who hate my kind. I will let you take a guess," he whispered into her ear. There was sympathy crunched in her brow. Peter shrugged.

I will endure this. I will endure this for her. Being part of her life means being at events like this. Even if I am an unwanted guest at this table.

"Pay no mind to Rachel. She's a piece of work," Blair whispered.

"You would think that being some of God's creatures you would be kind to your neighbour, or whatever they teach in that old ass book."

Blair giggled. Peter's magic sang at the sound. *God, she is beautiful in this light.*

The room fell silent.

"Queen Leta and Prime Minister Adam." Everyone rose as the wooden doors swung open, revealing the two that had been announced.

Queen Leta wore a more ornate licorice-coloured gown, a large crown over her head that refracted light onto the walls behind her. Adam wore a simple dark suit, cuffed in soft black felt.

The queen smiled. It did not reach her eyes as she looked around the room, pausing on Peter longer than the others. Adam had no emotion on his Angelic features. Sea green eyes cold and distant.

Peter watched them walk around the table. Blair bowed her head at the queen, who returned it. Their fake smiles were present and accounted for. Icy hazel eyes ran over Peter's attire, an impressed smirk tilted the corner of her red painted lips.

"It's great to see you all," Adam told them. His voice boomed through the silence. The same mellow tone from the broadcast Peter had witnessed.

"I am particularly joyed at the attendance of my beautiful half-sister, and her *friend*." Adam cast Peter a look the Half-demon could not place. Peter assumed they didn't have many Hellspawns at this divine eating table. His throat was sandpaper, parched from the dryness in his welcome.

"Pleasure is mine, your Highness." Blair bowed her head towards him. The tiara sparkled.

"But enough with the pleasantries, I am sure we are all famished," Adam said and took a seat. The other Half-angels followed suit.

Nephilim floated gracefully around the table, laying down shiny silver platters. They served the guests with precision and grace, their celestial beauty captivating to Peter. The aroma of roasted meats, exotic spices, and freshly baked bread wafted and tantalised the Half-demon's senses. His stomach growled.

Peter's plate was loaded with a little of everything from the table. Creamy mashed potatoes, roasted vegetables, and pork roast with a heavy slosh of gravy overtop.

Queen Leta cleared her throat. "Let us pray for this delicious meal before us." Peter put down his fork and knife that he had hastily picked up to dig into his meal.

"Thank the Archangels that we are graced with food onto our table. We pray that those who are less fortunate may receive the nourishment they need and may they find shelter as the nights grow colder. We pray that Michael keeps us safe and we may continue our way of life. Amen."

Acid burned Peter's tongue. Knowing from Damon's teachings that the houses of Angels did little to aid the people who were starving on the

streets, many of whom were Half-demons like himself. They were left on the streets to rot.

Peter looked at Blair who was already cutting her way into the meal. The guests talked noisily, indulging in delicacies fit for royalty, savouring each bite with delight. Glasses of fine wine were raised in a quick toast before music began filling the room. The Half-angels servants ensured that each guest's glass was never empty and every plate was filled with culinary delights.

“So, Mr. Bronze,” Adam called him to attention. Peter forced a piece too large to swallow into his esophagus. He choked slightly, drinking some wine to help with the pain. “I hear you were not part of our society until this year.”

Cocky, challenging eyes met Peter.

“What you heard is correct, Your Highness.” Shaky hands fell into Peter’s lap. Shoulders straight and squared to hide his unease. His magic was boiling under his skin, heating the room by a few degrees.

“How is it that a Half-demon with your extraordinary gifts, was able to remain undetected for so long?” Adam’s chin rested on his enclosed hands. His knife hung delicately.

“My mother suppressed my magic. She believed I was unsafe.” Peter tried to remain truthful whilst being vague. Blair had warned him that he would be under interrogation.

“There is no place safer than the Covenant.” Adam truly believed his words. He leaned back in the head chair, elbows resting on the arms.

“For your kind, maybe.” The words tumbled from Peter before he could stop it. Blair’s eyes widened. *Shit. Shit. Shit.*

“Says the *Half-demon*. Did you hear about what your kind did a few weeks ago in the Demon District?” Adam challenged.

“Yes. Blair told me about how they were trying to summon a Prince of Hell.” The table fell silent.

“Would you say that—statistically speaking—it is the Half-demons who elevate the dangers that present themselves to the Covenant.” It wasn’t a question, it was a statement. There were a few snickers around the table.

Peter’s jaw clicked with rage. “I guess so, but I have only been part of this world for a short time. Not enough to collect knowledge on the subject, nor form an opinion on such.”

“What do you think of his attire, Blair? I just knew the black would be striking on him.” Queen Leta pushed a bloody piece into her mouth. The red meat similar to the colour painted on the queen's lips. Peter was grateful for the change in subject.

“He does look rather dashing, I will say, Your Grace. You have excellent taste.” The smile towards Peter was warm.

“Gosh, you have such beautiful blue eyes, Peter,” the queen gushed. “Reminds me of the sky on the warmest day of summer, when the sun is beginning to set on the horizon.”

“Thank you, Your Grace.” Peter was stunned by the compliment.

“Tell me, after your accident, Mr. Bronze, where you killed those men, where did you go?” Adam’s verdant gaze ready to strike like a cobra after prey.

Peter shifted uncomfortably. Blair’s silverware clinked off of fine china.

“Those men were possessed by Demons,” Blair stated factually.

“Semantics. Please, Peter. Indulge me.” Adam wasn’t going to allow this question to slide. The prime minister was particularly interested in his life before the Covenant. *Wounded pride over the Covenant's effectiveness for finding more supernatural subjects to rule over, perhaps?*

“I went to Toronto and I lived on the streets. I ran with a gang that found my gifts… useful.” Peter’s gift of persuasion had gotten him and the gang out of some sticky situations. Convincing cops to let them go on a warning. Seducing club owners to sell their share of stocks. The Fallen Boys provided shelter and food, Peter provided his services. It was necessary to survive. The headmistress found him not long after.

“How interesting. Blair, my sister, you have a talent for picking them.” Adam snickered.

The Half-demon felt embarrassed. Magic made his skin tighten over his bones. The silverware began to bend from his heating grip.

“Peter has been an exceptional study and a natural warrior. He may have a… colourful past, but he is incredibly talented.” Blair placed a hand on his thigh. A comforting touch.

“So I have heard.” A bloody piece of meat entered the prime minister's mouth.

“Do you know who your father is?” the queen asked. Her voice was soft, calm.

Peter shook his head. “No. My own mother didn’t know who he was.”

“Ah yes, Sandre. She lost it a little bit the year she was expelled from the academy.” Adam faked surprise.

Expelled? Sandre told Peter that she left on her own volition due to her pregnancy.

“Your mom literally fell off the face of the Earth it seemed. But I see now that she hid you from us.”

Peter heard the promise in the prime minister’s tone. The promise that he would do everything in his power to understand why.

“You must join us for tea tonight.” Leta took a long sip of her wine. An invitation that neither of them could refuse.

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CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

Tea and Truth

What a shit show.

Blair Dawn had anticipated her half-brother's cold interrogation. Adam was the nosey sort, needing to know everything that was whispered in the walls of his city, especially when it came to Blair's friends.

Adam had particular interest in Blair's first and only Half-demon friend she brought as a guest in the palace. He had reluctantly dropped the conversation about Peter's past. The princess knew that it would not be dropped for long. Peter was a threat to the Covenant. A child as powerful as he, hidden from their society, was no small thing.

Blair had been surprised as Peter divulged parts of his past after Thomas' death. She had no idea that he was forced to live on the streets and run with a famous Canadian gang. She realised now that she had little understanding of Peter's gifts *and* his past.

Queen Leta had invited them to her tea room, a horrifyingly decorated sitting area with ugly pear green walls. The colour had always made Blair feel uneasy.

Oggith threw another log on the fire that raged inside a golden-edged fireplace. Embers sputtered into the air as the log was laid on the dying charcoal.

The Half-demon butler turned towards the queen. "What tea do you desire this evening, Your Grace?"

Leta's gaze fell to Blair. A hand motioning for her to choose.

"I think a green tea may help with digestion after that lovely meal you hosted, Your Grace." Blair's voice was every part princess.

Peter stared into the fire before them, elbows rested on the tops of his knees. His gaze was distant, empty. Blair watched the orange from the flames dance delicately on the feathers of Peter's collar.

"Green tea sounds lovely," the queen commented. Oggith bowed and vacated the room. The door closed with a soft click.

"You will have to excuse Adam. He can be quite invasive. I am sure that diving into your past was not pleasant."

Peter offered the Nephilim queen a smile that did not reach his azure eyes. "I am trying my best not to run from it anymore, Your Grace."

"Please, call me Leta. We do not have an audience here, Peter. No need to be so formal." The queen aggressively itched her head, pulling the crown off with a huff. It clung to her strands, pulling them from her perfect bun. "Ugh. I swear this thing gets itchier each time I wear it."

Peter stood to his feet and took the crown from her fingers, delicately removing the strands. Leta froze, startled at his closeness.

"Thank you, I was worried I was going to pull more of my hair out." Peter handed her the crown, which she tossed on the coffee table before them like it had little value. "Blair, you must tell me about school. I feel like it has been ages since you were home."

Blair almost flinched at the word 'home'. *This place was never my home, not really.* "School is going okay. I am a little behind, but nothing I cannot manage."

"That's very unlike you." Leta opened a golden case with snuff, taking a little of the white powder on her finger and huffed it. The queen sank into her armchair, relaxing into the cushions.

"I had to… take some time off for my Dreaming." Her time with the Emissary was still fresh in her mind, along with her visions of the darkness that was preparing to devour them all.

"Your mother had mentioned something about that. She was worried sick about you." The princess doubted that.

"She never mentioned such worries to me," Blair whispered.

"Miranda didn't want to worry you, dear. She knows how much stress you put on your shoulders. I am grateful you took time off university to help Adam. We are not sure what more can be done in this election. Hysperia Wist is turning the polls in her favour, even with the crimes of the Black Eyes. We simply cannot have a *Hellion* lead the Great Council. It's unnatural." The slur so casually rolled off Leta's royal tongue.

Peter jolted beside her.

The queen lifted her hand over her mouth. “I apologize, Peter. I did not mean to offend.”

Peter gave a stern nod. Blair watched his jaw flex. His eyes closed with a deep inhale before opening. A fake, forced smile on his face. In the corner of her eye, she saw the flames dance under his influence.

Oggith rolled a golden tray into the space with a china teapot decorated in marigold flowers with three tiny matching tea cups. Steam spiralled from the spout. Each cup was filled by the servant Half-demon, the only position in this palace that a low Hellspawn could have. The smell of jasmine rose from the steam.

She felt deep sorrow for Demonkind. Nephilim were always so quick to judge, just as she had. Even with the knowledge that her Dreaming had warned—the end of the world at Peter’s hand—she still had faith and hope that it would not come to pass. That Peter Bronze, the man sitting beside her, was capable of good.

Hot liquid burned the tip of the princess’ tongue. The pain searing away any flavour.

“Tell me about the summoning,” Leta asked casually.

“Xalrok, a Fallen Angel turned Demon, was tasked with summoning a Prince of Hell. We are not sure which Prince was summoned, but they were convinced that a child of Lucifer survived.” The queen’s eyes narrowed at the mention of the Devil.

“We engaged in combat soon after and then your warriors arrived. Xalrok is still at large, but I believe the Prince was banished back to Hell where he belongs.” Blair put her tea cup on its saucer with a clink.

“Pity, I hoped for theories and answers to the riddle we are faced with. The Council frets over the prophecy, over the offspring of Lucifer…” the queen's eyes landed on Peter just for a faint moment. So brief, Blair had almost missed the action. “Bringing the destruction the Seer’s wisdom warned. We feel it now, a shift in the air of the city. All entangled with the politics of the Half-demons.”

She brought the china to her blood red lips as if her words did not shake the very foundation of the sitting room. The Covenant was suspicious about a child of Lucifer being born and surviving. There was one person that had magically sprung into their world, a powerful Half-demon with the ability to summon Hellfire.

Peter and Blair walked to their rooms in silence. Blair carried her heels, the blisters on the back of her ankles aching for attention. Milo and Taron took their posts beside Blair's door, locking her in for the night.

"Thank you for the first glimpse into your world. Nothing says royalty with slight blackmail, racism, and interrogation, with a side of gravy and potatoes."

Taron snickered at Peter's review, clearing his throat to return the expressionless look to his face.

"I don't know what you expected inside the bureaucracy. We have silver spoons shoved so far up our asses." Blair sighed, her voice devoid of humour.

"I don't think you can lump yourself in with them. You're too compassionate to not see the suffering of others. It makes you different. You don't see us as slaves or lesser beings. You have always made me feel like I could be or that I am equal to you. At least inside the walls of Oaken." Blair could get lost in the vulnerability of his gaze. The way his blue invited her to dive right in the storm within, get swept up in desire.

"Thank you, Peter. Those are very kind words."

"Goodnight, Angel." Peter took her hand in his, pressing his searing mouth against the exposed flesh of her hand. Fire rippled through her veins at the contact.

Just as quick as it rushed through her, it disappeared as he bowed and rushed into the April Suite.

"My Lady."

Blair turned to see Hieu, still adorned in his formal evening clothes.

"Hello, Lord Hieu."

The Vietnamese male held out to her the manuscript she had requested from the archives, wrapped in a plastic protected container.

"Here are the stories you requested. I must return them when I leave for my home." Hieu would be returning to Italy soon, to work in the archives Blair dreamed of visiting some day.

Blair bowed towards the male. "Thank you, Hieu. I will return it to your possession in the morning." The short male reciprocated the bow and returned the way he came.

The manuscript felt heavy in her palm.

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CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

Secret Pages and Passages

Peter Bronze ripped off his jacket, tired of the feathers licking his neck. It felt as though little ants were crawling all over him. He discarded the jacket and button-down with vigorous force like he couldn't have been free from its shackles soon enough. His chest laid bare in the dim lit suite, he took a few settling breaths.

His lips had barely grazed her skin and yet his whole body was ablaze for her. The Half-demon had to make himself step away, hide in his suite to keep himself apart from her. That thread of honour dangling and mocking him for who and what he was.

Peter was the devil nipping after a slice of divine. Knowing he would corrupt Blair if he dared to step over that line of friendship, into a place where he would become a criminal in the eyes of the Covenant.

She is just on the other side of that wall.

Peter's skin felt tight, hot. Suffocating him from the outside.

He opened the latch for the window, the autumn night breeze blowing cold over his flesh. It eased the ache, but it simmered beneath him, threatening to turn him into an animal.

A groan with a click caught the attention of the Half-demon. Peter turned his head to the wall, now open to Blair's suite. A secret passage between the walls, conjoining their room.

So that is how she got in earlier.

Blair stepped through, wearing nothing but an onyx silk nightgown with lace decorating the edges. Her legs and chest bare to him.

Peter swore, turning back towards the open window. He sucked down three large cold breaths.

“Hey,” Blair’s innocent voice sang to him. Peter gripped the edge of the frame, the wood splintered under his hands.

“You okay, Peter?”

He didn’t turn to face her. Just heard her shuffle behind him.

Does she not realise what she is doing to me? How little I am holding onto control?

“Yeah,” he lied. Voice deep. Sultry.

Peter turned to face her, feeling the wind on his bare back. Blair sat on the edge of his bed, next to his discarded clothing. She held a withering piece of paper between her delicate hands. One that he had kissed moments ago.

Blair looked up to meet his stare. Her eyes finally saw that he was half-naked, abs and chest on display. Her eyes fluttered shut a few times. He watched the blush spread over her cheeks, making her glow.

“Like what you see?” he asked. Peter didn’t stop his ability from slipping in. The allure in his voice that made women do his bidding. Blair was affected by it, Peter watched her pinch her thighs together.

“Yes, you are very pretty,” she cheekily added. “But I came here to show you this.”

Peter eased his magic to a dull roar, allowing him to enter into her space and take the withering page.

“I can’t read this.” Peter raised an eyebrow. The words meant nothing to him, foreign to his understanding.

“Yeah, I know.” She snatched it back with a huff. “Merlin told me that you were doing research on Lucifer.”

“He did, did he?”

“Merlin and I tend to not keep any secrets. I am one of the few people that can help you uncover more information about the ruler of Hell.”

Peter took a step back from the princess, her scent making him drunk and dizzy.

“Can we talk about this later?” he asked.

“But– tonight–”

“Blair,” he warned. A desperate plea. He turned away from her and returned to the window.

“Did I do something wrong?”

Peter huffed a laugh. His gaze was heated, yet cold as he turned about towards the most beautiful woman that had ever walked into his life.

“You need to leave.” *She did. Right now. While I still have control.* But the longer he sat in her scent, the longer she wore nothing but that silk gown, the less control he had.

“Peter–”

“Please.” Peter was vibrating on the spot. The effort to stay away from her felt like he was lost in the desert with no water in sight to quench his thirst.

Blair stood from the bed, throwing the old parchment with his discarded clothes.

Peter held up a hand in protest that halted her movement.

“Please. I need– I need you to leave before I do anything stupid.”

“Talk to me. What did I do?” Another jolted laugh from the Half-demon.

He gestured to her attire. “Do you have any idea– how that– what *you* do to me?”

Blair’s eyes twinkled in the candlelight. Her lips parted realising that his aggression, the shaking, all of it was because of his desire for her.

“I don’t know how much longer I can hold myself back. I crave you so utterly deep that I go feral with desire whenever I am near you. Touching my lips to your skin, it undid me,” he confessed. He ripped himself to shreds before her, showing her all the ways she could wound him.

“I want to taste you on my tongue. I want you wrapped around my cock screaming my name and no one else's. I want you to be *mine*. But I know that if I take what I want, I damn us both. It is the only thing giving me strength to stay away.” His cock strained against the inside of his dress pants, leaking and aching.

“Peter.” His name was as faint as the breeze that came in through the window.

Peter lifted his heated gaze to hers, letting her see the seriousness of this. “You need to leave. *Please*.”

Blair took the manuscript and walked to the passage. Peter couldn’t help himself but look after her, the nightgown leaving little to the imagination. She paused in the passage, meeting his heated gaze with a look he didn’t know how to decipher.

“I’ll see you in the morning, Peter. Goodnight.”

The passage closed tightly, just as his fist enclosed around himself in desperate need of release.

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CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

Politics and Politics

While Blair Dawn had gone into the April Suite to tell him what she had learned about Lucifer in the pages, she had found him hanging by a thread. Ready to burst at the seams and take her.

She wanted him to. Wanted him to take that step and she wouldn't have stopped him. The nightgown hadn't been intentional, but she revelled in the effect it had on him.

Part of Blair was grateful for his restraint. The other part, the reckless side of her, was disappointed.

A soft knock sounded at her bedroom door.

"Come in."

Oggith and Madeline came through, breakfast in tow.

"Blimey, child, did you not go to bed? The conference is today and you look like you didn't get any sleep!" Madeline exclaimed. The Caster pinched Blair's cheeks after she sat by the vanity to have her breakfast.

"OW!" Blair swatted Madeline's fingers away. Oggith placed the tray in its usual spot. Eggs and avocado toast, just the way she liked it.

"How am I supposed to work with these bags! They aren't some flashy accessory that will go with your outfit. They will think you're a zombie. You think you would have grown out of this as a child, staying up reading all damn night." Madeline huffed and started to aggressively brush Blair's hair.

Peter appeared in the reflection of her vanity.

"Good morning, Angel."

She shivered. Peter was dressed in a simple navy tunic with dress pants. Nothing like the obscene outfit he had been forced to wear last night. His hands were stuffed casually in his pants, standing at the threshold of her room.

“You can come in, you know,” Blair said.

“NO HE MAY NOT! I NEED TO GET YOU READY.” Madeline shooed Peter away. “Out, out. You too, Oggith.”

“Oh, how I have missed you, Madeline,” Blair said before an ‘ow’ escaped her from the returned bristles of her brush.

Click. Flash. Click. Flash.

Blair Dawn did not miss the paparazzi. The way they suffocated and circled like a murder of turkey vultures after a fresh corpse that had been left on the side of a road.

Flashes of light. Insistent clicking.

Journalists and photographers shouted her name as Milo and Taron held back the sea of greedy journalists.

“Princess Blair! Who are you with?” A female Half-demon reporter shoved a microphone into her face. “Please let us in on the mystery of your guest.”

“This is Peter Bronze, a friend from Oaken Academy,” Blair told her, getting a look from Taron. Her guard’s disapproval was clear. He had told her not to engage with any of the reporters.

“The Half-demon?” The reporter gestured to Peter.

“The one and only,” Peter cockily responded. “If you don’t mind, we would like to get to our seats.”

Peter’s warm hand pressed the small of her back, pushing Blair into the building. Up the very steps where countless Half-demons had been slaughtered.

The Conference was to be held at the House of Angels, where the Great Council held and conducted their business. It would host the public debate between the opposing sides of the election. Adam Forne and Hesperia Wist would be asked questions, both parties responding with policies and solutions that would work towards society’s best interests.

Blair would remain by Adam's side as Michael had demanded of her. Showing her support in the way she could, reinforcing the reign and legacy of Michael's children.

The conference chamber of the House of Angels was an amphitheatre of seats. The Supreme Judge, a Nephilim male by the name of Remiel Brylinski, would serve as a moderator while the two leaders debated.

The room was alive with constant chatter as various people arrived for the debate. Only the most important people in the Covenant would be here. All the members of the Great Council, the Nephilim House leaders, the Alphas of the Werewolves, the Coven leaders of the Caster and Vampire Clans, the Half-demons of the Districts, and the Elders of the Emissary to document and witness.

The gavel hit in seven sacred knocks.

"Let this debate begin," the judge settled the room into silence. "I am calling to the podiums, Hesperia Wist, eldest daughter from the late Albin Wist. Daughter from the Demonic lineage of Asmodeus."

Hesperia took her position. Her tight curls had been braided into long dreads, blue and purple string delicately woven into the strands.

"Adam Forne, prime minister and eldest descendant of the reverend Archangel Michael."

Adam stood up from his seat beside Blair and made his way to the podium. He had worn one of his best suits, a deep emerald green matching Blair's eyes.

"We will take the first question," Remiel said with another slam of the gavel. The crowd erupted, questions fired in an entangled mess.

"Alpha Courts of the Thorn and Rose Pack, please ask your question." Remiel handed the conversation to Heath Courts. The crowd settled into restless silence, awaiting the question from the Alpha. Courts rose and adjusted his suit jacket.

"Our first question is in regards to the recent Demon activity unleashed in our city from the riots to summoning Demon Princes. What do you plan to do to eradicate the dangers that are posing to our citizens? We would like to hear from Hesperia first."

The Half-demon politician cleared her throat and pushed her shoulders back to stand a little taller. "I genuinely believe, Alpha Courts, that there is something larger at foot than just simple Half-demon riots. These attacks are being engineered to cover up a darker plan at foot. The riot that led to

the death of over thirty Half-demons began as a simple peaceful protest. I do believe that if there is attention given to where it is needed, and basic needs are met in the Half-demon slums, that the riots will cease. I would make sure there are policies in place and funding towards the people who need it most."

"And what about summoning Demon Princes? How does that have anything to do with *their* needs?" The Alpha's voice exposed the thoughts of many in the crowd.

"People will do desperate things when their families are starving, Alpha Courts." Blair could understand the meaning behind her words. The Half-demons, from the slums that she had witnessed herself, were being put into positions of desperation. *They were surviving in their district. Surviving was different than living.*

Looking at Peter, she wanted him to have access to everything he would ever need to live a good life.

"Prime Minister, your thoughts?" Alpha Courts asked.

Adam Forne cleared his throat. "While I agree with Hesperia and the resources she is demanding, I know for a fact that those finances will come from increased taxes, which is a point of stipulation. Wist has no experience in managing finances of the city, and does not understand what raising taxes will do to all people in the city, including the Half-demons." There were a few murmurs.

Hesperia debated in response to Adam, "While raising taxes may need to be done, I do not see why helping others in need is such a burden. Isn't that what God expects of us, to act in forms of charity?"

Though Blair could not see Adam's face, she knew that Hesperia had hit a nerve. Calling out the divine way of our people was the perfect place to poke holes in Adam's reign. Hesperia stood for charity, honour, and love. All things that Half-demons were rarely associated with. While Adam was playing politician. Greed, maintenance of power, and strength.

Blair was concerned about the corruption, the racism that laid deep within the Covenant. Raising taxes, especially for the rich who would feel the loss the least, was a simple thing that could be done to aid the Half-demons. Blair Dawn found herself agreeing with Hesperia. If you provide people the basic needs for survival, the people as a whole would benefit. Half-demons were citizens just as much as they were.

“While charity is part of our divine way, we cannot risk destroying the whole to aid the few. I will make sure that some of the funds are placed into the Demon Districts, but I will not risk collapsing the economy or raise our taxes to do so.” Many people in this room would vote for Adam just to maintain the lines of their silver pockets.

Greed would laugh at them as they tumbled their way into Hell.

The debate continued for three hours with a short intermission in the middle. Blair was having a hard time keeping her eyes open. Peter had to nudge her awake a few times. The princess appreciated it because it would have looked horrible if the tabloids made it out for boredom and not exhaustion.

Blair understood the debate surrounding racism in the Covenant was a complex and contentious issue that has been ongoing for generations. Hesperia’s concerns and policies focused on the needs of her people, who routinely were left with the scraps that the Nephilim left to them. Adam had continually focused on economy, divine reign, and the influence of Heaven.

Hesperia argued that racism was deeply entrenched in the society and manifested in systemic discrimination, prejudice, and bias that disproportionately affected marginalised Half-demon, Vampire, Siren, and Werewolf communities. She believed, and Blair had to agree, that racism needed to be acknowledged, confronted, and dismantled in order to achieve true equality and justice for all. The hierarchy in the academy was a clear distinction of that. Blair and her friends were no better than the parents that gave them life.

On the other side, Adam argued that racism is not as pervasive as it is made out to be, and that claims of racism are often exaggerated or misinterpreted. Adam believed that people should be judged based on individual actions rather than group identities, and that focusing too much on racism perpetuates division and resentment rather than unity. Blair also agreed with some of Adam’s points, that Half-demons were afforded more privileges than ever before but that privilege was still limited.

Half-demons were still forced to be Cuffed during their initiation into society. Magical tattoos that limited their magic and powers. Hesperia

wanted the Cuffs removed, so that Half-demons could be equals. But the traditions of fear overpowered the consideration. People in the room had even laughed at it. Peter had gone ridged beside her at that laughter. They would be denied the access to their full magic based on claims that solidified Demonic stereotypes.

The debate touched on issues of power, privilege, identity, and history, and sparked passionate and emotional responses from all sides. It was important to approach discussions about racism with empathy, open-mindedness, and a willingness to listen and learn from different perspectives in order to foster understanding and progress towards a more inclusive and equitable society. But Blair did not see that truly extended from those who were touched by the Heavens.

There were no words to describe her disappointment.

The front of the House of Angels was still packed with reporters who had hung around. Hoping with desperation to snag a photo or get a statement from anyone who exited the pristine building.

“Princess Blair! Can we get your statement about the matters discussed in the House of Angels.” The male was a Werewolf from the Dirty Paws, based on the banner surrounding his left bicep. The same arm that extended a microphone in her face.

Here goes nothing. Her father could flay her later.

“There were a lot of important issues brought to light that the Council has let fester in the Demon Districts. Hesperia Wist has done incredible research on the conditions of her people, and it seems like those concerns fell onto deaf ears.”

“Are you a Half-demon kind sympathiser?” the Werewolf asked.

“I do not condone those who use Dark magic and commit crimes, and that goes for any creature inside the Covenant. We should be holding all to their actions and not just their heritage. At Oaken Academy, I go to classes with many Half-demons and others alike. They are good people and want to be part of everything we are privileged to have based on our birth. I understand that the prime minister is worried about money and taxes, but some of us have more money than we'll ever need. Why can’t we act with God and give to those who need it?” Other reporters were crowding on her. She could not feel Peter beside her anymore.

“Do you think that not considering heritage may also apply to other groups, Princess?” The female Half-demon from earlier had made her way

over.

“We cannot use our sires to justify our position in society. Just because I am a child of Michael does not mean that I am anymore worthy. I think power and respect can be and should be earned. While I recognize the lineage that has ruled over the Covenant for a millenia, I think we have forgotten what it means to walk in the path of God. We see them as Demons and nothing else. I think we forget we are all half human.”

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CHAPTER FIFTY

Simmering Anger

Peter Bronze remained silent in the limo ride back to the Palace. He felt numb. Invisible. A phantom of a person.

His kind would never truly be free under Nephilim rule, as they sure as Hell would never let a Half-demon take the head seat on the Great Council. Blair had made several statements to the press about her position on the subject. He had felt his heart stir in how she stood with Hesperia's point of view and how the Covenant had lost something that used to grant them such prestige as Holy Chosen people of the Lord.

From the conference, Peter saw how rotten the core of this society was. All they cared about was money. It didn't matter who suffered, as long as the Nephilim remained in control and their pockets were full. Each person in that room had power and the privilege of their noble houses, their packs, their clans. What happened to them was of little concern. Demons were the crime, the dirt, the impure.

I will graduate. I will be Cuffed. And for what? To be limited to half of my power? My very essence?

His fire stirred inside of him, threatening to burn him from the inside out.

Peter said nothing to Oggith as the Half-demon butler greeted the pair. Blair had let him remain in his thoughts. Though he had wished she had spoken to him—distracted him from the battered hatred and resentment that swelled in his gut. He wanted to punish, painfully slow, every power hungry idiot who refused to listen to the cries of the people that needed help.

People like my mother. People like my friends. People like me.

The Half-demon felt a rush of disgust when he entered into the April Suite. All this wealth and privilege.

The door slammed shut that had the palace walls shaking.

“Peter. You’re going to set the room on fire.” He turned towards Blair who remained in her dress from earlier, standing in the passage between their rooms.

His magic clung to his skin. Flames climbing over his hands, up his arms. Flames swirled in his eyes as a promise of incineration, of death. The same look that encased his face the night he had banished Thomas back to Hell, where the bastard belonged.

He smiled, a predatory grin. “I want to burn this whole place to the ground.”

The princess’ throat bobbed once, but she still took a step towards him. Closer to the heat, the burn that was promised in his touch.

“*Stay away from me.*” The fire extinguished. He buried it within his Well. Peter vowed that would never burn her again. That puckered flesh of her arm flashed through his thoughts.

Maybe they are right. Maybe I am evil.

“Why don’t we go to the training room? You can blow through as much magic as your heart desires.” Blair’s warm hand touched him, just his wrist. She hissed at the temperature, but held on despite the burn. It was no different any other time their skin connected.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

Familial Disappointment

Blair Dawn sat in her room, untangling her braids in front of the mirror. Her thoughts locked onto Peter. The way his body had moved in the training room. The way his fire seemed alive and sentient. Even the other Blessed had been watching him with awe. Seeing what powers could lie within Half-demons.

A soft knock sounded at her doorway. Oggith came in, his brown skin gleaming with sweat.

“My Lady.” The Half-demon bowed and swallowed. His adam's apple bobbed. “Your mother has requested your presence. She seems… *distasteful* this evening.”

Great. Just great.

“Is Peter expected at this attendance or–”

“Just you, My Lady.” Blair’s eyelids slid shut in defeat. She wanted to avoid Miranda all weekend, but apparently she would not be afforded that luxury.

“Can you let Mr. Bronze know that I will be out of attendance?”

“Yes, My Lady.” Oggith bowed and disappeared into the dimly lit hallway, leaving her to stare at her own exhausted reflection.

Miranda was filling her long manicure nails into fine tip points. Sharp enough to slice and dig through flesh.

The duchess' eyes surveyed her daughter as she waltzed through the door of the Nephilim's study. Miranda, being the daughter of Raphael, had the beauty and grace of all Half-angels. And she was just as deadly as the rest.

"You wished to see, Mother?"

"Sit." Vexation laced the singular word. Miranda was not pleased. *Distasteful mood indeed*.

Blair walked to one of the leather chairs that sat in front of the modern desk and took a seat, tucking in the skirts of her dress. Blair's back was rigged as a piece of steel, her chin held high.

"I don't think I need to explain to you why you are here." No, Miranda did not need to utter a word as to why she summoned her offspring. Blair knew this wrath would come when she spoke to those reporters this afternoon.

Lightning skittered across the sky.

Michael appeared before her. His power surged through the room. A tremor ran through the princess' hands. Blair forced herself to hide her wince, keeping her back straight and chin upwards.

"Three visits in one year? I am honoured, Michael." Sarcasm was clear in every syllable.

"You will watch your tone when you speak to your father."

Or what? Blair wanted to retort but bit her tongue. Apparently, staying up for more than twenty-four hours had made Blair a little bold.

"You did the opposite of what I asked." Michael's voice sang through the space. The powerful voice of an Angel.

"I went to the conference and stayed by Adam's side, just as you asked. It is not my fault that I agreed with Hesperia on several counts."

"IT IS YOUR FAULT."

Blair felt the ground rumble beneath her as her father spoke.

"Your sympathy for Demonkind is a *sickening* perversion. You will not continue this friendship with the Half-demon that you have brought into the palace walls. The very Demon that *you* have seen ends this world. Yet you make *peace* with him." Each word hissed off the Archangel's tongue. Michael's eyes were ablaze with lightning. Threatening the storm to descend upon Blair for disobedience.

"You cannot control who I am or am not friends with," Blair challenged. *What were they going to do?*

“You will end Peter before he can mature into his powers. That is an order.” Michael’s face was the stone of a warrior. Unshakeable. Cold. Devoid of emotion.

“Peter has done nothing to warrant this hatred that you have of him.”

“Has he not?” Miranda asked. “The minute he stepped foot into the academy—magically found off the streets—Demon activity throughout the world has been stirring. They call him their messiah, the boy blessed with flame that was promised to them.”

“What?” Blair looked between her parents.

“Peter must die. And you must be the one to do it.” Michael was unwavering. His decision final.

“Not until you explain what the fuck that means.” Blair crossed her arms in defiance.

“*Language*,” Miranda interjected. Blair did not apologise, just held Michael’s electric gaze.

“The riots, the murders, the Dark magic– all increased the moment Peter was found. The Demons are planning something and we must be ready. The Hellspawn is at the centre of all of this.” Michael turned towards the windows, lightning shooting through the clouds overhead. A grumble of thunder followed.

“We don’t know why. The Seers have been unable to penetrate the veils. And each Half-demon who was caught involved with the summoning has refused to talk, even under torture.” Miranda’s face was neutral, like torturing Half-demons was something that did not bother her.

“You will kill Peter and end this before it begins.” Michael’s wings tucked in closer to the Archangel’s spine.

“If you make Peter into the villain that you so desperately want, you will push him in that direction,” Blair responded, then whispered, “I will not kill him.”

“YOU WILL OBEY ME.” Thunderous were the words that came from the Heavenly. Blair didn’t back down, she stood to her feet and stepped towards her father.

“*I will not*.” Blair’s magic flared. Her father’s lightning skittering over her arms. “Peter has done nothing but try to fit into the unrealistic expectations of our world. He is a powerful warrior and magic user that will be a valuable asset. I do truly believe that he will be on our side for this fight. I will only raise myself against him, if he warrants it. You only see the

evil in all. I wish to see the good too. Peter is dangerous, I have seen it myself, but I have hope that my visions are false. Half-demons are also half human, the very people you were put onto this planet to protect and I think you forget that."

The silence that hung through the room was heavy.

"You will not harm him. Not if I have anything to do with it. If—and I mean if—Peter does become a threat to the Covenant, I will destroy him." Blair bowed towards her mother and father, and left them in stunned silence.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

A Whispered Touch

Peter Bronze tried and failed, absolutely miserably, to sleep. The bed was too soft. The room was too hot. And he felt, deep in his gut, that Blair wasn't okay.

The Half-demon had heard the door to her room open and close, offering reassurance on her safe return. She had been summoned to meet with her mother, and from what he understood about Blair's familial situation, it was unpleasant.

Peter's hands rested on his bare abdomen as he stared at the ceiling. His skin was itching to make his way to her, but he remembered the nightgown from the night prior. He wasn't sure how much of this he could take before he caved and crossed that line they both couldn't return from.

The passageway opened with a click.

His body went rigid. He quickly closed his eyes. Heart pounding inside of his chest.

Her scent washed over him as her padding feet stopped beside the bed.

"Peter," she whispered. He opened one eye.

Blair had been crying, her eyes swollen and red. He sat up in alarm.

"Angel, what's wrong?" Concern bloomed in his chest.

"Can–" Her voice cracked. "Can I stay with you tonight?"

Like, in this bed? Beside me? In those white, lacy sleeping shorts and matching silk tank top?

Peter swallowed the dryness of his mouth and moved himself to the other side of the bed, skin feeling a little too tight. Blair crawled under the

sheets next to him and burrowed into the crook of his arm. Their bare skin flush together.

His cock throbbed at the contact. Her scent.

Her nose brushed his side and she let out a sob. Her fingers enclosing into fists.

“What happened?” Peter’s voice was husky, protective. He was ready to hunt down the reason she was feeling such sorrow.

“I don’t want to talk about it.” Her red rimmed eyes looked up to him. “Can you just hold me? I just need to be reminded that everything is going to be okay.”

Peter shuffled down the bed so they were face to face. Despite his growing desire, he would do anything to ease the melancholic glassy gaze that took the light from her forest green eyes.

Peter pulled the Half-angel princess into his arms.

“It’s all going to be okay, Angel.”

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CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

Partnership

Peter Bronze hesitated outside the dorm room door, his hand hovering just inches from the surface. The hallway smelled faintly of cleaning chemicals and something fried from the dining hall. It was louder than he remembered—voices bleeding through thin walls, footsteps echoing on tile—but none of it reached him fully. His thoughts drowned everything out, looping the same sentence over and over until it lost its meaning.

I'm in love with someone else.

He exhaled sharply.

The door to the commons opened at his command.

"Peter!" Gabby was on her feet before the door even clicked shut behind him. She crossed the commons in three quick strides and threw her arms around his neck, nearly knocking his bag from his shoulder. Her laughter was bright, warm—too warm.

"You're back!" she said, pulling away just enough to look at him, her hands still gripping his arms. "I was starting to think you'd fallen off the face of the Earth."

Peter forced a small smile, his body slow to respond, like he was moving through syrup.

"I missed you," she said easily, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. "You didn't message much. I thought maybe your phone broke or something."

"Something like that," he muttered.

She stepped back, finally giving him space, though her energy didn't dim. They walked to his room, the door already open. Crow was nowhere to

be seen, an unfortunate vacancy.

Peter tossed his bag onto the made bed.

Gabby moved around the room with quick, purposeful motions—straightening things on his desk, grabbing his discarded jacket, setting it neatly on the chair as if she'd been waiting for this moment.

"I kept your side clean," she said, gesturing proudly. "Well, mostly. You left that ridiculous Oaken mug, though. I wasn't touching that thing."

Peter glanced at it—still perched on his desk, exactly where he'd left it days ago. It felt like nothing had changed.

Except everything had. *I am in love with Blair Dawn, and she's in love with me*.

"Gabby," Peter started, his voice catching slightly. He needed to make it clear that there was nothing romantic between them.

She didn't look at him. Instead, she moved to Crow's mini fridge, pulling it open. "I got coke for your fridge. Figured you'd want one when you got back."

Her tone was light. Casual. Perfectly normal.

Too normal.

"Gabby." Louder this time.

She paused, one hand still inside the fridge, then slowly turned her head. "Yes?"

Peter swallowed. His throat felt dry despite the words he'd rehearsed a hundred times.

"I… We need to talk."

Something flickered across her lavender face—so quick he almost missed it. Then it was gone, replaced by a calm, almost curious expression.

"Okay," she said, closing the fridge softly. "Let's talk."

She sat down on the edge of Crow's bed, folding her hands neatly in her lap as if she were settling in for a lecture. Her posture was straight, composed.

"I don't really know how to say this without sounding like an asshole," he admitted, rubbing the back of his neck.

"You could just say it," she replied. Her voice was gentle. Encouraging. Almost kind. That made it worse.

He looked at her—really looked this time. At the way she held eye contact without blinking, at the stillness in her shoulders, at the slightest upward quirk at the corner of her mouth that didn't quite reach her eyes.

“I think… we want different things,” he said finally.

Her response was immediate. “That’s okay.”

Peter blinked. “You—what?”

“That’s okay,” she repeated, tilting her head slightly. “People want different things all the time.”

He frowned, thrown off-script. “No, I mean—I don’t think we should… keep doing this.” He gestured vaguely between them. “Us.”

Gabby’s smile grew just a fraction. Not wider—sharper.

“Doing what?”

“Sleeping together,” he said, the word landing heavier than he expected.

A pause stretched between them.

Then she nodded. Slowly.

“Oh,” she said, “you think we’re dating.”

Peter’s stomach dropped.

“I mean—no,” he said, struggling to keep his voice steady.

Gabby let out a soft, thoughtful hum, as if considering something mundane. “That’s interesting,” she said.

“Interesting?” he repeated.

“Yeah.” She leaned back on her hands now, looking up at him with that same unnerving calm. “Because I don’t remember saying that we were.”

Peter stared at her.

“We hang out,” she said lightly. “We had sex once.” She shrugged one shoulder. “That doesn’t make it something… official. People assume things.”

“That’s not what you’ve been giving off,” he insisted, a hint of frustration creeping in. “You literally told people—”

“I say lots of things,” she interrupted, still smiling. “People hear what they want to hear.”

Silence pressed in again.

This wasn’t how this was supposed to go.

“I’m seeing someone else,” Peter blurted out. The truth came out sharper, harsher than intended. “Or—I want to. I care about her. A lot.” He waited for the reaction.

Anger. Hurt. Tears. Something.

Gabby just watched him.

For a long moment, she didn’t move at all.

Then she nodded once. “Okay.”

“That’s it?” he asked, disbelief slipping through.

“What else would there be?” she replied. “You’re allowed to care about someone else.”

Her tone was so even, so neutral, it made his skin prickle.

“You’re not… upset?”

Another pause. This one longer.

Gabby’s gaze didn’t waver. If anything, it sharpened, studying him like he was the one behaving strangely. Her head tilted to the side, her horns glinting in the light.

“Should I be?” she asked quietly.

“I—I don’t know,” Peter admitted. “I just thought—”

“That I’d be heartbroken?” she offered.

He didn’t answer.

Gabby’s lips curved slightly.

“That would make things simpler, wouldn’t it?” she said. “You’d feel bad, I’d cry, and then you’d leave feeling like… I don’t know. Like you did something meaningful.”

“That’s not—” he started, but the words fell flat.

She tilted her head again, studying him from a different angle. “Who is she?”

Peter hesitated. “Does it matter?”

“Of course it does,” Gabby said, almost amused. “Everything matters.”

He shook his head. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Mm.” She tapped her fingers lightly against the mattress. “You’re right. It doesn’t matter. Don’t worry, I won’t tell her about your… meetings with Vivian.”

The movement was sudden but controlled, smooth in a way that felt practiced. She stepped past him, close enough that her shoulder brushed his arm.

“I’m glad you’re back,” she said softly.

Peter turned slightly, watching her cross to the door.

“You are?” he asked, uncertain.

She looked out over her shoulder, the afternoon sun washing the room in gold.

“Of course,” she said. “It’s important that you are back.”

Something about the way she said it sent a shiver down his spine.

“Gabby—”

“You should unpack,” she cut in, still facing away. “Classes start early tomorrow, and you hate rushing in the morning.”

There was a finality to her tone now, gentle but immovable.

Peter stood there for a moment longer, waiting for something to break—for her to turn around, to laugh, to cry, to *do* something that made sense.

But she didn’t.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

Haunted Castles

Peter Bronze walked through the academy, noticing the festive decorations that filtered throughout the halls. Twinkling lights and freshly carved Jack-o'-lanterns were scattered around. Peter had walked Blair back to her dorm, after training together. They had been prepared for disaster, Peter would give them that, but he couldn't get the sick feeling to leave his stomach. He just wished it hadn't been the one person he couldn't stand getting hurt.

Blair had been out of it from exhaustion, as her magic and strength had been depleted through training and dreaming. He was impressed with her ability to push forward. The ways she could use a blade to cut through an opponent. He found himself slightly aroused by the sight of Blair covered in blood.

Blair had tried to get out of going out to the Halloween bash, but he was not having any of it. They were going out and celebrating their progress, whether he had to carry her to the finish line or not.

"Peter!" Jules called out as he approached. "Is Blair pushing herself too hard again?"

"She's exhausted from us training together, she's just gone to lie down." Peter eyed him cautiously.

"I just have this sick feeling that won't leave…" Jules trailed off, pushing his sunglasses back down over his eyes. "Look, man, I'm sorry for doubting you had her best interests in mind before. I saw the broadcast and… I still love her, but she clearly cares about y—Demons. Will I see you at the dance later?"

“Halo, wings and as Angelic as possible, I’ll be there.” Peter kept his tone lighthearted.

“See you there, I’ll be… my usual self.” Jules trailed off as he walked back towards his dorm.

“*Peter.”*

His head shot around looking for the source of the noise. He heard faint whispers, incoherent but audible to his enhanced hearing.

Voices seemed to travel through the walls and echo around the halls. It was almost as if ghosts roamed the castle and were trying to communicate with him.

“*Peter*.” His name echoed through the hall again.

The whispers were both eerie and alluring. Peter found his skin perspiring with nervousness. He continued down the hall towards the Demon Commons ignoring the voices, dismissing them as part of his imagination. The voices didn’t seem to appreciate his ignorance, growing louder, but not less clear. Peter covered his ears, trying to drown out the noises.

“They aren’t going to stop until you listen.” Peter’s eyebrows shot up, taking in Gabby’s appearance. Her purple skin was glowing in the ambiance of the lights, her horns refracting as she picked at her fangs. There was blood in between her fingers.

“Can you hear them?” he asked, uncovering his ears.

“Yes. They are the souls trapped here. The walls between us and the other side are thinner during certain points of the year. Halloween is one of them, why do you think Pagans worship this day? The Celtic people believed that on the night of Samhain, the boundary between the living and the dead was blurred, and the spirits of the dead could return to our world. They would celebrate with lighting bonfires and making offerings to the spirits, as well as wearing costumes and masks to ward off evil spirits. It’s also a time for divination and prophecy, as the veil between the worlds was believed to be at its thinnest.” Gabby picked dirt from under her nails as the whispering wrapped around them. “I’m sure Blair is having the headache of her life today.”

Was that why she was acting so strange today? So irritable?

“So these spirits, what do they want from me?” Peter observed the daughter of Lilith.

“I don’t know. You need to learn to listen, Heylel. I’ll see you at dinner.” Gabby vanished into the shadows.

Despite the feeling of unease, Peter stopped trying to drown out the noise. The whispers slowly cleared, beckoning him forward using his name. He couldn't help but feel compelled to follow the whispers. They seemed to be leading him to a dark and mysterious part of the castle that had long been forgotten.

“*Peter.*”

As the whispers grew louder, Peter’s heart raced with anticipation. He felt on the brink of discovering secrets that had been hidden away for centuries. The voices lead him into the basement beneath the dining hall, where he had once come with Vivian. The Succubus had been avoiding him since he returned to Oaken with Blair. He appreciated not having to deal with that awkward situation yet.

One of the doors to the classrooms opened with a creek. A breeze burst through, dust flying through the door frame from years of neglect. The whispers concentrated around him, giving him a nudge forward.

Peter’s heart was racing inside of his chest, sweat gathering under his arms and forehead. He was not one to get spooked often, but ghosts were a whole new ballpark.

The classroom was situated at the far end of the Eastern side, isolated and seemingly forgotten beneath the floors of Oaken. A thick layer of dust coated everything, from the desks to the chalkboard and even the windows. The once-white walls had turned a dingy yellow, peeling in places to reveal jagged plaster underneath. The room was shrouded in darkness, with only slivers of light filtering through the grimy windows.

Desks and chairs were overturned and strewn haphazardly, as though the students had fled in terror, leaving everything behind. A broken clock hung crookedly on the wall, its hands frozen in time, a silent reminder of this place's abandonment. Cobwebs draped across every surface, and Peter could hear the squeaking of mice that scurried in the shadows.

Peter turned up his nose at the musty and thick air, filled with the scent of old textbooks and forgotten lunches. The chalkboard on the wall was covered in half-finished diagrams, the remnants of a lesson that was never completed.

The silence in the room was eerie, the whispers fading as he explored, broken only by the creaking of the old wooden floorboards and the

occasional flutter of a bird outside. It was as though time had stopped in this place, trapping it in a perpetual state of darkness and abandonment.

Another breeze passed by Peter, a chill descending down his spine. By the desk, dust was being disturbed from its long rest. A yearbook sat on the surface.

Peter took his uniform sleeve, running it over the cover. The year 1994 came clear after a few passes. This would have been around the years his mother Sandre attended here. She'd be roughly around the age of twenty. Curiosity drove the turning of the page. If his mother met his father while here, he might be in this yearbook.

The 1994 yearbook was a treasure trove of memories, with its faded pages filled with a multitude of pictures. The photographs captured different poses, from formal school portraits to candid shots featuring groups of students hanging out in the dining hall or cheering at the Dorm Hall Games. The pages were worn with age, bearing the marks of countless hands flipping through them in nostalgic remembrance. Despite the weariness, the yearbook has retained its charm, allowing Peter to experience the past at Oaken Academy.

Peter paused, finding his mother in the post-secondary category. She looked young, a bright smile on her face. She had bangs with a bob, matte lipstick over her lips, and a pearl necklace hugging her neck. Fingertips ran over the small portrait, a life his mother had that he never knew. Never bothered to know.

Pages continued to flip, finding his mother in various candids. She was quite the athlete, one of the first female Half-demons to qualify for rugby varsity. Peter found himself smiling as he discovered more of her life.

He turned to the back, signatures array on the page. His mother's signature was there with heart, underneath a message,

"Your fire sets me ablaze, I love you," Peter read aloud.

A loud bang came from the bookshelf to his left. Peter's skeleton almost left his skin, too concentrated on the signatures. Peter investigated the sound, the yearbook forgotten. A notebook sprawled on the floor.

Peter blew off the dust. The cover was plain black, wrinkled and worn from use. He opened the front cover, property of Heylel displayed within. Peter's eyebrows knit together, the name bringing something familiar that he could not quite place.

The yearbook and notebook tucked gently under his arm. He wasn’t leaving either of them behind.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

Masks and Monsters

Peter Bronze spent time gathering his costume, Angel wings and halo in position over his all-black attire. He was going for the dark and mysterious Angel, one who was ready to fall from grace. Crow had raised their eyebrow at the irony of his outfit. Peter just grinned, knowing he looked delectable. Crow had even convinced him to smudge some eyeliner on.

Peter made his way to Blair's dorm, taking in the witches, vampires, and mummies who milled about the academy, making their way to the dining hall for the dance. A bounce found its way into Peter's step, he was excited for his first dance at Oaken. He had never been interested in them during high school, but this year he had a date with someone special.

The door to the Angel Commons was open, the Nephilim meandering about and getting ready. Many looked in his direction as he walked through the doors, which wasn't surprising given his costume.

Willow came around the corner and stuttered when she saw him. "Damn," passed through her lips.

Peter did a little spin, arms wide.

"What do you think?" he asked, knowing from her face that she was startled by his appearance.

"Angel wings suit you. BLAIR! HURRY UP!" Willow called over her shoulder, trying not to take her eyes off of him.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" Jules spit from behind him. Peter spun around taking in his ripped clothes and poorly painted face.

A zombie. Quite fitting considering his normal state of being.

“Hi, Jules. Happy Halloween. Nice costume,” Peter complimented, trying to ease the distaste clear on the Nephilim’s face.

Jules rolled his eyes at Peter. “Try all you want, Bronze, you will never be one of us.”

“Oh darn! I really aspired to be just like you, you know. That’s why I went after your girl.” Peter placed his hands on his hips, watching red spread over Jules’ face through the make-up. Peter had never seen the Nephilim’s powers, he wasn’t even sure the son of Zachariah could use them considering he numbed himself out all the time, but Peter wanted to see if Jules would use them.

“Listen, you’re going to get what’s coming to you, Hellion. Just because you got to go to the royal palace and have tea with the queen, doesn’t mean you’re special. You will be sent to Hell with the rest of us.” There was a dullness in Jules’ voice.

“Oo, I am so scared.” Peter dramatically flared his hands, mimicking fear.

“Give it a rest,” Jackson added, coming out from his room. He was dressed in all black too, supporting fangs and a cape lined with crimson on the inside.

“Jackson, come on he–” Jackson just gave Jules a look. “We will see you at the dance, Bronze.”

Jackson practically dragged Jules over to the fireplace, their voices too hush for Peter to hear. *Damn, Jules was really itching for a fight*.

Peter turned back towards Willow who just shrugged at him, mouthing that she didn’t know.

The door to their room opened down the hall with a whine, revealing Blair.

She was wearing a short, midnight dress with sparkles over the fabric that caught the light from the chandeliers. As she came forward, Peter’s eye fell to her legs, wrapped in blood-red tights, tucked into matte black combat boots. Peter could feel himself becoming aroused as his eyes travelled back up her body. The dress hugged her hips creating a heavenly curvy shape.

Peter wanted to touch her. *Claim her*.

He could not look away, as he took in the charcoal and gold eyeshadow on her eyelids, paired with precise winged eyeliner that accentuated the colour of her eyes. She wore a silly headband with horns to complete the look.

Devilish indeed. She could corrupt him anytime. A full manifestation of lust itself.

“You look incredible,” he told her, letting his eyes roam over her form one more time.

“I know,” she said confidently with a little spin, letting the dress bellow at the skirt. He was quick to notice the knives attached to her thighs. Blair was always prepared for the worst.

“I have to say, the Dark Angel look is really doing something for me.”

She took a step forward, her eyes sultry and enticing. *God, she has to know the power she holds over me.* One look would have sent him to his knees in worship.

Peter could feel his breathing increase, deeply inhaling her scent that wrapped around him from her close proximity.

“Well, I think Fallen Angel would be a better title for it.” She raised a cocky eyebrow in silent question. Peter leaned forward, brushing her waves over her shoulder to access her ear.

He dropped his voice to whisper, “Because I am falling for someone as devilish as me.” His fingers trailing lightly over the skin of her neck. Blair’s face was flush, her chest heaving from his words.

Two could play this game she had started. She knew what she was doing with her body, her words, her looks. She had truly chosen to smite him. Testing to see how far she could push him before he caved, before he begged for her.

Peter held out an elbow. A smirk of victory was clear on his face. “Shall we?”

The grandiose dining hall—usually filled with bustling students and cafeteria chatter—had been transformed into a magnificent Halloween extravaganza, captivating to all who entered. Every corner and crevice of the hall was splayed with spooky decorations, casting an enchanting and eerie ambiance throughout.

As students entered, they stepped into a world of ghouls and goblins, their costumes seamlessly merging with the haunting music. In these meticulously crafted getups, witches, vampires, zombies, and superheroes

roamed freely, mirroring the kaleidoscope of imagination and creativity. Peter was impressed with the sheer effort that fueled the academy. He had never seen anyone take Halloween this seriously.

The flickering glow of countless floating orbs and lanterns, expertly arranged and suspended from the high ceilings, casted dancing shadows on the walls and dance floor.

The sinister illumination enveloped the hall where the pair found themselves. Peter was smiling with pure enthusiasm, something he had a hard time achieving most days. With Blair, the smile came naturally. He looked down at her, her eyes scanning the crowd before them nervously. *Is she concerned about what people might be thinking about us*?

A carefully curated playlist fueled the celebration, emanating from state-of-the-art speakers strategically placed throughout. The rhythmic beats and haunting melodies compelling the costumed dancers to move in sync with the music. Eerie tunes harmonised with pop, ensuring that everyone could find their groove. Peter began to lead Blair inside, feeling her finger tapping nervously on his arm.

The dance floor itself took centre stage. It was embellished with carved lit pumpkins and an ethereal fog that swirled under bright, coloured lights. The pulsating changes synchronised with the music, casting vibrant hues across the room and bathing the dancers in a mesmerising mosaic of Halloween colours. It was magical to see such joy and community.

The dining hall's vast space was further divided into different sections, each boasting a unique Halloween experience. A maze of Jack-o'-lanterns and cobwebs welcomed adventurous attendees, while a haunted graveyard beckoned those seeking a spine-tingling thrill. Wandering through dark corners and concealed passages, students could stumble upon interactive experiences, like fortune tellers and tarot card readers, adding an extra touch of mystery and enchantment. The student council had certainly outdone themselves. Peter wanted to try everything, feeling like a kid again.

A photo booth caught Peter’s attention, adorned with spooky backdrops, props, and themed frames. Peter made note to get a photo with his beautiful and enchanting date, to retrieve a physical memento of a hopefully unforgettable night. Halloween spirit was marked in laughter and the occasional entertaining fright that echoed throughout the hall.

Peter's eyes continued to scan the space, but was particularly drawn to the tables that lined the left side of the room. Delicious treats abound at

various food stations, each impeccably filled with Halloween-themed decorations. Tables displayed an array of snacks, ranging from witches' fingers made of cheese and crackers to slime-covered cupcakes. The intoxicating aroma of warm cider and freshly baked Halloween cookies made Peter's stomach growl.

"Want to get a drink?" He strained his voice over the music. Blair nodded at his question, still anxiously glancing around the room.

Peter led her to the food table, grabbing two ciders. He handed one of the cups to Blair, who looked grateful now that she had something to fidget with.

"What's wrong?" he whispered into her ear.

The beautiful Nephilim took a swig from her glass. "Nothing."

"Bullshit. You look anxious. Did you have a vision?"

Blair shook her head. "It's nothing. Just a feeling."

"Of?" Peter nibbled at the witches fingers, trying to curb the need in his stomach. Gosh, his appetite would be the death of him.

"I don't know. Something isn't right."

Peter stepped around to stand in front of her, hands on either of her shoulders he gave her a squeeze. "Everything is going to be okay, Blair. We are here with dozens of trained supernatural beings. Nothing will harm you."

"It's not me I am worried about. I just feel a sense of deja vu. Like I have seen this before." Peter took in the seriousness of her expression. Searching her eyes for answers that Blair would not give him.

"Look, let's try and enjoy ourselves. I think I saw a photo booth when we walked in. Let's go get our picture taken." He grabbed hold of her hand and began dragging her around the dancing crowd. Damon and Snow gave them a brief wave as they passed.

"Hey, Blair!" Arlie screamed excitedly as they reached the photo booth. "Holy God, you look hot! Are you guys getting some photos?" Arlie pointed to the props spread over the table and held up her camera in the air. Arlie was one of the members on the student council that was in charge of organizing the event.

"What do you say, Blair? A memento of tonight?" Peter reached for her, hoping to see her smile. That's all he wanted. He wanted to help remove the darkness that had gathered over her world since she had gone to the Emissary.

A small smile, though it didn’t reach her eyes, found its way to her face. Peter would take what he could get. He pinched her cheeks a few times, smiling at her like an idiot. Her smile grew as she batted away his hands.

“Alright, you two. Pick a few props. Is the cemetery backdrop suiting your fancy or would you rather a dark and mysterious castle?”

Blair looked at both.

“What do you say, Angel? Dark and mysterious?” Peter watched her cheeks flush slightly, her eyes glancing at his lips. Her pupils blew wide within seconds. “Where did your mind just wander, Angel?”

Her lips parted slightly before Arlie interrupted, asking them which background they wanted.

“The castle,” Peter told Arlie, grabbing Blair's fingers in his own. He pulled her closer, mere millimetres between them. God, her scent was driving him crazy.

Peter grabbed a gold masquerade mask from the table of miscellaneous props, placing it over Blair’s eyes. A black pair settled over his.

His gaze crashed to her lips. A fierce, undeniable pull tightening in his chest as the urge to kiss her roared through him.

Blair pulled him over to the backdrop, their eyes never breaking contact.

“Okay, ready? Three, two, one.”

A flash spread over them like Blair’s magic. Thunderous lightning. Yet he still couldn’t look away from her.

She is so beautiful.

“Okay, look towards me,” Arlie told them, Blair turning her head with a smile on her face. It didn’t reach her eyes, a sign of its falseness. It still made her dazzling.

Another flash.

Peter pulled her closer, his arm wrapping around her shoulders. He pressed his nose into her hair, inhaling deeply. He hardened into steel. Her body was hot against him and her dress was driving him crazy.

Another click of the camera and a flash flooded over them. Peter finally looked away, finding the will to smile as Arlie took a picture.

“You guys look so good. Best angel-and-devil duo I’ve seen. They take a few minutes to print. I’ll have them ready soon.”

“Would you like to dance in the meantime?” Blair asked.

“I thought you’d never ask. It’s this Angel's dream.”

Blair chuckled softly, lifting her hands to untie the mask. He grabbed her wrist to stop her.

“Don’t take it off.”

“But–”

“I’m sure Arlie won’t mind.”

Arlie shrugged at them. A knowing grin on the photographer's face.

Peter took her hand in his and led her to the dance floor, ignoring his growing desire. Need drew him closer to her.

The music flooded over them as they moved into the condensed crowd. He had never seen Blair dance, but he found her bobbing her head behind him. Damon and Snow yelled at him with a stoic cheer as they merged in with the crowd, getting lost in the sea of supernatural beings.

Peter turned towards Blair, their hands never parting. He wasn’t much of a dancer but he swayed with the music, pulling Blair into him. They stumbled slightly, pressing them closer together than he had intended. They both giggled from the clumsy mess they were creating.

Peter gave her a little twirl, their hands finally pulling apart. Blair’s hands rose above her head, eyes closing as her hips swayed side to side. Her raven-like curls bounced along with her, making her a sight to behold. Even other students had turned their attention to the princess, lost in the freedom of the beat, lost in the sea of music.

She was captivating, he couldn’t blame them. Everytime Blair had ever let herself have fun, or whenever she was in combat, she always caught the attention of others.

He wanted her to be his. *To Hell with the Covenant.*

Her eyes opened beneath the mask, finding him already staring at her with intent. He had stopped dancing, the world had shifted into slow motion as Blair stepped closer to him. His skin burned when she touched his hands.

“I need you,” he whispered. He could feel his cock jerk, his thoughts on their lips joining.

“Peter, we can’t–” He pulled her closer. Their bodies flush together. He rocked them to the beat, making it appear as if they were simply dancing.

“Fuck the Covenant. I want you to be mine and only mine,” Peter growled, his lips blowing hot air on Blair’s ear. He knew she could feel his arousal with her body pressed into him like this.

“Peter–It’s not that I don’t–but you don’t understand,” Blair stammered.

“Blair, you have no idea what it’s like to be around you. Ever since I started accessing my magic, I’ve been utterly insatiable. I can’t get enough of the way you smell. The way you feel against me. I dream of you.” Blair’s eyes closed, her hands bundling his shirt. Her breathing increased as Peter pressed his pelvis upwards, letting her know how hard he was for her.

“I understand. More than you know. But I– We can’t.”

A large boom echoed throughout the space cutting off the female Nephilim.

Dust fluttering over the crowd.

Followed by screaming.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

Broken Barriers

The wall behind the teacher's platform broke open, rubble and dust flying over the crowd drew Blair Dawn from her lustrous thoughts. The music cut out, replaced by a high pitched shriek that filled their ears. Blair knew that shrill.

Lesser Demons.

"FALL BACK!" Blair called out.

Panic embedded itself through the crowd as they rushed towards the dining hall doors to escape away from the damaged wall. Jackson and Merlin ran to her side.

"How the fuck did Lesser Demons get onto the grounds?" Jackson asked, raising his sword. Blair grabbed her own weapons that she had strapped to her thighs. She regretted not bringing her short swords, these daggers would do little against an onslaught of Lesser Demons.

"Not sure, right now we need to protect as many as we can." Blair began to pray for strength, for protection, for power.

"I will go get the headmistress," Merlin stated and disappeared through the panicking crowd. Another Demonic shrill broke through the intermingled screams. Blair started to rush forward, daggers ready and magic brewing beneath her skin.

Peter stayed behind her, his own daggers poised at the ready protecting her rear like he had during combat training class.

Students were fighting back, some already dead. Their flesh shredded from the nasty claws of the Lesser Demons.

“What are your orders, My Lady?” Taron and Milo had rushed forward, their armour covered in oily Demon blood.

“Kill as many as we can to hold them off as others escape,” Blair ordered.

The clock struck midnight, the bells ringing as they did every night and mid morning. The world was transformed into a supernatural playground. Ghosts, ghouls, and all manner of otherworldly creatures emerged from the shadows, ready to wreak havoc on the living.

This was planned.

The sky filled with an eerie purple haze, the quarter moon casting an unsettling glow over the landscape and through the broken wall. The Lesser Demons flooded in. At least a dozen of them surrounded a group of students standing their ground, using whatever was available to them as weapons.

Magic encircled the space, sending gooseflesh over Blair’s arms. The Casters worked quickly, the rubble transforming to hold Demons as concrete hostages. Blair shot forward, her blades making way into the crackled flesh of one of the Demons. An inhuman sound escaped the creature.

God, she was not regretting her shoe choice seeing women in bare feet or heels.

Peter came up on her right to charge at another enemy. The monster, with its twisted, horned visage and leathery charred wings, prepared to clash with the Half-demon. The air crackled with anticipation as the two adversaries faced each other, their eyes locked in a deadly duel. Flames shot down Peter’s dagger, the hot metal blistering the flesh of the Demon. It roared in response, its saliva sprinkling against Peter’s face. A look of disgust grew on his face as he drove the second dagger into its neck. It slouched from his hands, daggers dripping with black ooze.

The Demonic creatures, driven by their insatiable hunger for chaos and destruction, let out a chilling roar that reverberated throughout the hall. Flames danced across their agile frames, illuminating the grotesque tattoos etched onto their ashen skin.

Blair watched in horror as they transformed. Razor-sharp claws extended, each one dripping with acidic venom, ready to rend flesh and shatter bone.

The princess reached out to her magic, thunder pounding through the purple haze. Blair jumped over the group, as more Lesser Demons rushed

through the forced entrance.

Blair, towering above the Demons exuded an aura of raw power and righteous fury. Her skin began to glow as her prayer channelled divinity into her magic. A suit of celestial armour adorned with intricate engravings and sigils morphed over her form. It pulsated with Heavenly energy that flowed within her veins.

Glistening wings, iridescent feathers of pearl, unfurled majestically filling the air with a celestial glow as she prepared to counter the Demonic onslaught. Blair did not feel the pain of her flesh ripping open for the wings to unfurl.

With an explosive burst, the fight erupted.

The Demons lunged forward, their movements quick and unpredictable. They slashed through the darkness with a relentless flurry of strikes, the students fighting back with verberating strength. Searing trails of fire blocked the Demon blows, scorching the air and leaving trails of charred ruin in its wake. The darkness itself seemed to recoil from the menace of its attacks.

Blair closed her eyes, letting the transformation complete—letting her magic charge to full power. The sky crackled with lightning, responding to her call. She could taste it in the air.

Channelling divine energy through her body, she swiftly dropped, weaving between the Demon's strikes with an ethereal grace. Her celestial blades crackled with electricity as it parried each blow, radiating blinding bursts of light with each clash. Each strike threatened to banish the lesser creatures into oblivion. Her lightning exploded from her, marking her targets in the crowd.

Battle raged on, with the Demonic and celestial forces colliding in a chaotic ballet of blood and light. A deafening clash of metal and bone boomed; they fought with unyielding determination. The world around them shook with their power, cracks forming beneath their feet as reality itself trembled at their might.

With a brutal, booming smite, Blair’s lightning shot from the sky, striking the ground. The very earth shook from force, several Lesser Demons burning and breaking into small pieces. Their flesh became an abstract explosion of horror across the dirtied floor and upon the skin of her classmates.

Blair wobbled slightly, her body quickly supported upright with Peter’s firm form. More Demons filed in to replace those that had been taken out.

“Now would be a good time for some Hellfire,” she muttered weakly. “I don’t know how much more I have.”

Peter’s blue eyes were stern, black blood splattered over his hard, marblesque features. “We just have to hold out for backup. Merlin went to get help. I used too much of my magic during training. I don’t know if I can summon that much.” Blair nodded, pushing off of him to stop a clawed blow to his back.

“Thanks,” was all he muttered in gratitude before returning to the chaotic fury of battle.

Blair’s lungs burned with affliction. Her back throbbed from the wings that burst from her back. They were heavy. A burden to her.

The Demons’ relentless assault combined brutal strength and unholy sorcery, seeking to overpower Blair’s and the other Nephilim’s celestial resilience. But the Nephilim, fueled by their divine essence, matched the Demon's ferocity blow for blow, pushing back against the forces of darkness with unwavering resolve. Jackson led with a brilliance Blair had seen in combat training, his ice slowing down their opponents.

A new roar reverberated from behind the wall of the academy. A deep, gut wrenching sound from something much larger than their current opponents.

Blair’s heart pounded with trepidation.

In the grim depths of the courtyard, amidst swirling tendrils of shadow and suffocating darkness from the purple clouds, a terrifying sight emerged —a Greater Demon. In all of her training, Blair had never seen one in person. It was illegal to summon them, a crime punishable by death in the Covenant.

Towering over lesser creatures, this abomination embodied Hell, its monstrous form leaving even the most courageous trembling with unease.

Blair’s hands trembled, her attacks became sloppy. Her gaze bounced from the Greater Demon to her current opponent.

A distraction that cost her. The Lesser Demon slashed into her arm at the elbow, a small gap between her plates. A pained sound passed through her throat. Peter immediately turned in her direction, a slash scraping across his side.

Blair watched him take a knee, raising his dagger to stop another slash before looking back towards the monster. She ran her dagger through the Demon’s skull, watching it slop to the ground.

Blair let Peter wrap fabric around her arm.

They stared towards the nightmarish tableau before them.

The Greater Demon, its grotesque countenance a cruel amalgamation of nightmares, possessed a twisted and misshapen visage. Fiery crimson eyes burned with malicious cunning, pierced the soul of any who dared to meet its gaze. Jagged, elongated horns crowned with razor-sharp tips reached out from its skull.

The Demon's hulking frame was a sickening tapestry of leathery, charred flesh that seemed to ripple with a Hellish energy. Its muscular limbs flexed with an unnatural grace, terminating in wicked, clawed appendages capable of rending flesh and bone with ease. Each movement of this monstrous entity exuded power and terror, echoing through the air like a death knell. From its broad, powerful shoulders extended massive, tattered wings that spanned an expanse rivalling the sky. These wings, coated in gossamer-like skin, casted eerie shadows that writhed under his control. Veins of pulsating, molten lava snaked across the wings, promising to burn all in its path.

A twisted, barbed tail lashed out behind the Demon, laced with spines and adorned with wicked hooks. This appendage, an extension of the Demon's cruelty, was capable of impaling its victims and syphoning their very essence—leaving only emptiness in its wake. Blair had only ever seen one in a textbook.

“Do I want to know what the fuck that is?” Peter asked, killing another Lesser and tossing it to the side.

“You passed your exam. You should know what that is,” Blair punctuated.

“I was hoping I was wrong, Angel. Duck.” Peter threw one of his daggers over her head, slamming into the eye of another.

“Hellfire would be really nice,” she spat at him.

“It’s not as easy for me as it is you, Princess.” Peter looked annoyed, wiping the blood at his face. “The headmistress or some other help would be nice.”

Casters worked quickly, trying to slow down the Greater Demon. Wind swirled around it, the Earth opening and crawling up its legs. It roared with

annoyance, slashing at the ground with his large mace.

The air became thick with an acrid stench of sulphur and decay. Darkness seemed to obey this fearsome being, as if cowed into submission. Shadows writhed and twisted in its presence, conspiring to cloak the Demon's monstrous form in an impenetrable veil. Magic couldn’t pierce the shadows, rendering the Casters useless.

Fuck.

“What do we do now?” Jackson demanded, looking at the force field with defeat. Damon and Snow were behind Peter looking for guidance, leadership.

“We hit it with what we got. It can’t fight off everything.” Blair, feeling herself weakened, called upon her magic for another devastating blow. She would not let this thing step a single demented toe into the academy.

“I am with you, Princess.” Jackson readied himself beside her.

The Greater Demon emitted a sinister, low-pitched growl akin to the rumblings of a grave, rattling the nerves of those around her. The mere sound sent shivers down Blair’s spine.

“Formation!” Carter came from behind them.

Campus soldiers filed in, the professors amongst them. Blair sidestepped another Lesser Demon as the soldiers arrived, avoiding a venomous claw. Weapons were handed to the students. Blair twirled her dual short swords in her wrists.

“How did it breach the barrier?” Headmistress Penns stood by Carter’s side. The headmistress took in Blair’s wings with a momentary flash of shock. It was unheard of for Half-angels to possess the ability.

“We aren’t sure. I’ve sent men to investigate. Hopefully they will get it operating.” Carter barked more orders, the soldiers and students filing into formation and cutting down several more Demons in their path.

“We have to take this outside,” Jackson mumbled.

“No.” The headmistress was firm in her tone. “We have to trap it. Banish it back to Hell.”

Jackson looked dumbfounded. His eyes scanned the crumbled floor, where the bodies of Demons and their friends laid, lifeless. “Then we need to lead it in here somehow to trap it. I’m assuming a devil's pentagram?” The temperature dropped around them as Jackson wondered aloud.

“Correct, Mr. Norman. Ms. Dawn, help me draw the sigils on the floor here. Hide them under rubble.” Penns began using chalk to draw the

symbols on the floor.

“What about the students? Any Half-demon in the trap will also be banished,” Blair protested with concern for Peter and the other Half-demons. She quickly glanced at Peter who gripped his side. His t-shirt was darker where he held his hand. He had been injured. His costume halo was no longer seated on his head, the Angel wings shattered into pieces. Some of them singed at the bottom. He discarded them as he was handed armour. Wincing as he tightened it over his chest.

“We will clear them out, put them on the field outside rather than inside the academy. The four of you, join Carter and the others in the front line. Buy us some time,” Blair ordered, taking control.

“Yes, ma’am.” Jackson shoved Peter's arm to budge him forward. Damon and Snow glanced at each other before following after the Nephilim. Peter clearly didn’t want to leave her, he was reluctant to move. He sent a worried glance over his shoulder, then joined the front lines.

A roar exploded through the air.

“Dawn. We need to work fast,” Penns demanded, holding out another piece of chalk. They worked quickly drawing a pentagram followed by a circle.

Blair finished off the symbols from memory.

“They can’t hold him back much longer!” Blair heard Arlie yell at them. The slaughter continued to rage around them; screams of pain were an orchestra of horror. Blair’s heart was beating too fast, the pressure on her chest increasing.

Penns kneeled on the floor at the bottom of the five pointed star. She began to mutter in Latin. A banishment spell tumbling through her lips completed the pentagram. Though slightly obscured from vision, it began to glow a hearty orange.

Blair stood in the centre, her golden wings splayed behind her. She held onto her swords, offering a prayer to God for their perseverance. “Please, Lord, we need your strength.”

“Send it in!” Blair called out, her throat burning from the effort. The soldiers fell back, the Half-demons sticking to the edges. Blair couldn’t find Peter amongst the crowd.

The ground shook with force as the Greater Demon charged forward towards the hole. Dark mass morphed around him, his large leathering

wings pulsating radiant orange. Its eyes ablaze as it locked onto Blair. Steam rising from its nostrils into the October air.

Penn continued to chant as the Great Demon charged through the busted wall, its Lesser Demon minions trailing close behind. The soldiers and students hacked away, but Blair's focus remained forward. Muscles tight in anticipation she held her stance. Magic flared beneath her flesh. The Greater Demon swung its mace, a loud boom shattering through the room as it connected with Blair's blades. The windows shattered from the force.

The Greater Demon seemed surprised, Blair used it to her advantage. Ducking under, she slid under the towering beast using both blades to slash at its ankles. It roared in pain as metal contacted leathery flesh.

It refused to fall, turning around to swing his weapon at her once more. Blair prepared herself for another blow, narrowingly dodging before taking a swift tail to the face. Blair spiralled through the rubble, one of her swords discarded. She quickly got to her feet, the other blade still in hand.

His mace propelled towards her, crashing through her wing. Pain exploded down her left side following a disgruntled crunching of bone. Blair knee connected with the floor, her vision darkening.

The pentagram glowed as Penns continued the spell.

Anytime now would be great, Blair found herself thinking. Blair pushed herself to her feet refusing to give up, tucking the broken wing behind her, she lifted her blade out of spite.

The Greater Demon was faster than she had expected. Training with her fellow students had never been this intense. The two slashed at each other with force as Blair channelled her magic, waiting for the perfect moment to implode.

Neither combatant was willing to yield, their fight reaching a crescendo of intensity. Both of their bodies bruised and battered, they traded one final, earth-shattering clash. Erupting in a cataclysmic explosion of power. Lightning exploded through Blair's arms, connecting through their contact point. Lightning sparked over the Demon's skin, burning and ripping apart its flesh. It roared putrid breath but held its position, forcing more weight onto her blade.

Smoke and dust billowed, obscuring the scene as the aftershocks of their encounter ripple through the air. The pentagram's glow intensified as Penns finalised the spell. The weight from her blade eased, then the Demon was sucked into a spiral of darkness. Back to Hell from once it came.

As the haze cleared, only one figure stood.

Blair couldn’t move, but radiated an aura of triumph while gazing upon the defeated Lesser Demons and the bodies of those they’d lost.

A tear fell down her dusty cheek, her wings drooping behind her. She had never felt exhaustion this intense.

An exhaustion that utterly consumed her as she fell.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

Picking Up the Pieces

Peter Bronze barely reached Blair's side before she collapsed onto the floor. He grunted with effort, her deadweight creating strain on his open side. He brushed her hair to the side. It was slick to her skin with perspiration from her face. Covered in dust and blood, she didn't register his shaking wakes. The panicked Half-demon called out for help, realizing that something was wrong with her. Colour was completely devoid from her face. Her wings were bent in an awkward angle, broken from the Greater Demon's blow. Tears stained his cheeks as he called for aid once more.

A team of medics rushed in from behind Osric, pulling Blair forcefully from his arms. They laid her onto a stretcher.

Peter found himself reaching out, brushing his fingers over her soft feathers. He had never seen Blair with wings, he had no idea it was even possible. The magical armour that had protected her faded into the short black dress and red tights. The fabric reeked of iron and dirt. Peter stayed completely statuesque as they carried her body away.

"Headmistress!"

Carter and Penns turned towards the group of incoming men. Jackson, Damon, Arlie, and Snow joined his side waiting for news of the barrier. The group was badly injured, fresh bruises and cuts speckled all of their features. Fear and anxiety were thick enough to smell. Oaken had never seen an attack so brutal.

"Maxwell, did you find out what was wrong with the barrier?" Carter demanded.

“Someone tampered with the sigil stones sir. They have– They have symbols I have never seen before. Painted in fresh blood. I– We believe that they are somehow cancelling out the protection magic.” Maxwell looked exhausted, dark circles under his eyes. A paleness to his skin made it seem as though he wasn’t being completely forward about these symbols. Solidified by the side glances at the students in the room and his hushed tone.

“We will investigate this at once. The barrier must be restored,” Carter commanded, calling several names forward. The squad he formed shot through the hole of the academy into the night.

Peter looked at the headmistress once the squad had disappeared into the darkness. Her forehead was moist, the price that had been demanded from the spell.

“My dear Oaken students,” she spoke softly, making eye contact with Peter, “we must find strength in the horror that ensued here tonight. We will do everything we can to find out who is responsible for this attack. Go to your dorms, refresh yourselves, grieve. Those with injuries will be led to the medical wing. A proctor will be around every dorm to check-in and we will hold an assembly tomorrow afternoon.”

“What about our parents?” a Shifter called from the crowd.

“We will contact them. Same with the families of those we have lost. We will lower the flags for a time of mourning. We lost many brave souls tonight, which is why we must find it within ourselves to carry forward, to honour them, the Covenant, and our Holy Lord. Go. Now.”

“And for those who wish to stay?” Peter found himself asking. Despite his injuries—despite the pain that radiated throughout his body—he wanted to continue to serve. Going to the Demon Commons seemed like a waste of his energy.

“You can stay. Help lead the injured to medical treatment. Help us uncover the bodies.” Penns began to do as she had commanded.

Jackson nodded once at their orders before looking at Peter with a thumb over his shoulder.

“I will start on this side.” He tapped the Half-demon’s shoulder with the briefest of touches and then found his way over to a group of Casters to give aid.

Peter could not stop the disgruntled displeasure from contorting his face, but remembered the hawk-like gaze of the headmistress.

“Yes ma’am.” Peter glanced at the others. “Are any of you injured?”

Arlie shook her head. “Just a few scraps and bruises for me. Nothing serious.”

Damon’s shoulders slumped with relief once he heard.

Snow however, winced as if reminded she was wounded, her witches costume obliterated. She pulled back the shoulder of her dress to find large teeth marks. Black and festering. A hiss came from her as she pressed around it.

“I will take her to a doctor,” Damon announced. “You should go yourself, Bronze. Your side will need stitches.”

“I will be fine for now. It’s not that deep. I want to help.” Peter waved him off.

“Can’t help it if you don’t take care of yourself,” Snow rebutted before Damon could.

“I promise I will get looked at soon. The others need it more.” Snow shook her head, looking towards her friend to signal she was ready to go. Peter watched Arlie and Damon exchange a pained look before he left the dining hall with Snow in tow.

The Earth Casters began their work, moving the rubble in slow controlled movements through the air. Piece by piece the wall of the academy was restored, though disgruntled and blocky.

“I am going to start searching the rubble,” Arlie stated.

“I’ll help you,” Peter told her.

A pained sigh washed through Arlie’s body.

“Mentally, I knew we were going to see war in our lifetime. But part of me was not ready to start searching for the bodies of my friends,” the Nephilim confessed to him, shock seeping into her features.

Peter grabbed her fingers and gave them a squeeze. “Like the headmistress said, we must find strength for those who didn’t make it. They want to be found and returned to their families. It is the least we can do.”

Arlie wiped a tear from her dusted cheek and nodded once, summoning the strength Peter knew she possessed.

Piece by piece, Oaken Academy began to stitch its wounds.

Thirty-two.

Thirty-two of his fellow students lay dead.

White linen laid over their cold bodies, hiding the shredded horror underneath. Lesser Demon's claws left many of their bodies unrecognisable. Peter felt hollow knowing Isa, the daughter of Paimon, was amongst the fallen.

Peter and Arlie sat next to each other in silence, staring into space. The Half-demon and Half-angel needed the silent companionship after helping uncover the bodies. The headmistress was identifying them, one at a time, preparing herself to contact their families.

The barrier around the academy was wounded. A hole in the invisible boundary that was supposed to protect them. Someone had tampered with it, waited until most of the students had made their way into the hall for the dance and then attacked. Someone who knew they would be vulnerable because their guard had been down.

Arlie reached into her pocket and handed Peter a folded paper. Peter opened it to find the picture of him and Blair that had been taken together earlier, the two of them looking into each other’s eyes.

“You saved it?” Peter ran a finger over the glossy surface. Arlie’s equipment had been destroyed in the blast, he figured all of the photos she had gathered would be lost.

“Stuffed it into my pocket and deleted it off the camera. A fool would be blind to miss the connection between the two of you.” Arlie’s face was sad with understanding.

“Why did you and Damon end things?” Peter made sure to keep his voice low. Arlie’s hazel eyes brimmed with tears.

“Because the Covenant would have killed him. And I couldn’t live with myself in a world where he didn’t exist anymore. They torture people like us for having relations. Take my advice, don’t step over that line with Blair. It will only tear you to shreds when you can’t be with each other anymore.” The Nephilim stood and made her way out of the dining hall with her hands wrapped around her torso.

Peter pushed himself to his feet and wobbled.

“Woah.”

Someone rushed to his side to steady him.

He looked down to see Vivian. Just Vivian, not the illusion of Blair.

“Let’s get you to medical. You need stitches for your side.” Pain reverberated up Peter’s side, reminding him of the Demon claws that had slashed through him. Blood soaked his shirt, all the way down to his hips.

“I wanted to talk to you,” Peter whispered, feeling incredibly light headed.

“You have at least ten minutes to tell me on our way to a nurse.” Vivian chuckled and adjusted him against her.

“I wanted to say I am sorry,” Peter told her when they entered the stone hallway.

“For what? For fucking me? You don’t have to apologise, Peter. We had an arrangement that was mutually beneficial. I *assumed* that it would be tricky to maintain if Blair Dawn was back running around campus.” *Touché*.

“I just didn’t want you to feel used.” That was the truth. He took what he wanted from her, got the fix he needed to contain himself and helped Vivian gain power from him, but it still felt wrong.

“I’m a Succubus. Feeling used comes from the job description. I know you don’t want to be with me. I am not her.” Guilt swelled in Peter’s gut.

“I’m sorry,” escaped him again, knowing it would do little to ease the Succubus’ feelings.

They walked in silence from that point on, Peter limping pathetically beside her. Peter felt himself getting heavier, each step getting harder.

The medical bay smelled sterile. Osric rushed towards him and Vivian. The Earth Caster took Peter’s pathetic sagging form into his arms, ready to move him into a stretcher.

“Why don’t we try and be friends, Peter?” Vivian’s purple eyes were sad, but the smile on her face was genuine. At least it seemed in his semi-lucid state.

“I would like that,” he slurred. Maybe he could atone for what he had done to her.

“I need stitches over here!” Osric called, wheeling the bed into his own isolated unit.

Peter’s vision darkened around the edges. His heart was beating too slow. He welcomed the abyss like an old friend.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

A Sacrifice

Pain. Burning, blazing, blistering pain.

Blair screamed. Her back scorched in liquid fire.

"Hold still, Blair. We have to set this wing or it won't heal properly. I need more morphine, she's burning through it too fast!" Osric's hands were firm, but gentle.

Bone crunched. Hot tears seared down Blair's face, her mouth agape in muted screams. Nothing could have ever prepared her for this.

She welcomed darkness as it beckoned her away from the pain. Like a friendly, encasing embrace.

Blair Dawn opened her eyes, wincing at the painful light that entered her pupils. Her brow scrunched in annoyance.

"Hey, Angel. You've been out for a few hours." Peter sat next to her hospital cot, his hand holding hers anchoring her to the present.

"What happened?" Blair's voice was as rough as sandpaper. She needed water.

"You passed out after the Greater Demon was banished."

Right–The Great Demon. The barrier had been broken. The dining hall had been destroyed.

"Osric had to reset your wing a few times. Your quick healing kept mending the bones." Blair forgot she had wings. Her back throbbed in

recognition. There they were, golden pearl wings draped at her sides. She ran a curious finger over the feathers. They were soft to the touch, despite a few being coated in thick Demon blood.

Wings. Right—wings.

Blair put her head back onto her pillow and released an exhausted sign.

Peter was pale, his face ashen.

“Are you okay?” she asked. Wincing at the feeling in her throat.

“I lost a lot of blood, but I will heal.” His voice was low. “We lost over thirty people today. Isa was one of them.” Blair saw the sorrow that burrowed in his gaze at the mention of the captain of the swim team. “Whatever this was, it was planned. Meticulously. Carter and Penns haven’t been able to find anything or anyone responsible.” Peter’s jaw ticked. A look blazed in his eyes, one she had seen before. A promise of death to whoever or whatever was responsible.

“Peter, we will find out who did this,” Blair promised. Her hand gave him a light squeeze.

Willow pushed the off-white curtain out of the way and stepped through, her face devoid of colour.

“Blair, you might want to use whatever strength you have and– and come see what the headmistress found.”

Blair limped after Willow. Peter was by her side helping her, trying his best not to brush against the feathers of Blair’s wings. Students had gathered on the second floor near the entrance to the chapel’s pipe organ room. A commotion bustled through the crowd. A few of the students murmured as Blair approached, taking in her hobbling form.

The crowd parted like the sea at Mose’s demand.

Jules’ body, still in his zombie costume, was suspended from the rafters of the hallway. A noose strung tightly around his neck, now broken at an awkward angle. His face purple from suffocation, his mouth agape like a fish. Both of his wrists had been slit, brutally and vertically. Blood still slowly dripped off his white fingers to the pool of crimson beneath him.

Blair stumbled from Peter’s grasp and fell to her knees before the horror. Her hands falling into her ex-lover’s blood.

A banshee wail pierced through her chest and ruptured through her sore throat. Her pain and grief swelled in the pitch.

Lightning and thunder exploded across the sky.

Tears streamed down Blair's face, her body wracked with sobs. The sight of Jules hanging lifeless before her was too much to bear. Blair let out another guttural scream of grief, primal and raw, the sound echoing off the walls around her. Her heart felt like it was being torn from her chest, the pain of loss suffocating her tighter than the noose around his neck. She clutched at her heart, as if physically trying to hold herself together as she cried out in agony, the sound piercing the air with its intensity. Blood smeared into the fabric of her gown.

Every fibre of Blair's being ached with the overwhelming sense of emptiness and despair. She mourned the loss with another wail that shook the very foundation of the Earth. A haunting cry that spoke of a heart shattered into a million irreparable pieces.

Peter's arms wrapped around her middle, his warm chest pressing into her back between her sagging wings. Just as she had done to him the day she had entered into his mind.

Blair muffled her sobs. Her trembling hands holding onto Peter's forearms for support. Bloody handprints stained the sleeves of his skin. Her breathing slowed. It caught in her throat as her body quaked. Her nose was stuffed, snot dripping down her face. She wiped aggressively at her eyes.

How did I not see the signs? See Jules' suffering?

Taron and Milo had rushed to the underside of Jules' body, their boots stepping into the chilled blood. Blair hated the sound it made.

The headmistress cut the rope with her magic, a slash of air shredding the cord with an invisible blade. Taron and Milo caught Jules' body before it hit the ground.

Blair had to hold back her bile as Jules' head flopped to one side, his eyes soulless and devoid of light. Peter held her a little tighter.

"There's something in his pocket," Milo told the headmistress. His dark fingers handed her a folded piece of paper. The head of Oaken Academy read over the words diligently.

"It's a suicide note." Penns had a single tear dripped down her face.

"Can I–" Blair's voice cracked. "Read it?"

The headmistress held out the paper. Peter released her to allow her to fully sit onto the ground before the pool of blood. Trembling, red-stained

fingers opened the paper.

I needed the pain to stop. It was all too much. Losing Amanda to my own mistake has been a burden that I have carried with me for far too long. I was promised that I would see her again and that I would no longer feel this pain. I hope to join her now. Tell Blair that she was the light in my life, and it has been dark without her in it. Tell her that I am sorry for how I treated her and that I have always loved her. I had to do this, I needed the pain to stop. And he promised he could make it stop. Jules.

The paper trembled in the Half-angel's fingers.

This was her fault. She had been so wrapped up in all of her own shit, that she had stopped being there for Jules when he needed her this year.

"It's not your fault, Blair," Peter told her.

"Check this out," Taron muttered. He had lifted Jules' ripped t-shirt to reveal a large symbol that had been carved into his chest. The skin was puckered and inflamed, puss seeping from the wounds.

Jules hadn't just killed himself.

He had been a sacrifice.

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CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

A Vision Come True

The headmistress had been clear on her order for all students to return to their dorms. Peter Bronze had wanted to walk Blair back to her dorm, but Willow had no intention of letting him anywhere near her friend. She told Peter that he should return to his own dorm where he belonged. Peter submitted when he saw the blank look on Blair's face. Her eyes unseeing.

A numbness encased Peter that left him devoid of feeling or thought. He had witnessed great horrors, including Jules' hanging corpse. He was so shell shocked that he was unphased by the ghosts and whispers that still resided here on the magical night of Samhain.

The Demon Commons was quiet. Most people had gone to bed unable to cope with what had gone down. Anxious over the barriers wound leaving them undefended from creatures outside.

As the fire slowly died in the hearth, Peter took a rough log and placed it on the dying embers. His stare was focused, his magic ignited the dry pine. He sunk onto the couch.

Soon the sun would rise as if the horrors of the night had not occurred, but Peter was not sure he would be able to get any sleep. Any time he lowered his eyelids, he saw the Demons' snarling faces, and Jules swinging back and forth. He saw Blair's unconscious body that he couldn't wake. He heard Blair's wailing screams.

Peter's hands and face were still coated with dark blood, now dry and flaky. When he had come to, stitches in his side, he had walked right over to Blair's beside and sat until she woke up. There had been no time to clean himself.

“There you are! I have been looking for you everywhere.” Gabby bounded in front of him and pulled him to his feet, her obsidian eyes filled with annoyance. “We have to go. We have little time.”

“Little time for what?” Peter was dragged behind the Lilith spawn.

“To perform the spell to get in contact with your father.”

Peter froze, tugging Gabby back aggressively.

“I’m sorry, what?”

“You heard me.” Gabby tugged harder, pulling Peter down the hall. Their hurried steps echoed off the empty stone walls. “Your father tasked me with a very important mission to get you in contact with him.”

Peter’s father was coming for him. *Was he the one behind all of this? Everything that had taken place tonight*?

“We don’t have much time. We have to get to the library.” They descended onto the first floor.

“Gabby.” The female Half-demon ignored him. He said her name again with a growl.

Her black eyes turned to him, her purple skin darker with temperance. “I am growing impatient. It is important that he speaks with you, please. I cannot fail my mission.”

Curiosity swelled in his chest. He needed to know, as much as it pained him.

He followed Gabby to the library without resistance.

“Why tonight? Is everything that happened tonight because of him?” The smell of books was strong.

“Don’t you understand, Peter? All of this was for you.” The Half-demon gestured to the empty library.

“What do you mean?”

“This kind of magic requires an excessive amount of energy. The kind that only comes from death and sacrifice.”

Jules.

Gabby grabbed the Dark Bible and began flipping through it.

“You killed Jules?” Peter was going to be sick. The room tilted before him, leaving him spinning on the spot. *How did I not know Gabby had been conspiring with my father?* She had been on him from the start.

“No. Jules killed himself, but he was a *brave* volunteer. He was promised freedom from his pain, for helping me in return. I carved the channelling symbol into his chest and helped him tie the noose around his

neck. He slit his own wrists and jumped. He was a willing lamb to the slaughter. A necessary death." Her eyes were the same colour as her heart.

"And the Greater Demon?"

"A distraction to cover up what Jules and I had done to the barrier and what we were going to do to him. And, no one will be in the library for hours. Everyone will be too busy tending to the wounded and checking in on the dorms." Gabby kneeled on the floor before the altar of herbs she had built, her back to Peter. She started chanting Latin, words that Peter could not translate. Gabby threw things into a bronze bowl, beginning the spell.

"Thirty people were killed," Peter said. Gabby stopped her chanting to look over her shoulder.

"Again, necessary. Thirty-two deaths to help open a path to Hell. Tonight is the only night we can do this because the veil between worlds is thin." She went back to the spell.

"Why? Why me? Why does my father want to see me so badly? He hasn't been in my life for the past twenty-two years!" Peter's skin heated, his magic flaring in response to his bubbling emotions.

"You will have to ask him that yourself." The bowl before her erupted into flame.

Gabby continued the spell, the pentagram on the floor glowing a dangerous cobalt. Gabby sliced open her palm and dripped her blood into the bowl, before adding a vial of Jules'.

The ground shook. The marble floor around the pentagram cracked from force, a burst of hot steam escaped through.

A portal ripped open, a darkened swirl over the pentagram. A chill spread, frost extending from the base of the portal.

"Gabrielle, daughter of Lilith, I extend my gratitude for bringing my son to me." Lucifer's voice was Angelic. Strong and powerful.

"Thank you, Dark Lord. I will give you privacy to speak with your son." Gabby bowed with a hand over her heart.

"Your mother is proud of you. You will be rewarded for your efforts." Gabby left the library, letting the door close behind her.

Peter was frozen on the spot, and not just from the chill that exuded from the portal into Hell.

Lucifer was handsome. His blonde hair was meticulously shaped, and his face was marked with beautiful sharp features and sapphire eyes that pierced with intelligence. He dressed in stylish, sophisticated clothing that

marked his wealth and power. His demeanour was confident and charming, with a subtle air of danger and mystery about him. He exuded an aura of seduction and allure that Peter knew drew others to him.

Peter understood now, where his charm came from.

“You have aged into a beautiful young man. You look so much like your mother.” Peter had indeed gotten his mother’s dark hair and mouth, but everything else about his features was from the devil. They were almost identical carbon copies.

“Why did you want to see me?” Peter’s hands curled into fists.

“Can a father not want to see their children?”

Peter resisted the urge to roll his eyes.

“You had twenty-two years to come see me. Why now?” Peter spit out.

“I couldn’t come see you. My actions and whereabouts are monitored at all times.” Lucifer’s blue eyes glowed as he stepped through the portal and onto the pentagram. Ice spread from the devil’s feet.

“And they aren’t now?”

“Trust me, the Covenant is occupied. By the time they realize what I have done, it will be too late.” Peter didn’t want to know what that entailed.

“Come with me, son. I know that Hell is some big scary place to you mortals, but there are things I can teach you that no one else is capable of.” Peter’s fingers loosened. A desperate need to understand himself, his magic became a powerful temptation. Even as fear intertwined with his curiosity.

“You need to understand that the Covenant will never accept you for who and what you are.” *Human, Demon, Angel*. He was everything they feared and hunted. “You are a threat to the very foundation that the Nephilim have laid to maintain power. What my siblings have done to elevate themselves as gods. Come with me, learn about your gifts, claim your title as a Prince of Hell, build your strength, and then you will return here to resume your studies.” Lucifer made it sound like Peter was about to go on a mini vacation.

“All so you can walk the Earth?”

“So that Half-demons can live freely. That they may too, one day earn their way into Heaven rather than being banished into Hell.” *The infamous Lucifer, wanted freedom for Demonkind. Wanted them out from under the Nephilim’s thumb.*

“The portal will close soon. Please come with me.” There was desperation in the hand that was extended to his son.

The Nephilim had been right to be fearful of Peter’s arrival into the Covenant. The choice laid before Peter marked the beginning of his journey. That he could fulfill the prophecy the Demons worshipped, aiding Lucifer in returning to Earth and take his revenge against Heaven.

Peter was the monster they were looking for, the son of the devil.

Peter debated going with him. To protect Blair, protect all of them from himself.

“And if I don’t?”

“I will kill Blair Dawn.” Lucifer’s voice was calm, even as the threat lingered.

“You will do no such thing.” Peter’s magic stirred at the icy words of his father. It was protective, ready to take on anything that threatened Blair.

His teeth were clenched together as he started to pace. He hated that he had no control over the path that had been laid before him. He was always meant to be here at this moment, that was clear.

Blair had seen this moment before he had even arrived at the academy.

Peter's emotional instability let his magic have a will of its own. Acting of its own instincts to protect Peter.

Fire burned at the base of his feet, igniting the floorboards. It greedily used the dry materials to grow itself into a formidable heated force.

The books ignited, the leather hissing in protest. Soon he and his father would be engulfed in flames.

Flames began licking the walls of the library. Climbing higher and higher.

"Peter!" A scream bellowed behind him. Blair had burst through the doors in frantic panic. Her wings were no longer trailing behind her. Her face was pale and splotchy, like she had been crying all night.

Peter made his eyes cold, but he knew sadness echoed through his blue gaze. He couldn’t help it, he had to say goodbye to the woman he loved. The only person in this supernatural hellhole that made him feel like he truly belonged.

"Peter!" Blair called again.

"You have to stay away from me, Blair." His voice was low and calm, but a feral warning rippled through. Blair stepped towards him in the burning chasm shaking her head at him.

The bookshelves began to crumble around them. Peter’s magic burned and smelted. The paint on the walls was peeling, bubbling from the heat

that concentrated around them. As the flames grew higher, smoke hung thick in the air. It burned through Peter’s lungs but he revelled in it. Phantom pain shot through him as Blair’s body racked with a fit of coughing. Her eyes were brimmed with tears.

“Leave here, Blair. I have to go.”

Lucifer stood behind him. Peter could feel cold leaking from the portal and seeping into his skin.

"What happened to you training to come with me? To be by my side always." Her voice crackled, rough from the horrors of the day.

"I love you, Blair Dawn,” he confessed. He had known for a while, that line he crossed when she came back from the Emissary. He knew he had loved her from the first day they had ever met each other’s gaze. “I always will, but I need to know who I am. He can help me." He would come back for her. It didn’t matter how many Realms of Hell he had to crawl through. He would find his way back to his Angel.

"Who?" she asked. Tears stained her ash covered cheeks.

"My father." Lucifer stepped around Peter and came into view. Blair gasped at the sight of him. Peter knew that she would recognise the creature that sired him.

"Please don't go," she begged. “I can’t lose you too.” The sadness—the sorrow in her voice—shattered his chest cavity.

“We must go, son. The portal is closing,” Lucifer whispered as the devil on his shoulder.

Blair reached out, catching a sleeve of his singed shirt. Their bare skin meeting for the final time. Peter couldn’t hide the pain in his gaze that ignited with her touch.

"Please," her coarse voice pleaded.

His palm rested against her cheek, wiping away tears already evaporating from the heat.

"Stay away from me, please." He kissed her forehead, a brief and gentle touch that almost took away the strength he had to leave.

Some day she would understand the journey he had to embark on to understand the role he played in this war. Peter would find a way to make her forgive him.

Peter ripped himself from her grasp, making sure he didn’t brand her skin. It was one of the hardest things he had ever had to endure. To leave the very person he couldn’t live without.

Peter stepped through the portal with Lucifer.

END OF BOOK ONE

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