

## Chapter One

“Are you coming?” asked the man with dark, slicked back hair as he tugged on a woman’s arm.

“Maybe we should go back in and talk a little more,” she replied while pulling back, but the man wasn’t letting go.

She was clearly drunk, that was obvious from her subtle sway, but it seemed she was having second thoughts about leaving with this man. Sometimes what may appear like a good idea in theory often seems pretty stupid when the time comes to follow through with it. *I* would know.

“You said you wanted to see my house.”

“I did but...maybe when my head’s a little clearer.”

He pulled the woman to him and she slightly fought against him. It was enough that *I* noticed, but she wasn’t exerting enough strength to break free.

Was she actually scared, or was she trying to pretend that she didn’t want to go in hopes that he wouldn’t think of her as easy? Women sometimes do play games like that, and *I* didn’t know yet. So, *I* lingered in the shadows, puffing on one of the new habits *I* had picked up in my new life. It wasn’t like it was going to kill me, but *I* didn’t really like it either. It was more something to keep my hand busy so that it wouldn’t do things *I* didn’t want it to. Idle hands are the devil’s playthings...mine more than others.

“You got me all hot, telling me you’ll come back to my place to do something about it. Now you just change your mind? Come on baby, don’t tease me like that.”

“*I* didn’t mean to. The whole thing sounded better a few minutes ago. Now...*I* just want to go home.”

“Then let me take you. *I* don’t care where we go as long as *I* get some of what you’ve been putting out all night.”

The fear on her face intensified. She didn’t want this man knowing where she lived, or, at least, it seemed that way. *I* wasn’t going to chance it and act until *I* was sure of it though.

A hand touched mine, but my eyes were focused on the woman’s face still, evaluating the situation with great detail. *I* knew who it was anyway, and didn’t need to look his way for confirmation.

James often popped up when *I* went to the surface, whether *I* asked for his company or not. It was appreciated. *I* hated being alone with my dark thoughts and James was the only one who understood me in my current set of problems.

When *I* had attempted to kill him, it had been his choice to come back in a Zolera body, which he thankfully no longer had. It had been a creepy gesture on his part to do it in the first place. He had let me cut out his heart for a second time, after my constant prodding, so that he could come back in a more recognizable form. It wasn’t like we would ever be together, like he had hoped that day he’d chosen my species’ form instead of the one *I* knew.

Despite the affection *I* had for the guy now, he had created ripples of chaos in my life

since he had entered it. The most important of which was me being stuck mated to Lucifer, his father, which was the only way to ensure the son James had tricked me into conceiving would remain safe. Though, I guess it hadn't fully been James' fault. This was apparently prophesized by someone a long time ago, my son anyway, not that a demon would just wreak havoc in my life until my goodness rubbed off on him. I didn't want that prophecy to come true, but I feared the worst. Me being stuck in Hell was one thing, Spero was another. The deal had been hard, and not a day went by that my mind was not wrapped around my boy and those in my world I had never given a proper goodbye to. *As long as I stayed away...they were safe.*

Time escaped me when I tried to think about just how long I had now lived in this waking nightmare. It felt as if years had gone by, but I doubted that much time had passed, more that the time for me drug on to make an eternity seem like a day. I didn't think I would ever die now, and I was probably right.

"Hunting?" asked James and I nodded, my eyes still focused on the non-couple still semi-arguing on what they were going to do while puffing on my habit.

"I needed a break from that awful place...no offense."

"None taken."

I was pretty much stuck in Hell with the deal Lucifer had made me with few exceptions. I could visit my family and friends, but only at a distance since I couldn't let them see me, nor interact with them in any way. The truth was, I had only done so once after attending my funeral and being condemned to Hell. It had been too hard not to let them know that I wasn't dead like they all thought I was. The corpse I had conjured up had been pretty convincing. But, if I just wanted a day or night out of Hell, there was a price. There's always a price.

If I didn't take one soul for every night I remained on the surface, then I would lose my privilege of leaving it for years. But the longer I stayed in Hell, the more I felt who I was fade. It was worth the sacrifice, but I made a vow not to blacken my heart any more. Bad people were the only ones I would kill, as I had done in the past. And this creep in front of me seemed a likely candidate.

No matter how bad the person, I was stealing lives for my own selfish gain. I knew that, regardless of how I tried to rationalize it to myself. But if I didn't do it from time to time, I doubted anything of the person I was would have remained. To me, the benefit outweighed the cost, but the guilt when I did was always hard to live with for a while. James didn't judge me. He understood why I needed to leave and the cost I was willing to pay to do it. Most times like tonight, when I had gone alone, he would often show up to be a comfort. He was my only friend in the world now, so I didn't mind. The darkness often talked to me and it was nice when he was able to drone out the noise of its horrible desires. I may be mated to Lucifer, but I told myself that I would stay as pure as I could. My soul still held light, which I figured was the only reason James was being decent still. If it had just been our mated bond that had been keeping him this way, it should have worn off by now, or so I would have thought.

"What's your take on this situation," I asked him, jerking my head at the two.

"Seems like your kind of guy. Why don't you take care of him and we can go out to

dinner or something, maybe catch a movie.”

I flashed him an amused grin despite my low amusement level. “Still trying to date me even though I’m your step-mother now, huh?”

His face turned a bit green, despite the darkness of the shadow we were shrouded in. “Please don’t say it like that, and no, I just think you could use a night of normalcy.”

“After killing a guy?” The concept of normalcy was laughable in my life despite it being one of my main life goals so long ago.

“Another day on the job?” He placed a kind hand on my shoulder as my eyes hardened from his words. “You could use a night of fun. Come on, I bet there’s a new comedy out.”

I didn’t comment, mostly because the thought depressed me. I used to love comedies, before my life had turned into an occult film. Laughing was something I didn’t do much of anymore, not with what my life had become. The things I had to do just to get a vacation from Hell...

“Your father wants to get started on that whole baby clause. Did he tell you that?”

“You have centuries to follow through with that, why is he pushing for it now?” The heat from James’ eyes was only rivaled by that of his father, but only their direction was aimed at me.

The shrug I gave was involuntary. I was beginning to feel a bit robotic in my actions these days. “I told him that, and that I didn’t want to sleep with him, well...ever, but that I would hold up my end of the bargain when I freaking felt like it since the contract didn’t specify that I have to do it now.”

It was little consolation on my end that it would only take one time and I wouldn’t have to touch him again in that way. If a demon wanted kids with someone, it would happen whether the other person wanted it or not. James had proven that to me. But I guess the world was lucky that only certain women could carry demon spawn to term or the earth might be overrun with the hybrids. Only Lucifer could create full demons, and I was far from happy about becoming pregnant again. I doubted anything that Lucifer would put in me wouldn’t burst through my abdomen and eat its mother before scouring the earth and feasting on all the good that remains.

“I’m sorry I got you into this.” James’ eyes fell, a true look of remorse he had given on only a few occasions to date. “If I had only listened to what you wanted, we wouldn’t be here today.”

“Yeah...how about we don’t talk about *what might have been*. That’s a dangerous game the darkness likes to torment me with in hopes of pissing me off and taking me over.”

A scream filled the air and my head jerked back to the woman. The man’s grip was so tight on her arm now it was going to leave a nasty bruise. He had ripped through her blouse, and he was going for more.

“Looks like your cue.”

I threw the cigarette on the ground and stepped into the dim light of the surrounding buildings. “Let her go!” I said in my boldest voice and the man turned back to me with shock on his face first, then anger. Nothing scared me anymore. I had nothing left to lose, as long as I was alive, and this asshole wasn’t able to kill me. Not that his heart would remain beating long

enough for him to try.

“Mind your own fucking business,” the man barked but the woman stared at me with gleaming hope behind those frightened eyes. It was probably as strong as it was because I was somewhat human looking. Had I been wearing my real face, she probably would have just been afraid of me. Either way, my face hid tremendous darkness. I couldn’t guarantee that she would survive this night either. She *should* be afraid.

“Sorry, it’s nothing personal.” I knocked him back, pinning his body to the brick wall behind him with the darkness that gnawed at me rather than my hands. No longer tied to the douchebag, the woman stared at me with a question of “how” all over her face mixed with gratitude that I had intervened, but the fear she should have felt for me wasn’t present. “Go,” I said but she seemed rooted to the spot. “James?” I called out and he took her by the arm and led her away.

“What are you?” His voice was no longer angry, but more like a scared child fearful of the monsters lurking under the bed. I *was* that monster.

“It doesn’t matter what I am, nor does it matter what you are any more. Enjoy your time in Hell, I don’t.”

The darkness gave me directions on how this man would end up, but I tried to ignore them. Since they were more like shouting than the whispers James’ darkness had been, it was a difficult task. My arms were together, pointed at the man slowly sinking up the wall which I had not meant to do, nor did I mean to do what happened next.

My arms abruptly pulled apart fast, and with them, so did he. It was not as clean a split as a sword would have been, more like pulling apart a wishbone. Some went one way. Some went another. Either way, the man that had formerly been alive was now lying on either side of me and my eyes fell to my front. Amazingly, it was still clean.

I hated Lucifer’s darkness. When it took over it was different than it had been with James. Lucifer’s could take me over while I still remained myself and not hidden in the cocoon of my body. It was like having another person living inside of me which could take control at any minute and make me do things...horrible things. It always made me feel like I had been the one to do them by the method it chose. And, once it had killed one, it always wanted another. There was no way I was letting it do more damage tonight. I had taken my one soul which gave me the night off from my eternal damnation. If I wanted another night, I would have to find another to dismantle who I deemed bad enough to die as I had this one staining the asphalt. It wasn’t like I did research to see if the people I killed were completely bad, or had families. I merely saw people acting in the wrong as good prey to buy me some time.

“Fucking demons,” said a female voice and I spun to the side as a liquid flew past me, splattering on the wall and muting the shade of red. The smell of it told me it was either what that light seeker had used to send me to Hell, or something similar. I was not about to let this woman send me back after I had just bought myself 24 hours of freedom from that wretched place. I didn’t care who this woman was. If she was trying to get rid of me, I would defend myself and possibly get another night away.

She was dressed far different than the light seeker I had encountered previously. Both her pants and coat were black leather. A shiny green halter top contrasted the outfit and gave it a splash of color to make her stand out, even in the dim light of the alley. Her hair was cut to her chin and platinum white, though it looked like a dye job as I caught sight of darker roots down her part. Her face was scarred, not all over, but enough to let me know this was not her first fight. But her head was bowed, giving me only a clear view of two prominent ones, one across her eyebrow and another short one just before her hairline on the other side of her face.

"I don't kill for the sake of killing, and I have no issue with you. So please leave before something happens that I can't stop."

The woman grinned, though it was only slightly visible with the tilt of her head. "A demon who says they don't want to kill is a lying demon."

"I only kill when there is a need, so don't give me one."

"Demons don't need a reason to kill. It's what they do. It's why I'm here."

"I don't." My words weren't entirely true, but I hadn't intended for all of it to happen, and I had only killed those whom I believed deserved it. Those who had killed those close to me, threatened me or my family, and those who thought they were entitled to far more than they really were and would do horrible things to get it. But, there had been accidents I didn't like to think about.

"Says the woman who just split a guy in two."

My eyes found the mangled carcass of the man but my head didn't turn. If I did, the darkness would eat her alive and I didn't want to kill her. She hadn't done anything to me...yet. My skin was literally vibrating with the amount of energy it took to hold it in. My resolve was strong, but the darkness would win if this lasted much longer.

She struck a pose like she was going to attack me. The knife in her hand was easily identifiable, but how she had gotten her hands on one of the ceremonial daggers I didn't know or understand. Other than Lucifer's seemingly never ending supply of them, I'd had all the others in the country. Her accent was local, but perhaps she had visited another and brought this one back with her.

"See, you want to kill me."

"I don't. *It* does."

"It? What exactly is *it*?"

"The demon. I'm trying to keep it at bay, but I can't really promise anything if you don't get the hell away from me."

Her head cocked to the side and her eyes finally caught mine. "There was only one...but it can't be." Her words sounded like mumbles, but I was able to hear them whereas a human couldn't.

Those eyes counteracted the tough front she had been putting up. They were a shade of soft hazel, and even in the dim light I could see the flecks of blue. The familiarity of her upright face took a moment to place, but when it did my eyes widened in horror. She should have never seen my face, recognized me. To her I was supposed to be dead, and her eyes said just that.

“You don’t know me...do you?” Maybe I’d been wrong about who this woman was. Oh how I prayed that were true. My heart was pounding in my ears as I tried to use my brain but it wasn’t able to formulate anything rational. Her wide eyes gave way to an evaluation of my face as if she wasn’t sure. In the end though, she nodded. “Well *fuck*.”

“You look different, but you haven’t aged a day. How is it that you’re alive? They told me you died.”

It was true that Trista had aged...more than she should have in the time since I had last seen her. Noticing this put one thing into perspective. Either she’d had a very haggard life after I’d rescued her, or more time had passed than I thought. We weren’t friends, so hopefully her seeing me wasn’t going to cancel the deal I had made with Lucifer. He wasn’t big on being merciful, or understanding. My panic only intensified.

“I...I...faked my death. It was the only way. You just being here, seeing me, I don’t know if we just ruined everything that I sacrificed. Why are you in L.A. anyway? Shouldn’t you be back in Granite Bay?” I had chosen to surface where I didn’t know anyone to avoid situations like this. Apparently, I hadn’t chosen far enough away. Maybe I should have changed states too but I didn’t know a lot of the world. Los Angeles was often portrayed as being a spot with a lot of filth so I figured it was as good of place as any to collect souls.

“I think we both have a lot of questions to answer. We should go somewhere to talk.”

“I can’t really move unless you want to be in pieces.” My face wrinkled in concentration as I tried so hard to beat the darkness back. It wouldn’t last long enough for us to have a proper conversation. My eyes fell upon the knife she was carrying again and the darkness snarled. “Stick that in me.”

“What? I’m not going to kill you. You saved my life.”

“I’m not asking you to kill me. But...maybe I should do it. I think the darkness might hurt you if you try. Give me the knife.”

She stared at me for a moment, as if evaluating me to make sure that I was the same person she had known. “I don’t get it, but I trusted you once before, and I have a backup.” She held the hilt out to me and I grabbed it from her, plunging it into my side as fast as I possibly could while ignoring the pain it caused me.

Instantly, the urge to maim, destroy, and otherwise obliterate this woman I had once saved vanished and I breathed in a little easier. The relief was more prominent than the sting of the stab and I took in a deep breath. For the first time in a long time, I felt like myself.

“I think she’s going to be fine,” said James and both of our heads jerked towards him. His eyes evaluated the woman before me. “Oh, did you make a friend?” Then his eyes fell upon the dagger sticking out of me and his eyes flashed red before turning to her again.

“I did it to myself!” I announced as I sidestepped in front of Trista in case he didn’t comprehend my words before acting.

James took a step forward with purpose before he stopped to stare at the blood leaking down my leg. “Why did you injure yourself?”

“I did it to stop from killing her.” I stepped aside, seeing that he was not going to do her

any harm. “James, this is Trista. I rescued her from Hell the same day I made the deal with your father. Is her seeing me going to void the contract?” The man looked thoroughly shocked and speechless. He obviously hadn’t been prepared to run into someone who knew me any more than I had.

“He is a son of Lucifer?” asked Trista, another dagger sliding out from behind her coat in defense.

“He is, but he’s fine. I promise.” She slid the knife back into its holster with a nod and I turned back to James. “I need to know if this is going to be a problem. If her seeing me has broken the contract, then Spero is in potential danger and we need to act now.”

“The deal was friends and family of your previous life. Is this woman a friend?”

“We didn’t have time to become friends before I was *killed*.”

“Then it shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Seriously, you two need to explain what the heck is going on. And why the woman who was so nice to save my life then fake her own death looks more demon than the last time I saw her.”

“Now *that* is a long story,” I said with a heavy sigh. “I need coffee first and we can find some secluded place to talk this out.” She nodded and both Trista and James eyed each other cautiously before following me. I used a glamour to hide the knife and blood from my self-inflicted injury. The darkness was going to have to wait while I got the chance to dabble in my past a bit.

In any big city, there’s never a block without a coffee shop on it. This one was no exception. It was night, but not late enough that everything was closed and there were a fair amount of people out while we walked the short distance. There was also a nearby park that was deserted since it closed at sundown, but I doubted any of us cared that we were breaking the law, even the former cop. We took a seat in the grass and exchanged quiet stares for a few minutes while we sipped our beverages.

It was Trista who broke that silence. “This definitely changes the end of Kate’s last book.”

I both winced and perked up at the name. “How is she? How is everyone?”

She shrugged. “I mostly just talk to Kate, you know since she was the only girl in that house while I lived there. But, from what she said, the others are doing alright.”

“What about my baby?” James touched my leg and I corrected myself. “*Our* baby.”

“Spero? Oh, he’s doing good. Quite the weapon’s expert from what I’ve heard. They visit from time to time, but I haven’t been back to the house in some years.”

I gulped at her last two words, a question emerging that I wasn’t sure I wanted answered. She had lived in my home, and had been away for *years*. “Um...how many years has it been since I...died?”

She looked thoughtful as if trying to calculate it. “Well, Spero will be turning nineteen in a few days, so do the math.”

I choked on the coffee my throat had refused to swallow and James patted my back until I

could breathe properly again. When my eyes found his, his gaze was understanding with just a hint of something else.

*"You knew?"*

His eyes shifted away from mine, settling on his cup before speaking. "Though I have been in Hell more than I used to before this happened, and that was so you wouldn't be alone, I have been keeping track. You seemed to not want to know, since you have about a million consecutive life sentences, so I never brought it up to remind you." His eyes finally found mine again and they were sincere. "I thought knowing would make it worse for you."

It felt like only a year or two had gone by since I had given the little baby to Kafkus with the impression that I was going to be able to raise him. I had missed his entire childhood. My head sank, along with my heart.

"Hey," James said but my head stayed low. "He is doing well. That is what you wanted for him, isn't it? That's why you made this sacrifice which I guess I will never understand."

His words made me sigh and my voice dropped so low I could barely outwardly hear it. "He probably hates me for leaving him."

"That's not true," Trista said and my head raised a bit. "He talks about all you accomplished in your life and how he wishes that he only got a chance to meet you. Maybe he can now, you know, since you're alive. I bet he would be happy rather than mad to see you."

My voice cracked a few times before any words came out. "He's only alive because I faked my death and sacrificed my life to ensure it."

"Yeah," Trista started with a long pause as if she was waiting for me to elaborate. "You're going to have to explain that to me since you haven't yet."

I opened my mouth but shut it quick with a glance at James who was glaring at me.

"No, I want to understand why you did what you did just as much as she does. Spill it."

"But..." I started with no real excuse to make up. His decentness had lasted a long time...nineteen years apparently. Maybe it was here for good. I cringed before the words came out in case I had been wrong and I was only sealing Spero's fate. "That book of prophecies that you saw when you helped me out of that satanic ritual...you remember it?"

His eyes narrowed even more. "You *were* in there, weren't you?"

"I was, but it was more about Spero. It's because of what it said that I knew I had to keep our son safe from your father. If I hadn't known about it, I probably wouldn't have done what I did. I don't think he knows though."

James' brow rose as his glare intensified. "And what exactly did this prophecy say?"

"I never got to read all of it, mostly since it was in Latin, and had to be translated, but it—"

"I find that hard to believe since I personally know you can read and speak fluent Latin."

My own eyes narrowed to match his. "This was before I had nothing better to do than sit in Hell and pass the time. I learned it because I had to do something to keep my mind off what a shithole my life had become." His eyebrows lowered back to normal so I continued. "It was about how our son would overthrow your father someday. Or something to that effect, and unite Heaven and Hell. I wish I had more, but I knew just off of that that I had to make that sacrifice



to protect him because your father would kill him if he found it.”

James got to his feet and began pacing as my heart thudded loud in my chest. I had dreaded the moment when I would tell him about the prophecy since I didn’t know how he was going to react. I *still* didn’t know how he was going to react. His pacing just made me more nervous, and made me second-guess the fact that I had just trusted this man with the information I’d been keeping from him for years.

“You should have told me,” he said, finally coming to a stop. “I could have been more of a help to you than I have been.”

The sigh that escaped my mouth at his words was a relieved one. “You basically gave up your above ground life to assure that I wouldn’t be alone, and that there was one person who still gave a crap about me that I could talk to. That means a lot.”

“Yes, but had I known about this...it could have been different. You may not have had to give up your life like you did.”

I scoffed before I could help it. “Like there was anything you could do to stop your father from getting what he wanted if he knew. He doesn’t give a crap about me. He just wants to break me down and mold me up into this ultimate epitome of darkness he schemed up in his head.” My tone changed to remorse as I continued. “I also thought...you might turn on our son if you knew.”

“I would *never*.” His eyes bore into mine with absolute sincerity.

“Well I didn’t know that, so I kept it to myself in case it was true. Surely you can understand why I might have trust issues with you.” His brow furled, but he didn’t argue.

“Well, this has been very informative,” said Trista who had just listened to the two of us without intervening. “I’m guessing that he is the one you were mated to when you rescued me. And now it seems that you are mated to his father, Lucifer.”

“That about sums it up, no matter how much I wish that last part weren’t true. But now you know why I disappeared, and I just couldn’t bear the thought of them searching for me and getting them or Spero killed. That’s why I sent the body. If you talk to any of them, you can’t tell them that I’m alive. You just can’t.”

“I don’t want to cause any of them more pain,” she agreed. “Since it has been almost two decades, they’ve healed...for the most part anyway, and I wouldn’t want to reopen old wounds. Your death seems to have changed your world, or so I hear. I never got to go there but I heard a lot.”

“Changed for the better, I hope.”

“Yes, though I don’t know a lot of details about that because, again, I mostly talk to Kate.”

“Do the others still live in the house?”

“Kate and Kyle got their own place in Folsom. They’re married now, two little ones to look after. She said it was getting a little cramped with her brother around so they moved about...fifteen years ago I guess. Kate is still writing. After the success of your books, she decided to do her own story based on her brother and the whole werewolf thing. Daryl took over

the house and kind of made it his pack headquarters, but he still lives there. I think they wanted to 'keep it in the family,' so to speak."

I genuinely smiled for the first time in as long as I could remember. Kyle was happy, and he had a family, something I could have never given him. But that thought made my heart twinge. I had released Kyle hoping that he would be happy, but there were two more on my mind.

"What about Wylen and Kafkus, did they move on too?"

"From my few talks with Kafkus, he said that he had found the only woman he'd ever loved, and even though she was gone he would not take another. Wylen...I never met him, but from what Kate said he seems to have taken a similar stand on the subject."

My smile that followed her words was tinged with a frown. "Stupid men."

"I haven't gone looking for another either," said James and I flashed him a grin.

"Yeah, but you haven't had much time what with how much effort it takes to babysit me."

"I could have if I wanted too, but I think you would be fully miserable if not for my company."

"True, but I think I could say the same about you."

"Touché."

"Ok, I gotta ask. Is there something going on between you two?" Trista said and my head snapped to her.

"What? Why would you ask that?"

"You two obviously seem to care a lot about each other. And, apparently, you two spend a lot of time together. It just makes sense that you two would be involved in some sort of affair."

At the thought I let out a nervous laugh. "And piss the devil off further? Yeah, not going to happen. We are just good friends, though I do care for him."

"You love me and you know it," said James with a cunning grin and I patted his cheek with a fake slap. It was true that James, while not one of my fated loves (and our history was wrought with things I wished I could forget) had worked his way into my heart.

"I do, but through no fault of my own."

He laughed. "Always my fault."

"See, this is what I'm talking about. I would swear you two were dating, or even married."

James' smile transferred to Trista. "You know, I wouldn't mind that. It's why I mated her in the first place."

Trista seemed to have a hard time taking her eyes off the guy. "You know, for being the son of the devil, you don't seem quite like what I thought you would. I've met fiercer demons in my job."

"So what are you now?" I asked, curiosity getting the better of me. "A light seeker?"

"No, I'm not some religious nut-job who thinks merely sending demons back to Hell will balance the Hell on earth. I kill demons in what area I'm sent to by my boss. He has me looking

for something, but I haven't found it yet. The pay is good, and I really have a hatred for demons after..."

"Your demonic boyfriend left you to rot in Hell for countless years? Yeah, I think that would have the same effect on me as well. But James is alright. He says I did it to him, but who knows for sure."

"I know," he said with an indignant tone as if it was fact and not a theory. "I would still be the manipulating demon you met if not for you. Why can't you see that you somehow made me a better person, or demon?"

My face scrunched up at the thought. "It's a hard concept to grasp that I somehow changed you for the better. I more like to think that you saw in me the kind of person you wanted to be and grew to accommodate it. That makes more sense to me."

"I had no conscience before you."

"I bet you didn't have a soul either," said Trista. "No demon aside from Quartessa here has ever had one that I've met."

I stared at her, glanced at James then my eyes locked on hers again. "He doesn't have a soul." It came out as more of a question than I meant it to, but she had to be mistaken.

"I would beg to differ. He has one alright, though it is nothing compared to yours."

I remembered poor Franklin's ability to feel souls before he'd been killed. Trista hadn't touched him as he had me. "How would you know if he has a soul or not?"

"My boss gave me this." She pulled a clear crystal from her shirt which was attached by a thin chain around her neck. "It whispers to me if there is a body with no soul nearby. It's usually how I locate demons. Though, I guess it's not entirely accurate since it pegged you without one at first, until you stabbed yourself anyway." Her eyes fell to where the knife still lay hidden. "Doesn't it hurt?"

I glanced down at the invisible wound that was all too evident in feel. "Yeah, but not horribly. I'm kind of numb to pain anymore. It won't kill me, so it's not really worth thinking about."

She frowned, but it quickly transitioned into a smile before she spoke. "You want to see pictures of Kyle and Kate's wedding? I think I have some on my phone."

My eyes smiled, though my lips didn't with my reserve. "Please."

She pulled out the device that looked more like a piece of glass than anything electronic, until she tapped the thing and it lit up like a television. I guess nineteen years of technological advances had left me out of date, not that I had been great with electronics to begin with. Once she had the pictures up she told me how to navigate between the images.

They both looked so happy. Kate was in a beautiful gown that was far from extravagant, but still managed to make her stand out and look elegant. Kyle's hair was longer than I had last seen, parted down the middle and falling without bangs to the bottom of his ears. The next picture was of Kafkus, who hadn't changed or aged a bit, though his eyes appeared wiser which showed the time. He was smiling, his arms around a happy looking five-year-old on his hip that made my eyes water at the sight. That face resembled that creepy little boy who had visited me,

but his eyes were not an empty void, nor shifting shape as I had seen before. They depicted a normal child, a happy one. He was beautiful.

The next picture was Daryl with an attractive brunette on his arm. Perhaps he had finally found that special someone that he had wanted me to be to him. I hoped that was the case. The next was a very pregnant picture of Kate in a comedic pose. She looked like she had been in the middle of a dance move when the picture was taken. The next, Kyle was holding that little baby girl in his arms and staring down at her as I had seen Kafkus do to my son. It was heartwarming to see. The next was a family portrait of Kate, Kyle and their two girls.

The last image on the slide was a picture of Spero. My heart told me that again though I wouldn't have recognized him. He looked human in the photo. The ring he was probably using to conceal his Zolera characteristics was plainly visible on his thumb. He looked to be about fifteen, and unscarred from life which was all I ever wanted for him. The chain that presumably held the protective medallion was just peaking up around his dress shirt collar. I had a hard time tearing my eyes off of that boy who I would never know, but who I wanted to know more than anything.

She took the device back as I held it out to her. "There would be more, but I didn't think it would be smart to carry around pictures of your species out of their human form."

I nodded. "Do you think you could print out a few of those for me?"

"Of course." She smiled, an understanding one. "It must be hard to detach from everyone you've ever cared about."

My hands went to my head and it really sunk in. "Nineteen years...I can't believe it's been that long."

"Time has a way with passing us by, especially if we don't want to know." She glanced at the phone, messing with the screen as she continued. "Are you two staying here for the night? I could have the pictures for you in the morning."

"Yes. I killed that guy to buy me a night above Hell. He wasn't good, just so you know. He was about to rape a girl."

Trista looked intrigued by my statement. "Mated to the devil, forced to kill, yet choosing people who only taint this world...you really haven't changed."

My head sunk. "I doubt that's true."

Trista got to her feet. "My hotel is just around the corner. You could meet me there in the morning or we can meet somewhere else."

My hopeful eyes turned to James. "Where are we staying for the night?"

"We can get a room at the same hotel. I didn't have any other plans, did you?"

The truth was, I hadn't...before running into Trista. Now, I wanted nothing more than to visit my old house as well as my world to see for myself just how everyone was doing. That would be stupid on my part since it would break the only thing keeping them all safe from what would happen if I did that. *Selfish desires.*

"I do have somewhere I want to go, but it's a quick errand."

"Ok, well I'm going to turn in. I'll see you in the morning." She pointed to the tall

building which was the hotel and headed off in that direction as James helped me up.

“Where did you want to go, Tessa?”

“I told you to stop calling me that. Tessa, and all name variants, are dead.”

“You are not dead to me, and that is what I call you. Say it all you want, that fact will not change. Now, where did you want to go?” I glared at him but didn’t push the subject. Instead, I just headed for the street adjacent to the park and began my best at hailing a cab.

We had talked about my name change many times over the last nineteen years. He didn’t think Nemo, in Latin meaning “no one,” was a good substitution for my previous name. I thought it was fitting as that was how I saw myself, but he always argued it.

James tried to cheer me up on the short drive, but it didn’t do much for my mood. I had distanced myself from everyone I cared about, and seeing Trista had made me dwell on the past more than I had done in the beginning of this “new life.” Leaving the knife stuck in me let my mind be clearer, which wasn’t helpful for me at this time. It just made me question whether or not I could get away with conversing with those who thought me dead. Though...I knew the answer.

When we pulled up in front of the bookstore, James frowned, understanding what I wanted to do.