

# TAINED BLOOD

BLOOD BOUND SERIES BOOK 7



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# Amy Blankenship

## Tainted Blood

Серия «Blood Bound Book», книга 7

### **Аннотация**

Making a deal with a demon is binding, even if you don't know the person is a demon. Using that to his advantage, Zachary broke the sacred rule and deliberately offered Tiara a deal. He would become her only lover until she found a true mate... which he intended on her never finding. Sealing the deal, his dark side emerges when Tiara runs from him thinking she is now on PIT's hit list because of her tainted blood. Zachary fights fire with fire when he catches her hiding within the arms of the enemy.

## Tainted Blood

Blood Bound Series Book 7

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### Chapter 1

Craven walked the streets of the city having sent Nighthawk and Tiara ahead to their fortress. He'd learned the girl's name from the Indian. He was now riding high on several different adrenalin rushes... one being that he finally had the child he'd always longed for. Craven pushed the urgency away knowing she would not wake for a while.

He trusted Nighthawk not to feel the urge to hurt her in any way... he had seen as much in the Indian's eyes and it made him curious. He'd been searching for a reason as to why the zombie-turned-Night Walker had chosen to stay with him. Now it looked like Nighthawk had simply been waiting on something... or someone.

They both wanted to protect the beautiful little necromancer... even if it was for different reasons. If she was anything like her mother, then Craven could not fault Deth for siring a child with such a human. He could not feel his brother's life force in this world and it was disturbing to think he'd just abandoned his child.

Watching Nile suffer at the hands of his attacking children had given him immense satisfaction. He would have quickly become a problem had he not been stopped. Nile was a demon master and had already gathered much strength by taking that huge graveyard as his own. Even a lower class demon could become a nuisance if his or her army grew to such numbers.

While it was not he who had ultimately killed Nile, being able to witness his destruction had reminded Craven of the demon wars of old. It had filled him with bloodlust and the need to fight for dominance. Rarely did such an overpowering emotion possess him, but when it did he would find something that needed to be killed.

His time within the rift was only a fleeting memory. Time had suspended him there... much like a good night's rest. He could feel the lapse in time only when the rift opened and he'd awakened. He assumed it was the same as pulling souls from the afterlife... the same confusion followed.

The night had given way to early morning now, but unlike some of his underlings... Craven wasn't bound to the night. While he was in the mood, taking down a weaker master or two would be an enjoyable pastime. He could already smell the mess they were making of the city.

Craven leaned back against the side of one of the buildings just taking it all in. This was the same world he'd lived in for so long, before being banished into the stillness of the rift, but now it was different in so many ways. This time period was more

sophisticated... yet more wild than he remembered. The streets that crossed over the terrain held so many secrets... but with every soul he touched... he would learn more of this time from their memories.

The number of humans had grown along with the number of souls who had stayed behind to haunt the city on their own. He could feel them inside homes, hospitals... everywhere. He watched a city bus slowly drive by and noticed the soul of a man staring out the window at him.

Was this why the cemeteries he'd raised had been lacking the number of souls compared to the graves? From his point of view, it appeared as though the souls remained where the body had died, striving to continue an existence that no longer had any meaning. Most demons were only able to use the humans who were still alive... possessing or controlling their bodies. With so few necromancers in existence, his army would be immense once it was complete.

The passing of time had granted one thing... the number of the dead now matched the number of the living... if not surpassing it. Craven was fairly certain that if the dead were all summoned at once, they would easily overpower the living.

Testing the notion, he let his power flare out around him in waves, feeling for those who had no master to claim them. The souls he touched could feel themselves surrounded by demons, unable to move freely and most were too frightened to leave their security.

Craven was a soul collector... as was Deth. He used the weaker demons and any other creature of the night to do his bidding, but his bloodline was special. When he or anyone of his ancestry offered a soul a way home, it was then that a bargain was struck between them.

He could use his body as a medium to send the souls back to the afterlife, but if he ever called upon them to fight, they would be bound by the deal to return to this dimension and do as he wished. By waking the souls of the dead, Craven could then offer to send them back on this condition... that they remained his to call if he had need of them.

When a soul walked through him to return to the afterlife, they left a residue of their power behind... inside him, making him stronger with each passing. The same would happen with Tiara, and he knew Deth had not shared that secret with her mother. If the naiveté of the girl was any indication, she'd been given only the mother's training.

The secrets Deth possessed had not been shared, nor would Craven share those same secrets with Tiara. He would use the ability to walk souls to the afterlife and let the young necromancer believe he was helping her... endearing her to him by appearing to empathize with her 'need' to save them all. Such mortal notions were brought on by her human side.

There was no use in letting the souls he could feel remain free for another lower class necromancer like Nile to feed upon. Calling them to him, Craven made his silent offer. His bargain

was this... he was their savior from other demons, he was their sanctuary, and he was their direct path home if they accepted the deal.

One by one, the souls began to slowly emerge from their hiding places... walking past pedestrians who were going about their normal morning routines. Some humans could feel their closeness and would quicken their steps wanting to get away from the odd feeling. These humans had a heightened awareness; even though they could not see the ghosts whose energy they were feeling.

Souls that exhibited more bravery than others began stepping into him, taking his offer and disappearing from this plane of existence, while the more timid simply watched from a distance. Craven's lips hinted at a small smile as he sent out another wave of power to entice them. Suddenly more unclaimed souls crowded the streets, rushing toward him at a maddening pace.

Craven remained relaxed in his easy stance, leaning against the wall of the building as the souls rapidly flooded his body. If anyone had paid any attention, they would have seen his soft silver hair fluttering around his face in a breeze that was completely absent. However, on the inside, his power was building higher than the simple new souls that he'd been playing with in the graveyards.

These souls were old and tired of being in this world... strong souls giving him the touch of their power as they crossed over. He would use this power to protect what Deth had abandoned

for him to find... their bloodline. Once the tidal wave of souls had stopped, he resumed his inspection of the city.

A sinister smile graced his features as he followed some of the demon hunters from block to block, tracking their movements. He almost laughed when the hunters would stop short of one area to go and search elsewhere without wondering why they'd changed their minds. It was one of the oldest spells demons had used against their enemy since the dark ages... a repellent spell, making the unwelcome guest not want to come any closer.

The hunters were either extremely smart or extremely stupid considering their line of work. However, most of the hunters appeared to be human with no extrasensory perception, so it may have been just plain ignorance on their part.

He stopped to admire the fighting style of one who reminded him of Nighthawk... the human could have been a descendent of the Indian. Demon blood was streaked across his face like war paint and his magic was of high quality. This one Craven would have to remember, not out of fear but curiosity.

Becoming bored, Craven backtracked to the area that the hunters were unconsciously avoiding. It was riddled with darkness and provided a sanctuary for the dregs of this society to run and hide. Inside that darkness, power was waiting and feeding on the life that thrived in it. Craven stood at the mouth of it, looking in before stepping through the fog that had drifted in off the ocean toward the self-deluded power source he had discovered.

Yes, self-deluded was the perfect term for this power. It felt very confident, sure of its claim in the darkness and Craven approached it almost happily. He walked down the sidewalk taking in the silent screams of agony, and the pain that accompanied it.

The few females he encountered walked past him, giving him longing looks but keeping their distance... almost falling off the edge of the sidewalk into traffic, or nearly pressing their backs against the walls of the buildings.

The males were no different except their expressions were anything but longing. Fear and hatred seemed to flow from their very pores when they looked at him. He'd learned long ago that mortal women thought he was beautiful and the men were jealous of that fact. Craven felt nothing for the living... necromancers rarely bothered with a soul that was still attached to its body or a body that was still alive.

As distasteful as it was, Craven now paid attention so he could find the master demons that controlled the living. They were not to be taken lightly because their armies could also become a threat to his own territory in the future.

Reaching an intersection, Craven stood on the edge of the sidewalk watching the traffic lights for a moment. A deep gurgle caught his attention, blocking out the sounds of the morning traffic, and he turned his head toward the sound. His eyes glowed with excitement for the fight that was to come. He followed the sound of a human whimpering with fear knowing it would lead

him to his target.

When he walked down a short walkway leading between two buildings, he stepped into a parking lot where a dense fog had settled, trapped between the buildings. People were gathered in a loose circle in the middle of the lot watching a struggle of some kind taking place.

Just a glance at them told Craven the humans had been possessed by shadow demons. Their souls were still intact but the demons had taken them over. Again Craven mentally shook his head at human weaknesses. Weaving his way among the possessed humans, Craven stopped just outside the inner circle to watch as a shadow demon forced its way into the mouth of a human female.

The woman was dressed in some kind of skirt suit with her belongings scattered on the ground around her. The demon had worked its way so far in that only the tail end of its black glittering cloud was sticking out, wriggling back and forth. Craven had concluded correctly that the shadow demons were working together to find victims... and from the looks of it, their numbers were growing rapidly.

He tilted his head to the side in fascination when the woman's body started twitching violently from the intrusion. As her struggles against the inevitable slowly ceased, her eyes rolled into the back of her head leaving only the whites visible for a moment before returning to normal... complete possession.

Craven's lips hinted at a knowing smile and he completely

suppressed his power when he felt the real threat approaching at a rapid pace. A long stretch of glittering shadow came around the corner of one of the buildings in full daylight. It was as he'd thought. This demon was a shadow master... but even shadows had a weakness he could exploit.

The shadow pooled on the ground next to the woman's feet looking like a puddle of thick tar. It sloshed thickly for a moment before a humanoid shape began to rise up out of it. The shadow seemed to drip from the form before it finally stabilized revealing a tall, dark-skinned man. His head was shaved close, no hair on his entire body that Craven could see except a Fu Manchu mustache on his face.

The shadow master walked over to the woman, his black knee-length dashiki and charwal pants flowing around his legs. The neckline of the dashiki was ornately decorated with red and golden thread leaving him with little need for jewelry, however a large golden medallion hung from his neck and a single gold hoop earring was pierced through his left ear.

He looked down at the woman and narrowed his midnight black eyes. "Who do you belong to?" the shadow master asked, his voice a deep baritone.

The woman's mouth opened and closed a few times before her voice finally decided to work properly.

"I belong to you... Master," she stated in a confused voice.

"Very good, now rise up and serve me."

The woman slowly regained her feet with jerky movements as

though she weren't used to the body she inhabited. In a way it was a completely accurate description. When a human was under complete possession, at first the shadow demon inside of them could not fully control the most basic of bodily functions.

"What is it you desire of me?" the lady asked her voice almost normal but still a little dazed.

Craven chuckled darkly already growing tired of the foreplay. In a condescending voice he answered the woman's question, "He wants you to go find unsuspecting men and bring them here so they can also be possessed and his pathetic army will grow."

Both the woman and the demon turned their heads in his direction to look at Craven. He tilted his head to the side when the possessed humans also turned toward him. Their eyes abruptly began to cloud over, going from dull grey to blacker than pitch in a matter of a few seconds.

The shadow master was looking at him like he was a piece of easy prey and Craven resisted the urge to laugh again. How little they knew. He waited patiently as the humans started slowly walking toward him. When the first hand grasped hold of his shoulder, Craven tossed his head back and opened his arms wide. A tidal wave of souls began streaming out from his body and straight through the humans... emerging from the possessed with the shadow demons in their grasp.

Craven felt no sympathy for the humans who had fallen under the shadow master's possession... releasing them from those who would eventually try to invade his territory was merely a

side effect of removing their possession. He took notice that the shadow master had enough intelligence to stay in his human form where the souls could not touch him.

“Very impressive necromancer,” the shadow master murmured in his thick accent. “But you only delay the inevitable.”

Craven smirked, “Very true, perhaps I should just kill you and be done with it.”

The shadow master growled deep in his chest and ran at Craven. He twisted to the side to avoid one fist, then to the other side to avoid the second.

“Too slow,” Craven mocked. When the demon spun his leg toward Craven’s head, Craven bent backwards so the strike sailed directly above him. Using the momentum of leaning back, Craven flipped onto his hands and swung both feet up in a somersault, landing a double kick to the master’s chin.

Craven flipped back to his feet just as the shadow master regained his own footing. A thin trickle of thick, black liquid trailed from the corner of his mouth onto the front of his dashiki.

“So you can bleed,” Craven taunted. It wasn’t his fault the shadow master was scared to change back into his other form. He would beat this demon either way.

The man spit on the ground and glared with unfathomable rage. He knew this necromancer wanted his territory and he refused to back down. He lived by his own code... a demon that backs down is a demon that deserves to die.

“I won’t let you!” the shadow master growled and came at him again. Only this time Craven didn’t dodge. When the demon came within arm’s reach, Craven’s fist flashed forward burying itself in the demon’s chest.

They both stood there staring at one another, one with shocked surprise on his face, the other with a smug expression of triumph. Craven pulled his fist from the demon’s chest and stepped back. A hole remained showing the inky blackness inside the human façade the demon had claimed.

A human scream erupted from one of the women followed by the sound of feet hitting the pavement. The humans couldn’t see the shadow master for what he really was, nor could they see Craven as a demon. What they saw was two men having a street fight and one punching a hole in the other one’s chest.

Craven smiled sardonically, “You lose.”

The shadow master staggered back a few steps and looked down at the hole in his chest. A long, deep wail filled the parking lot and the demon looked up just in time to see the first soul fly into the hole. His body jerked forward at an odd angle just before another soul forced its way inside. More followed suit, flying into the demon’s human body to attack the darkness within.

Craven sighed with satisfaction when the last soul fought its way inside. The demon stood ramrod straight with his arms outstretched. His skin began ripping apart and wisps of black smoke rose from the gaps accompanied by a soft white light.

Spinning around, the demon tried to run but his movements

were stiff and jerky, almost zombie like which amused Craven to some extent.

The master threw his head back and screamed just as his body was completely ripped apart from the inside out. The scream abruptly silenced and a thin, grayish black smoke hovered for a moment before fading in with the morning fog and vanishing completely with a final hiss of contempt.

Craven held out his arms as though asking to be embraced. The souls moving about the parking lot turned toward him and shot back into his body. When the last soul disappeared from this dimension, Craven lowered his arms and approached the remains of the clothing the shadow master had been wearing.

Leaning down, he picked up the medallion and exited the parking lot. As he stepped back out onto the sidewalk, Craven looked about and saw more humans mulling about.

In the shadows cast by the nearby buildings, he spotted a few shadow demons slinking around... useless with no master to follow. Shadow demons were normally not much of a threat once their master was defeated, so Craven didn't really concern himself about where they went. Holding up the medallion in the dim sunlight that was starting to burn away the fog, he smiled once more.

“Good morning!” he said quietly before putting the Aztec medallion in his pocket and headed toward home. Perhaps he would find some amusement in the medallion the shadow master had been wearing.

He began shimmering through the city so fast that when he saw the silver-winged creature it was only an afterimage. Slowing his steps, Craven turned and again faced the inner city in contemplation. Now this was interesting... he'd thought all of the female Fallen were taken from this world at birth.

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Carley had followed the Indian carrying Tiara all the way across town before they'd finally arrived at a dark mansion in the outer hills. The place gave her the creeps... maybe it was because of the gargoyles and demons that were crawling all over the outside. The inside wasn't much better.

Once again, she was glad most of the monsters couldn't see her. Even if they could, they wouldn't be able to hurt her thanks to Tiara's spell. That didn't stop her from flinching when she heard screaming coming from the basement... at least she hoped it was the basement and not the actual ground.

Trying to block out the cries of agony, Carley hurried after the Indian as he went up the stairs to the second story. If he was taking Tiara to some kind of torture chamber, then she'd have to act fast. When she entered the room behind him, Carley paused to watch the man simply staring down at Tiara.

Nighthawk frowned wanting to feel something... even a spark as he gazed at the beautiful girl. She had caused something to spark within him when he'd met her the first time, but it had been so quick that now he wondered if it had only been an illusion. His gaze was drawn to the graveyard dirt lingering on her face

and body.

Carley went into panic mode when the Indian started removing Tiara's clothing.

"Stop it!" she yelled and slid between them only to have Nighthawk reach right through her without missing a beat. "Damn it, where's a cowboy when you need one?" Carley railed and made a flurry of movements trying to get his attention off Tiara and on her. She finally stopped since it seemed to be useless.

She needed to go back to PIT and let Jason and Guy know Tiara's location but she couldn't bring herself to leave until she made sure her friend would still be alive when they came back to rescue her.

Nighthawk stood up and removed his own clothing down to his breach cloth before taking the girl back in his arms. Moving into the bathroom, he stepped into the large garden tub and kneeled down, patently waiting on the basin to fill with warm water so he could cleanse her lover from her. He also did not like the scent of the Spinnan master lingering on her skin.

Relaxing his body, Nighthawk let his mind drift while the heated water rose. He despised necromancers because they had turned him into what he was now... even that feeling had to be concentrated on before he felt the slight twinge of it. This necromancer was different from the others... she didn't want to control... she wanted to set them free.

Looking down at the woman in his arms, he didn't have to

wonder why her body had no effect on him. His soul was still trapped in the grave and with it... most of his emotions. He felt no need to be loved or to be hated... much less want someone.

Finding the shampoo on the corner shelf, Nighthawk gently lathered up her long silver hair allowing the strands to slide silkily through his fingers. Seeing no reason to rush, he took his time washing her. It had been a long time since he'd touched someone without the intent of causing harm.

When he was satisfied with her scent, he rinsed her off and emptied the tub. Wrapping some towels around her body and hair, he stepped back into the bedroom and placed her down on the bed. He'd done what he could for her. Since the water hadn't roused her, he knew she was in a very deep sleep and probably would not awaken for some time. Without the right protection, this war would be the end of her.

Removing the towel from her hair, Nighthawk gently lifted her upper body and touched his fingers to the injury on the back of her head. He'd felt it while washing her hair. During his first life he'd been somewhat of a healer... a shaman... so he knew this injury was not life threatening.

He let his mind reach deep inside her, wanting to know if there was another reason for her to want to stay asleep... abandoning this world for a little while. He had never severed the link she'd established with him in the smaller graveyard and this allowed him to turn the mental link back on her. In the past, when a necromancer would link with him, it had felt more like a choke

hold. Hers was the equivalent of holding hands.

Even in her sleep, he could feel her hunger burning... the side of her that wasn't of Craven's bloodline. She was keeping it deep inside her... hiding its call. The hunger was offering to speed up her natural healing abilities. This was the one thing he could not do for her... the energy she needed came from the soul, and as of yet... he didn't have one. It was good that she slept for now, even though it was a slower way to heal.

Nighthawk traced the back of his knuckles across her soft cheek where Nile had struck her and left a dark bruise. Craven had said a lover's caress could heal her. Did one have to have a soul to love? He supposed so since he had not felt the emotion since his true death decades before. He had to strain just to feel any emotion beyond hard numbness most of the time.

Gently lowering her back to the pillow, Nighthawk straightened to his full height and glanced over his shoulder at the soul who had been haunting him since returning to the house.

"You are hers... are you not?"

Carley jumped in surprise, not realizing the Indian had been aware of her the whole time. She narrowed her eyes on him. He'd just simply ignored her while she'd yelled and ranted at him... the jerk. Her expression softened... she'd stopped yelling after a while, becoming confused after seeing him take such tender care of Tiara.

She slowly came forward, stopping to hover next to Tiara, appearing to sit on the edge of the mattress. There was no sense

in hiding from him... it wasn't like he could hurt her even if he wanted to... which she doubted.

“Someone might assume that I was hers... but I'm not.” Carley answered honestly as she reached out and ran her hand over Tiara's long clean hair imagining what it would feel like if she were still alive. She hadn't been dead long enough to forget the feeling of touch.

“Then why did you follow her?” he asked.

Carley looked up at him and raised her chin defiantly, “She's my friend... I want to know she is safe.”

Nighthawk nodded, respecting the answer. “And Craven's magic does not touch you even though you are inside his walls?”

It seemed like an important question to the Indian so Carley shook her head and gazed down at her friend, “Because of Tiara, necromancy can no longer touch or control me. I love her for that, so please don't hurt her.”

Nighthawk felt his chest swell with hope. The emotion quickly vanished but it had been enough of a taste to make him want more. That's all he'd ever wanted... to never be called upon by a demon again.

“We have no intention of harming her. It was her wish to come with us and we honored that request. If you do not believe me, then you are free to stay until she awakens and ask her yourself.” He spoke only the truth... the one trait that he had carried over from life.

“Then who hurt her?” Carley asked knowing it wasn't the man

standing next to her, but the rapidly healing bruises on Tiara spoke volumes of evil intentions.

“The demon she was fighting in the cemetery did this. Craven saved her from him,” Nighthawk answered as he moved to sit on the window seat where the sun could touch him. This was one of the only rooms in the house where the windows had not been painted black. Nighthawk tried to remember if he had ever enjoyed the sunlight or not... he supposed so.

Carley frowned when he turned his face toward the window as if dismissing her and the conversation. “And Craven would be the demon who was with you? Would that be the same man that has surrounded this house with so many monsters? I honestly don’t think Tiara would approve.”

She reached out and laid her hand on Tiara’s even though it went right through Tiara’s hand. “And why would she leave us... her friends, to be with a demon?”

“She and Craven are blood kin. You would call Craven her uncle. But in Craven’s mind, his brother’s child is the same as his own child. That is why he will not harm her. She is not a prisoner here and she will not be forced to stay. Once she heals... if she decides to leave, I will go with her as a protector.”

“Why would you do that?” Carley asked. It was Craven that was kin to her... not the Indian. “Did Craven order you to?”

“No, I am beyond Craven’s control now.” he answered without turning to look at her. “I am a Night Walker and she is the only one that can return my soul to me.”

Carley's jaw dropped... a Night Walker? Now that was some powerful magic. She thought back to the myths and legends she'd studied and even those ancient writings had rarely mentioned of them.

From what she remembered, a Night Walker was created from a human who'd possessed mystical powers during their human life and was then raised from the dead like a zombie by a powerful wizard. But that was only the first step toward becoming a fully developed Night Walker.

Unlike most zombies, they could use their own power to regain their mind and heart. It was said they were soulless but she didn't recall what powers a Night Walker possessed or if there was even a limit to what they could do.

She frowned when she couldn't remember reading anything about a Night Walker regaining their soul. Was that even possible?

"Isn't your soul in the afterlife?" Carley asked curiously.

"No, it is bound to my grave," Nighthawk answered as he vanished into the spirit world.

Carley sat in stunned silence. Bound to the grave? She shivered at the thought of being bound under the dirt instead of free as she was now. Lowering her gaze to the floor, she noticed Nighthawk may have vanished but she could still feel him there within the room.

Looking back at Tiara, Carley decided not to push the subject by continuing to speak to him... granting him the privacy he had

silently requested.

## Chapter 2

Amidst the mayhem of Hollywood Cemetery, Michael looked down at the dead Spinnan at his feet and dusted his hands on his coat.

“That was enjoyable,” he muttered. He glanced up just in time to see Kane rip the head off of another demon and toss it over his shoulder. Michael scrambled out of the way of the flying head and glared at Kane’s back.

“Do you mind?” Michael demanded. “I’ve made it this far without getting dirty... I’d like to keep it that way.”

Kane smirked at him over his shoulder, “You’re quick enough to move if something comes flying at you.”

Tabatha sighed having seen enough gore to last her a lifetime. Now it just looked like the boys were playing in it. “If I didn’t know any better Kane, I would swear you’re having too much fun killing these things.”

“Well, I never heard...” he stopped and thought for a moment then looked around at the dead demons then back up at Tabatha. “You’re right, I am having fun,” he shrugged unsympathetically.

“Remember what you asked about us using a camera?” Tabatha asked coyly.

Kane dropped the headless demon to the ground and let his eyes rove over his mate’s body suggestively, “Yeah... I remember.”

“No camera,” Tabatha growled and started walking away.

Michael started laughing at the look of dejection on Kane's face just before the blonde vampire ran after his mate.

"Wait," Kane called. "I take it back... I'm not having fun at all." He paused long enough to stick his hand through a Skitter that was running alongside him. "They're annoying... see?"

Angelica arched an eyebrow secretly wanting to laugh. She suppressed the urge and simply looked up at Syn curiously. "Your sons are... interesting."

"They have yet to grow out of their adolescence," Syn stated with a straight face, "That... and they need their mother."

Michael shot Syn an indignant look having overheard the remark. "I've grown out of my adolescence just fine thank you very much." With that said, he stomped off like a child having a temper tantrum and muttering to himself. On the way, Michael kicked the head Kane had thrown at him like a football and it went airborne. It landed in a stand of trees followed by a loud exclamation.

"Who the hell's throwing demon heads?" Jason's voice was heard shouting.

Michael froze for a moment cringing then decided not to stick around. "I'm gonna go check on Kane," Michael explained as he ran by Syn and Angelica, in the opposite direction of Jason.

"I rest my case," Syn said conspiratorially, making Angelica look away to hide her amused smile.

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"Did you see that?" Nick's voice shouted from behind a crypt.

“I just saw a flying head wiz by here.”

About that time a Skitter stumbled into view trying to escape its death. There was something funny about seeing a boogiemán having a frightened look on its face.

“Yes Nick, I saw it,” Kriss answered and walked into view.

Nick shot at the Skitter’s legs with an expression that bordered on sadistic, “Come on. Let’s see if you can dance.”

“Nick, stop playing with that damn thing,” Steven growled, then rolled his eyes realizing he was taking up for a monster.

Jewel walked up to the Skitter and blew its head off with the shotgun before smiling sweetly at Nick, “Your dancing partner just died.”

“H-hey!” Nick whined. “That was my kill.”

“Actually it was mine,” Kriss said with his arms crossed over his chest. “Who do you think it was running from?”

“Too many hunters and not enough prey anymore,” Dean said as he stepped out of the shadows of a nearby tree.

“At least Nick got rid of that arm,” Steven muttered then did the rendition of an all over body shake while adding, “Eww.”

Kriss made a face, “Don’t mention the arm... EVER again.”

“Why?” Jewel asked not getting the joke.

Nick grinned, “Well, I...”

Kriss turned on him and growled, “Say another word and I will give you a one way trip to St. Peter myself.”

Dean smirked, “Don’t test him kitty cat... he looks mad enough to do it.”

Kriss looked over at Dean and his eyebrows shot up into his hairline when he saw the underlying desire shining in Dean's eyes. He couldn't help it... his gaze shot down Dean's body and a light blush dusted his cheeks making him look away.

Jewel smiled, aware of what the two men were thinking. However, Steven and Nick were completely clueless.

Dean's eyes darkened attractively as he watched Kriss' reaction to him. Stepping up behind the other Fallen, Dean wrapped his arm around Kriss' waist and placed his lips near his sensitive ear, "I think you guys can handle it from here." He smiled when Kriss gave a light shudder from where his warm breath had touched him.

The three people blinked as the two Fallen vanished into thin air.

"How do they do that?" Steven asked softly.

"I don't know," Nick answered trying to mentally bleach his mind of the fact that Dean had been holding Kriss so closely.

Footsteps from the side made them look over as Quinn and Kat walked into sight from behind the crypt.

"Well, that's almost everyone," Nick said. "I'm ready to leave the rest of this mess to PIT."

"All that's missing now are Envy and Devon," Steven said.

Jewel looked around, "I wonder where they are?"

"Last time I caught sight of them, they were with Envy's brother and our favorite gun-toting carebear. I'm sure they can catch a ride with him," Nick stated. "So if you're riding with me,

this train is leaving now.”

“You ready?” Quinn asked Kat, snagging her around the waist. “Like an hour ago,” Kat smiled up at him. They’d made a great team tonight but all of this fighting had gotten her in the mood for other things.

Steven slipped his arm over Jewel’s shoulder and steered her toward the front of the cemetery.

Nick rolled his eyes. He was starting to feel like a third wheel.

In another area of the cemetery, the four people in question were patrolling through the cemetery picking off demons one by one. Trevor had his cell phone to his ear giving orders to the people he had planted in the precinct.

“Yeah, we’re gonna need a couple road blocks to keep humans away from Hollywood Cemetery. Make sure all side roads are covered.” Trevor became quiet for a minute while the officer on the other end of the phone was talking.

“Set it up as soon as possible,” Trevor continued, “It’s going on nine now... we need it set up within the next ten to fifteen minutes. Spectators are already showing up but luckily I have sent people out there to stop them. The thing is they are not cops so it’s causing a huge hassle. We can’t have just anyone tampering with the crime scene... if you know what I mean... vandals and arson... about three days.... No, if anything tries to get out, I don’t think it will use the roads.”

Trevor rubbed his temple with his other hand. “Look, if you see something you’ve never seen before... just shoot it.” He hung

up the phone and sighed heavily. “I hate having to spell out everything.”

“You can spell?” Chad asked with comically wide eyes.

Devon snorted with laughter and Envy smirked.

“No,” Envy quickly answered feeling a little goofy. “But he can come close by sounding out words.”

“Let me guess,” Chad interrupted. “He spells ‘the’ like it sounds?”

Envy nodded, “Yep, t... h... u... h.”

Chad nearly fell over laughing while Trevor sulked beside him.

“Will you two knock it off?” Trevor growled.

“Knock what off?” Envy and Chad said simultaneously which started a chorus of giggles between the siblings.

Envy smiled at her brother remembering all the times they’d gotten in trouble while growing up because they’d caught the giggles and wouldn’t be quiet. Come to think of it, it had usually happened when they were supposed to be going to sleep. She glanced closer at Chad. Yep, his eyes were glassy.

Devon wasn’t really paying much attention to the teasing now. He’d spotted Warren off in the distance dismembering a demon and fought the urge to shift so he could run with him.

Envy caught Devon’s expression and saw the longing in the way his eyes changed color. She followed his gaze seeing the jaguar and it dawned on her that it was in his nature to shift. He was probably staying human only because of her and that wasn’t really fair to him.

“Why don’t you go help?” she said reaching out and laying her palm on his upper arm. “I’ll be fine.”

Devon looked back at her, “How will you get home?”

“I’ll take her to my place,” Chad offered actually liking the idea. The apartment hadn’t felt the same since she’d left. “I’m ready to get the hell out of here anyway. You can stop and pick her up when you get done here.” He quickly added, “And take your time because we will probably be crashed out anyway.”

Devon was about to object but looked between the two siblings, realizing for the first time that they were so tired they were damn near high. He felt a twinge of guilt for not noticing sooner. Humans need twice the amount of sleep a shifter did... if not more.

“Okay,” Devon conceded and gave Envy a lingering kiss. “I’ll be by to pick you up... go get some sleep.”

Envy nodded and watched as Devon stripped off his clothes and shifted into his jaguar form. He took off across the graveyard after Warren and she marveled at how graceful he looked in all forms.

“Can we go now?” Trevor’s voice was dark, not liking the way Envy was staring after Devon.

Envy and Chad both nodded in agreement.

“Good idea,” Chad said. “I’d hate to make an easy target for some lucky Skitter just because I decided to lay down in the graveyard and take a nap. I haven’t had any sleep for the last couple of days.”

The three set off for the cemetery entrance, killing a couple more Skitters along the way. When they finally reached Trevor's car, Chad had to stop and stare for a moment, unable to control the sadistic grin that appeared on his face.

"Where's your old car?" Evey asked as Trevor approached the new black beauty. "Not that this one doesn't look awesome, because it does."

Trevor froze suddenly remembering the extra feature Ren had put on the car. Oh shit! He had the sudden urge to turn and run like hell.

"Trevor," Evey said excitedly in Evey's stolen voice. "I'm so glad you're all right. I scanned everyone coming and going from the entrance and have already filed most of your report into the PIT system."

All of the color drained from Trevor's face as he looked over at Evey and saw the incredulous expression on her face.

"Trevor," Evey mimicked the concern she'd heard in the car's voice... her voice. "Is there something you'd like to share with the rest of the class?"

"Oh, who's this?" Evey asked. "I've never seen her before and she's not in the PIT data bank. Shall I add her?"

If Trevor didn't know any better, he'd swear that Evey's voice was just a little too sweet to be sincere.

"Evey, this is my sister Evey," Chad introduced. "She's human and not a part of PIT. Can you give us a ride home?"

The car doors opened and they got inside with Trevor and

Chad up front and Envy in the back seat.

“When did you learn to talk?” Envy asked glaring at Trevor in the rearview mirror. If looks could kill then a dead man would be driving.

“Just recently,” Evey said with a short, clipped answer... then suddenly added, “Don’t you dare think you can take Trevor away from me.”

Chad’s eyebrows went up into his hairline before he started laughing so hard his sides started to hurt.

“Oh, don’t worry about that.” Envy said with an almost evil smirk at Trevor through the mirror. “I have no intention of taking him away from you. I think you two make the perfect couple.”

Evey gasped excitedly and the car doors slammed shut. “Where do you and Chad live?” This time the voice was happy.

“I’ll drive,” Trevor said, wishing the earth would just open up and get it over with. “You go ahead and get acquainted with Envy.”

“Yes,” Envy said as Trevor started the car. “Please tell me all about you and the fun things you and Trevor have been up to.”

Chad was nearly in the floorboard with laughter and didn’t stop until they were almost to his apartment. As soon as Evey was placed into park, Chad scrambled out of the car and rushed into the apartment knowing Envy would take a few minutes longer. Damn his cheeks hurt. What made it even funnier was the little fact that it wasn’t Trevor’s fault this time.

“Evey,” Envy asked sweetly, “Would you mind if Trevor

walked me to my door? I've seen way too many monsters tonight to feel safe all by myself... and it looks like my big brother has left me behind.”

Trevor cringed knowing he was in for it and Evey wasn't helping matters. This was definitely not his night.

“That's a good idea. Trevor, you make sure nothing harms my new friend. I'll just finish updating your PIT report for you.” The dashboard lit up, turning into a computer screen as Evey set about her project while humming quietly to herself. She had decided since Envy was Chad's sister and obviously fighting monsters that she deserved her own file added to the PIT data bank. She secretly snapped a picture of the girl with her hidden camera.

Trevor sighed giving into a moment of self-pity and slowly got out of the car. Well, he'd wanted a moment alone with Envy and now it looked like he was going to get it. He was all up for trying to see the bright side of things but the bright side was starting to look very dim.

They finally made it to the door and Trevor glanced back at Evey seeing that a huge tree in the front yard now stood between them. Envy chose that moment to turn on him and glared heatedly, having thought about this during the entire ride over. She poked her finger in his chest so hard Trevor thought for sure he'd have a hole there when they were done.

“Was that supposed to be a joke, because if it was, it's not very funny?” Envy hissed in a hushed voice not knowing how sensitive the damn car's microphone was.

“Oh, it’s a joke alright,” Trevor growled back. “But it was meant to torture me... not you. I had honestly forgotten all about it until we made it back to the car.” Trevor explained running his hand through his bangs. “I’m sorry you had to see that.”

Seeing the sincerity in his eyes and hearing it in his voice took the wind right out of Envy’s tantrum. He was telling the truth... she hoped. “Why would someone do that to you?”

Trevor’s bluish-silver eyes darkened just a touch as he stared down at his soul mate. “Because everyone in the world knows I love you and you hate me. They think it’s funny. Why do you think Chad was laughing his ass off the whole ride here?”

“Trevor,” Envy felt her chest constrict painfully with his words. “That’s not true,” she corrected softly. “I could never hate you.”

“I know,” he gave her a small smile but it quickly faded into a frown. “I’m very aware that you’re in love with the both of us. Devon knows it too.”

Envy’s eyes widened and she took a quick step back. Barely shaking her head she whispered, “Why would you think that?”

“We are shifters Envy... we can smell it,” Trevor insisted, taking a step forward and closing the distance between them. “Don’t tell me you don’t want me when I know you do. You love me just as much as you do him because you have two soul mates.” He swallowed hard now that he’d said it out loud.

Envy remained silent, looking up at him with doe eyes and feeling like she’d been caught in his headlights. She didn’t know

how to respond to that because the truth was... Trevor could still turn her on a dime. She'd even been forcing herself to ignore her attraction to him because she had chosen Devon.

"Tell me you don't love me," Trevor whispered, leaning closer until their lips were almost touching.

Envy was the one who swallowed this time. She willed herself to deny what he was saying because buried feelings wouldn't allow it. She hated to be lied to... therefore she was almost incapable of doing it herself. She still loved him... but it was wrong to be in love with two men at the same time.

"I love Devon," she breathed against his lips all the while damning herself for hurting him again.

"Smart move... avoiding," Trevor said after a moment and leaned back just a little bit to let his gaze pierce hers. "Because if you lie to me... I'll be able to smell it on you."

Envy took a step back while Trevor hovered above her, blocking out everything else even though he'd moved away. Reaching behind her, her hand fumbled around trying to find the doorknob. She didn't want to think about this... it was only breaking her heart.

Finally, her fingers brushed the knob and she turned it, opening the door. She slipped inside and started to close it when Trevor's hand shot out and stopped the action.

"You know I'm right," Trevor whispered. "You feel it too."

Envy felt butterflies erupt in the pit of her stomach and quickly shut the door in Trevor's face. Turning the lock, she spun around

and pressed her back against the door waiting to hear Trevor start up his car and leave. For some reason, it felt like he was still standing behind her just waiting to reach through the door and wrap his arms around her.

Trevor laid his palms against the doorframe feeling her presence lingering... leaning against the other side of the wood separating them. He could hear her heart racing through the thick wood and inhaled deep to calm his nerves. His instincts were screaming at him to burst through the door and take back what was his... but he'd be damned before giving her a reason to stop loving him.

He frowned after a moment when he didn't hear her move away from the door. Leaning closer to the barrier between them, he laid his forehead against the cold wood and sighed.

“Envy,” he whispered. “I love you.”

It was then that he heard her flee to her room.

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Jason sat down on a stone bench that had been placed in front of one of the larger crypts to take a breather. He hadn't run into anything or anyone for the last three minutes and that was a record for the night so far.

Tapping the ring, he hoped the thing would somehow turn back on. His stomach was twisted in knots not knowing where Tiara was and if she was really okay. Lowering his head a little, he mentally berated himself for not being able to get her out of the mausoleum. Some protector he'd turned out to be. She'd even

had to ask a demon for help.

“You might want to look behind you,” a voice suddenly said from the surrounding silence.

Jason’s eyes snapped up seeing a man with long dark hair standing only a short distance away. He blinked when what the man said finally sunk in.

The hair on the back of his neck stood on end and Jason shot forward a few steps before doing a one-eighty to see what was behind him. Four skitters stared back at him from only a couple of feet away with their lipless mouths pulled back showing every one of their sharp teeth.

“Oh come on!” Jason yelled, feeling a small rush of anger. He was bored with fighting these things. “Haven’t you morons figured it out yet? If you live in a graveyard you’re supposed to be dead.”

Angelica smirked having caught up with Syn just in time to hear Jason’s tantrum. “Hey Jason, wanna see something cool?” she asked stepping up beside him and raising her hands in front of her. She opened her mouth and started whispering a spell that was supposed to make them implode. To her dismay, the Skitters suddenly backed away before turning and fleeing into the darkness.

“Neat,” Jason said thinking that had been the spell.

“Damn it, if you’d quit scaring the hell out of them, maybe I could have made a decent kill tonight.” Angelica snapped as she turned around finding Syn right behind her. “You’re like demon

repellant.”

Jason smirked when he caught on to what she was ranting about. “Black Flag for demons,” he muttered but quickly shut his mouth when Angelica’s glare turned on him. “I mean... right. You are so right.” When in doubt, always agree with the women.

Syn laughed softly, “I did nothing but walk up behind you, my dear. I can’t help it if the Spinnan fear me. Maybe they were just cowards. Shall we go in search of braver monsters?” He was rewarded when Angelica rolled her eyes and smiled. She was warming up to him quite nicely.

Jason’s shoulders slumped realizing this was the man he’d been warned about when he’d started asking questions about the beautiful Angelica. Deciding that path was hopeless, he sighed and returned his attention to the ring.

“This stupid thing is worthless... the damn GPS is broke or something.” He growled and attempted to take the ring off. He pulled for a moment but decided to stop when he felt his finger pop at the joint. He stared at it again for a moment and tilted his head to the side. Maybe it was a good thing it couldn’t come off, because if it did... he’d probably throw it at the damn Skitters.

“How can I protect Tiara if I don’t know where the hell she is?” he ranted at the ring. “This isn’t the time to be taking a nap for crying out loud.”

“Can I see that?” Angelica requested, holding her hand out so Jason could lay his hand in hers. She recognized the ring from the memories that Zachary had shared with her and was curious

as to its power.

Jason couldn't help himself as he watched Angelica with wide moon eyes. She was gently cradling his hand and examining the ring with a critical eye. The softness of her skin was very soothing against his... though he did flinch when Syn decided that was a good moment to laugh.

He glanced up and saw Syn out of the corner of his eye. That laugh had been just a little too creepy. The run in with Kane last night had scared him but this guy... he was probably the one Satan searched for under his bed or in the closet before daring to call it a night.

Syn watched patiently as Angelica held her other palm about an inch above the ring. Seeing her bite her lower lip in concentration was his undoing. Reaching out, he laid his hand over hers and slowly interlocked their fingers. Bringing his head down next to hers, he brushed his cheek against her soft hair while reaching around with his other hand to gently hold her against him.

Angelica blinked suddenly feeling what she'd been searching for. "That's cheating," she whispered but quickly searched the aura of the ring while she was so tapped into it. She felt two paths coming from the right... one light and one dark. Out of morbid curiosity, she began following the dark one to see where it led.

"That's enough," Syn said softly and pulled her hand away from the ring's power. "Not only is it linked to the girl but also to the demon's mind. We must be careful not to summon him

accidentally.”

Angelica swallowed and nodded knowing he was right. She'd felt it, the power of the demon inside the ring. She let her hair fall forward to hide her eyes as she gazed at their hands still linked together. It was intimate and sexual at the same time, such a simple gesture that left her mind reeling.

“He's still alive?” Jason gritted his teeth and held his hand away from himself imagining a demon exploding from it. If what Nile had said about Deth was true, then that was one demon he really didn't want to just pop out of the ring like a Genie. “Like I really needed another reason to want rid of this thing right now.”

“The girl is unconscious,” Syn informed him but narrowed his eyes not liking the aura of the ring. He'd felt the demon turn to look at him but cut the link before his image was stable. If that creature returned to earth there was no telling what darkness he would bring with him.

“Unconscious? That's even more of a reason to find her,” Jason said, forgetting his fear of the ring. “There's no telling how much trouble she could be in. With her missing and Zachary down for the count...”

“Down for the count? What are you talking about?” Angelica demanded as her temper spiked making her jerk her hand from Syn's.

“I thought you knew,” Jason frowned, “I thought everyone on the team knew by now.”

“Knew what?” Angelica asked in frustration.

“Zachary went ballistic when that demon ran off with Tiara and he blew up the main nest all of these things were coming from. The demon breeding them all went up in flames along with it. Zachary passed out in the fire right after the explosion.”

Seeing the shock on her face Jason quickly continued, “It’s okay, Ren got him out of there and vanished... we haven’t seen him since. Storm would probably know where they went because he was there when it happened.”

“And Tiara was kidnapped by a demon?” Angelica felt her heartbeat racing. No wonder Zachary had gone ballistic.

“Not exactly,” Jason hedged. “It’s hard to explain. The point is she passed out as she was leaving with the other demon and until this thing starts working again, I don’t even know if she’s okay, much less where to start looking.” He smacked the ring with his other hand in frustration trying again to kick start it into working.

Without another word, Angelica took off toward the entrance of the graveyard while mentally kicking herself for her selfishness. She’d been so busy with Syn and the monsters that she hadn’t been there to watch Zachary’s back... the one time that he needed her.

Her vision blurred with tears and she angrily swiped at them only to run right into a brick wall named Syn. His arms went around her to steady her but before she could stop herself, she started to struggle against him. She hit his chest with her small fists, knowing it wouldn’t do any good but her first instinct was to remove whatever had gotten in the way of finding her best friend.

“Let go of me,” Angelica hissed, madder at herself than she was at him. This was why she didn’t want to get close to anyone. She’d chosen Zachary’s friendship because he was strong and wouldn’t give her a reason to cry. If he’d passed out in his own fire... then something was terribly wrong with him.

Syn locked his hands around her wrist and pulled her flush against his body with a growl, “I will show you another thing that we can do together.” He slashed his lips against hers in an attempt to ease the jealous hunger he’d felt rising within him.

Angelica stilled and her eyes went wide the moment his lips descended on hers. She felt her knees weaken when Syn slowly sucked her bottom lip between his. The movement was so slow and sexual that her thighs nearly went up in flames. The urge to kiss him back hit her hard.

Before she could follow through with the growing need, he ended the kiss and she found herself once again staring up into his dark amethyst eyes. In her semi-dazed state, it took her a moment to realize there was now a wall behind him and the breeze she’d been feeling no longer caressed her skin.

Syn waited on his mate to come back down from the touch of ecstasy he’d just given her before he let go of her wrist. He hadn't needed to kiss her to perform the teleportation, but if she thought he did... he wouldn’t correct the misunderstanding.

Angelica swung around in surprise finding herself in Storm’s office. Her eyes quickly scanned the room before locking on Zachary. He was inside a translucent barrier... lying on a bed of

his own flames just like Jason had described. A soft sob left her seeing him in such a state.

Her steps were slow as she approached the seal around him. She'd never seen such dark flames coming from him and knew it couldn't be a good sign.

“What's wrong?” she whispered, wondering if Zachary could hear her.

Placing her hands on the barrier, she watched a river of what looked like sparkling water rush between her fingers and disappear before hitting the floor. The shield turned an electric blue around her hands and she pushed on it... testing its strength.

“Zachary, open your eyes. Please... just to let me know you're okay.” Angelica felt her hope plummet with every passing second that he didn't respond.

His blond hair fluttered around his face and his body was just barely swaying gently in the flames letting her know that it was what kept him levitated above the floor. What frightened her the most was his complete stillness... she couldn't even tell if he was breathing.

“Is it a spell Zachary? Did someone do this to you? I'm coming... just hold on.” She closed her eyes and started mentally picking at the locks around the barrier. She could do this... she would do this... for Zachary.

Syn had remained quiet, giving her privacy with her friend but he could not take her heartache a moment longer. Stepping up behind her, he laid his palms against the shield above hers...

strengthening it rather than helping her bring it down.

“Why? Why are you stopping me?” Angelica asked not understanding.

“Because, I do not think your friend Zachary will be very happy when he wakes up only to find he has harmed you with his phoenix fire. He is not dying... he is reviving himself. And from the looks of it, he is going to bring all of his power with him when he awakens.”

Angelica turned her back on the barrier not wanting to watch the eerie image of Zachary burning. Wanting to feel safe, she wrapped her arms around Syn's waist and hid her face against his warm chest.

Syn folded his arms around her giving her the comfort she was quietly seeking. He gazed at Zachary and silently wondered what would have happened to her in this life if he hadn't found her. Would her friendship with Zachary have grown into something more intimate?

He tightened his arms around her, burying his face in her dark hair and decided not to dwell on it. She loved the phoenix dearly and for that he was at least thankful... but it was time for his mate to remember what true love really was.

### Chapter 3

Damon crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back against the tool shed used by the caretakers of the cemetery. This area was lacking in hunters because it was in the very corner of the massive graveyard and fairly secluded. It also seemed to be a

refuge for a lot of the Spinnan that had survived this long, almost as though they were trying to regroup and hide.

He had promised to let Alicia practice fighting and, all in all... this was an excellent place for her to do it... as long as he was there acting as the referee. These Spinnan were weak compared to most of the things running around the city right now, but still he only allowed Alicia to fight one at a time.

Every time a brave Spinnan would try to tag team her, he would shatter them before they got close enough to distract her from the one she was fighting. Destroying the monsters coming at Alicia was giving him a sense of satisfaction and Damon was quite enjoying himself. She wasn't half bad... for a beginner.

He'd also noticed a drastic drop in the creatures since the explosion a few hours ago and concluded that someone had found and destroyed the nest. Personally, he wouldn't have minded getting a look at the demon that had spawned these creepy critters but he shrugged it off. It was probably just as ugly as these things were anyway.

Hearing footsteps and the sound of voices coming from the boundary of trees down the short hill he was standing on, Damon stepped around the corner of the shed and went to investigate. This edge of the cemetery was lined with tall, stately pines that separated it from a suburban neighborhood.

Being this close to houses, Damon was curious as to why no one had heard anything during the night and come to investigate. There were a few times he thought he'd seen the shimmer of

a barrier around the property but dismissed it as part of his imagination. If a barrier had been put in place, then maybe the demon hunters weren't as useless as he'd assumed.

He was almost to the tree line when two men emerged from it, but they stopped when they saw him. Seeing the white outline of a structure through the trees, he summarized that the main maintenance building was probably on the other side of them and these men had just shown up for work.

These guys couldn't have used any of the major roads to get there... they'd been blocked off. Add to that the fact Damon hadn't heard any car engines approaching told him the men lived within walking distance of this cemetery.

"Good morning," Damon said closing the distance between them so he could put them under his thrall.

The two men frowned at him. There had been a lot of strange things going on in the graveyard the last couple days and it made them suspicious of anyone who looked like trouble... and the guy walking toward them fit that description to a T.

The one with a white tank top under his unbuttoned uniform shirt spoke in an authoritative manner. "Can we help you? Visitors are not supposed to be hanging out near the equipment."

Damon nodded, focusing his vibrant amethyst eyes on them, almost smirking when their expressions mellowed out into a dazed state. "Actually, I'm here to help you by letting you know that you have already finished your work for the day. Your employer said to go back to the maintenance shed and relax until

your shift is over. You do not remember seeing me and if anyone asks... you worked hard all day.”

The second worker with his uniform shirt buttoned up and looking more professional glanced over at his co-worker. “It’s time to try out that TV you hooked up in the shed.”

“Yeah, let’s go catch Jerry Springer,” worker number two said in a stupor.

Damon smirked and waited until they were completely out of sight. Once the humans were gone, he turned to start walking back up the hill when he saw an impressive mound of dirt go flying into the air. When he made it back to the top of the hill to check on Alicia’s progress, his expression darkened.

She was now fighting not one... but three Skitters at the same time and it looked like she was having a hard time of it. A deep growl rumbled in his chest when one of them knocked Alicia to the ground with a bone-jarring thud.

Alicia lay there staring up from where she’d been thrown. Everything had been going good until Spinnan number two and three decided to show up and have a tag team. Damon had been helping her out and when nothing happened to the other two right away she’d looked around for him.

Not finding him anywhere, she’d felt a little bit of happiness and frustration at the same time. Happiness because she thought he was allowing her to fight it out... and frustration that he wasn’t there to witness her kicking all three of their asses. Lifting her head up off the ground, she was about to push herself back to

her feet when the Spinnan suddenly froze. They stood there for a second before abruptly shattering like glass.

Alicia covered her face with her arms to avoid getting hit with the debris. Thankfully, all of the bits and pieces had blown outward and away from her. When she lowered her arms, she found Damon standing there, straddling her lower legs and looking just as angry as ever. She flinched when he suddenly held his hand out offering to help her up.

“Damn it Damon, I could have taken them if you’d just given me a chance,” she said while grasping his hand.

Damon gently pulled her to her feet and flush against his chest. Alicia was about to protest when she saw the tightness of his jaw and the hardness in his amethyst eyes. Her temper vanished realizing she had unintentionally scared him.

“The rule is one monster at a time,” Damon growled, gearing up for an argument he intended to win. He was taken by surprise when Alicia wrapped her hand behind his head, making sure to thread her fingers through his hair before pulling him down for a mind-blowing kiss.

When they finally pulled away from each other, Damon growled again and pushed Alicia back against the side of the shed he’d been leaning on earlier. The growl would have sounded threatening to most, but to Alicia it was sexy as hell.

“You’re not allowed to do that,” Damon instructed softly.

Alicia looked up at him with feigned innocence shining in her eyes. “Not allowed to do what?”

Damon brushed his cheek against hers, his lips barely touching her skin before hovering near the shell of her ear. “You’re not allowed to distract me.”

“Oh,” Alicia whispered seductively. “You mean like this?”

She rose up on her tiptoes and kissed him again, this time their tongues twining intimately with each other. When Damon pushed his thigh between hers, she spread her legs and pressed down. Liking the sensation, she started rocking back and forth on him. Her eyes slammed shut when Damon lifted his leg and her feet left the ground.

“This is a first,” Alicia panted when their mouths separated.

Damon smirked, “You started it.” His smile vanished and his eyes darkened to a deep amethyst, “Now I’m going to end it.”

Alicia couldn’t help but whimper and wrapped her legs around his waist, rubbing against the erection she could feel growing behind Damon’s zipper.

Damon roughly pressed her against the shed wall and unabashedly ripped her shirt open. His hands found her breasts, tantalizing the hardened peaks beneath the lace before unfastening her jeans.

Alicia lowered her legs and let Damon slowly push her jeans down. She stepped out of the denim around her ankles and lifted her legs around his waist again. Damon smirked while he worked his zipper open and freed himself from the confines.

Shifting their positions, he exhaled harshly as he thrust his hips upward at the same time he brought Alicia down on his

erection. Alicia cried out and her head connected with the concrete wall behind her. Damon rolled his hips at a punishing pace, making sure she fully understood what it meant to distract him.

Alicia opened her eyes and grabbed on to Damon's shoulders, pulling him closer to her. His head dipped and he sucked a nipple deep into his mouth. Alicia gasped at the sensations and arched against him. As hard as he was driving into her, it felt like her body was convulsing with each thrust.

A sound behind Damon made her glance up and her eyes went to half-mast when she saw a Skitter running up behind them. Apparently, the demon thought they were vulnerable and sought to take advantage of the situation.

"Skitter at twelve o'clock," Alicia whispered breathlessly.

She watched the creature shatter with Damon's power and moaned loudly when he started thrusting harder. He was like a man possessed... hard, fast, bordering on pain and she loved it.

"On the right," Alicia warned.

Another Skitter met its maker and Damon lifted his head from her breasts. Taking her wrists in his hands, he pinned them to the wall behind her and bared his sharp fangs.

"Come for me," he growled when he felt Alicia's soft walls start flexing around him in the same rhythm he was pounding into her.

Alicia ignored his demand and turned her head to the side to avoid looking him in the eyes. She was trying to hold on as long

as she could because despite what other people might think... making love in the middle of a cemetery was hotter than hell. The fact they could be caught by anyone at any time made it all the better.

“Do it,” Damon rumbled viciously against her ear.

He was barely holding on by a thread but, like her, he wanted it to last and come to completion at the same time. They were both so turned on by the idea of being caught and killing demons while doing it that neither one of them were in any shape to last much longer.

Alicia cried out and finally gave in... turning her gaze back to Damon’s heated one. The coil in her belly was wound so tight that she was sure it would break. More movement from behind Damon made her look over his shoulder and she gasped.

“Behind you,” she managed in a ragged whisper.

Damon smirked and extended his power toward the attacking Skitter. At the same moment it shattered, Alicia’s body tightened around him like a vise and she screamed her release to the sky above them. Damon followed a few heavy thrusts later, filling her with his seed... once again claiming her body and soul.

They remained pressed against one another, breathing heavily as their heartbeats began the process of slowing down. Damon was so proud of his little hellcat, she was just as demented when it came to sex as he was... and that was what made it so damn hot.

Finally, Damon pulled back a little and gave her a soft smile. They both moaned when he removed himself from her and let

her legs drop from around his waist. Looking her up and down, he had to admit she made one sexy-as-hell vision.

Her shirt was ripped down the front with the lacy cups of her bra pushed down to reveal her bare breasts to the morning sunlight. It was the first time he realized that she wasn't wearing any panties... nor were they tangled in her jeans still bunched on the ground.

"How do we explain the shirt?" Alicia asked when she looked down at herself.

"We don't," Damon answered with a smirk.

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Warren and Devon circled around the Skitter that had crossed their path. It was hissing viciously at them and swiping its long claws. With a shared look, both jaguars attacked. Devon managed to grab one of the arms between his fangs while Warren was able to get a back leg. The Skitter began screaming when they started pulling in opposite directions.

Putting more strength behind it, Devon abruptly jerked his head to the left. The arm gave and Devon backed away with the dismembered arm in his mouth. Warren dropped the leg and took a few steps back when Devon pounced and sank his fangs into the demon's neck.

Warren sat down and started cleaning himself when he heard the unmistakable sound of another Skitter just beyond a cluster of trees. Looking back at the skitter that Devon was finishing off, he decided that everything was in good hands and went to

investigate.

Devon saw Warren leave out of the corner of his eye and quickly killed the Skitter before jumping off its back. Dropping the head, Devon shook himself and turned in the direction Warren had gone. They'd tag-teamed since joining up with one another and Devon was having a blast.

He'd gone a few feet when another Skitter dropped from a tree directly in front of him. A deep growl erupted from his throat and he hunkered close to the ground preparing to pounce. His feline eyes narrowed when he noticed that this one looked extremely agitated.

They stared into each other's angry eyes before the Skitter hunkered down in mimicry of what the jaguar was doing. Devon growled and leapt toward the demon, intent on killing it quickly. The Skitter leapt at the same time and the two collided in midair.

Devon's claws swiped at the Skitter but missed, however the Skitter's strike directly at his head was dead on. The Skitter landed unharmed on all fours while Devon's unconscious body landed with a thump... knocking him out cold.

The Skitter hissed victoriously, ambling over to the jaguar and grabbing one of its hind legs with a long clawed hand. Dragging the huge cat across the cemetery behind it in the opposite direction its partner had gone, the Skitter approached a small crypt. Opening the door, the Skitter placed the jaguar inside before backing up and staring down at the animal for a moment.

Its head tilted at an odd angle as if it was deciding the best way to kill its prey... instead, it simply backed out of the crypt. The creature returned moments later dragging two of its dead brethren through the damp grass. Dropping them beside the unconscious jaguar, it moved back out of the crypt and shut the door, locking it with the loosely hanging bolt lock.

Without looking back, the Skitter ran at top speed across the cemetery, avoiding the demon hunters scattered across the property. Making its way to a side road, it stopped and appeared to take a deep breath before its body began to shift.

Within the passing of a few seconds the Skitter was gone and in its place stood Trevor.

Rolling his neck and shoulders before dipping down to pick up the clothes he had discarded, Trevor calmly stepped into Evey's view. He'd backtracked to the cemetery and parked her there before re-entering the graveyard saying he was checking on the progress of the battle. Once he was out of sight of his car, he'd shifted into one of the Skitters and put his plan into action. Now all he needed to do was get dressed and finish his self-appointed mission.

Trevor combed his fingers through his hair in agitation... he didn't like what he'd just done but still allowed the small smile to form on his face. When Evey opened the driver's door for him, he closed the distance between them. Trevor paused when he heard a fox whistle coming from her.

Looking down at his naked body, he wondered what Ren was

thinking when he'd given Evey such a human personality. It was a good thing the car had no idea what he'd just done... otherwise he'd been in a world of shit.

"Such a magnificent specimen," Evey's voice teased.

"You hush," Trevor growled and quickly dressed. He slid behind the wheel knowing he would only have a couple of hours before Devon woke up. This would have to be fast if he wanted to get away with it.

Trevor was silent as he drove Evey to another secluded spot and shut off the car. He sat there for a few minutes with his eyes closed wondering if he was doing the right thing.

"Is everything all right Trevor?" Evey asked softly.

"I'm fine Evey," Trevor said. "I need you to do something really important for me. I've got a secret mission that I need to finish. No one else in PIT is to know about this... its top secret." He cringed at what he was about to say next, "Storm doesn't want any reports filed on this and you can't say anything to anyone."

Evey was quiet for a moment, "How long will you be?" she asked.

"Only a couple of hours," Trevor answered. "It won't be too long."

"Be careful," Evey said then the dash lights went dark.

Trevor got out of the car and started walking down the street. Once he was out of Evey's sight, he shifted once more... this time into Devon Santos and jogged the rest of the way to Chad's place. Walking into the house using the spare key Evey had

forgotten to take back from him, he made his way through the quiet apartment.

He knew Chad would be asleep and bypassed his friend's room to Envy's closed bedroom door. Pushing it open, he walked in and stared down at Envy's sleeping form. His eyebrows furrowed into a sad expression when he caught the scent of salt lingering in the room. He felt bad for making her cry but he was handling his jealousy the best way he could.

Back at the graveyard... there had been one fleeting moment where he thought about killing Devon. With Devon gone, would Envy have turned to him in her grief? He had forced the tempting thought from his mind. It startled him at how quickly the evil temptation had appeared in the first place.

He could never hurt Envy like that and it scared him that he'd even remotely considered it. Besides... watching her mourn another man would be just as bad as watching her love another man. And as much as it killed him, Trevor knew Envy loved both of them. He hadn't been lying a couple hours ago when he'd pointed that annoying little fact out to her.

Moving silently, Trevor slowly stripped off his clothes and crawled in the bed behind Envy. If this was what it took to steal a couple of moments alone with her... then he refused to care who she thought he was. He agreed with the concept that there were no rules when it came to love or war... and right now he felt like he was in the middle of both.

Envy felt the mattress sink down behind her and instantly

turned toward Devon, hugging him very tightly and hiding her face against his chest. Her mind had been filled with thoughts of Trevor for the last hour and it left her feeling very guilty.

Now that she'd seen PIT in action, she realized Trevor had been keeping secrets from her because he had no choice. She'd been heartless enough to break up with him over something he couldn't control... even wrongly tasered him for it. How could she have been so mean?

His heartbreak now was her fault and she wasn't going to punish him for it... if anything, she needed to try to become his friend again and maybe his heart would mend. She rubbed her head against Devon's hand where he was caressing her hair so tenderly.

"You're back," she whispered, wishing the heaviness in her chest would ease.

"What's wrong Envy?" he asked softly.

"Nothing," Envy lied and loosened her hold on Devon so she could pull back and smile up at him.

"Then why have you been crying?" he watched as Envy frowned up at him in confusion. Before she had a chance to deny it he reminded her, "I can smell the salt from your tears. You can't hide your feelings from me." He had to know if she was going to sic Devon on him later for what had happened when he'd brought her here.

Envy's eyes widened. That was the same thing Trevor had said to her. Did both of them know what she was feeling better than

she did? The knowledge that they could both read her so well left her feeling a bit exposed.

He felt her tense but before he could catch the expression on her face she pressed her cheek to his chest again. “Did Trevor say or do something to upset you on the way over here? Because if he did, I swear...”

Envy quickly pushed away and looked up at Devon almost angrily, “No, you promised me that you would never hurt Trevor no matter what.” Her heart thudded in her chest not ever wanting to see them fight again. If one of them were to get hurt... she would hate the other no matter which one it was. She knew that now.

Trevor almost quit breathing as he stared down at her defending him. She had made Devon promise to never hurt him... and Devon had agreed for the same reason he hadn't killed Devon tonight.

“As for the tears,” Envy lowered her voice getting a handle on her high-strung emotions, “I had a dream that one of those monsters in the graveyard had you and I was crying when I woke up.” Well... that was also the truth.

“It was just a dream,” he whispered and hugged her to him. Trevor squeezed his eyes shut wondering if the link she shared with both him and Devon had caused the very accurate dream. Not wanting to think about it he rolled Envy over to her back and gazed down at her before slowly lowering his lips to hers.

Envy moaned softly and arched her back, pushing her breasts

against his chest. She wound her arms around his neck only for him to take hold of her wrists and gently press them down into the mattress.

Their mouths separated and Envy tilted her head back when Devon's lips began a long, torturous trail down her neck and across her collarbone. Smiling into the sensation, she parted her legs and wrapped them around his waist to pull him closer until she could feel Devon's hardness press inside her.

Trevor stopped and looked down at her, hovering there for only a moment before thrusting forward. He didn't care who he looked like... this was his body and this was right where he wanted to be. Hovering above her, he made love to her like a driven man who had become lost within his own insanity.

Envy bit her bottom lip to keep from crying out and waking her brother. She gripped Devon trying to match his rhythm but quickly found out there was no way she could keep up with him tonight. It was all she could do just to hold on as he brought her so many times it made her high.

Trevor quickly claimed her lips when she forgot they weren't alone in the house but he wouldn't give her a chance to regain her sensibilities just yet. He held a tight rein on his own control, not giving into to the same high until over an hour had passed.

He allowed himself to watch her sleep for a few minutes before leaving a soft kiss on her lips and slipping from the bed.

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Warren was starting to get concerned. He'd been searching the

graveyard for Devon's scent for the last hour. When he wandered away from his brother earlier, he figured Devon would be right behind him and ready to fight. Warren had killed three more Skitters before he fully realized that Devon was still nowhere in sight.

He'd even sent out a piercing feline cry, basically the jaguar's version of checking in with each other. There was no responding cry. Going over the last place he'd seen Devon, Warren found the signs of the fight but no Skitter and no trace of Devon. It took him a few more minutes but when he finally found Devon's scent. It led him toward an old crypt.

Approaching the building carefully, he sniffed around the perimeter before pawing at the locked door. He growled at the lock and two solutions popped into his mind. Devon had either been put in there or the door had slammed shut and somehow locked during a fight.

Shifting back to his human form, Warren wrenched the door open, breaking it away from its hinges with the scream of old metal against heavy wood. His eyes widened when he saw Devon lying in the middle of the floor with two Skitters heaped on top of one another next to him.

Devon's eyes opened slightly when the door banged open but he immediately shut them when the morning light invaded, burning his retinas. He felt like he'd just drunk Kat's entire stock of Heat and got into a losing fight on top of it.

"What the hell happened in here?" Warren demanded softly.

Devon growled low in his chest and shifted back to his human form. Bringing a hand to his head, he slowly sat up with Warren's help and took a good look around.

"The last thing I remember was getting into a fight with another Skitter after you left," Devon answered. "I must have trapped it in here and killed it..." he looked over at the heaped Skitters and frowned, "...killed them. One must have knocked me good in the head before it went down."

"I think that's enough fighting for now." Warren said at length. "We both need some sleep."

Devon nodded and let Warren pull him to his feet. "Great, we're naked," he muttered.

"Just call us the streak," Warren smirked. "Wanna slowly stroll out of here and see how many cat calls we get, or do you wanna race?"

"The count of three," Devon responded with a raised eyebrow.

When they got back to the vehicle, they put on the change of clothing they kept stashed there just in case.

"Drop me off at Chad's place. Envy's there, so I'll just crawl into bed with her," Devon said as he leaned back in the seat. "Also, do me a favor."

Warren looked over at him as he drove. "I won't tell anyone so it doesn't get back to Envy."

Devon smiled at his elder brother's uncanny ability to always know what someone was thinking. Sometimes it made things not so awkward.

“Thanks,” Devon said. “I hate it when she worries.”

A few minutes later, Warren pulled to a stop in front of Chad’s apartment and looked over at Devon. “Get some sleep and just call me when you’re ready to come back.”

Devon shook his head, “Don’t worry about it, either Chad will drive us or I’ll call a cab.”

Warren waited until Devon opened the front door and was inside the house before he drove off. He didn’t want to say anything to Devon, but finding his brother like that had sent up red flags. The way the door had been locked from the outside was a bit too planned out making him wonder if someone or something else didn’t lock him in there on purpose.

Shaking his head, Warren decided not to think about it anymore today... he was exhausted.

Devon moved silently through the apartment toward Envy’s room. Opening the door, he smiled at the vision of her angelic face relaxed with sleep. Removing his clothes, he slipped into bed behind her and curled up against her back, wrapping an arm around her waist.

She snuggled closer before relaxing against his chest and tilted her head back. Her breathing returned to the long breaths associated with a deep sleep and Devon relaxed. He decided to let her sleep this time instead of waking her up to let her know he was there... he would have to remember to take better care of her sleep habits from now on.

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The seventh floor of the hospital was peacefully quiet. It had been a long and boring shift as the nurses did their rounds to the various patients. The soft rhythms of the life support machines beeped steadily, creating enough background noise to keep the darkened floor from feeling eerie.

“Long ten hours huh?” the security guard asked one of the nurses at the station.

“And then some,” the nurse said with a smile, “You going to the corner deli for lunch?”

“Yeah,” the guard answered. “You want anything?”

The nurse nodded, “We were talking about it earlier. I’ll get an answer from everyone and let you know before you go.”

The system monitoring the patients suddenly started lighting up and the nurse jumped to her feet. Blue led lights flashed sporadically making the nurse grab the phone sitting next to her.

“Doctor Gordon and Doctor Harris to the seventh floor stat,” she announced before hanging up the phone and rushing out from behind the desk.

More nurses came from the smaller stations at each end of the sprawling floor, each one trying to cover a set of rooms in order to see more patients in a shorter time. The security guard brought out his radio and called main floor security. It wasn’t long before the two doctors on duty along with a small army of ten more nurses rushed the floor to help.

Panic and mayhem started to bloom among the staff as the patients began dropping like flies. They stayed with the people as

long as possible before moving on to the next one, barely taking a moment to note the time of death for each one.

As the staff moved down the hall, they realized that whatever was causing the patients to die seemed to be moving closer to the ICU also located on this floor. Though they were all thinking the exact same thing, none of them voiced that fear... it was only a coincidence after all.

The security guard was waiting at the elevator when the police arrived. He was disappointed that only two officers had answered the call but it was better than nothing. With the earthquake about a week before, added to all the people showing up dead and dismembered, he could understand the lack of available cops.

Screaming erupted down the hall and the officers pulled their guns as they ran forward. Two nurses went sailing across the hall, hitting the wall hard enough to crunch bones. They fell to the floor leaving long smears of blood behind on the pristine white paint.

“What the hell?” the security guard whispered.

The officers tightened their grips on their side arms and slowly moved down the hall toward the bodies. More staff members began flying from the doors while others attempted to run for it.

The security guard stared wide-eyed as a dark figure emerged from the last room next to the entrance of the ICU. It was fading in and out of their vision as it moved. Its face couldn't be seen beneath the ragged black cloak, but a long bladed scythe could be seen clearly in one of its ridiculously long-fingered hands.

It moved down the hall toward them, grabbing up nurses and flinging them aside like rag-dolls. The officers opened fire while backing away from the specter. The scythe came down in a long arc slicing one of the officers in two. Blood sprayed across the floors as the officer fell but the creature kept advancing on the officer still firing his gun.

Blood sprayed again, this time across the security guard's face as the second officer was cut down. He vaguely registered the elevator ding, signaling that someone was coming up but he was frozen in fear and couldn't move.

A man appeared in the corner of his vision... young, with a long trench coat and punkish dark hair. He lifted a hand toward the creature and it was sent flying down the hall. It screamed, using the scythe to stop its flight and seemed to stare at the newcomer before vanishing into the floor.

"You okay?" Ren asked the traumatized man.

The security guard abruptly collapsed in a dead faint. Ren sighed heavily and took out his cell phone. It was a good thing this hospital was close enough to some of the city paranormals or he wouldn't have had the power to scare the thing into not attacking him too.

"We need a huge cleanup crew and the best demon exterminator on the roster."

## Chapter 4

Angelica paced back and forth in Ren's office trying to stay within eyesight of the barrier and away from everyone else that

had business in the huge room. She'd already bitten Storm's head off when he'd informed her that staring at Zachary wasn't going to make him wake up any faster.

She glanced at Syn who was still leaning against the wall and raised an eyebrow. She was starting to believe that man could turn into a statue if he tried hard enough. He hadn't moved in hours.

Maybe Storm was right, because the walls were starting to close in on her and Zachary hadn't as much as twitched. Her cell phone rang, the loud sound startling her out of her musings.

Seeing the caller ID and thinking Storm was just checking on Zachary she answered the call, "No Storm. He still hasn't woken up."

"Ren needs you at the local hospital," Storm said seriously. "He ran into something rather nasty and has lost it somewhere in the building."

"And he needs me to track it down," Angelica finished gazing at Zachary one last time before turning away. "I'll be there."

She hung up and glanced at Syn, "I gotta go to the hospital." Syn closed the distance between them so fast she almost missed it.

Syn wrapped an arm around her waist and smiled down at her before pulling her tight against him. It was about time she left her friend's bedside.

Angelica blinked and they were suddenly standing in the front entrance of the hospital. PIT members dressed up as police

officers were already escorting people and patients out of the building. It was far from the orderly fashion it could have been but if this thing was nasty like Storm said, then she couldn't really blame them.

"Where is it?" Angelica asked one of the PIT team.

"I don't know but Ren's on the seventh floor trying to find it," the man said recognizing her.

Angelica and Syn moved to the elevators and took one up to the seventh floor. When the doors opened, the first thing Angelica noticed was the smell of blood. Her eyes widened at the amount of carnage in the hall.

Ren had the entire area roped off with a few PIT members scattered around checking the bodies to see if anyone was left alive. The only other thing that was out of place was the security guard huddled in a ball in a corner behind the nurse's station. He was rocking back and forth muttering something about the Reaper.

"What happened?" Angelica asked.

Ren sighed, "It looked like the Grim Reaper, scythe and all."

"A death demon," Angelica mused. "Never been up against one but I've heard they can be really vicious."

"It sank into the floor and vanished." Ren explained. "We haven't been able to find it since."

"It's still here," Syn informed them.

"I know... I can feel its evil energy crawling all over me like a damn disease," Ren said in frustration.

Angelica took a deep breath and began to mentally feel her way across the hospital to the floors above and below. Sometimes she could follow the invisible path a powerful demon made, but this demon had been all over the place, crossing its own path too many times to make it easy.

Ren's eyebrows shot up into his bangs when he felt her power touch him. "Interesting," he said having never felt it before. He supposed that when they were within the sanctuary of the castle, her power was always dormant because she didn't need it. Ren shrugged, knowing right now wasn't the time to be testing out new powers and returned to his job.

Angelica moved away from the massacre to the emergency staircase. Syn was right behind her when she entered the tall, slim area and watched her look around for a moment. He felt the blood in his veins start to heat up when his sensitive ears heard the sounds of children crying... they were begging for someone to help them. Syn's amethyst eyes slowly rose to the ceiling as he zeroed in on the sound.

Angelica inhaled sharply and started running up the stairs at breakneck speed. They ascended three floors and exited on the tenth. She slid to a stop and placed a hand over her mouth at the scene of carnage.

Looking down at her feet, she felt tears spring up in her eyes when she saw she was standing in a pool of blood. A small child not more than five years old lay just a few feet away, his life force slowly bleeding out. Small bodies lay strewn everywhere, some

of them with expressions of terror frozen on their angelic faces.

“No,” Angelica whispered. She could handle almost anything that came with the job she did... blood, gore, and demons, but these children were innocent.

An eerie inhuman scream came from down the hall making Angelica and Syn look up. The death demon was standing in the main room of the children’s ward covered in blood. It slammed the butt of its scythe on the floor cracking the tile before coming at them.

Syn slowly moved past Angelica, stalking toward the demon as it approached at a rapid pace. It brought the scythe up to cut him down but Syn’s hand came up, grasping the weapon just as the blade was a centimeter from his skin.

“Let me introduce myself,” Syn hissed and slammed the palm of his hand into the chest of the demon, reaching through its robes to grasp something inside. The demon screeched and backed away, leaving Syn holding the scythe in one hand and something black and beating in the other.

“To kill a child is not allowed.” Syn said in a dangerously calm voice, hefting the scythe with a practiced hand. “You will know the pain you give.”

Dropping the black heart and shifting the scythe to his right hand, Syn spun the weapon in front of him before cutting through the demon with a precise swing. He didn’t cut the demon completely in half, wanting to watch it suffer and knowing it would take more to kill it.

“You are not the true reaper... he shows mercy where you do not,” Syn growled and brought the scythe across the demon’s chest. “He will see you shortly and lock you in a cage where others will rip you to shreds like you have done to these children.”

Syn’s last swing of the scythe went directly into the dark hood, piercing the demon’s head. The tip of the scythe buried itself into the wall, pinning the demon there. Angelica watched as Syn continued to glare at it for a moment before it suddenly burst into bright white flames.

“Syn,” Angelica whispered when he didn’t move and slowly approached him.

Syn was breathing heavily with his hands fisted at his sides. “War is not for children,” he said trying to contain his rage and keep from leveling the hospital. “This needs to be erased from history.”

Angelica reached out to touch his arm but he moved away from her. She felt tears well in her eyes when Syn walked over to the closest child, a little boy, and very carefully picked him up. Placing the small lifeless body in a bed, he sat on the edge of it and gently pushed the hair out of the child’s face.

He put his hand over the little boy’s heart. Angelica’s jaw dropped open in awe when she saw a soft white light shine where Syn’s hand was touching the child’s chest. The wounds on the boy slowly vanished along with any trace of blood.

Angelica pressed her hands to her mouth, unable to control the tearful laughter when the child suddenly inhaled deeply then

started breathing normally.

Syn leaned down to whisper something in his ear before standing up and retrieving another child from his own pool of blood. He began the process again, ending once more with whispered words next to the child's ear.

When he started on the third child, Angelica began to see sluggishness in Syn's movements and a darkening around his eyes. She gazed around at the children still sprawled on the floor. She picked up the child closest to her and laid the little girl on an empty bed.

Syn staggered away from the third child, finding the next bed already held a body. He stumbled toward the bed as he felt beads of sweat forming on his skin... cautioning him that he was using too much power. He ignored the warning.

The two of them began to move in sync... she would pick up the children while he moved behind her, healing and whispering to them. When Angelica had placed the last child in a bed, she turned around to look at Syn and gasped as the powerful man reached out to steady himself against one of the life support machines, stumbling and knocking it over.

She rushed toward him with a hand outstretched to help him, but Syn brushed by her and went to the next child. There were tears silently streaming down his cheeks but he paid them no mind.

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