

Chapter 8 The Promise of Darkness

"You can't be down here," the voice growled again.

"And yet I am." Lenore composed herself to stare at her mate. "What do you intend to do about it?" She watched as his mouth gaped open slightly before a soft chuckle that sounded like heaven rumbled through him.

"What the hell is the universe thinking?" His eyes traveled over her as he stepped up to her. His hand reached out, his fingers brushing just under her chin. "What am I supposed to do with you?"

She could see the sadness in his eyes as his trembling fingers touched her face. His hot breath whispered against her lips. "I can't offer you anything but darkness and danger. You need to run. Leave this place, and don't return."

"I need to do a lot of things, but—" she shrugged, "I prefer to follow my heart. Also, I'm not about to be brushed off. Especially not by my fated mate." His fingers trailed over her cheek as his eyes bore into hers. His touch sent electric sparks through her. A sweet, tingling sensation that she wanted him to feel as well. Slowly, she reached up to touch his face. He leaned his cheek into her touch as he let out a shuddering breath.

"Please, don't make this harder than it already is," he whispered, closing his eyes.

"Then don't make it hard." She leaned her front against him as she tilted her lips up, softly brushing her mouth over his. The tingling was intoxicating, as every inch of her screamed for her mate.

"You don't understand. You would have to stay trapped in darkness. Your life would be lived in hiding. You could never leave. That is no life. I won't allow it," he growled forcefully, pushing her away from him. "GO!"

"I don't take orders from anyone." She lifted her chin up at him confidently.

"You are no match for me. Leave NOW!"

She felt hot heat begin to push her, her feet moving under the pressure. As if she would just comply. She planted her feet firmly as she swirled his energy away from her, decorating the room with new light. A glow formed around her, as Misha raised a protective barrier.

A red whip moved towards her, pushing her back gently. He wanted her, but he couldn't do that to her. He couldn't subject her to a life in hiding. Not someone so young, who had barely begun to live. "Please, I want to keep you. If you continue to fight me, I'll end up doing something selfish."

Suddenly his legs were wrapped in shadows, as darkness swirled angrily with the light.

"Who are you?!" Elena ran up to her sister as she eyed the stranger.

"Elena, it's okay. He's my mate," Lenore said, and Elena immediately released the man.

"Your mate?! Why are we fighting your mate?" Elena turned to look at the stranger, who was now eyeing them curiously.

"Because he thinks it's okay to fight for me."

"Oh... well, should I tie him back up? You want to play dominant and submissive? I can give you some privacy."

Lenore grinned as she heard the man stifle a sound in his throat.

"Elena," The man said, making the two women look at him. "If your sister stays with me, she can never leave. She would have to remain in darkness, never to return to the light. Her life would be in danger, and—"

"And that is her decision. Why do men think it's okay to make decisions for women? As if we're incapable of knowing our own minds." She stared at the stranger angrily. She would give up everything if it meant she could be next to Aba. She wouldn't see her sister denied of her mate. This was a joint decision, not a one-way street. Especially if they both wanted each other. "I heard you say you wanted her. Let her make up her own mind."

Forget the logistics of it, Lenore. You can find out the how later. But talk with him and see what you want. I can always visit you. I can teleport to you. Even if you can never leave, everything will be okay. But make the decision you want, and not the one that's expected of you.

Lenore smiled and hugged her sister. "I think we need to talk. Properly," she said, looking at the stranger. "My name is Lenore, I am—"

"I know who you are," the man said as he sighed. "I'm Taric, the demon prince."

Elena bumped Lenore with her elbow. Talk about a score!

"Vampire/Fairy princess mated to the demon king. Talk about stacking the deck." Elena pursed her lips together tightly in a smile.

"But you're more than that." Taric's green eyes were locked onto Lenore's. "You have original vampire blood. A primordial descendant. My father would want this bloodline. This is why I can't have you. It's dangerous. I—"

"You're making decisions on your own again." Lenore folded her arms over her chest.

"You're going to have to hear her out. You can't win against her, so you might as well get used to that." Elena giggled, and then began to walk away. "I'll be looking through the old tablets and books. Take all the time you need, Nora." She winked at her sister before she strolled back into the dark, leaving the two alone to talk.

One of the reasons she loved her sister so much was because of how supportive she always was of her. She knew that the idea of being separated was killing her, but instead she encouraged her. They both knew how important the mate bond was. Their parents were soul mates. It was such a special connection, one that neither of them would ever deny the other, no matter what that meant.

"Why are you here?" Lenore moved past him to sit on his bed.

"I'm avoiding my father. We don't see eye to eye, because I disagree with his methods. I can't directly oppose him. I'm not strong enough. Instead, I'm waiting it out. Selene and Rogio told me I could live here undetected. It was under their jurisdiction, and I couldn't be found as long as I didn't leave. She told me that my father's reign would come to an end, and when it did, they would need me to take over. What's a century or two for an immortal? So I agreed. When the time comes, I will rule the demons and keep the balance. We aren't all evil, just like all fairies aren't good. Then you have vampires that sit on the line between both." He stopped and took a few steps back. "If you stayed with me—once I marked you, you could never leave. My power would flow to you, and my father could find you. You would have to stay here with me until after my father is overthrown."

A small smile rested on her face. So it was always a choice. If she chose this man, her fate would be sealed to this world and its darkness. But she would be safely underground with her mate. Is this what Yin and Yang were waiting for? For the women to decide their own fates? Or at least for one of them to choose? This would mean Elena would live in Elysium. And honestly, that's exactly what Elena needed. She needed her family and their support more than she did.

Unlike her sister Elena, she always felt the pressure of having to live up to the standard expected of her. Her sister was the fiery one with the voice to be true to herself. In Elysium, her sister would be respected and loved for who she is. They would stand beside her and support her. It all made sense.

"You understand why this can't work." His voice was heavy with emotion, the sadness so thick it could be tasted in the air. Her eyes brimmed with tears as she listened to his quiet words, each one like a tiny pinprick driving into her heart. He was willing to stay in the darkness alone. He claimed he wanted to be selfish, but this was the opposite of that. He was putting her first. He didn't even know her, but he was looking out for her.

She stood up from the bed, making her way over to him. Her fingers wrapped around his. He turned to look at her as the warm tingles raced through them both. "I understand your words, but nothing else. I'm not saying let's seal everything and mark each other immediately. But I'm also not saying this can't work, because I think it can. Fate thinks we're compatible, so why don't we see?"

"It could be centuries in the dark." He turned to face her as she lit up the room.

"It's not dark." She smiled as she stepped closer, her chest brushing against his.

He chuckled and tilted his head to the side. "Do you always wear men's clothes?"

Her cheeks heated red. She completely forgot what she was wearing. With a wry smile, she composed herself, as she traced her finger up his chest. "No, sometimes I don't wear any clothes." She was rewarded with a sweet growl as she continued to trail her finger upward and around his lips. "You know, you shouldn't agree to buy something without testing it out first. Especially when we're talking about an eternity." Her eyes ickered up to his. Slowly, his head tilted down to hers until his lips barely touched hers.

"But once I claim something as mine, I can never let it go again. Even without my mark, you'll belong to me. Whether you come back to me now or centuries from now, you'll be mine. Are you sure you wish to continue?"

"I don't share what I claim. Now or for eternity. Once you're mine, you can never be with another. Are you sure YOU wish to continue, prince of the demons?" Her sultry voice whispered as she traced his bottom lip with her tongue.

He gripped the back of her neck as his lips crashed against hers, his thumb applying pressure to her bottom jaw as he plunged his tongue inside her mouth. As they kissed, Lenore's hands roamed over his chest, feeling the toned muscles beneath his shirt. She could feel his heart pounding against her palm, and she knew he was just as affected by her as she was by him. With a sudden surge of desire, Lenore pushed him against the stone wall, his hand sliding up her shirt.

His touch was electric as she arched into his hand. A soft moan escaped her lips as he continued to dance with her tongue. Then he suddenly stopped, pulling away. She tried to close the gap, but he held her chin firmly in place. His brows furrowed down at her as he took in a steadying breath.

"Wait a minute. Lenore, why are you two even down here?" He watched as her eyes seemed to widen.

"Oh yeah. Damn, this has to wait. I have to read a book about shadow curses."

"Shadow curses?" His thumb brushed over her cheek tenderly.

"Yes. Someone is manipulating shadows. It might be a plague curse, because it seems to be spreading. I think someone is trying to pin the blame on my sister. So we snuck out and came here looking for answers."

"Shadows—" Taric sighed as he pulled her closer. "Someone who can manipulate shadows and cast a curse. A witch, witch doctor, certain dark fairies, and demons can do this. Of course, there's also the nycrops."

The word nycrops slammed into her gut as she gasped. Was this Meryl's doing? Is that why Beryl was such a mess earlier? "I have to help my sister."

"I've been all over these books. There are more underwater that I haven't seen yet. What exactly are you searching for?"

"Something that will clear the blame from my sister until we find the culprit. Maybe, if this happened before, it was also by a nycrops."

"I'll show you where the underwater library is. We can look together." He interlaced his fingers with hers, gently kissing her lips.

Elena moved her fingers over the books. She was happy for her sister, but she was also hurting, thinking of being separated. Maybe this would be for the best. It would help them learn to be independent of each other. Her sister finding such a powerful mate was a well-played move. A demon prince and a fairy princess uniting in an epic alliance. It also solidifies a peaceful future... someday.

She climbed up the ladder and sat at the top of the stone bookshelf. Someone had stacked more tablets at the top of the shelf, making them seem almost hidden. Dust and cobwebs littered the ancient manuscripts laying there. As she reached for one, she felt him. The dark, angry energy filled the room only seconds before he made his appearance.

She looked at the entryway, meeting with dark, menacing orbs. His hands trembled as his face contorted in rage.

"GET. DOWN. HERE!"