

Chapter 145: Shadows of Doubt

Lottie POV

"You are wrong." I heard Knox scream, somehow breaking the dark magic hold that had been his gag. My heart hammered in my chest hearing the desperation in his voice, but as Astaroth's words echoed through the cathedral, each syllable distracted me, striking like a dagger aimed at my soul.

Could it be true?

Could Knox, the man I loved more than life itself, be tainted by the darkness of his bloodline?

"Angel?" Knox choked out in a plea to get my attention, but I couldn't bear to look at him, I couldn't bring myself to meet his gaze as the weight of uncertainty pressed down on me.

"It can't be true," I whispered discreetly. My mind raced, trying to make sense of the chaos unravelling before me, but all I could see were fragments of doubt and fear that Astaroth was installing in us.

"Please, baby girl!"

"She hates that you call her that. Did you know that?" Astaroth smugly laughed.

"Fuck off." Knox barked, but I could hear the pain in his tone,

and not just because his throat was raw from the pain of fighting Astaroth's magic. Tears blurred my vision as I struggled to hold back the flood of emotions threatening to consume me. My mates were my rocks, my sanctuary in a world fraught with danger. The mere thought of losing them to the shadows that lurked within this shady realm sent a shiver down my spine.

"Language!" Astaroth laughed, mocking Knox, the delight coating his tone evident. My thoughts spiralled into a whirlwind of uncertainty, memories of our shared moments intertwined with the chilling whispers of doubt. Hot salty tears welled in my eyes. I knew I should comfort my mates, but I felt consumed by the emotions threatening to spill over as I grappled with the possibility of betrayal.

"Poor Princess!" Astaroth teased as he drew nearer, sending a shudder running down my spine. My instincts screamed at me to flee, but Chase lay at my feet, vulnerable and defenceless, his life hanging in the balance. With a heavy heart, I remained rooted to the spot, my resolve bolstered by the need to protect those I loved.

"I guess love is fickle after all! I can feel the pain you are feeling at Knox's betrayal." Astaroth bullied with malice, sending the room into silence.

"Charlotte?" Kane's voice whimpered through what sounded like an agonisingly painful throat. With trembling hands, I wiped away the tears clouding my vision, lifting my gaze to

meet Astaroth's heckling stare. My jaw clenched in defiance.

"You are wrong!" I spat. I refused to cower before the demon's malevolent presence.

"Am I though?" He chortled, tilting his head to glower at me, the smile on his face irritating me beyond words. Did this fool genuinely think he could come between us? Did he really think I was so weak?

"Quite the opposite, actually." He shrugged, his behaviour only irritated me further, it was like he thought that invading my private thoughts was a normal thing to do.

"Stay out of my head!" I yapped, anger rippling through me, his responsive dark chuckle in the room, grinding on me also.

"Do you think the pain I feel is because my mate 'concealed' something from me?" I snapped, taking a step closer, ignoring Kane's whines for me to stop. "The pain you feel flaring inside me is for them!" I seethed, pointing at Knox and then to Kane. "For my mates! I know the pain of family betrayal, remember!" Shaking my head at the anger I felt brewing in my stomach, I lowered my eyes to my stomach, where my hand rested protectively.

"They deserved better! We all did!" I found myself unable to fathom Leigh and Laura's decisions IF this foulness in front of me was indeed telling the truth, because I knew I would do anything to protect those I loved. What was worse was

that I knew without a shadow of a doubt I would kill for my children.

"I am telling the truth, I assure you of that." Astaroth mocked, his brow rising in a challenge.

"What have I told you about staying out of my head," I growled, sensing Knox's eyes on me. I knew it was a warning to behave. Well, fuck that! This wanker wasn't playing by the rules. Why should I?

"You need me to make this deal, right? After all, your mind games and trickery with Knox forced him to agree." I asked, dismissing his comment with a challenge of my own. Daring him to contest my statement.

"Consent is consent." Astaroth shrugged, unbothered by my accusations. I lifted my chin defiantly to meet Astaroth's gaze. His laughter cut through the silence like a knife, each offence and insult a reminder of the power he held over us.

For now!

"Is she always this feisty?" Astaroth asked Knox, but his eyes remained glued on me.

"Yes!" Knox replied quickly, his tone laced with entertainment, a smile twisted the corners of my lips, loving that even in our darkest moments he could make my stomach flutter with excitement. "I suggest you answer her question, big guy!" Knox added with a grunt, yet still Astaroth's eyes remained glued on mine.

"I need you to agree, yes." Astaroth responded, his eyes narrowed on me as he delved into my mind, his large form drawing nearer, his presence so suffocating, I instinctively stepped back, a silent plea for him to stay away. But Chase lay at my feet, his still form a stark reminder of the vulnerability that surrounded us.

"Why?" I asked as I refused to surrender to despair. "Why not Kane? He is just as protective as Knox. Do you really think he won't have something to say about who his daughter mates?" I asked with determination.

"He is.."

"It doesn't matter!" I growled, cutting him off. "Because what you fail to understand is that we are a family!" I snapped, my eyes raised to meet Knox's, only then realising that he had edged closer to Astaroth, who seemed oblivious.

But Knox's intentions were clear to me.

Attack!

"That is a mistake," I boomed, at Astaroth, but it got Knox's attention, his motions paused momentarily to look at me. Those big blue eyes I adored were filled with anger, and not because of Havoc. It was all him. Levelling my eyes on my mate in a silent plea not to do anything stupid, I let out a breath seeing his movements falter as his eyes lingered on mine filled with surrender.

"Do you think it really matters to us who her biological father is?" Knox asked Astaroth, when a smile split Astaroth's lips, and he dismissed Knox with a wave of his hand without even looking at him. I continued, confident my mate would behave given the slight - for now!

"We will be a team!" I barked over Astaroth's laughter. My eyes flicked to Kane needing to check on him, because his breathing had become so slow it was making me nervous. Knox, sensing my fears, nodded his face tight with anger as he headed over to Kane, letting me deal with the demon who it seemed only cared for what I had to say anyway.

"We WILL make decisions as a family, we WILL raise our children as a family! Make no mistake, Kane WILL be just as involved as Knox and I. There will be no, his and his! Just OURS!" I stated with firmness.


"Is that so?" Astaroth laughed bitterly, the sound losing its charm, sounding more like nails on a chalkboard than the enchanting lure it had been when I arrived. I could see there was more he wanted to say, more he wanted to share with us. No doubt only to screw with our heads further than he already was.

"Say it beast," I growled, my eyes flickering to where Knox was lifting Kane's chin as he hung on the wall, Knox's eyes filled with concern for his brother only making me more anxious and nervous. I had to get them out of this place.

And fast.

"From the glimpse of the future I have seen, Kane will be team... Beast!" Astaroth smugly grinned. "So you see, I do not need his consent, I know he will freely give it, in fact, he will beg me to court her." He added with a wink that sent a chill through my blood.

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