

LUCIFER

Lucifer felt the hold on him release as soon as the hooded figure disappeared. He held the book his un-invited guest had handed him, open to the last page. The words he had read just a few minutes before were gone, replaced by the usual About the Author blurb. It pissed him off to think he'd had someone surprise him on his own plane. In his own home. He looked around. Well. Azazel's old room he'd turned into a bedroom for Adina, to be truthful. This was the only place he'd found himself since he'd destroyed his library in a fit of rage. His thoughts traveled to the middle plane, the source of his anger these days. And then to Adina. She was all of nine, how could she have chosen them over him? He'd turned this room into an oasis for her. Who wouldn't want to live here?

“You. Dumbass,” a voice called out to him.

Lucifer spun around looking for where it had come from. He was disappointed to find there was no one there. He had hoped the hooded figure had returned so he could ask them what the message they'd given him meant. The one that was no longer written in the book he was still holding, for no apparent reason. He threw the book in the direction he hoped the voice had come from. It fell to the floor without hitting anything or anyone.

That's it. He'd gone completely crazy. He worried it would happen. It only took a thousand years. Lucifer stormed out of the room and vowed to never enter it again.

“Alright Lucifer, sulking time is over,” he told himself when he stepped into the space where his library had been. With the flick of his wrist and a snap of his fingers the rubble transformed into shelves, complete with books he'd been through hundreds of times. The fire place lit up with red and yellow flames. His wood table, leather chairs and candelabras

reappeared. Lucifer stepped up to the table and picked up a pen and some paper. He tried to remember the message the hooded figure had sent. As he put the pen point on the paper words appeared on it without him having written them: You will not find anything new if you keep looking in the same direction, dumbass.

“Stop calling me that!” Lucifer yelled into the empty room and immediately regretted. Talking to himself was a sure sign he’d gone mad. He looked back at the paper. It was blank again.

#

TYLER

The training room was not as empty as Tyler hoped it would be. He had come here to blow off some steam. Instead he was having to update Phenex and Azazel on Chloe’s condition, which had taken a turn. “We’ve got 24 hour hospice care,” Tyler told them. “It’s only a matter of time now.” He went back to placing wooden targets around the room, most of which looked like Lucifer, to give him added motivation.

It was odd speaking about Chloe’s condition so matter of factly, but it wasn’t something that had come as a surprise to any of them. She’d broken her contract with Lucifer and thus had returned to the state she had been in when she had made the deal - dying of a brain tumor. She’d already lived longer than she should have, and caused enough destruction for a lifetime. Los Angeles was still rebuilding after Lucifer’s army had destroyed it, with Chloe’s help. A voice in his head reminded him Azazel had been a part of that too. And in comparison to Chloe’s punishment of having to carry a half human, half demon baby for 4 months in her belly, Azazel’s new role as cook at a diner in Downtown Los Angeles seemed, mild.

“How’s Adina doing?” Phenex broke Tyler out of his reverie.

“Surprisingly well,” Tyler admitted. “She’s dealing with her own rapid aging process, and her mother’s rapid demise. I’d have destroyed half the world by now. Good thing she’s not my daughter, and good thing I wasn’t made to destroy anything,” Tyler said with a smile.

“Interesting that she is Lucifer’s daughter, though,” Azazel pointed out. “You’d think she’d have his same fiery temper.”

“She has his fire,” Tyler told him. “Without his need to destroy everything.”

On that note, Tyler turned his attention to one of the targets and blasted it to pieces. He smiled at the pile of tinder the energy blast had left behind. “I guess I can destroy some things. Just not ones that matter.”

#

GEMMA

Gemma stood at the foot of her the empty bed that used to be her mother’s. She tried to remember it had only been a day since Pandora had chosen to return to Interplanum, but it felt like a lifetime ago. She still held her mother’s pouch, her pouch now, she reminded herself, against her chest. She swore she could feel the jar inside pulsating like a heartbeat. It made sense, seeing as there was life inside it. She began to picture what Hope would look like. Angelic, Gemma thought. The things she’d do if she were brought into the open. Gemma shook the thought from her mind. Curiosity was her mother’s downfall. She vowed it would never be her own. “No, you are much stronger than her.” A booming voice filled the room. Gemma turned around to see if anyone was there, but she knew it was coming from above her.

“I can’t just sit here and guard the jar,” Gemma said to the ceiling.

“No, I don’t suppose you can,” the voice replied.

“Any suggestions?” Gemma asked.

The room fell silent. Gemma rolled her eyes at the ceiling and felt ridiculous for both talking to it and staring up at it. She set the pouch gingerly on the bed.

“There is still a war coming.” The booming voice was back. Gemma fought the urge to stare up at it. “Return to Los Angeles and help the Omphalos train for what’s to come. He will need your guidance. And Pyrrha. Under no circumstances will you bring the jar with you. It stays here.”

#

CHLOE

Chloe could feel the last bits of life leaving her body. It was a familiar feeling, having been through this once before. She wondered if she’d return to the room where Azazel had taunted her and Lucifer had made her the offer that led her down this path, or just straight to wherever it was she was meant to be in the end. She thought of the lower plane and of Lucifer’s library. She knew that’s where she belonged. Being endlessly tortured by the demon for eternity. It’s what she deserved. She shuddered at the idea of Lucifer’s endless torture as she rotted away in the depths of the lower plane.

She could hear voices all around her, talking about her. The only one she cared to hear was Adina’s. It was a wonder she recognized it, now that Adina had grown from nine to thirteen. She’d hoped the rapid growth would stop once Adina had been rescued from the lower plane but Alexis had warned them that the time she’d spent down there would accelerate her aging for a while longer. He assured them it would level out at around seventeen. And then she’d likely

grown at a normal human rate as long as she remained on the middle plane. Chloe begged Adina to be cautious about the coming war between Tyler and Lucifer. The only way to ensure she'd live a full life and not age faster was to keep her away from the lower plane as much as possible. Tyler tried to promise Chloe he would keep Adina safely on the middle plane, but they both knew that might not be an option. They would need all the help they could get fighting back against whatever plan Lucifer was putting in motion now.

Not her problem now, Chloe thought. It should be, she reminded herself. She took the coward's way out. She could have helped Jonathan and Tyler raise Adina, and fight against Lucifer. But she knew that wasn't her fate. The dragon had told her that too. Things were playing out exactly how they were meant to. She heard Tyler's voice join the chorus of nurses and ask if there had been any change.

"I think she's ready," Adina answered him. It was a mixture of sadness, knowledge, and content. And with that Chloe knew she could stop fighting. She gave Adina's hand one last squeeze and let go of her last breath.

#

TYLER

"She's gone," Adina said without looking away from her mother. Tyler kneeled down beside them and caught sight of Adina's eyes. They were bright blue. Earlier they had been an amber-y gold. Aside from her going from age nine to age thirteen in a day, it was the only sign of her being anything but human. There were no tears falling, despite their sadness. This was a moment they all knew was coming sooner rather than later. He thought about that sentiment he always hated hearing. "At least she's no longer suffering." Tyler refrained from saying it out

loud. In truth he had no idea whether or not Chloe was suffering. A lump caught in his throat.

Jonathan kneeled beside Tyler and they shared a knowing glance. Adina wasn't the only one experiencing rapid growth. It wasn't too long ago Tyler would have wished the worst kind of pain and punishment on Chloe for her role in all this madness. Jonathan put his hand over Chloe's heart and closed his eyes. Tyler knew he was praying for her. Although he no longer knew who he was praying to. They hadn't discussed faith in a long time. It was a touchy subject before everything had fallen apart around them. But Jonathan still had it in him to be both a minister and a man of faith. And somehow Tyler loved him anyway.

#

#

CHLOE

Chloe knew she'd never go to heaven, even before she made a deal with the king of the lower plane. She thought it would be a fitting ending to her life that she'd end up back on that plane, under Lucifer's thumb after all. So it took her by complete surprise to wake up in the middle of a dark forrest surrounded by trees and fog and darkness. "Of course," she said out loud. The sound of her voice echoed all around her. She crouched down instinctively, waiting for some demon stuck in between the middle and lower planes to notice her presence. Nothing moved. Purgatory. She should have known she's end up here. She tried to remember the last time she was here. Azazel had led her through a maze of trees and mud that eventually led to a dragon's lair. Chloe wondered if she could find her way back there now. Or if she was even meant to. She stood and tried to adjust her eyes to the darkness. It didn't help. It all looked the

same. “You’ve got an eternity to figure it out,” she whispered to herself and picked a direction to head in.

#

GEMMA

Despite everything inside her telling her otherwise, Gemma chose to take the long way to Los Angeles. Which meant traveling by airplane rather than teleportation. She didn’t feel like just dropping in on Tyler and his friends, again. Granted the first time wasn’t exactly her fault. She wasn’t sure where they would be anyway. The gods had given her a name: Enessa Jane. Gemma wondered if that was a new member of Tyler’s army but a quick Internet search told her it was the name of a restaurant. As soon as she landed at LAX she found a cab and relayed the address to the driver. He gave her a sideways glance but punched it into the GPS on his dash. As they traveled through the streets of Los Angeles Gemma could see the remnants of the battle that had occurred there. She had seen it on the news but in person it looked much worse. She silently wondered if they could prevent this from happening again.

When the cab pulled up in front of the Enessa Jane Gemma understood why the driver had been reluctant to take her here. Everything around the area was in shambles. Except two side by side buildings that were perfectly in tact. The driver glanced at her in the mirror. She just shrugged and paid her fare.

When she stepped through the doors it was Phenex who greeted her at the hosts station. For a moment it surprised Gemma, and then it didn’t.

“What brings you back to town?” Phenex asked as she led Gemma to a table.

Gemma cleared her throat. “The gods thought it was a good idea,” she whispered.

Phenex pulled out a chair for Gemma and invited her to sit. “The gods wanted you to have Chinese food?” Phenex said with a smile. “I mean, I know it’s the best cuisine on the west side, I didn’t realize the news had traveled that far.”

Gemma returned the smile. “It appears so. This is where they sent me.”

“Try the Kung Pao Chicken,” Phenex said before returning to the host station.

#

TYLER

Tyler unlocked the door to the apartment and watched as Abby, Adina, Jonathan and Azazel stepped inside. Chloe had asked for a simple funeral with no sermons, burial, or crying. She wanted to be cremated. She made him promise not to force Adina to hold onto the urn, and after a brief discussion he and Jonathan settled on keeping them locked away. He stepped into the hallway and opened the linen closet. Tyler gently slid the urn behind a pile of blankets and closed the door. When the time was right he and Adina would take the ashes and scatter them.

Adina was taking the events of the day fairly well. In fact Tyler was amazed at how well she was adjusting to all the things going on with her. Especially the fact that she’d aged four years in just a few short days. He was thinking about how differently he reacted when he found out about his own powers. As he stepped into the living room Azazel approached him.

“Phenex just checked in. Apparently the gods sent Gemma back to LA. She’s at the Esessa Jane,” Azazel whispered.

Tyler contemplated this news. “Does she have the, weapon with her?”

“Phenex didn’t say, but she did suggest we make our way down there as soon as we can,” Azazel answered him.

Tyler looked around. It seemed the group was following Chloe's wishes. No one was sad or in mourning. It was just another day to them. "I suppose now's as good a time as any." He shrugged and patted Azazel on the shoulder. "Who wants Chinese?" He said to the room.

#

LUCIFER

Lucifer stood in the middle of his library marveling at how much it looked just like it had before he'd destroyed it. It shouldn't surprise him, this wasn't the first time he'd had to rebuild the room after rage and anger prompted him to lay waste to it. But for some reason this time felt different. All his life he'd been warned that the middle plane would affect how his powers worked. It didn't appear to have had any adverse affects at all. "Probably another one of his many lies," Lucifer said out loud.

"You have no idea," the voice Lucifer had been hearing all day answered back.

Lucifer spun around hoping to catch a glimpse of whoever it was. Once again there was no one there. He wondered if he was losing his mind. Maybe there were some adverse affects to his travels after all.

"I assure you I'm real," the voice said.

"I'd appreciate it if you'd stay out of my head," Lucifer said out loud. "In fact I'd appreciate it if you left me alone, period."

"Believe it or not Lucifer, I'm trying to help you," the voice replied.

"Great. You can start by staying out of my way, or, my head, as it were," Lucifer snapped back.

"Fair enough," the voice answered.

Lucifer knew it couldn't be that simple. So he wasn't at all surprised when a hooded figure appeared in full form in front of him. It appeared to be the same hooded figure that had annoyed him with the books in Azazel's bedroom. He didn't have time for games and his patience had long worn thin. "I thought you said you'd stay out of my way."

"You wanted me out of your head. In this form I am unable to listen to your thoughts. I can either be here in corporeal form or I can be inside your head," the figure said.

"How about neither?" Lucifer spit out.

"I promise you, Lucifer, you're going to want, and need, my help."

"I doubt it. I don't even know who you are."

The figure sighed. Bony hands peeked through the long sleeves of the robe and slowly lowered the hood revealing his face.

"Hades," Lucifer said with a whisper.

"Hello, Lucy," Hades voice was much different in reality than it had been in Lucifer's head.

#

CHLOE

Chloe had been wandering in circles. She didn't know how she knew that, but she did. It didn't matter that the trees all looked the same, or the fog hadn't changed its thickness. She could just tell she had gotten nowhere. She stopped walking and looked around her like it mattered what her surroundings were. They were the same. Trees. Fog. More trees. More fog. Dirt, mud, dirt, mud. She wanted to scream out but decided against it. She put her hands on her knees and stood still. She wasn't out of breath or tired. She wasn't much of anything. This was going to be

her life, she thought. Walking in circles looking for a door she saw once, that leads to a dragon she never felt comfortable with. “This is my fate,” she said out loud.

“Not so much,” a voice answered her back. “Although I wonder if it should be.”

Chloe stood up and came face to face with a tall man with pale yellow eyes. “Who are you?”

The man looked down at himself and smiled. “Ah,” he answered. “I’m in human form,” he said like that was a perfectly good answer. “Alexis,” he said his name and held out his hand to shake Chloe’s.

She hesitated and then laughed at herself for being afraid. What was she afraid of? Dying? She was already dead. So she held out her hand and shook his.

“I believe you’ve been looking for me,” Alexis said after a beat.

Chloe continued to stare at the man in utter confusion. Then it dawned on her. In his human form, he’d said. “Oh,” she said finally, “You’re the dragon.”

Alexis nodded. “What is it I can do for you, Chloe?”

“Last time I was here it was to find out my fate,” Chloe answered. “I guess I thought maybe I was supposed to look for you again?”

“Fair assumption,” Alexis said. “But, as it appears I am not in my usual form, the universe is not ready to show you what to expect in your next life at this time.”

Chloe contemplated this. “How long will I have to wait to find out?”

“Sorry to say I don’t have that answer,” Alexis said. “But there’s no need for you to walk in circles looking for me when they are ready for you. I will find you on my own.”

“So I’m supposed to just wait here until you show up in your dragon form?” Chloe asked

with a tinge of annoyance in her voice.

“Pretty much,” Alexis answered before disappearing as fast as he had appeared.

Chloe looked up at the blackness that was possibly sky or maybe just the bottom of the middle plane. “Of course.”

#

#

TYLER

The Esessa Jane was busy as usual and Phenex was playing host like a pro. Tyler tried to catch her eye but she was deep in conversation with a large man in a three piece suit, laughing at what was likely not a funny joke, Tyler assumed. A quick scan of the room and he found Gemma sitting alone at a table located right in front of one of the giant speakers that surrounded the karaoke stage. Tyler shook his head. Phenex had clearly given Gemma the worst table in the room. He'd have to remind her Gemma was an ally.

“Wait here,” Tyler suggested to his companions who nodded in agreement.

The speaker was blaring a terrible instrumental version of a song Tyler knew but couldn't put his finger on. A woman in a dress too short for her with a voice unfit for the key of the song was attempting to belt out lyrics she clearly didn't know. Tyler cringed and leaned next to Gemma's ear “Follow me!”

“We can't enter the training room now,” Tyler said to the group when they were all together. “There's too many people here. You guys want to eat something?”

“She'll make us wait for a table,” Azazel said with a smile.

Tyler looked around the room again and found that it was at full capacity. The only open table was the one he'd just rescued Gemma from. There was no way they were sitting there.

Phenex finally returned to the host station and made eye contact with Tyler. She smirked at him as if to agree with Azazel's previous statement. She wasn't giving up a table to them.

"Maybe we'll have better luck at the diner," Azazel suggested. "I know but maybe it'll be ok, we'll see who's working tonight," he said after getting several sour looks.

The diner wasn't nearly as popular or as appetizing as the Esessa Jane which meant it was often half empty. The only time it had any semblance of a crowd was during breakfast. Word had spread about the amazing cook who made the best bacon and eggs in the downtown area. If they only knew he also happened to be a demon.

Azazel was right and the diner was mostly empty. They slid into a booth toward the back to have the most privacy and Azazel headed toward the kitchen. "He works here," Tyler told Gemma. "Phenex owns this place too. She gave him the job."

Gemma nodded "Got it."

Azazel returned to the table and sat next to Abby who had been pointing out to Adina which menu items were her favorites. "Joe's on duty, we're good."

"Phenex doesn't give you guys free food, or a discount?" Gemma asked and then looked toward the door "I left without paying..."

"You're okay. It can be tricky eating here depending on which cook is in the kitchen. We were just making sure the food will be, edible," Jonathan said.

"What brings you back to LA?" Tyler asked Gemma after a short silence.

"I made the mistake of asking what I was supposed to do now, out loud, and the gods

suggested I come here and help with the preparations for the war,” she whispered the last part.

“And for some reason they gave me the name of the restaurant as where I could find you guys.”

“Yeah the training room is in the back, hidden to the human eye, you literally walk through the walls to get to it,” Tyler explained. “We would have been there but we had a funeral thing today.”

Gemma’s face fell. “I’m so sorry.”

“We knew it was coming,” Tyler told her. “Chloe. Inoperable brain tumor. In short, Lucifer gave her eternal life in exchange for her services, when those turned out to be more diabolical than Chloe could handle she begged to be let out of the contract. Once he had what he wanted, Adina,” he smiled in Adina’s direction when he said her name, “he obliged.”

“Wait, that’s the child Lucifer sent me to kidnap?” She said this louder than she meant to and looked around. No one cared.

“I’m half demon, I age really fast,” Adina told her, without anger or confusion. It was just a fact.

“How old are you?” Gemma asked her.

“Thirteen. I’ll stop aging at around 18,” Adina answered, again with a straight matter of fact tone.

Gemma smiled. “That’s how old I am. Or at least that’s how old my soul is. This body is about twenty five.”

“Cool,” Adina said with a smile.

“I’m 118,” Abby chimed in.

“But you don’t look a day over 115,” Azazel poked at her.

Tyler watched as his rag tag group casually talked about aging, both rapidly, and not so rapidly. It was the most normal conversation he'd heard in the last several days. Mostly because it involved living a long life.

#

LUCIFER

“I suppose I should have known it was you,” Lucifer stepped away from the man and went to sit in his oversized leather chair. He knew he was making Hades mad by turning his back on him, but this was his domain and Hades had no business being in it.

“Why's that? Is it because you are taking from my playbook and you knew it was only a matter of time before I called you on it or is it because you clearly need my help and were hoping I'd come see you?” Hades asked.

Lucifer laughed. “You can't seriously think I manifested your presence.”

“Didn't you though? You used unnatural means to create a life,” Hades started. “And then when you didn't get your way you caused a massive earthquake on the surface of the middle plane.”

Damn. Hades was right. He'd taken directly from the king of the underworld's playbook. Lucifer was thankful Hades could no longer rummage around in his head. He'd be even more insufferable if he knew Lucifer agreed with him. “You cannot honestly think you are the only one who can create a life,” Lucifer taunted.

Hades stepped forward and faced Lucifer directly. Lucifer wondered why he hadn't done so before now. Something was off about the titan.

“Why are you here, really, Hades?” Lucifer asked.

“You’re making my brothers restless,” Hades admitted. “And when you make waves down here they call on me to fix it.”

“I’d appreciate it if you stopped talking to me like I’m a child,” Lucifer snapped.

“Then might I suggest you stop acting like one?” Hades spit back.

Lucifer stood up and tried to make himself as big as possible. It was hard to do being that Hades was literally a God. “Do not test me Hades. I am not in the mood.”

Hades smiled. It only made Lucifer madder. “You know better than to believe I’d actually come here looking to stop you from whatever it is you think you’re doing,” he said. “I’m here to help you, or at the least to prevent you from creating more havoc than necessary. We’re all getting pretty tired of your assbattery.”

#

CHLOE

Chloe changed her mind, she was clearly in Hell. No matter what anyone had chosen to call it, this place, Purgatory, with its wetness and darkness, and trees that seemed to be alive and dead at the same time. This was a nightmare. And all she could do was sit, stand, and pace around wondering when Alexis would return in his natural form and give her some kind of inkling of what the rest of her eternal life would be. Every now and then she’d wonder if this was it. Her life was going to be one long waiting game now. Once again she reminded herself how much she deserved it. When her mind would wander and force her to remember the things she’d done she’d shudder to think of what kind of punishment was in store for her. But then again she wondered if the punishment had been living on the middle plane when she should have died months ago. Then she thought of Adina and reconsidered. She’d turned out to be so much, more,

than Chloe had imagined. As Adina grew inside her belly Chloe wondered if she'd have claws, hooves, or fangs, or be some sort of puke green color. Or bright red. Having to grow 18 years in a matter of two weeks wasn't a whole lot better than any of those things, but at least she looked normal. Aside from her constant eye color changes. And Azazel had mentioned she'd be a shapeshifter. Chloe hadn't been able to spend enough time with them to find out exactly what that meant.

She stood up, then sat down, then stood up again. "OK Chlo. Time to bring back that zen yoga shit you learned when you were in Atlanta." She sat back down, crossed legged, closed her eyes and tried to go to a quiet place in her mind. There weren't many in there anymore. But she sought one anyway.

Chloe could feel a shift in the fog even with her eyes closed. She tried to open them to see who or what had approached her but she was unable to. They were heavy and seemingly glued shut. She started to panic when a voice spoke in front of her.

"No need to panic, I'm not here to hurt you," a male voice spoke so softly she barely heard it.

"Dragon?" Chloe asked assuming Alexis had returned in his natural form and she would be out of this, Hell, sooner than she imagined.

"No," the voice answered. "But I do have information about your fate. Or, more accurately, I have an offer to make you regarding your future."

Chloe shook her head in immediate protest. She'd had enough of offers and contracts and deals. "I'll take my chances and wait."

"I understand your resistance. I assure you this offer has no consequences, and no

strings.”

“Everything has consequences, and strings,” Chloe protested.

#

GABRIEL

It had been a long time since he walked into this room. Lately Yahweh (Author’s Note: this will be the new name for God or as referenced in the previous books “He” or “Him”) had been holding meetings outside in the courtyard. Gabriel figured Yahweh was making up for the hundreds of years He’d been held in Epimetheus’s underground dungeons. Today his father had called him into his office specifically. Gabriel knew this meant something had changed on the middle or lower planes.

Yahweh was standing at the window directly behind his large mahogany desk, his back to Gabriel. He knew the archangel had entered, he could always feel their presence. But he did not turn to acknowledge him. “Father,” Gabriel said quietly.

When Yahweh turned to face him there was a look on his face Gabriel had never seen before. Worry.

“What is it?” Gabriel stepped forward on instinct. His father was still frail, still recovering from his time on the middle plane. It had drained most of his light and made him look more of a man than the leader of the upper plane. Gabriel was the only one who could see the difference. Most of the angels who interacted with Yahweh complimented him on how good he looked for having been “down there” so long.

“Haven’t you felt it?” Yahweh asked him.

Gabriel's worry shifted. "I have," he answered.

"As much as I need you here, my son, I believe now more than ever that you are needed on the middle plane. If the Greek's are interfering they must have information they are not sharing with us." Yahweh's voice emitted a mixture of anger and sadness.

"As you wish Father," Gabriel nodded.

#

CHLOE

"I made a promise to myself, and to my daughter, that I'd never take another deal no matter who's offering it," Chloe told the voice that had not shown itself to have a body.

"You should know better than to make promises you can't keep Chloe," the voice taunted her.

"Ya know, it's really not fair to play games with a dead woman stuck in purgatory," Chloe called out. "If you're not gonna to tell me where I'm going to end up then you're of no use to me."

The voice laughed. It boomed through the darkness and shook the trees. "Look at you, still acting as if you have a say in how the world works."

Chloe huffed and crossed her arms over her chest. She tried to block out whoever or whatever was invading her space.

"That isn't going to work but good effort," the voice called out. "But you're right, I should stop stalling. Just because you have eternity doesn't mean the rest of them do."

Chloe's interest piqued again.

"You still have a role to play in this war," the voice told her. "When the dragon finds you

again he will give you a choice. It will seem to be a trick. I assure you it isn't. Take whichever path you feel is right for you. But remember what I've said. The universe is not done with you quite yet."

Chloe could tell she was alone again. The air was cold and still. "Nobody ever comes out and says anything real!" she screamed out. It echoed off the trees and faded into the darkness.

#

LUCIFER

"The upper plane is going to flip its lid when they find out you're back here getting your hands dirty in a war you swore you'd never take sides in again," Lucifer said with a smile. It delighted him to think of Yahweh and the archangels discovering Hades was back in the game.

Hades laughed. "Let's be clear, Lucifer. I'm only here to help you stay on the right path. If, when, it comes down to a fight, you're on your own."

"I wasn't suggesting you were going to fight along side me," Lucifer retorted.

"Good, because this war is still between you and your father," Hades said.

Lucifer stared into the fireplace and watched the flames dance. That's always what it came down to in the end. His hatred for the leader of the upper plane. He would destroy the middle plane if it was the last thing he did. And the way things were playing out, it just might be.

#

TYLER

The training room was growing more and more crowded every day, which both worried and delighted Tyler at the same time. On the one hand, it meant the number of people on his side was growing. On the other hand, it meant the fight was growing closer and someone out there

was worried his side wasn't going to win.

It turned out Gemma was more skilled than Tyler imagined. She was teaching him hand to hand combat and she'd knocked him on his ass more times than he was comfortable with. Thankfully she didn't gloat about it. "Give me a minute," Tyler asked her after she helped him up from another easy takedown. She nodded and handed him a towel.

"You've got skills that will probably keep you from having to use any of what I'm trying to teach you, but it's better that you know how to defend yourself in case your energy is tapped out or damaged in any way," Gemma suggested.

Tyler hadn't even thought of that. To him, the electric energy he was able to emit from his palms was unlimited. "Shit," he said under his breath.

Abby was sitting with Adina when Tyler approached her. They were clearly locked in a staring contest. Tyler wondered if he should tell Adina that Abby could sit that way for several eternities. But it seemed Adina was just as capable of not blinking. His presence caused Adina's eye color to shift from yellow to blue. Abby lost concentration and looked away. "I win again," Adina smiled.

"Good job," Tyler said and held up his hand to high five Adina. Abby stared at him. "I need you for a minute," he smiled at her and tried to look regretful that he'd made her lose.

"You shouldn't breed competition into someone who's already got the fire of Lucifer and the tenacity of Chloe in her," Abby scolded as they walked to a corner of the room.

Tyler knew she was right, but he had more pressing matters to discuss. "Who has the capability of rendering my powers obsolete?"

Abby tilted her head in her usual manner which meant she was contemplating and

confused all at once. “As far as I know, only the gods. Or Prometheus. Why?”

“Something Gemma said, about fight training. Got me thinking,” Tyler told her.

“We’re going to win this fight Tyler,” Abby assured him.

Tyler tried to smile and act as if he agreed, and believed. He didn’t.

#

PROMETHEUS

Once again the titan was taken by surprise that a guest had shown up at his door without him previously predicting it. And once again it was his brother.

“Epimetheus,” Prometheus greeted him.

“Brother,” Epimetheus smiled.

Despite the desire to close the door in his face, Prometheus invited his brother in. The only time Epimetheus acknowledged that they were related was when he needed something. And it was usually something big.

“Tea?” Prometheus offered.

Epimetheus nodded and sat in one of the overstuffed chairs in Prometheus’s living room.

“Things are oddly quiet around here,” Epimetheus noted between sips of tea.

“Yes,” Prometheus agreed. It had always been this way, but with the pending battle and his new ability to watch over the events without consequence, it was odd things had gotten so still.

Prometheus and his brother had never really been close. The resentment Epimetheus had for him always sat in the air like a weight neither of them could lift. Today was no different. But he was not going to ask him what it was he was after. Epimetheus was going to have to either sit

there in silence, or speak on his own.

The only sound in the room was the clattering of tea cups against saucers and the slow sips of hot liquid. Prometheus knew his brother was playing the same game. He also knew it was Epimetheus who had come to see him. For a brief moment Prometheus considered maybe this was a social call after all.

“I need your help,” Epimetheus said quietly.

Prometheus had the good sense to not be disappointed. He’d learned valuable lessons in his thousands of years on this plane. “With what?”

“Pandora.” Epimetheus said her name with both sadness and admiration.

Prometheus set his cup and saucer on the table with more force than he meant to. Epimetheus’s wife had agreed to a life of servitude in exchange for protection. “She cannot be helped,” Prometheus told him.

“She can. We can break the contract. You know it. I’m going to get her back with or without your help,” Epimetheus retorted.

“If you are going after her on your own, why are you asking for my help?” Prometheus prodded.

“If. When, the others discover what I’m up to, I need you to back me up.”

Prometheus laughed. “You cannot be serious.”

“I am serious Prometheus. You and I both know they’ll listen to you now. I have burned all my bridges. You are the last of my allies.”

Prometheus felt guilty feeling it, but he knew deep down he was not truly an ally to his brother any more than Epimetheus was to him. But he gave the titan credit for trying to be

vulnerable.

“I doubt that to be true, brother. I cannot, will not, stop you in your quest to rescue your wife. But I cannot do much more than turn a blind eye and let you go on your way. My attention must be given to other matters.”

“Fair enough,” Epimetheus said with a grumble. He stood and headed for the door.

“Good luck,” Prometheus offered.

“You as well, I imagine your fight will be a great deal harder than mine.”

Prometheus watched as his brother shut the door behind him. He knew Epimetheus was right.

#

TYLER

Tyler’s conversation with Abby did nothing to slow down his racing thoughts. He hadn’t considered the idea of having his powers taken away during combat. There was no way Prometheus would have created him to do battle with someone who could beat him, right? He supposed it was possible. Nothing had gone according to plan so far. Although maybe it had? Tyler wasn’t sure who was pulling the strings anymore. The greek gods were poking their nose in things more often, there were entirely too many players on the board now, and he found himself in a situation he never thought he’d be in. Father, partner, hero?

“Maybe that’s what the universe had in store for you, even if it wasn’t in your plans.”

Tyler spun around to face the voice who had spoken to him. He knew who it was before turning around, but he was certain it couldn’t possibly be the archangel. Sure enough, there stood Gabriel, looking as solemn and quietly strange as usual. “Hi.” Tyler had no other words in the

moment.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to pry in your thoughts, I was trying to announce my presence without scaring you,” Gabriel said with a crooked smile.

Tyler nodded as an acknowledgement. “What brings you to our humble plane?”

“We. Yahweh, and I, felt it was beneficial for me to be on this plane for a while. There’s something happening and we can’t quite put a finger on it,” Gabriel admitted.

Tyler shook his head. He was pretty sure that wasn’t true. There was nothing about this entire show that the Upper Plane didn’t have their hands in. But he humored the angel anyway.

“What sort of shift?”

“New players, new activities, and strange occurrences we haven’t seen before. There was a Hell Hound loose at Griffith Park last night. They should not be able to pass between the lower and middle planes unless a door between them is open.”

“Do you think these new, players, sent the Hell Hound here?” Tyler asked. He pictured a giant Hell Hound roaming the park and wondered how it went unnoticed.

“They’re undetected by human eyes,” Gabriel answered the silent question. “The angels have been watching your plane closely. They believe some sort of rift was created when Pandora passed into the lower plane.”

Tyler cocked his head to the side.

“Rips in the fabric holding the planes closed between each other. We haven’t seen anything unusual between your plane and our plane, just from below.”

“Other than a rogue Hell Hound, what else have the angels seen?” Tyler asked without really wanting to know the answer.

Gabriel looked around the room. He locked eyes on Gemma. “The Greeks pride themselves on keeping things balanced. If they sent Pyrrha here to help you, they’ve certainly sent, or discovered, someone on their side helping Lucifer.”

“Any idea who, or what, that would be?”

Gabriel shook his head no.

#

LUCIFER

A knock on Lucifer’s door startled him. He hadn’t had anyone visit him with the courtesy of knocking on his door in a while now. “Enter.” The door opened and a woman he hadn’t seen before stepped inside. Lucifer tried to assess whether or not he was in danger of if this was one of his demons who hadn’t fully formed yet. She stood there letting him stare.

“What can I do for you?” Lucifer tried his hand at flirting. He shuddered and promised not to do it again.

The woman’s expression, which was clearly sheer panic and fear, did not change. “You instructed us to bring you information on anything suspicious going on around here,” she said quietly.

Lucifer tried to quell his anger at how timid and meek this creature was. But then again, he’d taught his underlings to fear him. “Go on,” he instructed.

“A Hell Hound escaped last night, the angels watching the middle plane dispatched of it.”

“Escaped?”

“It seems that a rip in the space between planes opened up and it just, walked through it.”

Lucifer stared at the woman. Was she lying to him? Why would she? “What happened to

it?”

“Sir?”

“The Hell Hound.” Lucifer said, raising his voice.

The woman blanched. How a demon woman could blanch was beyond Lucifer’s imagination but then again she’d just brought him news of Hell Hounds roaming the middle plane and that wasn’t entirely possible either. “They destroyed it.”

This made Lucifer even more angry. They were fully capable of sending the hound back to the lower plane. They were getting overly bold and overly cautious. Maybe his movements had spooked them after all.

“Thank you,” he nodded at the woman who backed out of the room as quickly as possible.

Lucifer looked up. “Is this your doing?”

There was silence. Lucifer continued to stare at the empty space that used to be a ceiling. He must have forgotten to put one back when he recreated the room. “Hades!” He shouted the name.

“Lucifer!” Hades screamed back at him.

This new partnership was going to drive Lucifer mad. “You’re already mad my friend,” Hades taunted him. “Look, Lucy, you can’t just ask me a question and expect I have an immediate answer. I’m not Google.”

“How. Do you possibly know, about Google?” Lucifer called out.

“I created the Internet, I know everything that goes on with it,” Hades said proudly. “No Lucy, I didn’t open any doors between planes recently.”

“One of my people just informed me that a Hell Hound walked through one last night.”

“Interesting. You should look into that, and keep a tighter leash on your creatures.”

Lucifer rolled his eyes. “Yeah I’ll get right on that.”

But first, he created a new ceiling.

#

PROMETHEUS

His night was restless. He kept picturing Pandora. She was standing at a table in a what looked like an open market. The items on display were nothing he’d ever seen before. Talismans, he assumed. Used in spells that should never be created. When he woke up he hoped the dreams were simply a check in. But the things Prometheus wished rarely came true.

“You are right, brother,” a voice boomed in his head.

“Athena,” he spoke her name out loud.

“Epimetheus came to you with a request,” Athena said this as a fact, it wasn’t a question.

“Yes,” Prometheus said with a sigh.

“We’d suggest you help him with it.” also a fact, not a question.

“Why?” Prometheus asked in earnest. The gods were never more uneasy than when Prometheus and Epimetheus were doing a task together. Although these days Epimetheus on his own wasn’t so much of a gift either.

“Exactly,” Athena said. “You have seen where she is. That is all we are able to show you. As for how to get there, and exactly where it is, that will be up to you.”

Prometheus sighed again. “I’ll get right on it.”

Epimetheus’s mansion was quiet. The guards were no longer at the gates, and no one

greeted him at the front door. He let himself in. Had Epimetheus already left for the in between world?

“Brother?” Prometheus called out. It echoed through the empty foyer and carried through the house.

No one answered. Prometheus headed toward the back of the house, stepped outside onto the back courtyard and noticed activity happening in the guest house. He rushed to the door and heard raised voices.

Inside he found Epimetheus holding Deanna, the caretaker’s wife, by the neck. Sam, the caretaker, was laying lifeless on the floor next to them. Prometheus couldn’t decide if he should try to rescue Deanna or find out if Sam was still alive.

“Prometheus!” Deanna croaked out. “Tell him, tell him I cannot bring him to his wife. Please! Prometheus!”

“Brother, let her go. She’s telling the truth, she cannot bring you to Pandora,” Prometheus said calmly. “But if you hurt her she cannot tell you where she is either.”

Epimetheus flinched. Prometheus stepped forward and placed his hand on Epimetheus’s arm. “Brother.”

Epimetheus let go of Deanna, as she fell to the floor Prometheus caught her, preventing her from hitting too hard. “Sam,” she cried out to him.

“I didn’t kill him,” Epimetheus said with an air of offense.

“What are you thinking?” Prometheus yelled as he knelt to wake Sam from whatever slumber Epimetheus had rendered him to.

“She knows where my wife is,” Epimetheus said as a defense.

“Yes. But how is she going to tell you if you kill her,” Prometheus retorted.

“What are you doing here?” Epimetheus said after regaining his composure.

“Against my better judgement, I’m here to help,” Prometheus said.

#

Once they had revived Sam and gotten him settled on the couch Prometheus turned his attention to Deanna. “I’m sorry for the pain we’ve all caused you in the past few days,” he said solemnly. “I understand if you have no desire to help us. But I’d appreciate it greatly if you’d at least point us in the direction of where we can find the place where Pandora is being held.”

Deanna was quiet for what seemed to be an eternity. Prometheus couldn’t imagine the thoughts going through her mind. Well, maybe he could. This poor woman had been tortured by Pandora and Epimetheus, both whom she’d been loyal to for years. Not to mention how much her husband had gone through taking care of Epimetheus and Yahweh when the deity had been held here against his will.

“Interplanum,” Deanna said finally.

Prometheus didn’t know what that meant. “What’s that?”

“It’s where Pandora is. Interplanum. The place between,” Deanna answered him.

“Thank you,” Prometheus said genuinely. As he stood up to leave Deanna put her hand on his arm.

“You cannot travel there without me. Or at least not without someone who can guide you through the place. And someone who is well known amongst the people who live and work there,” she said.

Epimetheus let out a grumble behind them. Prometheus turned to him. He didn’t have to

say the words. His brother knew exactly what he had to do. And he was terrible at it.

“I’m sorry,” Epimetheus said the words like they were torture.

“That wasn’t very convincing but I will help you,” Deanna said after a beat. “For Prometheus.”

#

JONATHAN

The darkness was overwhelming. He couldn’t see where he was and it scared him. He kept looking around, hoping the thick fog would clear just enough for him to catch a glimpse of his surroundings. He was starting to feel a strange sense of claustrophobia. As his panic heightened the fog opened up and a figure appeared in front of him.

“I should have known,” Jonathan’s voice carried through the space. His demeanor calmed but only slightly as he found himself face to face with the devil himself. “Where have you taken me?”

“Nowhere.” Lucifer looked around. “Honestly. You’re still standing in the kitchen at your apartment.”

Jonathan could only see fog. He remembered he had been making himself a sandwich when everything went black. He recalled his last thought. The one he’d had nearly every time Tyler left for training, leaving him alone and unable to be helpful.

“Yes, that’s why I’ve come,” Lucifer said. “You called for me.”

Jonathan scoffed. “That’s not true in any way, shape or form.”

“Oh but it is. Any time you think a negative thought about your human life, I get a ping,” Lucifer said with a smirk.

“You have me on some sort of underworld Google alert?” Jonathan said sarcastically.

“Something like that,” Lucifer said in earnest.

“Is there a point to you interrupting my perfectly fine and perfectly normal pity session?”

Lucifer shifted his weight from side to side and tapped his fingers together. “I can help you with your, human issue,” he said finally.

Jonathan shook his head no.

“No you don’t have a human problem or no I can’t help you?” Lucifer taunted.

“I don’t want any part of anything you’ve got to offer.” Jonathan raised his voice.

“You think your boyfriend is going to stand by you as you age well past his youthful good looks and immortal body?” Lucifer asked pointedly.

Jonathan flinched. The demon had him there. He had thought about that moment. The one in which Tyler grew tired of him and moved on to a younger man. He smiled.

“What?” Lucifer caught the slyness in the gesture.

“You.”

“Me?”

“You honestly think you’re the only one that can offer me eternal life? I’ve got gods and angels all around me,” Jonathan said. “And none of them will ask me to give up something as drastic and life changing as whatever it is you think I can give you in exchange for this generous offer you seem to think you’re bringing me.”

“Indeed you do. But none of them will ever offer it, and they certainly wouldn’t agree to it should you ask them. It isn’t in their rules. I, on the other hand, don’t tend to follow any sort of guidelines.”

“Clearly,” Jonathan retorted.

“Think about it Johnny. I’m offering you endless lifetimes to do, whatever you want,”

Lucifer ignored him.

“Does that mean you don’t see yourself winning this fight in the end? I mean, if you’re offering me endless lifetimes with Tyler and Adina, sounds like you’re feeling the imminent defeat.”

“Just because I am aware of the Omphalos’s inability to be destroyed doesn’t mean I won’t win. I will get what I want. I’m perfectly fine existing on the same plane, as long as we’re all clear on who’s running the show.”

“The answer is no, Lucifer. I’ve seen what entering into a contract does to a person,” Jonathan said.

“It’s funny, how suddenly you all forgot about how awful that woman was to begin with. I didn’t make her evil. That’s not how it works. I take people with nefarious tendencies and heighten them. I don’t need to go around making people my minions. They come to me on their own.”

Jonathan folded his arms around him. “Can I go back to making my sandwich now?”

“If you change your mind, you know how to find me,” Lucifer said with a smile. He stepped back into the thick fog and was gone.

The fog left as quickly as Lucifer had disappeared.

#

PROMETHEUS

“You’re going to have to do better than this,” Deanna said gesturing up and down

Epimetheus and Prometheus's bodies. "You may have fooled ordinary humans into believing you're one of them but the people of Interplanum can see through these minimal effects without even trying."

It was true. Both Prometheus and his brother had don't the bare minimum in disguising themselves as titans. They dress in whatever garb was fitting for the time, and they hid as much of their muscular frames as possible without making themselves look, meek, but the witches and wizards of the in between world saw things no one else did. Prometheus held his hand out, palm facing his brother.

Epimetheus put his hands up to block him. "What difference does it make if the people recognize us?"

"We can't just go barging in there and take back your wife. They have rules, just like we do. We have to do it stealthily and carefully," Prometheus told him.

"Fine. Just don't make me look weak. Or stupid," Epimetheus argued.

Prometheus held his tongue. The things he could have said to his brother in that moment. Light from his fingertips floated over Epimetheus. His form slowly changed, making him much more portly, shortening his stature, and giving him a patch of baldness right on the top of his head. Epimetheus ran for a mirror and scoffed.

"I'll change it back when we have Pandora safely back here," Prometheus promised him. He then turned his efforts to his own appearance. His changes weren't nearly as drastic. He shortened his stature by one inch and greyed his hair slightly. His muscular frame remained. "I'm the younger brother," he pointed out when Epimetheus rolled his eyes at him.

Deanna waved her hand over the open air. A doorway appeared and she gestured for

Prometheus to walk through it. He did, followed by Epimetheus, and then herself.

“Welcome to Interplanum. The space between your world and the world of magic. If anyone finds out I brought you here they will strip me of my powers. And then burn me at the stake. They do not mess around,” Deanna said as the door behind them disappeared. “Stay with me at all times and we’ll be fine. And please, do not, under any circumstances, use your powers here.”

“How are we meant to get my wife back if you won’t let us use our powers?” Epimetheus whispered.

“We’re going to buy her back, imbecile,” Deanna said with a shake of her head.

“I don’t think she likes me much right now,” Epimetheus whispered to Prometheus.

“Brother, I don’t think she ever liked you,” Prometheus said with a laugh.

Deanna led them through a maze of houses made of cement and rocks, the streets were cobblestone and dirt. Prometheus wondered why a group with powerful magical abilities didn’t live in better conditions. When Deanna stopped at the edge of the last house on the small street Prometheus saw the opening of the marketplace he’d dreamt about and knew immediately where they were heading. He scanned for the table of wares he couldn’t put names on. He didn’t see it.

“Come,” Deanna instructed.

They walked through the tents of vendors selling colorful crystals, animals Prometheus hadn’t seen before, and potion bottles containing herbs and liquids he imagined did terrible things. He tried to shake off the thought. He’d only been taught that magic and spells and potions were the devil’s doing. But he had never felt anything other than respect and love for Deanna, and to his knowledge she’d never used her powers to bring anyone or anything any harm. Even

when she had the chance she didn't hurt Pandora. Not physically anyway.

Deanna stopped, Prometheus almost ran into the back of her. "Sorry," he whispered.

In front of them was the table he'd seen in his dream. Behind it sat Pandora. He instinctively smiled at her. She looked the same, no worse for wear, being a mere merchant at a magical market instead of living the life of luxury she had grown used to in Greece. The only difference was her dress. Tattered cloth with her hair wrapped in a bun.

"Deanna," Pandora said with a shock. "What are you doing here?"

"My," Deanna cleared her throat. Prometheus and Epimetheus stood at attention by her side. "Clients would like to speak to your handler."

For a moment Prometheus was confused. Why hadn't Pandora recognized them too? Then he remembered the new disguises he had made for himself and his brother. He nodded in Pandora's direction.

"I'll see if he's available," Pandora said before ducking behind a canopy.

"She cannot know who you are just yet, it's too dangerous, okay?" Deanna whispered to them.

Prometheus knew it was mostly for Epimetheus's benefit. He stood still, clearly stunned by the sight of his wife, and her lack of recognition when they approached.

After a brief wait a man stepped out from behind the canopy. As soon as his eyes locked on Deanna his demeanor changed. She and the wizard clearly had history. And it didn't seem like good times.

"Deanna," he greeted her with little emotion. "What brings you back here?"

The words seemed like a warning. Prometheus continued to observe despite wanting to

step in and be the hero.

“My friends are interested in some of your wares,” Deanna told him with a smile.

The wizard’s demeanor chanced slightly. It seemed the prospect of a sale put him in a better mood.

“Well, one item in particular,” Epimetheus spoke.

“Oh?” the wizard brightened even more.

“Maybe we can discuss this in private?” Deanna suggested.

Prometheus looked around. Eyes were beginning to fall on them. There was clearly a rift between the witch and the wizard and there was an audience gathering to see the show.

The wizard shook his head. “Right here is fine.”

Before Prometheus could stop him his brother spoke again. “Your servant. She belongs to me and I’d like her back now.”

The air went still. The wizard laughed, it was a cackling, evil, bone chilling sound. “You should have known better than to bring gods into Interplanum,” he pointed a finger at Deanna.

A murmur traveled through the crowd. Prometheus tried to shake his head in denial of the accusation.

“I suggest you go back to whatever cloud you came from,” the wizard warned. “These people don’t take too kindly to your species here.”

“I’m not going anywhere without my wife!” Epimetheus yelled, as he shook with anger his disguise fell revealing his true self. Prometheus tried to calm him. But the titan grew taller, stronger, and more angry. He towered over the crowd, the marketplace, and Prometheus. It was the first time in many centuries since he’d seen his brother’s true form.

“Stop him!” Deanna cried out.

“I can’t,” Prometheus whispered to her.

#

CHLOE

It turned out having all the time in the world didn’t make Chloe any more patient. She hated waiting. She’d been that way all her life. She wasn’t sure why she thought things would change in death. She figured this was her payback for all the wrongs she’d done. The dragon hadn’t returned. The voice that came out of nowhere talking gibberish hadn’t said another word. She was left to sit with her thoughts. Which was her least favorite part about waiting. She started pacing in circles. Being still meant her mind wandered. At least moving kept her busy. The thick fog and rocky ground meant she had to concentrate on each step she took.

There was one blessing Chloe couldn’t deny. She didn’t end up in purgatory with brain cancer that was eating away at her mind. It was just, gone. The fact that she could walk in circles and not get tired was a good indication of the change.

“You’re certainly making me dizzy though.”

Chloe spun around to see where the voice was coming from. A large creature stood before her. The dragon. About damn time, she thought before remembering it could read her mind.

“Sorry.” Chloe stood as still as she could. She didn’t want to piss off the creature, especially if it was about to give her important information about her future.

“It seems the universe is not quite done with you. It’s rare that someone’s fate is presented to me so soon,” the dragon said.

Soon? Chloe thought.

“Typically souls who end up in purgatory remain here for at least a year before they are given their final resting place. You should consider yourself lucky.”

It took every bit of self control not to argue the definition of lucky with a supernatural being but Chloe restrained herself. “You have news for me then?” She said through gritted teeth.

The dragon lowered its head to get closer. Chloe flinched, a natural reaction. It didn’t seem to bother the creature. “In order to restore some balance in the world we’re dealing with right now, the greeks have asked a favor,” the dragon said with an air of resentment.

Chloe was never one to miss these sorts of cues. She knew the underworld was not too happy about having to both be in league with and be under the thumb of the greek gods. She almost smiled. But again, maintained her composure.

“Pandora is currently being held as payment for services she requested of a conveyer of dark magic, in a place called Interplanum. The greeks are attempting to negotiate an exchange. Your life for hers.”

Chloe stared at the dragon for a moment. She briefly remembered talk of witches and wizards as she teetered on the verge of death. She thought it was the cancer taking over. She shouldn’t have been surprised they actually exist. Especially since she was hearing it from a talking dragon. “No deal,” she finally said.

The dragon had let her go on that journey in her mind before continuing. “I haven’t finished. You will be made immortal.”

The words rattled around in her head. Immortality. Isn't that what got her in this mess in the first place. "That's what got me into this mess in the first place," she decided to say out loud.

"Indeed." The dragon didn't even try to argue that point. "However, this is different. You will live out eternity in Interplanum. You will not be allowed to travel between worlds."

She knew what he was saying. She would still be unable to see her daughter. She'd made peace with that when she thought she would end up on the lower or upper planes. As least she could keep an eye on her then. This meant no access at all.

"To be fair, you would not have had access to her on any plane," the dragon pointed out. "Only the highest of beings can watch over their loved ones and even then you have to prove you have the ability to simply observe. It's why guardians are assigned randomly, if a mortal is worthy of one. You've seen the consequences when an angel steps over the line."

"She at least got to live on a plane where her family existed," Chloe argued.

"Several years after her last living relative left the plane," the dragon said.

As much as she and Abby had fought against each other this news made Chloe sad for the angel. She shook off the feeling. "How much time do I have?" Chloe asked. "To make a decision," she added on the dragon's confused head turn.

"None. Apparently this is a pressing issue and either you agree to the swap or I find someone else who will," the dragon said gruffly.

Chloe looked around. She didn't see anyone else around.

"Just because you can't see them doesn't mean there aren't any other souls here Chloe. The powers in charge don't like you all talking to each other."

Chloe laughed. Some day she'd ask the dragon to tell her how it came to be that so many

rules were put in place. Somewhere, at some point, someone had fucked up royally. She wanted to know all the gory details.

The dragon's eyes sparkled slightly. Chloe knew she had hit on something. They then changed back to the dark yellow menace imploring her to make a decision about her future without any time to consider the options.

“The options are spend forever amongst the living or wander amongst millions of other souls where you will be lost and eventually forgotten.”

“Harsh,” she scoffed at the creature. “Offer accepted.”

#

PROMETHEUS

“What do you mean you can't?” Deanna screamed at him.

“They took away my ability to go full titan,” Prometheus explained.

“Whatever, do something before he kills Frank,” Deanna continued to scream at him.

“Who's Frank?” Prometheus said it out loud but knew immediately she was talking about the wizard. What kind of name is Frank?

Prometheus stepped in between his brother, who was easily four times his size now, and tried to get his attention. “Epimetheus calm yourself,” the titan screamed. He felt ridiculous. He stared up at the sky “Really? You're gonna let this happen? You can't make an exception here? I know you've got at least one more favor in you!”

Within moments he felt a weight lifted off of his shoulders and he was growing in height and size. He continued until he was towering over his brother. “Stop it now!” He put a hand on his brother's shoulder. “You're making quite the spectacle here you big dumb idiot. I thought we

agreed to let this one be solved quietly.”

“I changed my mind,” Epimetheus barked out.

“Clearly.” Prometheus was stalling. Below them Deanna was attempting to convince Frank the wizard to flee the scene. For some unknown reason he was refusing. Prometheus looked down at them. “Why are you still standing there?”

The wizard looked up at him. “I belong here. Why aren’t you leaving?” Frank retorted.

He had a point. Prometheus turned his attention back to Epimetheus. “You need to calm yourself and go back to human size. We can figure this out like people. We’re not savages.”

“Speak for yourself,” Epimetheus said and attempted to move past Prometheus.

Prometheus was the stronger of the two titans even when he wasn’t taller than his brother. Epimetheus had no chance against him. But he wouldn’t give up easily. The two wrestled for several minutes before Epimetheus finally relented. When Prometheus looked down again he wasn’t surprised to find Deanna and Frank still standing there staring up at him.

There was no sign of Pandora. Frank must have had her hidden somewhere. Whatever magic the wizard was using it to keep her hidden was powerful.

“Where’s Pandora?” Epimetheus said for what must have been the hundredth time.

“Safely out of your reach,” Frank yelled up at him.

“Come on brother, let’s return to a more reasonable form,” Prometheus suggested again.

Epimetheus nodded. Prometheus watched as his brother shrunk back to the six foot two man he’d been posing as for centuries. The disguises they’d come in with were rendered moot as soon as Epimetheus pulled this stunt, so Prometheus returned to his usual human form as well.

“If you think I’m negotiating a deal with you now, you’re out of your mind,” Frank

barked as soon as the titans had returned to a normal size.

Prometheus stepped in front of Epimetheus once again, hoping to avoid a physical fight. “We’ll figure this out, just stop, honestly Epimetheus you’ve already done enough damage here.”

He pointed around to the crowd who was still gathered around them. There was a mixture of anger and admiration, confusion and absolute hatred. Titans didn’t belong in this place. And these two were causing all sorts of problems.

As he turned his attention back to the matter at hand Prometheus noticed that Deanna had gone silent. She was perfectly still, her eyes glazed over.

“What did you do to her?” Prometheus prodded the wizard.

“Nothing,” he said putting his hands up as if it were proof he couldn’t be doing this.

“Deanna?” Prometheus shook her. No response. “Deanna!” He tried screaming it. As he started to yell her name louder Deanna broke out of the trance. She turned her attention to the wizard, ignoring Prometheus’s look of worry and confusion.

“The gods have an offer for you,” Deanna said slowly.

Her non-responsive state suddenly made sense to Prometheus. But he was still confused. The gods hadn’t mentioned any sort of deal to him.

“They’ve found someone who’d be the perfect companion, and servant, for you,” she continued.

“There is no one in the known worlds that is an equal replacement for Pandora,” Frank argued.

“Indeed.” Deanna nodded. “But they are willing to overlook your egregious act of enslaving one of their creations if you agree to this deal.”

The wizard laughed. Again it was loud and heavy.

“This is serious, Frank,” Deanna spoke as herself. “You could jeopardize all of Interplanum if you do not take this deal.”

Frank looked around. Contemplation flashed in his eyes. “Fine,” he said with a sigh.

“Release Pandora from the protection spell and they will send the replacement,” Deanna said with an air of relief.

The wizard reached into his pocket and removed a vile from it. He slammed it onto the table in front of them and it broke into pieces. A fully formed Pandora appeared out of thin air, startling Prometheus and Epimetheus.

“You shouldn’t have come here,” Pandora yelled at them.

“You’re free to go,” Frank told her.

Pandora stared at him in disbelief before stepping around the table and standing between the two titans. As soon as she was safely in their grasp Chloe appeared.

Prometheus looked up and shook his head at the sky. “I should have known,” he whispered.

Chloe shrugged at him. “They made me a choice I couldn’t say no to.”

#

#

LUCIFER

He wasn’t all that surprised the mortal had turned down his offer. But it was worth the trip. The rumors of anomalies created when Pandora opened up a hole in the protections to

rescue her daughter proved to be true. Lucifer had walked right into the apartment the Omphalos shared with his mortal boyfriend. But he returned to his own plane drained of all energy. He wouldn't be making many trips back there until the protections could be damaged more than they currently were. He sat in his red leather chair in front of the fireplace. His mind wandered to his exchange with Hades. He hated the idea that the greek was involved but the god was right. Lucifer needed a new plan. Everything he'd done so far had failed him.

A book fell from one of the shelves starting him. He stood up from the chair and went to retrieve it. Things didn't just fall off shelves in this room unless there was a reason for it. He picked up the book and instinctively turned to the last page.

"The greeks have granted Chloe immortality." He read the words out loud. "Why would they do that?" He asked the words on the page.

"No telling. However it's not all good news, for her anyway. She's been given to a practitioner of dark magic, in exchange for Pandora. She will live in eternity as his ward." The words appeared as if the book was have a conversation with him. Lucifer assumed he was speaking to Hades but it couldn't have been the god. He would have used a different term. The greeks, that's what people like himself called them.

"Who is this?" Lucifer felt stupid doing it, but he spoke directly to the book.

"An ally. It is not important to know who I am right now. You will learn my identity in time."

Lucifer closed the book forcefully. This entire exercise was trying his patience. But maybe that's what they were trying to do. Annoy him so much he'd give up this fight and go back to ruling the lower plane and put away his ambitions to be bigger, better, than everyone

else. Well, he'd show them.

#

PROMETHEUS

He would not leave until he had apologized to each and every witch and wizard in the marketplace. Once he knew Epimetheus and Pandora were safely on the other side of the door between the two worlds he returned to Frank's station and made sure it was back in the order the wizard wished it to be in. He then made his way up and down the aisle promising beyond all measure that he and his brother and anyone else of their kind would never return to this place. They were wary of his words but nodded anyway. Prometheus knew they were afraid of him. He tried to make himself as small as possible without changing his appearance again. He feared another drastic change would scare the folks of Interplanum permanently.

Deanna was pulling at his arm as he greeted and bowed each merchant. "We need to go now," she kept saying.

When Prometheus was satisfied that he'd done enough damage control he followed Deanna to the edge of the marketplace where she conjured the doorway and pushed him through it. He turned to make sure she had followed him. She did.

They had returned to the guest house in the same state they'd left it. Sam was on the couch resting and there were tables and chairs turned over from the scuffle between he and Epimetheus. Prometheus turned to Deanna.

"I'm truly sorry for the trouble we've caused you," he said as he picked up a chair and set it on its legs. "As I said to the people in Interplanum, we won't be disturbing you any further. I'm sure Epimetheus would understand if you wished to be let go of your duties here. And I'll make

sure you are compensated for your troubles.”

Deanna smiled at him. “I can’t speak for my husband, but I myself cannot imagine trying to find other employment at my advanced age,” she said. “Your apology is accepted, and your offer is appreciated. I’ll keep an eye on your brother, and Pandora,” she promised.

Prometheus nodded and returned her smile. “Thank you.”

#

TYLER

The training room was a mess. Tyler had spent several hours destroying anything that had a target on it. His fingers burned and he was having a hard time catching his breath. Gemma had long since given up being his sparring partner and she and Abby had taken Adina out to the restaurant to have dinner. The only ones left in the room were Gabriel and Azazel who seemed to be having a fairly intense conversation.

It was still a strange sight. To anyone else they looked like men. To Tyler they were an archangel and a formerly high ranking demon.

“I’m telling you, Azazel, the Upper Plane doesn’t deal out favors. Just because they thank Him for things doesn’t mean Yahweh did anything to help them. Athletes are champions because they trained hard and played well. Actors don’t win awards because Yahweh wanted them to,” Gabriel was saying. “Can you honestly say that someone who’s exceptionally good at something make a deal with Lucifer to get that way?”

Azazel knitted his eyebrows together. “Not that I was privy to, but I wouldn’t put it past Lucifer for making those sorts of offers.”

“You should be careful who you share that information with,” Tyler said as he

approached them. “Us humans like to believe if we pray hard enough we’ll achieve great things.”

“We don’t deal in granting wishes, you of all people should know that,” Gabriel pointed out.

“Oh I’m fully aware of the deal. It’s just that people like those in Jonathan’s congregation are still under the impression that someone out there is listening,” Tyler said.

“I didn’t say no one was listening. We hear the prayers,” Gabriel said with a slight tinge of offense.

“Did you ever wonder if that’s the same thing as granting wishes?” Tyler wondered out loud.

“How so?” Gabriel offered.

“Most people pray to whoever it is they believe in just hoping they’re out there listening. So if they pray for something like, a championship win or a pony for Christmas, and they get that thing, they think someone listened. Maybe you’re granting wishes without even knowing it,” Tyler explained.

Gabriel sat speechless for several minutes. “I suppose that’s why people continue to pray. Sometimes it works,” he finally said.

“People continue to pray because they are taught from an early age that they are to both believe in themselves and a higher being. Anything we achieve cannot be attributed to our own hard work but to the magical being up in the sky,” Tyler said. “And naturally anything or anyone doing bad things is the devil’s doing,” he turned to Azazel and shrugged.

“None of this is news to either of us.” Azazel shrugged back at him.

“No, I didn’t think it was, but it seems that both Yahweh and Lucifer take great comfort

in knowing humankind continues to hold those truths at all costs,” Tyler said. “I mean, isn’t that why this war between them has been going on for thousands of years?”

Gabriel and Azazel shared a look. Tyler didn’t have to read their minds to know neither of them could argue against the point. But he also knew they were both pieces in an ongoing game between their ancestors. Though he did give Azazel credit for throwing an audible and defecting to the other side. Whatever side that was these days. Tyler was still having a hard time deciding if they were good, bad, or indifferent.

#

#

JONATHAN

He couldn’t decide which he hated more, being at the training facility with Tyler and the crew watching them train, or sitting at home waiting for Tyler to come back from a day of training. Either situation made him feel helpless. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to fight. It was that he simply couldn’t. This was a war between immortals, gods, demons, people with strength and power that could kill him in an instant. The thought made him think about this encounter with Lucifer. He knew better than to even consider it, but there were moments, like this particular one, when he wondered if he shouldn’t have heard Lucifer out. Being immortal would certainly solve his current problem. “No,” he said out loud.

By the time Tyler got home the sun had gone down and Jonathan had gone through the full cycle of HGTV programming. He’d long since turned off the local news. Watching it made him weep for humanity. When he wasn’t weeping for them anyway, knowing what was coming

for them. He shook off the thought. “Hi,” he said with a forced smile. “How was your day?”

Tyler sighed as he sat next to Jonathan on the couch. “Unsettling,” he said.

Jonathan was ready to tell Tyler all about his visit from the ruler of the lower plane but Tyler’s answer threw him off. “What happened?”

“Gemma,” Tyler started. He seemed to be searching for words. “She uh, mentioned something I hadn’t thought about before.”

Jonathan waited for Tyler to continue. After a long silence Tyler turned to face Jonathan. “What if I lose my powers and I can’t beat him?”

“Why would you lose your powers?” Jonathan asked.

“How do we know Prometheus won’t change his mind about me and just, take them away? Better yet, how do we know someone won’t try to balance the scales and give Lucifer a weapon that could beat me?”

“To be fair, Ty, Lucifer had that weapon and he mishandled it,” Jonathan said.

Tyler looked at him with confusion.

“Chloe, and in turn, Adina. We’ve always had the advantage,” Jonathan pointed out.

There was a sadness in Tyler’s eyes as he stared into Jonathan’s. “We have to be prepared for anything, babe. We cannot take for granted that Adina will always be on our side. He’s still her father.”

Jonathan’s face fell as Tyler said the words. Everything inside him wanted to believe Adina would never side with that, demon. But he knew that was naive. And it was naivety that had gotten him in trouble in the past. The time for being overly confident in faith was gone. He wrapped his arms around Tyler and held him against his chest. “Whatever happens. We’ll figure

it out. It's what we do."

"How was your day?" Tyler asked.

Jonathan considered lying to him. Tyler had enough going on. But he should probably know Lucifer was able to enter the middle plane. That's how he was going to justify it in his mind anyway. "Um," he started.

Tyler sat up and looked at him. "That wasn't your usual 'not much happened today' um," he noted.

"Lucifer came to see me," Jonathan said. He figured pulling the bandaid straight off was the best way to go about this situation. Tyler was going to be furious with someone either way. Either Jonathan for not telling him right away or Lucifer for the audacity of showing up in their kitchen.

Tyler stared at him, Jonathan waited for him to say something. "Holy hell Jonathan," Tyler screamed. "When, and why, and why are you only telling me this now?"

"I was making lunch, in the kitchen." Jonathan pointed toward the room like Tyler wouldn't know where that was. "He just sorta showed up out of nowhere. I mean first the room went dark and I thought something was on fire, it had filled with smoke, that turned out to be fog."

Tyler was opening and closing his mouth, starting and stopping in the middle of words. "What did he want?"

"To offer me immortality," Jonathan said.

Tyler's eyes widened. "In exchange for what?!"

"I have no idea, I didn't accept the offer and I didn't ask what he wanted for it, I wasn't

interested in it either way.” Jonathan was surprised Tyler even thought he’d consider the offer, let alone find out what he’d be losing if he did. “Also you’ve asked all the right questions here, but I’ve noticed you didn’t ask how. So is he able to travel between planes again?”

Tyler’s shoulders loosened slightly. “ Apparently there’s some sort of rift in the protections,” he said. “Pandora fucked things up when she went after Gemma.”

“Ah. Look Ty, don’t be mad, I handled the situation,” Jonathan said. “Things never got out of hand. He didn’t try to forcefully push the offer on me. He seemed to be in a hurry to get back to wherever he came from. The conversation lasted all of three minutes. He offered, I refused, he made a half-assed effort to convince me, then let it go and left. My toast didn’t even have time burn.”

Tyler put his hands on Jonathan’s chest. “If he did anything to hurt you,” he said through gritted teeth.

“I promise, if I thought I was in any real danger I’d have called for you.”

“Okay,” Tyler said with a sigh. “I need sleep,” he said standing up from the couch.

Jonathan followed Tyler into their bedroom. As he reached to turn off the light Tyler kissed him on the forehead.

“Don’t think this discussion is over,” he said quietly. “When I’m more awake and able to process the information, we’re gonna have a conversation about why Lucifer was offering you immortality and how it only took three minutes to turn him down.”

#

LUCIFER

The book stopped speaking to him and the words that had been on the page had long

since vanished. Lucifer wondered how Chloe had managed to convince the greek gods to grant her immortality. They seem to be much more forgiving than the new regime, Lucifer thought. For a moment he wondered if that was the key to his victory. Get the old gods on his side, try to reason with them to see how it could be beneficial to all of them. He knew deep down that would never work. The fact that Hades had traveled to the lower plane hidden under a cloak meant he had done so in secrecy. A clear indication that the greeks weren't exactly keen on his plans. Though he was sure it gave the Hades great pleasure taunting Lucifer before showing himself.

Not that he knew what his plans were at this point. His goal was still clear. Take over the middle plane and lay waste to it. How he was going to go about all that was unclear now. He'd tried breaking the protections, he'd tried creating his own personal allies. And yet, here he sat, still firmly stuck on the lower plane.

The foundations were cracking though. This he was sure of. How else would he have been able to pay a visit to the mortal? He walked right into the man's kitchen like it was nothing. It had drained all his energy, like always though. The cracks needed to get bigger. But how? Lucifer looked around his office to see if any other books would fall off the shelves. They didn't. His thoughts went back to the mortal. He'd been so quick to turn down an offer of eternal life. He didn't even ask what the consequences were, so he couldn't possibly know they were too great. Everyone wanted to live forever. That's why they fought so hard to cure diseases and figure out all the things that taste good are bad for your health.

Humans confused him. It was why he'd decided to destroy them all rather than try to rule them. I mean, aside from the fact that all their teachings portrayed him as the worst kind of bad. It used to bother him. He'd been an angel once, one of the most loved angels that ever was. He

fought by his brother's side as they took power over the upper plane. The books forget that. Or they gloss over it completely. His descent onto the lower plane erased all good he'd ever done. He knew his brother had made sure the stories were told his way. Defiance was never tolerated on the upper plane. He wasn't even the first to go against his brother's wishes, and he certainly wasn't the last. He was just the one who made it count. Or maybe he was just the one who hurt him most. That gave Lucifer a small bit of solace.

He smiled at the thought of that continuing. You couldn't count the number of fallen angels who'd defied the ruler of the upper plane anymore, and yet he was still the only one Yahweh punished as harshly as he had been over the thousands of years he'd been down here. Protections against him had been secured all over the place. They were afraid of him. They should be.

Lucifer was going to get his way no matter what it took to get there. He amended that statement slightly at the thought of his daughter, now a part of those humans he was so eager to destroy. What would he do when they were face to face and he had to destroy her. Would he hesitate? Or would she come to his side to preserve her own life? Lucifer tried to imagine her stepping forward and standing next to him. He didn't much care that it wasn't a loving response, on any level.

If it came down to it he'd destroy her too. He knew he'd have to. If she wasn't on his side she was his enemy. And that's what he did to his enemies. Laid them to waste like the traitors they were.

#

TYLER

As much as Tyler trusted Abby he didn't like the idea of not having Adina at home. She had begged him to let her have a sleepover with the angel. He relented with the promise that they'd check in often. He'd woken up to a text that said "We're having breakfast, we'll see you soon." Tyler wondered if Abby even knew how to make breakfast. But surely in the hundreds of years she'd been on the middle plane someone had at least taught her to make eggs.

As he stood in the shower letting steam fill up the room he remembered his conversation with Jonathan. It made him angry all over again, the audacity of Lucifer coming here. He could feel his energy pool up in his fingertips. He shook out his hands and tried to focus on other things. No need to destroy a perfectly good tile shower today.

When he stepped out of the bathroom he could smell the aroma of bacon coming from the kitchen. He made his way toward there, greeting Jonathan with a smile. "Hi."

"Hi." Jonathan smiled back.

Tyler sat at the small table in the corner of the room and let Jonathan serve him coffee. It was one of the few things he'd asked for when they agreed Jonathan would go back to his duties at his church rather than spend time at the training facility with Tyler and the others. Jonathan had asked Tyler for one simple favor. They'd always have breakfast together in the morning. Tyler wasn't sure Jonathan had intended for it to be more of a "let me serve you breakfast" deal

but he didn't seem to be protesting it either.

Jonathan set a plate of toast, eggs and bacon in front of Tyler and sat down across from him.

“So, I was up all night thinking about this, and I'm just gonna get it out of the way here and now,” Jonathan said.

“Okay,” Tyler said between a bite of eggs.

“I have considered, many times, asking one of our friends, Gabriel, Abby, Prometheus...” Jonathan started “how I can become an immortal.”

Tyler dropped his fork.

“Let me finish before you start lecturing me,” Jonathan cut him off. “The truth is, I am happy as I am. I don't want to live forever. I love you. And I want nothing more than to raise Adina with you. See what she becomes. But that's not my calling. Not my place in all this. So when Lucifer showed up I'd already made up my mind. And in truth, any deal I made, whether it be with a god or a demon, would come with some sort of consequences. There was never a chance I'd agree to anything he said.”

Tyler waited to make sure Jonathan had nothing else to say. “I'm sorry you even had to think about something like that. And I'm sorry it never occurred to me that you would.”

“That's it?” Jonathan asked after a few moments of silence.

Tyler nodded. “That's it. I'm keeping my promise. To trust you. Which I do, more than anyone. You're right. Any way you look at it, asking for immortality comes with consequences. Our allies would ask for something in return just as much as our enemy would. I'd rather have you for, however long we have together, than have to constantly wonder when someone will

come looking for payment.”

Jonathan smiled. “I’ll hold up my promise too. Stay out of the fray and trust that you, and the others, have it covered.”

“I love you too,” Tyler said.

#

LUCIFER

It was true, Lucifer could easily snap his fingers and appear anywhere he wanted to be in the lower plane. But it was cathartic to ascend the rocky stairs down into the depths of the underground, watching as the souls trapped there went from decidedly human to decidedly monstrous as the air grew thinner and the darkness grew darker. It was his time to think. Things had changed drastically in the last several days. And yet they hadn’t, really. His goal was the same. Get to the middle plane and take it over. It gave him a small amount of pleasure to know that the omphalos’s team was adding more pieces, strong contenders, to battle against him. He knew they were afraid of his power, his demon army, and his ability to break through their plane more often than he had ever done before. Granted he couldn’t stay on the plane long, but he was growing more capable of it by the day.

As he continued to revel in his imminent victory and continued to descend the black rocky steps into the dungeons of the lower plane his head began to throb, as if a heartbeat was suddenly present in it.

“Lucifer,” a voice called out in his mind.

Turns out a heartbeat was present in his head. It wasn’t Hades, it wasn’t the omphalos. “Now what!” He said out loud, his voice echoing through the cavernous underground.

“You’re getting a bit too cocky in your assumptions,” the voice said.

“You have no right rummaging around in my head, whoever you are,” Lucifer said out loud, though he wondered why he was making the effort.

“If you truly believe the omphalos and his team are no match for you and your demon army, I’ll go away, but from my view, you’re seriously underestimating their side. Or, overestimating your own, which seems more likely.”

Lucifer was long past being done with these voices in his head, the games the gods were playing with him, and arguing with people he couldn’t see and didn’t know. He continued with his task, assessing the number of demons in his horde and calculating the timing of their readiness.

“In the number of years you’ve been down there, Lucy, how many times has ignoring the voice in your head worked out for you?”

He continued to ignore the voice. His mind remained focused on his army. The numbers were strong. He knew it was too early to know if any of them were going to be of use. But he didn’t need them to be one hundred percent useful. He just needed them to be mean. And these monsters fit that description beyond imagination. He’d been cultivating them for millennia. They were large, and ugly, and there was zero trace of humanity left in any of them.

“The omphalos has grown stronger. He is gaining more confidence every day. His allies are coming together.”

“I know that,” Lucifer broke down and answered it.

“Your daughter is growing stronger too,” the voice said.

He knew it was meant to goad him. He tried not to let it. He’d come down here to get

away from the thought of her. Adina, growing older by the minute, wondering how many of his own traits she'd inherited. And how many of her mother's she'd have.

“More than you can imagine,” the voice told him.

#

TYLER

Prometheus and Gemma were in a heated conversation when Tyler entered the training room. As he approached them he could hear Prometheus urging Gemma to visit her mother. “I’m sure she’d like to see you,” the titan was saying. Tyler stopped just before reaching the pair, trying not to disturb them. Gemma took his approach as an opportunity to bail.

“Sorry,” Tyler greeted Prometheus.

Prometheus watched Gemma as she walked away and sighed. “How are you today?” He said turning his attention to Tyler.

“I’ve had an interesting 24 hours,” Tyler admitted.

“Oh?” Prometheus’s eyes lit up.

“Jonathan got a visit from Lucifer yesterday, in our kitchen.” Tyler’s tone was accusatory.

“Is he okay?” The titan asked immediately.

“Who? Jonathan or Lucifer?” Tyler’s voice didn’t waver.

“Jonathan,” Prometheus said with authority.

“He’s fine,” Tyler answered. “Less shaken up than I am about it all, in fact.”

“What did Lucifer want?” Prometheus asked.

“To give Jonathan eternal life,” Tyler told him.

“In exchange for what?” Prometheus continued the questioning.

“No idea. Jonathan turned him down without asking,” Tyler said, his voice showing the endless admiration he had for his partner. “Which is admirable to say the least.”

“Yes,” Prometheus agreed.

“Are we sure Pandora’s return will prevent Lucifer from showing up on this plane wherever and whenever he pleases?” Tyler’s accusatory tone returned.

“It may take a day or two but yes, the anomalies will right themselves, I promise,” Prometheus assured him.

“Good,” Tyler said.

“Was there something else?”

Tyler paused. “Yeah, I was wondering if you could help me with something.”

Prometheus waited for Tyler to continue.

“I’m having trouble locating my family. And I’d like to see them before,” Tyler took a moment. “Before things get dicey.”

“You’re still worried you won’t survive this?” Prometheus asked him.

“Shouldn’t I be? It seems counterproductive to assume I’m just going to step in front of Lucifer and destroy him. What are we doing here if it’s that simple?” Tyler pointed out.

“Point taken,” Prometheus said. “There will be casualties, as with any war. But do not lose faith in your abilities, or those of the people around you. While it’s important not to make any assumptions either way, it’s also important to have confidence. Lucifer can sense weakness. And he will use it against you. It’s why he visited Jonathan unprovoked. He knew it would get under your skin.”

“I know,” Tyler said with a sigh.

“I won’t make any promises, but I’ll see what I can do about finding your parents,”

Prometheus told him.

“Thank you,” Tyler said with a nod. He started toward the center of the room to begin training.

“Tyler,” Prometheus called him back.

He turned to face the titan. “Yeah?”

“You said Jonathan turned down Lucifer’s offer without question. Are you doing okay with that?”

Tyler knew what Prometheus wanted. To be assured Tyler wouldn’t be distracted by this new development. The titan wasn’t exactly happy about his relationship with Jonathan. Not because he disapproved in principle but because he worried about the distractions it brought with it. “I’m good,” he said with a smile that he hoped conveyed that it was the truth. He’d left their apartment surprisingly satisfied with the conversation he and Jonathan had. In fact he’d left with more admiration than he’d ever had for him.

#

LUCIFER

The voice in his head had gone silent. Lucifer almost wished it hadn’t. He was already way past satisfied with the number of demons in his horde but he continued to descend into the depths of his underground prison. Holding chamber, he corrected himself mentally. These creatures have no idea about the freedom they’re about to experience. “You have no idea,” he said out loud. One of the creatures snarled at him. “Now now.” He held up his hand to calm it.

The beast retreated to the back of his cell.

While the walk down through the dungeons was helpful and cathartic for Lucifer, he had no desire to walk back up the rocky stairs. He snapped his fingers and returned to the dim light of his library. A book he knew he didn't place on his desk sat open on it. "Really?" He said out loud before stepping in front of it. Words appeared on the page.

"This is the only way I can communicate with you," they said. "Unless you'd like me to return to speaking through your mind? I'm certain we'd both prefer not to do that anymore, yes?"

"Yes," Lucifer said out loud.

"Good. Now, as I said, I have been keeping an eye on things and they don't seem to be going well. We need to fix that."

Lucifer huffed and folded his arms against his chest. How dare he, she? Whoever question his progress. "Let's first get some things out of the way. Who are you and why should I listen to you?" He stared at the blank page.

One by one words started to appear. "I am the angel Uriel."

"Uriel? The archangel?"

"The same."

Lucifer wondered if Hades was playing a trick on him. "No really, who is this?"

"I assure you, I am who I claim to be."

Lucifer was stunned. The archangels were helping him now? What was this?

"Not the archangels. Just me."

"Why?"

“I have grown wary of my brothers faith in mankind. They do not appear to be living up to their full potential. I believe as you do, that the world needs change. That mankind needs a reset. I cannot achieve this myself. But I am confident you can.”

This made Lucifer happier than he had a right to be. It was clear Yahweh had no idea this was happening, although he wouldn't put it past Him to have instructed the archangel to speak to him.

“Father does not know I am in contact with you. He and the others are still very clear on their intentions to stand by and watch as mankind attempts to fight for itself. As I stated, I do not intend on being an observer.”

“Isn't Gabriel a part of the Omphalos's army?” Lucifer pointed out.

“He is there to guide the Omphalos. Not engage in battle. It is only fair that you have the same benefit. So I am here to consult. To guide. To keep you informed. I cannot fight alongside you.”

“Fair enough.”

Several thoughts ran through Lucifer's mind, but the one thing that really stuck out was his ability to keep an eye on his daughter without even being in the room with her. He liked this more than he wanted to admit.

“That is first thing we need to work on.”

Lucifer looked up, on instinct. Now he knew who he was talking to.

“You must let go of the idea that your daughter has any intention of fighting alongside you. Her choice has been made. Her fate is set.”

“You're an all powerful angel, you're telling me you can't help me change that?” Lucifer

taunted Uriel.

“You are correct. I have unlimited power. Except when it comes to your daughter. She may well be more powerful than any of us, in the end.”

Lucifer beamed with pride. “Of course she is, she’s my daughter.”

“It is not the power she inherited from you that worries me. It is her mother’s strength. I may not have much faith in mankind but that does not mean I have lost my senses. It is her humanity that will be the detriment to this fight. And it is well past time you let go of the part of her that you contributed. It will be all but gone from her by the time this battle takes place. You need to learn to face the facts Lucifer. When all is said and done it will be you and your daughter left standing. You are truly lost if you believe she will ever stand beside you.”

#

GEMMA

Deep down Gemma knew her uncle was right. She should go visit her mother. It still seemed odd thinking of him that way. Uncle Prometheus. She hadn’t been around him this much in hundreds of years. Gemma had no family herself, so Pyrrha grew used to not having any either. She’d assumed she’d never see any of them again. She should have known better than to assume fate would work out that way. Strange that it had taken so many years to catch up with her though. She’d hidden herself from her family to save them from any further turmoil. She also should have known better than to assume her absence would alleviate their issues. In the short time she’d been back in their presence her mother had defied the gods and been sold to a wizard. And that was only in the last few weeks. Before that she’d been told Epimetheus kidnapped the leader of the upper plane and held him hostage for two hundred years. Maybe she should have

stayed.

Gemma shook off the thought and went back to the current situation. Pandora's return from Interplanum meant more than a return to Greece where Pyrrha, as Gemma, could re-establish her relationship with her mother. It also meant the balancing of the anomalies that her absence had created. And meant Gemma no longer had to take responsibility of her mother's jar. At least she hoped that's what it meant. She felt uncomfortable having that kind of power in her possession. Gemma had only offered to take over as protector of the jar because she felt obligated. The gods didn't hesitate when she offered to keep the jar safe. Gemma wondered if they would even consider giving it back to Pandora. Of course they would. The gods were all about setting things back as they were always meant to be. The jar was never a weapon in mankind's war against Lucifer. It was and always will be her mother's responsibility. And anguish.

Gemma headed toward Tyler who had been destroying wooden cutouts of Lucifer, honing his inner Omphalos energy. She tried not to disturb his concentration. He was already upset with her for mentioning his mortality.

#

TYLER

The target was getting easier to hit. Tyler focused his mind on the center of the fake wooden Lucifer's chest and willed the energy from his palms to hit it directly. There were no misses anymore. Even when he was interrupted.

Gemma approached him. Tyler took a deep breath and lowered his hands to his sides. She'd been the source of some serious anxiety the day before. Tyler braced for whatever it was

she was going to tell him about his abilities or lack thereof today.

“I’m gonna take off for a bit,” Gemma said.

Tyler didn’t answer her, first because he was so sure she was about to lay out his shortcomings, and second, because he wasn’t used to having someone report to him. Everyone else just sort of came and went as they pleased. “Okay,” he said finally.

“I’m just gonna go visit my mom,” she started. “Pandora,” she explained when Tyler’s expression showed confusion.

“Right,” Tyler said with a nod.

“I won’t be gone long,” she assured him.

He wasn’t actually worried, and then he wondered if he should be. “No problem, everything seems to be moving slowly here, I’ll let you know if something urgent comes up.” Tyler thought that sounded like something someone in charge might say.

“Thanks,” Gemma said with a nod and a smile, and then she vanished.

Tyler didn’t dwell too long on how jarring it was to see someone just disappear into thin air, because just as Gemma left, Adina and Abby arrived, by the same means. Tyler ran toward them. He hugged Adina tight. “I missed you,” he said.

“I missed you too,” Adina said with a giggle.

Her eyes shined bright blue. Tyler took a moment to see if there were any changes in her. There didn’t seem to be. She was still growing, but not as rapidly. “Did you have fun?”

“Yes,” Adina said brightly. “Aunty Abby showed me her wings!” She said with excitement. “And she said I might have wings someday too.”

“You’re lucky, she doesn’t show her wings to anyone,” Tyler said out loud. Internally he

was assessing Adina's wings comment. For a brief moment he wished a more normal life for the young girl. And then he remembered normal was no fun. He smiled at her and said "Your father was an angel once."

"Until he betrayed his brother and was sent to the lower plane as punishment," Adina said.

Next to them Abby stood with her arms crossed across her chest. "I told her about Lucifer's fall. It was the only thing I could think of as a bedtime story." She shrugged.

Again Tyler felt a tinge of sadness for Adina. She'd never know the simplicity of Goodnight Moon. But she already knew the demise of her own father.

#

LUCIFER

Lucifer sat in his big leather chair recounting the recent developments. It seemed to him that more and more powerful people were beginning to realize that he was right to want to take over the middle plane. First Hades and now Uriel. These weren't allies to be taken for granted. They were powerful. But he still had no idea what Hades had meant by looking in a new direction. Everything he'd tried in the past, and everything he'd read and heard and seen pointed to one thing: find a way to enter the middle plane and stay there. He didn't seem to be any closer to that plan either. His little jaunt to visit the mortal was still weighing on him. He felt weak and tired. Two things he'd only ever felt when trying to enter and spend time on the middle plane.

The doors had been shut by new wards. That he knew for sure. He could feel them pulsing in every corner of the library. Why he'd chosen to build it so close to the middle plane was still a question he couldn't answer. As he sat still watching the fire flicker in his fireplace he

could feel the pockets of energy from the middle plane dissipating. Something had changed up there.

“Any idea what that could be?” He said to ceiling.

The book in front of him flew open to a blank page. The words started appearing one by one. “Pandora has returned home.”

Lucifer chuckled. Of course she has. He knew there was no way the gods were letting her stay in some in between world as the slave of a dark magic dealer. That’s his M.O. For a brief moment he wondered how they managed that, then he remembered they were gods and they played by their own rules.

“They did this on the level,” Uriel told him through words on the page. “They made a new deal. A soul for a soul. They gave the wizard Chloe.”

This made Lucifer laugh whole-heartedly out loud. He couldn’t decide if it made him feel better that the woman was stuck in some in between place on the middle plane where she had to do whatever a wizard told her to do, or stuck in purgatory without any idea of where she’d end up, for eternity.

Either way she was away from him, and Adina. That was enough for him.

#

#

GEMMA

Gemma re-appeared just outside the gates of her parent’s house. She felt it only fair to announce her arrival rather than pop into their living room without warning. The guard greeted

her with utter boredom. She understood. From what she knew of Epimetheus, no one wanted to visit him. And Pandora usually went out to visit friends, they rarely came to her.

“It’s Gemma, here to see Pandora,” she told him.

He looked at her sideways, assessed that she didn’t pose any threats, and picked up the phone. If he only knew what I was capable of, Gemma thought.

The guard said “Yes, I’m sure that’s the name she gave,” several times then handed the phone to Gemma with a huff “She doesn’t believe me.”

“Hi mom.” Gemma tried to sound like it was a normal occurrence to refer to Pandora as mom. She’d probably have to get used to it, at some point. “Everything’s fine, I just came to visit.” She handed the phone back to the guard.

“Yes ma’am,” he said dryly. He set the phone back on its cradle and pushed a button to open the gate for Gemma waving her through dramatically. She smiled at him as she passed by.

Gemma was begging to regret choosing to be courteous. The driveway was entirely too long. She could have teleported to the door but she was keenly aware of the guard’s eyes on her. When she finally got to the front door her mother was standing there waiting.

“Welcome back,” Gemma said between breaths.

Pandora reached out and pulled her into a hug. It felt awkward but Gemma reciprocated anyway. “Something must be wrong, why would else would you walk up the entire driveway without using your abilities? Even more, why wouldn’t you just show up at the front door in the first place?”

“I didn’t want to startle you. And, the guard was watching me so I thought it best not to vanish into thin air,” Gemma told her.

“Roger? He’s just like most mortals. He sees things, but he doesn’t believe what he’s seen,” Pandora told her as she led Gemma inside the foyer. “Sit, I’ll get us some tea.”

“Thanks,” Gemma sat in a soft chair. It felt good to be off her feet. When Pandora returned with a pot of tea and some cups Gemma sat forward. “Where’s Sam?”

Pandora poured tea into a cup and handed it to Gemma. “We are still working through our, previous issues,” Pandora told her.

“Ah,” Gemma didn’t have to ask for any more information.

“I was surprised not to see you here when I got back from Interplanum,” Pandora said.

Gemma took a small sip of the hot tea and set it down. It was too warm for her at the moment. “To be fair, we didn’t think you’d be coming back from there. So, I didn’t know what to do with myself. And I forgot that sometimes when you ask the universe for answers, they give them to you.” Gemma pointed up at the ceiling.

“How are things going?” Pandora asked.

Gemma caught on to her mother’s skipping the Interplanum conversation. She followed suit. “Slow. We’re planning and training and waiting. Lucifer has been quiet. At least as far as his activities on this plane. We don’t know what he’s doing down there.” She pointed at the floor. She wasn’t sure why she was doing that. Her mother was perfectly aware of what Gemma meant.

“I was also surprised you didn’t have the jar with you,” Pandora said after taking a sip of tea.

“They were clear about two things. It was in our best interest to help the Omphalos in his fight against Lucifer, and I was under no circumstances to take the jar or offer its use to anyone

no matter the circumstances.”

“Sounds about right,” Pandora said with a sigh.

#

TYLER

As soon as he'd asked Prometheus to find his parents he regretted it. What was he going to do if he found them? What was there to say? He knew better than to think they would apologize for their behavior, and he was in no way going to apologize for leaving town. So much had happened to him since then. Things that made him believe. Things that made him mad about it. Jonathan's influence was a big factor. “You'll have regrets.” He'd told Tyler. He'd argued that he would hold on to the memories of their behavior forever. Jonathan reminded him that just because he was immortal didn't mean they were too. He'd regret not clearing the air. Or at least finding out that they hadn't changed and he could continue on with his life for eternities with the knowledge that he'd done the right thing. “It's better to know for sure,” Jonathan had said several times.

He couldn't help but go over the conversation in his head. In one scenario he'd tell them everything they believed about heaven and hell was real and that he was going to save mankind from destruction despite their insistence that he was unnatural. He wondered if they'd be more destroyed to know that he was gay, or that he was an immortal being created to bring balance to an otherwise upside down world. In another scenario he'd simply tell them that he'd found a man, they'd moved in together and adopted a daughter. And the supernatural of it all would be left out of the conversation. A large part of him wanted to bring Adina and Jonathan with him. Here's the family you thought I'd never have. Maybe you should have been nicer to me, because

this is the only time you'll ever see them.

Tyler wondered how many decades it would take for him to get over what they'd done to him. Many, many decades, he thought.

Abby approached him. "She's going to be fine ya know," she said.

"Who?" Tyler asked, because he wasn't sure she'd been reading his mind and meant his mother, or someone else.

"Adina," Abby said her name as if it couldn't be anyone else.

"Oh, right," Tyler glanced in Adina's direction. "There's just a part of me that wishes she would get to have a normal childhood."

"I understand. But these days, what does that even mean?" Abby pointed out.

"You know, you're pretty smart, for a two hundred year old angel," Tyler teased her.

"You'll get there too someday. Older and wiser. Maybe not as wise as me though," Abby teased back.

It was odd how easily they were able to joke about their immortality these days. Tyler was finally getting used to the idea of living forever. He flashed back to his conversation with Jonathan and smiled brightly at Abby. He was glad she'd be around for him when Jonathan wasn't.

#

LUCIFER

From the time he'd been sentenced to eternal life in the darkness of the lower plane Lucifer had been plotting and planning his way out. There wasn't anything he hadn't thought of, tried, failed at, and tried again. So the idea that there could possibly be another way seemed

highly unlikely to him. Sure, he now had the power of Hades and the Archangel Uriel on his side. But he still couldn't safely enter the middle plane without feeling like he was going to turn to ash within the first ten minutes of being there.

The anomalies allowing him to travel to the middle plane had disappeared anyway. He should have known they wouldn't last. The gods always find a way to restore balance. He was only slightly surprised it meant trading Chloe for Pandora. It made him mad all over again that his little experiment wasn't spending an eternity wandering around purgatory wondering when whoever she believed was going to own her soul would come collect it. As soon as he managed to get onto the middle plane he'd pay her a visit. And destroy the place. It would be his pleasure.

#

GEMMA

Gemma knew she should be getting back to the training room. Well, she knew she wanted to get back there. It wasn't so much that there was any urgency to. She wasn't lying when she told Pandora things were moving slow. It made her uneasy.

"Things are moving along as they should be." A voice in Gemma's head told her. She looked around to see if her mother had heard it too. Pandora sat quietly sipping tea from a small cup and didn't appear to have.

"Of course they are," Gemma said back, in her own mind.

"I know you've come for more than a simple visit," the voice said.

"Shouldn't we include Pandora in this conversation then?" Gemma suggested.

"You have a point."

The voice was out in the open now. Pandora looked up from her teacup. "I have a what?"

Gemma shook her head at her and her and pointed to the ceiling. Pandora nodded, understanding.

“We’ve discussed the matter of the jar, in great detail,” the voice said.

“I’ve only been home a day,” Pandora retorted.

“The consensus is that the jar was gifted to you and therefore should be in your possession now that you have returned.” The voice ignored her.

Gemma was secretly relieved. She would have held on to the jar and taken on all the responsibilities that came with protecting it at all costs, had Pandora not returned from Interplanum. But it only seemed fair that it go back to its rightful owner. For once in her long life she agreed with the gods. It made her shudder.

“Don’t push it, or we’ll change our minds,” the voice was back in her head.

“Sorry,” Gemma answered.

The room went quiet. And then a weight lifted from her chest and shoulders. She watched to see if Pandora showed any signs of having the wait return to her. She didn’t move. Gemma figured it was a feeling her mother had grown used to.

The two women sat quietly. Another voice interrupted Gemma’s thoughts.

“Sorry to bother you,” the male voice said.

“Tyler? Did something happen?” Gemma seemed almost, excited.

“No, everything’s fine,” he said. “We’re about to have a meeting to discuss next moves, wanted to make sure you were aware in case you wanted to be here for it. You don’t have to be, just didn’t want to make that choice for you.”

“I’ll be there in a few,” Gemma told him. She was relieved to have the excuse. There

wasn't much her and her mother had to talk about aside from rehashing the past, which Gemma was never inclined to do. "I have to get back to LA," she told Pandora.

Pandora nodded. "Thank you for coming to see me."

"I'll see you again soon," Gemma promised.

She and Pandora shared a quick hug and then Gemma vanished.

#

TYLER

With Gemma's return from Greece there were eight people in the training room. Prometheus, Phenix, and Jonathan would not be in the mix when the fighting began, or ever if he had his way, as far as Jonathan went, and Adina was technically still a child who Tyler wished with all his being didn't have to be involved in this at all. That left himself, Gemma, Abby, and Azazel against however many millions of demons Lucifer had in his horde. The odds did not seem to be in their favor at all.

"This is our weekly check in," Tyler announced. "Anyone have anything to report?"

They all looked around at each other and shook their heads no.

"Doesn't mean things aren't happening down there," Azazel said.

Tyler knew Lucifer wasn't just giving up on his goal of eliminating the middle plane just because the anomalies had gone away and the gods were putting pieces into place. In fact he knew that made Lucifer even more determined to fight his way to the surface and lay waste to everyone on it.

"Just means he's gathering his army," Tyler said. "We're severely outnumbered. I know our abilities are supposed to make us more formidable than we seem, but let's not pretend we're

not on the short end of this stick. Let's make sure we work together, use our individual skills to compliment each other. We'll start training as a group and, keep waiting."

He still didn't like being the leader. But there was a small part of him that liked to have people listen to him. He wasn't exactly happy that he was probably leading them to their deaths, but he tried to remind himself that they signed up for this. Well. Maybe not all of them. He approached Gemma. "I'm sorry you had to cut your visit short," he said.

"It's okay, really, I was happy to have a reason to get back," she said. He understood. "I do have some news," she whispered.

Tyler knitted his eyebrows together.

"I'm no longer in charge of the jar," she continued to whisper.

"The jar? Oh, THE jar," Tyler whispered back. He wasn't sure why this information was a secret but he respected her wish not to let the news travel through the room.

"I just, I don't want it to be an argument every time we talk about the thing," Gemma answered his question. "But I thought you should know I didn't have it to give even if it were an option, which it still isn't."

"Thank you," Tyler gave her a small smile. He hadn't thought about the weapon in the jar for at least the last few days and now that it was back on his mind he was mad about it again. They had a weapon on hand that could stop this whole thing and the gods weren't going to let them use it. He felt bad thinking it, but he felt it no matter how childish it seemed. This was truly unfair.

#

LUCIFER

Now that it was the chosen form of communication between himself and his new, strange ally, Lucifer kept a book in front of him, open at a random page, at all times. He hadn't heard much from the angel, but he didn't want to miss the messages when they came in. He was still trying to figure out how in the world Hades could see an alternative option to Lucifer's current plan. It had always been the best plan. Surely more efficient than the times he tried possessing a human and making him, and sometimes her, do his bidding. Mankind. They certainly had a penchant for believing in God and the Devil guiding them to do good and evil. But when he tried to influence them to follow his instructions, they had minds of their own. Then there was the time he sent demons to destroy the artifacts guarding the entrances between purgatory the lower and middle planes, and they just went to Salvation and the Abbey and drank all their liquor. That's when he got the idea to give eternal life to someone who could lead them from the front line. She did her job. But he wasn't satisfied and hashed the new idea that he needed a child. A lot of failed attempts with very little results, Lucifer remembered.

Thinking of Adina always made him cranky. Well, crankier than usual. He stood up to do another demon horde count when the book flipped pages and words began to appear.

"Pandora has regained possession of the jar."

"What kind of update is that?" Lucifer screamed up at the ceiling.

"You will understand eventually," Uriel seemed to be mocking him. Lucifer couldn't hear the tone but he was pretty sure it was sarcastic. If archangels were even capable of the gesture.

"I assure you we are aware of many human tendencies," Uriel wrote.

"If you're gonna speak to me via words on pages of books you could at least stop

reading my mind,” Lucifer said to the ceiling.

“Believe me I’d rather not be spending time in your mind,” Uriel answered him telepathically. “Unfortunately I don’t answer to you. Hades has requested his own updates, so I have to be here until further notice. So we can continue communicating via the book or I can go back to speaking to you this way.”

Lucifer wasn’t sure which part of this was more annoying. Uriel’s invasion of his thoughts or Hades interference with his plans. “Alright. Let’s make a deal. If it’s urgent information you can break into my thoughts, when it’s bullshit about Pandora and a jar, go ahead and write it in the book,” Lucifer continued to talk to the ceiling despite knowing Uriel was in his head.

“I assure you this is pertinent information. Get your head in the game and stop wallowing in sorrow, you made bad choices. Get over it,” Uriel spoke to him as if he was a parent to Lucifer’s childish behavior.

“That’s how it feels, to be honest,” Uriel retorted.

“Thanks for the information, you can go away now,” Lucifer said in his head.

Pandora has the jar in her possession. He read the words again and still didn’t know what it meant.

#

TYLER

Azazel and Phenix hadn’t been as involved in the training process as Tyler had hoped. Azazel assured Tyler he’d be ready when it came time to fight, and Phenix was less and less inclined to show up to train him over the last several days. Even the dragon hadn’t paid them a

visit. Tyler knew better than to believe it was because they felt he didn't need the added training. Phenix used the excuse of her businesses being busier than usual. Azazel was constantly at work at the diner, and who knew where Alexis was hiding. Probably deep in his dragon den. Amongst his books and trinkets and scrolls of people's fates.

Today Phenix and Azazel were working with Adina. They'd agreed to help discover whatever it was that would trigger her transformation.

"Will you show me how to grow my wings?" Adina had said excitedly.

"Those will grow on their own, in time," Azazel spoke gently to her. It made Tyler laugh at how calm and level headed the demon was with the girl. His quirky temper and hot head only showed themselves with the adults, Tyler thought.

Abby and Gemma had similar abilities. They'd both had experience in combat and they were both excellent with the power of persuasion. It wasn't just because they were pretty girls who could flutter their eyelashes and giggle when prompted. They both just had an air about them that made you want to listen to whatever they asked you to do, and do it happily no matter how stupid you looked doing it.

As per usual he was on his own. The only one that could truly cause Lucifer any harm and the only one, in the end, that would have to face him head to head. The rest of the team was simply learning to fight the demon horde, whatever that might contain. Azazel had tried to explain the different creatures and their abilities, but he couldn't guarantee they'd be the same when they got here.

Jonathan had stuck around. He was watching intently as Azazel and Phenix guided Adina through meditation.

The only one missing now was Prometheus. He'd left just after the meeting. Tyler couldn't be certain if he was still on the task he'd given the titan or if the titan had other tasks handed to him from powers bigger than himself. There was a lot of that going on in Prometheus's world these days. His brother had been more of a menace than ever with Pandora gone. Tyler hoped that with her return to Greece Epimetheus would go back to ignoring his brother as he'd done for hundreds of years.

The thought of it made Tyler return to the topic of his own family. There was still the matter of what he was going to do if and when Prometheus found them. He had a hundred questions. He had a hundred more grievances to file. Maybe a simple final goodbye would suffice. Maybe that would be enough to make him feel better about disappearing. He doubted it, but maybe.

Then there was the matter of Pandora's jar, which had been brought to his attention again.

He shouldn't be surprised they would create such an item and not allow anyone to use it.

#

PROMETHEUS

He already knew he wasn't going to be able to find Tyler's family. He wasn't sure why he had told him he'd try. Tyler's creation was planned from the start. Prometheus had chosen him because he knew it was the only way to keep the kid from unraveling completely. He'd been watching Tyler since he was born. Naturally he wasn't able to step in when the worst of the behavior began. The titan felt particularly bad when he had to stand by and watch as Tyler was tortured as a teenager. And he'd begged the gods to save him when the shock therapy went awry.

He been trying as hard as he could to avoid telling Tyler how much he'd been involved with his life. Well, if involved meant watching from afar and having to let bad things happen until the time was right to guide him out west.

The gods assured Prometheus that things would work themselves out. So when a mass shooting at the church they attended took Tyler's parents his only guilt feelings were for the other victims. He never wished unnatural death on a member of mankind, but these people were not human. Tyler's parents. Prometheus often wondered if the gods had stepped in and made sure they never had another kid to ruin after Tyler was born.

Prometheus had made sure the news never got to Tyler. It turned out to not be a difficult task. He was lucky Tyler made a concerted effort to avoid anything having to do with his old life. And he was just young enough to not be interested in watching the news, not at the time anyway.

So the only question now was how to tell Tyler all this without making him more angry at the gods, at the titan himself, at the world.

Instead of being on a quest for the Jones family Prometheus had travelled back to Greece on the insistence of the gods. "Check on Epimetheus and Pandora" were their instructions.

"What have they gotten themselves into now?" Prometheus had asked.

"Nothing, yet," was all they'd said.

Prometheus didn't bother asking how long he was meant to stay in Greece, he knew they wouldn't give him an answer.

It wasn't as if he was unhappy to be home, he just wondered why keeping an eye on his brother and sister-in-law required him to be in Greece. He was the god of foresight. He could just as easily watch them from Los Angeles.

“We need you in Greece.” They’d insisted.

So that’s where he was. Waiting on whatever it was Epimetheus and or Pandora were about to be involved in.

#

LUCIFER

The book in front of him was not the book he and Uriel had been communicating through. He’d agreed to let the angel speak to him telepathically so the need to have a useless book written by some mortal author who had long since died, someone named Dante who thought he knew what Lucifer was all about, was moot. He’d tossed it into the fire and was watching it burn more slowly than he’d imagined it would. He did have a book in front of him though. He knew Pandora’s history by heart. It was why he let her manipulate him. He was just trying to figure out why Hades would want Uriel to tell him about the jar again. He’d tried that route already. Pandora had fled the mortal plane, hiding in one of the worst places for an immortal. Interplanum. If she was willing to live as the slave of a black magic dealer she’d be willing to do much more to continue to protect the jar. So why was it in play again?

The words on the page were the same ones he’d read hundreds of times before. There was no new information. He read between every line. Deciphered every word. It was the same story over and over again.

Uriel had gone silent. Clearly no one was going to give him any further information. Not that Lucifer minded having his mind to himself. Though he knew Uriel was still spying on his thoughts. Just for fun he’d let them wander into awful territory to give Uriel a little scare. He didn’t know if the angel was even bothered by them, but it gave Lucifer a good chuckle.

The fire crackled next to him and he glanced to the side to watch the spine and cover of Dante's Inferno turn to ash. Fitting, Lucifer thought. If Dante had wanted to write a true history of Lucifer he should have come to see him instead of making it up.

And then it hit him. Who's to say Pandora's story wasn't a work of fiction? "Is that it?" Lucifer said to the ceiling. No one answered.

That had to be what they were trying to get him to figure out. The question was, how could he find out the true history? He couldn't ask Pandora. He couldn't travel to the middle plane and she certainly wasn't coming back down here. Kidnapping her daughter again wasn't an option. Hades knew the truth. It was the only reason he'd directed Lucifer to this conclusion. But would the titan tell him the truth?

"Not until the time is right," Uriel said in Lucifer's head.

When the time is right. That was always the answer when it came to both sets of gods. They had all the time in the world and they intended to use it the way they wanted to. It didn't matter if Lucifer was in a hurry.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" Uriel asked him.

That was a good question. Lucifer had all the time in the world himself. And it seemed all the players in this game were immortal. So why the urgency?

He'd waited long enough. That was the only answer he could come up with. Thousands of years was enough time to wait. It was his time now. The gods were just gonna have to adjust their timeline.

"It's not that simple," Uriel argued.

"Isn't it though? What difference does it make if I step onto the middle plane today or

hundreds of years from now?” Lucifer retorted.

“You have even less of a chance to step onto the middle plane today than you ever had. It is more fortified than ever. The longer you wait the more complacent they get and things get overlooked. For once Lucifer take the time to do things right.”

He knew the angel was right. He didn't like it, but he knew his only course of action was not to take any. Time was his only weapon now.

#

PROMETHEUS

Prometheus walked through the hallways of his old living quarters at the giant Greek palace far out of sight of the human eye. He felt the cold of the marble floor through his shoes and the brisk air through his clothes. He looked down to see himself wearing traditional titan garb, a white cotton robe with a braided gold sash and brown leather sandals. Things he hadn't considered wearing in he wasn't sure how long.

He continued down the hallway to where he thought his old library had been. He passed gold statues and old paintings of battles long since fought and won. The only recounts of the battles they'd lost were hastily written in leather bound books locked away in his library.

Prometheus hadn't been home, his former home, in hundreds of years, if not longer. He wondered if his brothers and sisters had called him back. A meeting? Maybe something had gone terribly wrong and they'd zapped him back to the palace to live out the rest of eternity. Not likely, he thought. The last thing he remembered was being called back to Greece to his mortal home inside the mountain. Tasked with watching over Pandora. Maybe they'd meant come home, home.

A voice, or, something he couldn't quite discern the origin of called to him. He looked around the room to find its source. There was no one. It called out again. Prometheus followed the sound. He was moving slower than he was capable of. It frustrated him to no end, but he continued moving in what he hoped was the direction of the voice calling out to him.

The sound grew louder as he reached a giant wood door in the middle of the hallway. It hadn't ever been there before. Not that Prometheus remembered anyway. The door had no markings. No window. A gold door nob with no lock. He turned it and it opened without a struggle. Instinct told him that it couldn't possibly be as simple as walking through it. Sure enough when he stepped inside he was in another long hallway.

This space was different than any room he'd ever seen in the palace. And he'd spent many days and nights wandering the hallways back when he was welcome here. There was no marble floor, no gold accents. No paintings. Black and white checkered tiles lined the floor. The walls were stark white. Ahead of him, another door. It was also white, almost blending into the walls around it, except for the giant silver padlock hanging from it, indicating it was clearly a door and clearly someone was hiding something behind it.

"Prometheus," a female voice called out to him.

He stared at the door with both fear and curiosity. Both things made him hesitate. He knew the voice was coming from behind it. He knew better than to let the curiosity push him forward. He did it anyway. As he continued walking slowly toward the door he began contemplating how he was going to past the padlock. The gods had taken away his strength to ensure he'd not be tempted to help the Omphalos in battle. His appearance was that of a young man, his body was that of an ancient one.

“You can break the lock.” The voice was close now. As if its owner was standing right behind the door.

Prometheus reached up and wrapped his hand around the metal lock. It crumbled into dust without much resistance. He slid the metal latch away from the hook. His movements were deliberate. He was still unsure he should be there and truly unsure if he should be giving in to his curiosity. He knew where that emotion got people.

The door creaked as it opened. There was light coming through it but it was dim. When the room came into full view he could see why. The only source of light was coming from a giant bank of television screens. An odd sight in such an ancient palace. Prometheus wondered if he was even in the palace anymore. His thoughts were interrupted by a figure perched in a chair directly in front of the screens. She was slight, her knees pulled up to her chest. Her hair black, long and stringy. Against his better judgement he approached her. Prometheus could see her eyes now. Bright blue. Darting back and forth, watching each screen intently.

“Who are you?” Prometheus asked.

She did not take her eyes off the screens. Prometheus looked at them to see what it was she was watching. Hundreds of scenes were flashing by, he could barely keep up with them. But as he stared he could see glimpses of mankind going about their day to day activities. Businessmen and women, families.

“What is this?” He asked another question.

“My name is Hope. I am the only one keeping mankind alive.”

Prometheus sucked in a breath and the room disappeared around him. He blinked his eyes and found himself in the living room of his mountain home, back in Greece. It had been a dream.

The titan knew what his dreams meant. Premonitions. Predictions. Signs of future occurrences. But this was different. This wasn't a scene about to happen. It was happening now. He began to understand why the gods had instructed him to return to Greece and watch over Pandora.

In all of their brief time on the middle plane mankind had been taught that Pandora opened her box, or jar, and released disease, and pain, and suffering and evil but had trapped Hope inside. Then came the new gods giving them the resources they needed to move forward when all seemed lost. When in reality Pandora had released the entire jar. Including Hope. Who had been locked away in a secret room watching over them all this time.

Prometheus stood up from his chair and headed toward the door. He resisted the urge to teleport directly into his brother's living room. He was going to confront Pandora about this but he knew he couldn't approach her with anger. She'd only lie again. It was in her nature. In fact he needed the time to decompress and put his emotions in check. So he walked, down the mountain, toward Epimetheus's giant mansion, as slowly as he'd done in his dream.

#

TYLER

Tyler and Abby were practicing concentration. Tyler was still not the best at keeping his focus on the task in front of him. His mind had a tendency of wandering. Abby had just smacked the side of his head after she'd asked him to recall the sentence she'd just recited and he stared at her blankly.

"I suppose it's not surprising Prometheus didn't think to create an Omphalos without OCD," he remarked.

“Where do you suppose he’s ran off to this time?” Abby asked.

“I asked him to find my parents,” Tyler told her.

Abby’s face went sheet white. Which was a feat in itself because it was already stark white with small tints of gold all around like a glow. When he’d met her that glow was non-existent. He’d been tempted to ask her if she was albino. He always refrained. Now that Yahweh had restored her angelic powers she glowed all the time. Except right now.

“What’s wrong?” Tyler asked.

“Why would you do that?” Abby asked almost accusatory, as if he didn’t have a right to find his own family.

Tyler still didn’t have a solid answer to that question. But he gave one anyway. “Just in case something happens to me.”

The glow slowly returned to Abby’s face. But not completely. “What could possibly happen to you Tyler?” Abby was still angry. Tyler couldn’t for the life of him figure out why.

“That’s what everyone keeps telling me. But I’m not taking any chances. There have been quite a few promises made and broken around here.” Tyler was starting to get angry himself.

Abby’s facial features were going through several different emotions. Tyler watched her as he waited for her to tell him what was bothering her about him asking the Titan to find his parents. “Oh!” Tyler exclaimed. “You’re made because I didn’t ask you to do it?”

That sent her into a whole new set of facial expressions. “No, but now that you mention it, why didn’t you ask me?”

“I didn’t want to send you on a possibly fruitless task, I need you here to help with

Adina,” he said.

“Still. You should have come to me first,” Abby said.

“Do you know where my parents are Abby?” Tyler asked pointedly.

“Yes, Tyler. As a matter of fact I do,” she told him.

It was his turn to turn different colors and make several faces.

“Where are they?” He asked through gritted teeth.

Abby shifted her weight from side to side and fidgeted with her shirt. She took a deep breath and looked down, breaking eye contact with Tyler. She let go of the hem of her shirt and pointed toward the ground.

“What does that mean?” Tyler asked despite knowing the answer deep down.

Abby looked up at him. “They’re dead Tyler. Your parents are dead.”

“How long?” Tyler demanded.

“What?” Abby asked.

“How long have they been dead, and how long have you known about it,” he was doing everything in his power not to physically lash out at the angel.

Abby stepped forward and brought her hands up toward his head. He flinched, naturally. She made a face at him. He let her continue.

She touched his temples. Nothing happened. “What did you do?”

Abby didn’t answer him. She picked up a cell phone, something Tyler was surprised Abby would have and tapped her fingers on the screen. Then she handed it to him.

Tyler took the phone and held it up. It was open to Google. The search item read “Mass shooting, church, Minnesota.”

There were a number of headlines on the page. “Several Die in Mass Shooting at St. Paul Area Church.” “16 People Dead After Gunman Opens Fire at Church.” He scrolled past the headlines, each one essentially the same, just the facts. Further down were the opinion pieces “How Do We Stop This.” “Even Church Isn’t Safe.” And then there were pictures of the victims. A handful of faces Tyler didn’t recognize. And then two he did. There they were. His mother and father, staring blankly at him like they used to when he was a kid. They seemed to be taken back then too. He scrolled back up to the headlines to find out when they had posted. Eight years ago. He handed the phone back to Abby, resisting the urge to throw it at her.

“Are you okay?” She asked.

Tyler looked at her like she was insane. Of course he wasn’t okay. “No, why would I be okay?”

“Well, no I just mean, you know what happened to them now. Does it make you feel better?” She said.

He hadn’t truly processed the news yet. All he could think about was how long ago this had happened. He had so many questions. He went with the first one. “How did I not hear about this?”

Abby sighed. “Let’s sit,” she suggested.

Tyler didn’t really want to sit, but he did it anyway.

“The day this happened Prometheus came to me. He couldn’t tell me why, but he asked me to put a block on your mind that would either look past the news of this event or read something completely different when you saw it in headlines. I’d never come in contact with a Titan in all my years on either plane. I was already in trouble with my own people so I did what

he asked. I felt it was better to stay on his good side. But that's not the only reason I did it. You were happy here, living life freely and honestly. It had taken two years to get to that place. I couldn't find a way that this news wouldn't destroy you all over again. So I did what Prometheus said. And I forgot all about it," Abby explained.

Tyler stared straight ahead for a very long time. He was looking past Abby, trying his hardest not to look directly at her.

"Tyler, say something," Abby begged.

"I'm trying to process this. I'm trying to find a way not to strangle you to death. I'm trying to figure out how I can continue to be Prometheus's weapon when all he seems to do is undermine me."

"He was trying to help you Tyler."

"Once again he, and you, made a choice for me for my benefit without asking me first. We're all meant to be on the same side, but I'm beginning to wonder if that's true. No matter what my state of mind was at the time, I should have been told that my parents were dead. How I decided to go about dealing with it at the time was on me. It wasn't for you or Prometheus to make the choice for me."

"I know it seems like I'm just a ball of excuses. But I had good intentions. I was still learning. And I know it sounds cruel, but I truly did forget. It's not fair to you but it's the truth," Abby said.

Tyler went silent again.

"Try to see it from our perspective. I was trying to keep you happy and Prometheus was trying to keep you on a certain path."

“You should step away now, you’re honestly not helping.”

Abby didn’t hesitate. She stood up and walked away leaving Tyler there with this new information to sort through.

#

PROMETHEUS

The slow walk to Epimetheus’s mansion did Prometheus good, just as he’d hoped. By the time he reached the guard shack he had calmed down significantly. He stopped at the window and was greeted by Roger who seemed very bothered by his presence. The man rolled his eyes at Prometheus and pushed the button to open the gate as if it was the worst thing he’d been asked to do that day.

Roger continued to scowl at Prometheus as he walked by. The titan smiled as a response and continued past, through the gate and up the long driveway. He knocked on the door and heard footsteps almost immediately. They definitely did not belong to Sam. He was well past an age that allowed him to move that fast. The door swung open and it was Pandora standing behind it.

“Oh, I thought you were Pyrr...Gemma,” Pandora exclaimed. “You just missed her. Of course you get to see her more than I do these days.”

And just like that Prometheus’s mood soured again. He brushed passed Pandora and stomped into the living room. Pandora followed him.

“Hello Pandora, nice to see you settling back in,” she said in a mocking tone.

“I just saw you yesterday,” Prometheus snapped at her.

“Yes, I suppose it has only been a day, so why is it you’ve stormed into my house in such

a huff?”

“You,” Prometheus said in an accusatory tone.

“Me? What have I done now?”

Prometheus chuckled. He couldn’t help it. At least she knew she was in trouble. “It seems that jar of yours is causing more trouble in the modern day than it did in our own time,” he said.

“Indeed,” Pandora said with a note of questioning in her voice. “Everyone seems to have renewed interest in it. What has you so bothered about it that you’ve come barging in here so grumpily?”

“A vision. One of those ones I get just before something happens in the world. It seems you’ve been lying to all of us,” Prometheus told her.

Pandora rolled her eyes at him. She was created to lie, his accusations were silly at best, of course she was lying about something, all the time.

“The events that took place when you opened the jar...” he started.

Pandora jumped at him and put her hand over his mouth. “Not here,” she whispered.

“Follow me.”

Prometheus followed Pandora through the back of the house to the guest house like he’d done several times over the past few days. Pandora knocked on the door and they were greeted by a very surprised Deanna who growled at them.

“I’m sorry, I wouldn’t have come here if it wasn’t important,” Pandora said as gently as she could.

Deanna stepped aside and let Pandora and Prometheus enter the house. “What is it now?” she said with as little emotion as she could possibly use. Prometheus wasn’t sure she even spoke

the words, maybe just let them breathe out.

Pandora looked at Prometheus. “They’re house has a protection spell over it. Deanna created it long ago so that her magic would not be detected by anyone who might be, looking in on people like them.”

“The gods can’t see or hear us here?” Prometheus looked around the room as if the spell would be visible.

“Correct,” Pandora told him. “I’ve known for a long time,” she turned her attention to Deanna. “I’ve never said anything to anyone. And I will continue to keep your secret. I trust that you will keep whatever secrets you hear between us?”

Deanna nodded. Prometheus was amazed at how understanding this poor woman had been with all she’d been put through. Granted she did try to steal the jar out from under Pandora but little did she know it was empty. Wasn’t she in for a big shock.

“As the story is told I opened the jar and unleashed Hell on Earth. When I realized what I’d done I tried to shove everything back inside. But the only thing I could catch was Hope. And she is all that remains in the jar. Thus creating the only weapon that can destroy Lucifer permanently. That is a lie. The jar is empty,” Pandora explained.

Deanna sat down on the couch. Prometheus felt for her. She risked her life to steal an empty jar. He shrugged at her, then turned back to Pandora. “Why the fallacy?”

“Zeus. He captured Hope before she could get out of the palace,” Pandora said.

Prometheus made a face at her.

“He wanted the new gods to think they were in charge of mankind. So that one day when everything fell apart and they were unable to put the middle plane back together he’d be able to

hold over them his little secret. It's been Hope all along. The stories the mortals tell each other to help them get through life about powerful beings who grant wishes if you're good and take you away if you're bad. It's all fiction."

Prometheus was trying to unpack this news. Pandora was built to lie but she rarely lied about Zeus. She lied for him, but never about him.

"When these visions come to you, who usually sends the message?" Pandora asked him.

"Athena, primarily. Every now and then I'll get one that clearly came from Poseidon and on very rare occasions I get something from Artemis," Prometheus answered.

"Never Zeus?"

"No. He does everything in his vast power to avoid me," Prometheus admitted.

"So why would he reveal Hope to you now?" Pandora asked.

Prometheus pondered this. Why would he show his hand now? "What if the message didn't come from Zeus. This wasn't the typical dream I have where I see blurred scenes of events about to occur. I was at the Palace. In my old quarters. I was walking the hallway toward my library when a door appeared in the wall. A modern door. I was able to break the padlock and open. Inside was Hope sitting in front of hundreds of television screens. All of mankind flashing by on them. It was as if the scenes were on fast forward."

Pandora shook her head. "Your father. He is a vindictive sort isn't he. It'd be just like him to hide Hope away in your living quarters. He still hasn't forgiven you for creating them. Mankind. So why not hold the only thing keeping them alive in the one place you're forbidden to return to."

Prometheus couldn't argue with her. It was definitely a move right out of his playbook.

“What did she say to you?” Pandora asked.

“I’m Hope and I’m the only one keeping mankind alive.”

“Too simple for Zeus. None of the other Gods know. In fact none of the other Titans know. Zeus made it clear that if I told anyone about her he’d lock me away with her,” Pandora said.

“It was Hope herself then. And if she’s showing herself to me something’s happening that she doesn’t like,” Prometheus said.

“Do you think you could get back to that room?” Pandora asked him.

“I’m still banned from the palace. I can’t get back there unless she brings me back.”

Prometheus answered.

“If she’s trying to tell you something maybe she’ll bring you back?” Pandora suggested.

“Or maybe the message is as simple as knowing she exists and where Zeus is keeping her?” Deanna piped up from the couch.

Prometheus had forgotten she was there. “I have to get back to the palace, somehow.”

Pandora shifted her weight from foot to foot and bit her lip. “You’re gonna have to convince Athena to call you home. Explain to her the circumstances if you must. But she’s the only one Zeus won’t lash out at when you show up at the Palace without his permission.”

He knew Pandora was right. The only way up was through Athena. His mother was already displeased with the situation on the middle plane and his involvement in it. This was not going to be an easy task.

#

#

TYLER

Tyler sat still. His eyes fixed on a spot on the wall in front of him. He concentrated on blocking all noise around him. He took short deliberate breaths and slowed his heart from beating out of his chest. His anger slowly turned to fierce energy. As soon as he could be sure he wasn't going to cause anyone any harm he stood up and joined the group again.

“Let's break off into our teams for a bit and work on complimenting each other's strengths and making up for each other's weaknesses. Then we'll call it a night,” he said in a calm tone.

They did as he asked. Abby and Azazel led Adina to one corner of the room, Phenix followed behind them as their designated consultant, and Gemma stepped forward to join Tyler with Gabriel as their designated consultant.

That left Jonathan sitting alone. Tyler approached him. “I know we agreed to have you stay out of this. And I know you said you're okay with that. But I'm totally fine with you joining a team if that's what you want to to,” he said with a small smile.

Jonathan looked at him and then over toward where Adina was.

Tyler nodded at him silently giving Jonathan his approval in choosing to stand beside Adina. It was the right choice.

“Lucifer won't be able to control his demon army once they've been unleashed. As soon as he gives them permission to attack, all bets are off. They will no longer respond to his commands. Their only mission will be destruction. I suggest that we let them go, and focus on Lucifer himself,” Gabriel said. “We should assume there will be other, more human like warriors

protecting him. They don't have nearly the power needed to fight any of us. To be honest Jonathan can eliminate them on his own. Not that I'm suggesting he should," Gabriel paused on Tyler's look of distress when Jonathan's name came up. "It's just a ploy to make Lucifer look heavily guarded. They follow his directions and will die protecting him. Once they're out of the way it will just be Lucifer."

"I realize my weapons are my hands and the energy they wield, but shouldn't I learn how to use a sword or some other kind of weapon? And if he's got his spear with him, which why wouldn't he, shouldn't I have a shield?" Tyler suggested.

Gemma stepped in front of him, facing forward. "I'm the shield."

"Technically they're all your shield," Gabriel said pointing to the other group.

Tyler put his hands on his hips and bit his lip. The anger was building back up.

"They knew that when they joined the fight Tyler," Gabriel said.

"Are you sure about that?" Tyler spit out. "Does everyone here know exactly what they've signed up for? Or am I the only one being left in the dark?"

Gabriel didn't answer him.

"Did you know about my parents?" Tyler asked the angel.

"Your parents?" Gabriel asked. "What about them?"

"It appears they've been dead for ten years and no one thought it was important to tell me," Tyler said pointedly.

"No Tyler I did not know about your parents," Gabriel answered.

Tyler believed him. This was a Prometheus thing.

"I'm gonna go now. If you all want to continue practicing dying for me, be my guest. But

I'm out of this fight until further notice. You can take up any grievances you might have with Prometheus," Tyler shouted to the room and vanished.

LUCIFER

"New development," Uriel's voice echoed through Lucifer's head.

"Oh?" Lucifer responded with curiosity despite the annoyance of the interruption.

"It appears that the Omphalos's mortal parents have moved on and their souls are down there with you," Uriel said.

"Now see. That is useful information," Lucifer said brightly. "How long have they been here?"

"Ten years," Uriel answered.

"Thank you," Lucifer said.

"You're...welcome?" Uriel said with confusion.

Lucifer was already on to the new task. Ten years wasn't long, even down here. The Omphalos's parents would be in the less demonized section of the lower plane. He stepped out of his library and nearly jogged toward the cells just two flights of rocky stairs below him. Would he recognize their aura? Would they look like the Omphalos at all? Lucifer didn't know the answer to either of those questions. But he was determined to find them and use them against the Omphalos in unimaginable ways.

He walked through the long rows of cells. Many of the souls should have been moved down a level. But with Azazel having abandoned him Lucifer still hadn't found a sufficient

replacement. And he'd been too preoccupied with his own tasks to do it himself. None of the beings called out to him. They'd long given up the fight. He passed each cell and stopped, searching for some kind of sign that would tell him they were the souls he was looking for. Nothing. Didn't matter. He had time. He would continue to walk up and down the cell blocks level by level.

After a while he began to wonder if the information had been wrong. Surely the Omphalos's parents wouldn't be any further down than he'd gone. Unless.

"Uriel," he called out in his mind.

"Lucifer," Uriel responded.

"Do you know what it is the Omphalos's parents did to get them sent down here?" Lucifer asked.

"It appears to be quite a long list. Child abuse," Uriel started.

"That's all I needed to know," Lucifer interrupted him. Ten years wasn't much time down here but when you abuse a child you get an accelerated sentence. They may be more demon like than he'd previously suspected but they wouldn't be down in the dungeons with the monsters just yet.

Lucifer walked down several flights of steps and entered the cell block that housed some of the most offensive souls he had in his possession. Child abusers, sexual predators, child molesters. Even as a demon he saw the evil in those acts and shuddered.

As he passed each cell he paused. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. And then, he felt them. A presence he could reach out and touch. He looked at the beings in the cell. Distinctly human if not for the grey hue they'd picked up being underground. A large bullet hole adorned the man's

head. The woman had one in her chest. Now Lucifer wanted to figure out if the gunman had made his way down there too. If so, he'd make sure to make him part of the party too.

#

PROMETHEUS

Prometheus had a long history of contacting Athena to ask her for something he claimed was important. Usually it was just him trying to get out of his punishment laid down by Zeus a thousand years ago. Since then he'd contacted her only once. To beg her to let him help the Omphalos fight Lucifer. It was Athena who'd convinced Zeus to allow Prometheus to walk free and get involved with mankind's latest problem. The titan knew that Zeus only allowed it because mankind's downfall was dangerous for the Greek gods too.

"Athena," he called out to her through his thoughts. He knew he was taking a risk even trying to contact her, the gods were on high alert and there was always someone listening, watching. Prometheus hoped saying her name in his own mind lessened the threat of having other prying ears intercept his call.

"Prometheus," she answered almost immediately. "Is everything alright? You disappeared briefly, did something happen?"

"No," he said. "Nothing happened mother, well not to me anyway."

"You called me by name, I assumed it was urgent," Athena told him.

"Yes, I was hoping to get only your attention," Prometheus admitted.

"What is it Prometheus?" Athena said in a more annoyed tone.

"I need a favor," Prometheus said sheepishly.

"Of course you do." Athena sighed deeply.

“This is different. I can’t explain why, not yet anyway, but I need to get access to my old quarters, at the palace.” Prometheus didn’t waste any time. The longer he kept the connection open between he and Athena the more likely someone would be listening.

“That’s a big favor,” Athena told him.

“I know, believe me when I tell you it’s important. You know I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t,” Prometheus was beginning to sound desperate. He hoped Athena was catching on to the urgency.

“You have to promise me you will not linger here. Get in, get what you need, and get out. I won’t ask any questions at this time but you will most certainly tell me why I am risking Zeus’s anger pointed at me on your behalf, again, when this madness is over,” Athena said after a beat.

“Thank you mother,” Prometheus replied. He immediately cut the connection by thinking of something else. He pictured his favorite park on the other side of the mountain. He thought about sitting on the grass and watching the mortals go about their day. Things no one at the Greek palace would care a bit about. Once he was certain the coast was clear he pictured the hallway in his old living quarters, just as he saw it in his dream, and willed himself to travel there.

#

The hallway looked exactly how it always had, and exactly how he’d seen it in his vision. He was no longer calling it a dream. His dreams were premonitions. This was something someone wanted him to see now. He walked slowly but deliberately toward where he had seen the door in his vision. As he continued down the hallway a loud booming voice called out to him.

Prometheus spun around, expecting to see Zeus. There was no one. “Prometheus!” He heard his

name again and realized it was in his head.

“Who’s this?” He asked the voice.

“My apologies, it’s Gabriel,” the voice sounded much more calm and ethereal now.

“Ah, yes, my apologies for not recognizing your voice, how can I help you?” Prometheus continued to move forward searching for the nondescript white door with the padlock on it. So far he hadn’t seen it.

“It’s Tyler,” Gabriel said.

Prometheus stopped. “What about him?”

“He left.” Gabriel was being very vague.

“What do you mean left?” Prometheus asked. He started down the hallway again.

“Prometheus, it’s Abby.” A new voice interrupted.

The titan didn’t have time for this, but if both the archangel and the angel were calling out to him something must have happened to the Omphalos. “What’s going on with Tyler?” He asked her calmly.

“He came to me, told me that he’d asked you to find his parents. And I told him the truth about them. I’m sorry, I couldn’t lie to him anymore. So I broke the block on his mind and let him read the news about the incident,” Abby spoke very fast, Prometheus almost asked her to repeat herself but he knew what she had said.

“And that’s when he left?” Prometheus asked her.

“Well, no, that’s when he screamed and yelled and then got very zen and then he left. He said something about us continuing to train to die for him. And then he said he was out of the fight until further notice.”

Prometheus really didn't have time for this. He was dangerously close to being in the palace too long and he couldn't find the door to Hope in the hallway anywhere. "I'll talk to him as soon as I'm done with the task I'm currently working on." He did his best to sound calm.

"Okay, thanks, and I'm sorry," Abby said.

"It's fine, thank you for letting me know," Prometheus answered her and felt the connection sever.

As soon as it did the door appeared in front of him. He picked up his pace and reached it as quickly as he could. He did as he had done in the vision. Reached up, wrapped his large hand around the padlock and pulled. It opened in his hand. When he stepped inside the room everything was the same as he'd been shown. Banks of television and computer screens lined up all over the room. Scenes of human life flashing by on each of them. And in the middle of it all a frail young woman.

"Hope?" Prometheus asked as if he didn't know the answer.

She looked up at him with bright blue eyes. "Thank you for coming. I needed to show you something but I could not do so unless you were right here in front of it."

Prometheus stepped forward slowly, he didn't want to startle the girl. Her eyes were wide and darted back and forth when she looked at him. She was pointing at one screen in particular. When he was in front of it the scene that had been racing by slowed down for him. Buildings on fire, mass destruction. Dead bodies everywhere. And standing in the middle of all of it, Lucifer. And next to him, Adina.

"I have run all the possible scenarios and in every one of them Lucifer wins," Hope said in a strained voice.

“There’s nothing we can do to stop it?” Prometheus asked.

“There may be one way, but it is risky,” Hope said quietly.

Prometheus pointed at the screen. “Riskier than allowing this to happen?”

Hope sat silent for what seemed like a very long time. “There is a fifteen percent chance we can stop this,” she finally said.

“What do you need me to do?” Prometheus asked.

“Take me with you,” she said.

#

#

LUCIFER

Lucifer led his two new friends out of their cell and up the stairs to the upper levels. They weren’t in the best shape, beginning to turn to the more monstrous side of demonhood. Exposing them to the more human sector would help slow the process down. He found one of the least populated cells on the upper level and opened the door.

“Take good care of these two,” Lucifer said to no one in particular and closed the door behind them.

He returned to his library with a renewed optimism about how things were going. He had big plans for the Omphalos’s parents and the previous discussion about time made a lot more sense now. He’d need a little time to let them return to a more human state and then he’d need some time to train them properly.

#

PROMETHEUS

The titan wanted nothing more than to take this young woman and save her from the dark room she'd been trapped in, but he knew that was risky. He was already pushing the limits by being there in the room with her in the first place.

"I can't," Prometheus said solemnly. "We would both suffer severe consequences if I tried to take you out of here right now. But I will come back for you. I promise."

Hope didn't seem to be upset by Prometheus's response. She had probably seen it coming. "This will happen if I am trapped in this room much longer," she said in a much clearer voice than she'd spoken with previously.

"Does anyone check on you here?" Prometheus asked her. He was looking around the room, taking in more of the space. There was a small kitchen. A room Prometheus assumed was a bathroom.

"I think of the foods I want and they appear in the kitchen," Hope said.

Zeus was still taking care of her. There was no way he'd leave one of his disciples in charge of something so important. In fact there was no way he'd tell anyone about Hope's presence here at all. So he may not be watching her but he would certainly notice if she wasn't asking for food after a while. "How often do you ask for food?"

"Whenever I see something that looks good on the screens, I ask for it," she answered.

"We have to figure out a way to get you out of here without Zeus finding out," Prometheus explained again.

"I know," Hope said. Something on the screens caught her attention. "You should go now. You've been here too long, he's beginning to sense your presence."

“I’ll find a way to get you out of here,” Prometheus told her. He headed for the door and step back into his bright hallway. The light startled him. Before he could get too stuck on leaving the girl behind he pictured the living room at his mountain carved home.

As soon as he appeared back in the room at home in Greece Athena called to him. “Zeus wants to know what you were doing up at the palace,” she said.

“Tell him I forgot my toothbrush,” Prometheus snarked at her.

“You need to tell me something so that I can appease him.” Athena ignored the comment.

He knew it was risky but he told her the truth. About Hope’s escape from Pandora’s jar and her residence in his living quarters at the palace. And about Zeus’s part in all of it.

“How did you find her?” Athena asked.

“She called me to her,” he said.

“Why now?” Athena asked.

“She saw something that scared her. A world where Lucifer wins. She says that she can stop him if I get her out of that room,” Prometheus told her.

“And you believe her?”

“I believe that the way things are going right now, there is a strong possibility that Lucifer will win this war and wipe out all of mankind. That’s not good for anyone, no matter how much animosity their existence has caused us.”

“You appear to have lost control of your Omphalos, Prometheus. You should find a way to get him back on track. I will help Hope. You take care of keeping your up your end of our bargain,” Athena instructed.

“Yes mother,” Prometheus said. He knew better than to argue with her.

Prometheus took a deep breath and did what his mother asked. He teleported to the middle of the living room where his Omphalos sat sulking about parents he didn't like in the first place.

"I hear you have a grievance to report," Prometheus said as a greeting.

"Several ." Tyler said with a huff.

Prometheus raised an eyebrow at him. "I'm listening."

"For starters how dare you barge into my house unannounced."

#

TYLER

Tyler's brain was racing a mile a minute. It was reciting all the things he would have said had his parents still been alive, reliving good times that he was pretty sure he was making up or had seen on television somewhere involving families that were made up and weren't his own. He was building up all the words he was going to shout at Prometheus when he confronted him. He was in the middle of a particularly juicy stream of four letter words when the titan appeared in front of him.

Tyler jumped up from the couch then sat back down when he saw it was Prometheus. Sure, he was ready to confront the titan, but he wasn't dumb enough to try to fight him.

"Tell me, Prometheus, why did you choose me to be your Omphalos when you didn't think I could handle the death of my parents? If you thought I'd fall apart knowing they'd died in a mass shooting how do you think I'd do when the world was at stake?"

"It wasn't that I thought you couldn't handle their deaths. It was that you'd dwell. You'd think of all the words you didn't get to say. You'd focus on the things you didn't get to show

them about how good your life was now. And to be honest, Tyler. Those people weren't worthy of your time when they were alive, they certainly didn't need to be taking up any of it dead."

Tyler was taken aback by the titan's response. It was honest. And cutting. And what he needed to hear. But he was still mad. "But you made that choice for me," Tyler argued.

"You're right. I took that option away, and I apologize. But it appears I was right."

Prometheus didn't appear to be taking any shit today. Tyler liked this side of him. "I'm not dwelling, I'm processing."

"How long do you think that will take?" Prometheus asked him.

Tyler stared up at him. "What's gotten into you?"

"The war is coming and we're going to need everyone at full strength if we have even the smallest chance. I've seen the future and it isn't good, Tyler. Lucifer takes the middle plane. And Adina with it."

#

TYLER

It didn't take nearly as long as he'd hoped, but he returned to the training room with Prometheus close behind him. It had only been two hours since he'd proclaimed he was quitting the fight. Deep down he knew he'd return eventually. He just wished it wasn't this soon.

His friends were continuing on with their training. It made Tyler feel even more ridiculous that they were counting on him to return, and not at all surprised by his appearance in the room. Even Jonathan shrugged at him.

Prometheus called everyone together in the center of the room. He hadn't told Tyler anything about what was going on after the ominous announcement that he'd seen the future and

it was bleak. For all Tyler knew the titan was lying to him to get Tyler back into the fight. But something about Prometheus's demeanor made Tyler nervous.

“Despite what our fearful leader here believes, we are not setting ourselves up to die for him. Or anyone, for that matter. So let's get that out of the way first,” Prometheus said.

Tyler nearly stuck his tongue out at him, but refrained. Instead he shrugged. These people were his friends, they knew him well enough to know he was prone to dramatics.

“I apologize for my absence lately, there have been some new developments. I can't explain anything in detail, yet,” Prometheus continued. He looked at Tyler “This isn't a god thing, it's a life and death thing. As soon as I know the situation is handled and the threat is no longer present, I will fill in the blanks.”

Once again Tyler refrained making a face at him. When Prometheus said life or death it wasn't in Tyler's dramatic flamboyant manner. It was dark and foreboding and he meant it. He stepped forward. “Sorry. I got news I didn't like and I let it get to me. I won't promise things I can't hold up, but I'll do my best not to storm off again.”

“Thank you,” Prometheus said. “I'm trusting you Tyler. I need to see this new development through. As soon as I know it has been handled properly I'll be right back here to help in the planning and training and preparations.”

Tyler nodded at him. As did everyone else. And with that the titan was gone.

“So, how's the training going?” Tyler asked the group.

#

PROMETHEUS

Prometheus returned to his home in Greece where his connection to Athena would be at

its strongest. He'd chosen the mountain because it acted as both a shield and an antenna. He could communicate with the other titans, and the gods, when he was able to get them to listen, without much interference. If he'd remained in Los Angeles and tried to contact Athena he was sure to alert any number of his brothers and sisters as well. Here he was able to pinpoint exactly who he wanted to communicate with and it barely caught the attention of anyone else.

"Athena," Prometheus called her by her name again. That was another sure sign he'd go undetected. When he wanted something he called her mother. The gods and titans knew his patterns. He'd been begging to be let out of his punishment for so long they'd taken to ignoring him out of boredom. But these days, with mankind's fate hanging by a thread, there were a lot more interested parties. They were ready to mock him. They couldn't wait until his creation failed.

"Prometheus," Athena called back to him.

"Any progress?" Prometheus asked her.

"I spoke to Zeus," Athena answered.

Prometheus's heart beat faster. If Athena made even the smallest slip up and let Zeus know they were aware of Hope's existence, Prometheus couldn't imagine what the god would do.

"I told him there were items in your library that you needed to retrieve in order to better help mankind in the fight against Lucifer. He's agreed to allow you back on the premises with an escort," Athena said.

A small bit of relief came over the titan. But an escort would be a problem. Zeus's guards were big, and strong, and they took their jobs very seriously. There would be no way to get away

from them, get to Hope and get her out of the palace without them knowing.

“My thoughts exactly,” Athena said. “So I also convinced him to let me be the one to bring you to your quarters.”

Prometheus felt a tremendous sense of relief hearing this news. But he knew better than to trust even his own mother. “What’s the catch here, Athena? What’s in it for you?”

“Ah Prometheus. Still holding on to so much animosity. If what you say is true, and there is a chance we can prevent the predicted outcome, it benefits all of us. Your father may not see it as clearly, but I do,” she answered.

“We won’t have much time,” Prometheus told her. “Surely Zeus will tell everyone he knows that I will be on the premises because he allowed it.”

“Then let’s get going,” Athena said.

Prometheus felt himself get pulled upward. The living room in his mountain home slipped out of view and the gold and marble of his palace hallway came into view.

#

LUCIFER

Lucifer had returned to his library in a much better mood than he’d been in in a long time. If the Omphalos was insistent on using his own daughter against him, the demon was certainly going to take advantage of having two people that meant something to the Omphalos in his employ. His mood shifted slightly as he found Hades standing in front of the fireplace.

“Hades,” Lucifer greeted him with a slight hint of confusion in his voice.

“Lucifer,” Hades said his name back in the same tone. “You seem chipper today.”

“I thought it was too risky for you to come here, isn’t that why you have your upper plane

spy rummaging around in my head instead of doing it yourself?” Lucifer ignored the tone.

“Indeed,” Hades answered. “However, there’s some strange activity happening up at the palace and it’s causing a bit of a distraction. So I took the opportunity to check in here.”

Lucifer laughed. Hades was full of shit. He knew every move Lucifer made, Uriel was making sure of that. “I’m taking your advice and biding my time,” Lucifer said. “I have some new friends who will surely throw the Omphalos off his game. And that’s about all that’s happening down here. What is it that’s happening up there?” Lucifer wasn’t sure Hades would tell him, but he thought he’d ask anyway.

“Zeus has allowed Prometheus back on the premises to retrieve some items needed in the fight against you. There’s talk that it might not be something he’s looking for, but rather, someone,” Hades answered him.

“Who?” Lucifer pushed his luck. Hades seemed to be in a talkative mood.

“For many years rumors have been circling that Zeus is holding a hostage in Prometheus’s wing of the palace. They’ve always just been talk between guards and underlings, you know how people like to gossip,” Hades started.

Lucifer didn’t quite know about that, he’d never had anyone under his employ other than Azazel. As far as Lucifer knew his brother hardly talked to the souls, he just moved them around when the time came. “Why does anyone care that Zeus has a hostage?” Lucifer asked.

“In most cases no one would bat an eye at what Zeus does or doesn’t do up there,” Hades agreed with Lucifer. “But this is a special case.”

Lucifer raised his eyebrows at the god.

“Rumor has it the hostage is Hope,” Hades told him.

#

PROMETHEUS

As soon as Prometheus appeared in the hallway of his old quarters he knew something was wrong. The hallway was blocked by several guards. A quick glance at their armor told Prometheus they were sent by his father. Zeus's sigil adorned their chest plates and his requisite red broom top helmet sat on their heads, covering their faces. He spun around to head to his garden and found several more guards.

"Athena! You traitor!" Prometheus yelled out. He tried to zap himself back to the middle plane, anywhere he could think of, but he wasn't able to teleport. Something was blocking his powers. The guards began to ascend on him. Prometheus stood his ground, lashing out at whoever tried to approach him. He continued to curse his mother for her betrayal as he landed a punch here and there.

The guards were too much of a force for him and he finally gave in. They shackled his hands and feet and led him out of his palace quarters. He made a point of walking slowly, acting as if the shackles were a hinderance to his footing. In truth he could have walked at a normal pace. As they made their way through Prometheus's gardens he was intrigued to find that someone had been keeping them up. Not the time, he reminded himself. He needed to keep trying to get a message out that he'd been captured.

"You can keep trying but it isn't going to work," Zeus's voice boomed in Prometheus's head. "I've blocked your ability to contact anyone outside the palace. But you can certainly keep shouting at your mother. Maybe she'll hear you?"

Prometheus wanted to lash out again but remembered his hands were tied. He nearly tripped trying to wrangle free from his captors. They grunted at him through their helmets and pushed him forward. Zeus's guards were ridiculous for any year but especially now, in these times, where full armor was unnecessary. He felt a pang of pride, thinking his father geared up his men fearing Prometheus would be too much of a titan for them to capture.

"Don't flatter yourself," Zeus said. "They wear these every day."

"A little paranoid, don't you think?" Prometheus shot back at him.

Zeus's guards led Prometheus into a giant room that used to be the throne room where Zeus, Athena and the Gods and Titans held meetings. Those days were long gone. The Gods and Titans did their own thing for the most part now. Prometheus imagined the only time they met in this room for the last 100 years was to figure out how to deal with Prometheus's current mankind problem.

"You would be correct," Zeus's voice echoed through the room.

Prometheus wasn't surprised the God sat in his usual seat at the head of the table as if he were about to conduct business. "Where's my mother?" He asked as the guards dragged him closer to where Zeus was sitting.

"You'll see her soon," Zeus told him.

"What are you doing Zeus? Why not just let me go. Let me take Hope down to the middle plane. I'll resolve this whole issue and you can be done with it." Prometheus tried reasoning with the God. He wasn't surprised it didn't work.

"If your precious creations knew the truth, they'd crumble under their own grief," Zeus told him.

“You’re wrong about that. Mankind doesn’t care who’s pulling the strings, they only care that someone is. Whether it’s the upper plane and Yahweh or some other god or deity that goes by another name. Buddha, Allah. Whoever they speak to. They just need to know someone is listening. The fact that it’s Hope means nothing to them. But you and I both know it matters to Lucifer. That’s why you created her isn’t it? To be his ultimate foil?”

“I created the jar and everything inside it as a test for Pandora. I thought she’d do the right thing and keep it corked. She didn’t. Whatever happened after that is beyond my control,” Zeus answered.

“That’s what this is, isn’t it?” Prometheus said. “You couldn’t control Pandora. You can’t control mankind. You can’t even keep the gods and titans from fighting each other at any given moment. You’ve lost your grip. So you keep Hope locked in a little room and force her to keep the world turning as it should.” Prometheus paused. “I get it. You don’t want me to show them Hope because you want to do it. At the golden hour, when the middle plane is in it’s last dying moments. You swoop in with the one thing that can stop Lucifer from laying waste to it. And you’re the hero again.”

“You talk too much Prometheus. That was always your problem.” Zeus motioned to the guards “Take him to his cell.”

“The Omphalos will prevail Zeus,” Prometheus shouted as he was led out of the room.

#

Zeus’s guards were holding Prometheus’s arms with a tight grip and pushing him forward forcefully. The holding cells were down a long walkway through several wood doors and down ten flights of stairs. Prometheus knew the area well. He’d been sent there just before his final

sentence had been handed down. Eternity on the middle plane having his liver eaten by a savage bird. He'd somehow managed to befriend the hawk and they'd had some nice long talks. Now that the sentence had been lifted Prometheus hadn't seen his friend around much. Not that he minded.

He figured they'd throw him into his old cell, it would be like Zeus to remind him of the past. Instead they walked by that cell and took him to a bigger one at the end of the hallway. When they opened the door heard a voice inside call out. "Zeus! Get me out of here you big dumb oaf!"

"It's me mother," Prometheus said with a sigh.

Two of Zeus's guards blocked the door as the other two unlocked the shackled on Prometheus's arms and legs. They pushed him inside and closed the door behind him, quickly, efficiently. As if no time had gone by since they'd last done this. For a moment Prometheus wondered if they were the same guards who were watching over Hope.

"What happened?" He turned his attention to Athena.

"Exactly as I said. I told him you needed to get something from your library. He agreed to let me take you there. I contacted you. As soon as our connection was gone his guards were on me and I was thrown in here."

"You said I needed 'something' from my library? Just one thing? If he didn't assume we'd found out about Hope then he certainly figured it out when you insisted on escorting me there."

"I did what I thought was necessary, Prometheus. If I'd lied to him any more than that he'd have found out anyway."

“At this point, mother, you might as well have just told him I was coming to rescue Hope,” Prometheus threw up his arms in frustration.

“Yes well, let’s not dwell on what was and wasn’t said at this point, let’s figure out how we’re going to get out of here.”

“He blocked my powers,” Prometheus told her.

“Mine too,” Athena said.

Prometheus sat on the hard ground and put his head in his hands. Surely someone would notice if he didn’t come back?

#

LUCIFER

Lucifer felt like the walls were closing in on him. The story of Hope had always seemed like just an idea. And as long as that idea was locked away in a fragile jar made of clay, it wasn’t threatening in any way, shape or form. Now Hades was telling him Hope was a living, breathing being. He thought the worst of his troubles was going to be battling the Omphalos. But Hope. She could destroy him and everything he worked to build on the lower plane.

“Calm yourself Lucifer,” Hades commanded. “We’re still in control here.”

“You’ve just told me the one thing that could erase me from existence is not only a real thing, but she’s living outside the jar she’s supposed to be trapped in,” Lucifer snapped back at him.

“If it were really that simple, to erase you from existence just like that, don’t you think she’d have done it already?” Hades said.

Lucifer didn’t want to admit it, but Hades had a point. He’d done enough to warrant

action and it never came. Why?

“I can’t be certain, but I think it’s twofold. One, she can’t do much harm to you locked away in a room somewhere above Greece. And second, Zeus hasn’t decided it’s your time to go yet,” Hades said.

“If you know where she is, why haven’t you done something about getting to her and eliminating her?” Lucifer asked in an accusatory tone.

“Until recently no one could confirm her existence at all, let alone right under our noses,” Hades told him.

“So instead of doing something when the rumors were confirmed, you came here to taunt me with the news?” Lucifer was growing angry now. Hades was toying with him. He came all the way down here to tell him about Hope just to see his reaction.

“I came to tell you about it because it’s important that you know,” Hades argued.

“There isn’t a thing I can do about her, as long as she’s locked away in the palace you live in!” Lucifer screamed. “Go back up there, find her, and destroy her!”

“I wish it were that easy Lucifer,” Hades said calmly.

It annoyed Lucifer to no end that Hades wouldn’t fight back. And that he had no intention of doing anything about this Hope situation. He was about to say that to the god but he’d gone stiff and quiet. Lucifer waved a hand in front of Hades’s face. Nothing. “Hades!” Lucifer yelled. One more attempt at the hand wave and Hades came out of the haze.

“Something’s happened. They’re looking for me at the palace. I have to return immediately. I’ll send word as soon as I have something to tell you,” Hades said sharply and disappeared.

“Rude!” Lucifer yelled at nothing.

#

TYLER

Tyler stood just off to the side of Abby, Adina and Azazel. Jonathan was just behind him with his hands on Tyler’s shoulders. The demon was waving his hands into the air, pictures of animals appeared in the sparks of fire that he was generating from his fingers. As each animal appeared Adina mimicked the creature by shapeshifting into it. A rabbit. A cat. A dog. A larger dog. A big beautiful bird. Tyler smiled, Azazel must have taught her that to impress Phenix.

“Well aren’t you just a bundle of surprises,” Tyler said applauding.

“Thanks, I learned to draw when I was a tiny thing,” Azazel said proudly.

“Yes Azazel, I’m proud of you too, but I meant Adina,” Tyler smirked at him and reached out to hug Adina tight.

“She can actually shift from memory,” Abby said. “But it seems Azazel likes drawing them out for her.”

Azazel scoffed at her, with a smile. “She likes it, right Adina?”

Adina let go of Tyler’s waist and turned to the demon. “Yes uncle Zay.”

Tyler couldn’t help himself. He laughed wholeheartedly at the exchange. If he’d told Azazel, the demon he met just one year ago, that he’d go by “Uncle Zay” someday he’d have punched Tyler in the face. Now he was smiling ear to ear and couldn’t be more thrilled with the nickname.

“You guys are doing great,” Tyler commended them. He turned to Jonathan and motioned for him to follow Tyler. When he felt they were out of earshot enough he stopped. “How you

doing?” He asked Jonathan.

“Me? I’m doing fine. How are you doing?” Jonathan asked.

“I’m still mad, but I’ll get over it,” Tyler said honestly. “I just. You know they’re going to have to start showing Adina some pretty awful creatures eventually,” Tyler said glancing back over to her as she transformed into a Koala bear.

“Koala bears are much more vicious than they look,” Jonathan said flatly. “I know Ty. And so do they.”

“If you decide you don’t want to be here for that,” Tyler started.

Jonathan put his hand on Tyler’s chest. “I’m fine. We’re all fine. You’re the one worrying too much. We’ve all made peace with the fact that this is going to be brutal. And we’re all okay with that. It’s time you start being okay with it too.”

“I’m trying. It’s just. Every time I think I’m on the right track and I have everything under control, I get new information that throws me off the path,” Tyler said.

“Did you ever think that maybe that’s part of the training process?” Jonathan asked.

Tyler stared at him.

“Think about it Ty. We can train and prepare and be ready for the fight when it comes, but does anyone really know what’s in store for us? Maybe the universe is giving you the tools you need to learn how to deal with whatever comes your way,” Jonathan said.

Jonathan was right. No one knew what was coming, not really. “You’re too smart for me,” Tyler told him. “But just because that’s what’s happening here doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

“No, and I don’t expect you to, but maybe don’t quit the fight and run away from it,

anymore?”

“It’s good to have you here,” Tyler smiled, kissed Jonathan on the forehead, and returned to his own training.

#

PROMETHEUS

It frustrated Prometheus to no end that he couldn’t communicate with anyone outside of the cell he was locked in with his mother. He kept trying anyway. Calling out to Tyler, Abby, even Gabriel. No one answered.

Athena wasn’t faring any better, clearly upset with how mortal she felt. She was drawing pictures in the dirt, designing new gowns she’d create when she got out of there. But none of them came out as elegantly as she meant for them to. She hastily erased each drawing and started over.

“Someone is going to come for us, right?” She kept asking Prometheus.

“Yes, mother,” Prometheus assured her.

Just who that was going to be was a mystery to the titan, however. He couldn’t get word out to anyone on the middle plane and no one other than Zeus’s guards had been by to check on them. Zeus himself hadn’t yet made an appearance.

“If he hurts that girl,” Prometheus muttered under his breath.

“He won’t hurt her. He needs her. He’ll surely move her, though. It’s going to be even more difficult to rescue her.” Athena, still absolutely certain they were getting out of their cell, and soon.

Prometheus was attempting to concoct any number of plans when he heard footsteps

coming toward the cell. Both he and Athena sat forward in anticipation. Maybe Zeus had had a change of heart.

The voice he heard outside wasn't that of the fatherly god. It was deeper, more sinister.

"Hades?" Athena whispered.

"What's he doing here?" Prometheus whispered back at her. She shrugged.

The cell door opened and the overbearing figure of Hades stepped inside, blocking all light. "Well, what do we have here?" He mocked.

"Treason," Prometheus answered.

Hades laughed. It boomed through the cell and down the hallway. "How do you figure?"

"Who locks up Athena?" Prometheus countered.

"Yes, you do have a point," Hades answered. "What did you do?" He asked directly to Athena.

"I asked a favor," Athena said.

"Now, mother, you and I both know Zeus isn't going to lock you up for a simple favor. It must have been something out of the ordinary to warrant this." Hades waved his hands to indicate them being locked in a cell.

Everyone called Athena mother. It was her nature, despite not having given birth to any of them. Still, it made Prometheus uncomfortable hearing the god refer to her as such.

"What brings you out of your hole, Hades?" Prometheus changed the subject.

The god smiled wide. "News of your capture has traveled all through the palace. I had to come see it for myself," he said.

"Are you going to get us out of here or just stand there and gloat?" Athena stood up. On

her feet she was at least six inches taller than Hades. He took a step back from her.

Just for show Prometheus stood up too. It did neither of them any good, but Hades didn't know he and Athena didn't have their powers.

"I'm sorry to say I can't get you out of here." Hades had the good sense to sound remorseful about this. In truth Prometheus knew the god was more than happy with the situation they were in.

"You can't, or you won't?" Athena shot back at him. "Maybe you can stay on the surface long enough to find someone who can?"

Even without her powers Athena was a force. Prometheus feared her and they were on the same side. If Hades couldn't help them no one could. But Athena wasn't going to let the god leave without trying to get something from him.

"I'll see what I can do," Hades promised and backed out of the room. The guards closing and locking the large metal door after him.

#

LUCIFER

Lucifer was having a hard time with the idea of patience, especially now that he was awaiting word on the existence of Hope and whether or not Hades was going to be able to confirm her location at the Greek palace. This new development shouldn't change anything about his plans. But it did. The Omphalos was just one in a number of obstacles against Lucifer in his pursuit of the middle plane. Hope was the epitome of a full on road block.

Lucifer made his way down to the holding cells where he'd placed the Omphalos's parents. They seemed to be returning to a more human state but were still unable to speak in

more than grunts. Their features were returning and he could see the resemblance between them and their son. Lucifer was eager to get them talking. He wanted to know everything about raising their child and what they did to get them sent to the lower plane. He knew the generals. He wanted the details. He also wanted their names. He could find their records somewhere in his books, but he didn't have the patience to go seeking them out. It wouldn't be long now before they could just tell him.

When he was satisfied with checking on their progress he made his way down to the dungeons to walk through the beasts and monsters again. It calmed his nerves, knowing he had such terrible creatures at his disposal. They'd wreak havoc on the middle plane even worse than the ones before them. He'd been kind in his first round of attacks. The demons that destroyed most of Los Angeles were the less beastly of the bunch. These creatures were going to burn the city to the ground.

Lucifer slowly walked up and down the stairway through the dungeons until he was certain he'd given himself enough time to calm down. He returned to his library to find a book open on his table.

"Hades apologizes for running off so quickly, it seems Prometheus and Athena got themselves in some trouble at the palace and are currently being held in a cell Zeus's quarters. Hades cannot be one hundred percent certain but he thinks they tried to rescue Hope. They wouldn't give him any information when he spoke to them." Uriel's message was written on the page.

That all but confirmed she was out of her jar and somewhere tangible. Lucifer immediately went into planning mode. Someone was going to find her for him.

#

TYLER

Tyler had forgotten how big Alexis was in his human form. Granted he was even bigger in dragon form, but still. He was a giant of a man. Tyler had asked Phenix to contact the dragon and see if he'd come to the surface to spend some time working with both Tyler and Adina. Tyler needed his mental stability back and Adina needed some guidance from someone other than a phoenix who could take on human form, an angel that looked human and a demon that also looked human. Adina needed the dragon. How he was going to transform in the small training room was beyond him, he was just glad Alexis obliged the request to show up.

As soon as Alexis appeared in the room the energy was different. He brought a calmness Tyler was meant to be able to achieve. He also brought news.

“Chloe is managing well,” Alexis told the group.

With everything going on in his world Tyler had barely thought of Chloe and her new gig as a ward to a wizard in Interplanum. For a brief moment Tyler wished they could switch places.

“Not that well,” Alexis said in Tyler's head. “You called on me. What is it I can do for you?” He said out loud.

“You were working with me on my ability to bring calmness to the people around me. It appears I have forgotten everything you told me,” Tyler admitted. “Also,” he motioned for Adina to come forward. “Adina is learning to transform, and I think she'd very much like to learn how to turn into a dragon.”

Adina nodded enthusiastically. Alexis leaned down to her level. It wasn't a careless gesture, it was a necessity. He did it with almost everyone. He looked into her eyes with

intensity. Tyler had to look away but Adina didn't flinch.

"She's got a good soul," Alexis said in Tyler's mind. "You don't have to worry so much about her. Her choice has been made."

"Thank you," Tyler said back silently.

"I'll start with you," Alexis pointed at Tyler. "You're going to need more of my time."

If it were anyone other than the dragon Tyler would have taken that sentence very personally. But the dragon was direct. And Tyler knew he spoke the truth. Calmness wasn't exactly something easy for Tyler to muster up these days. Which was fine locked in a small room with little to no action going on around him. But in a fight, his emotions would drive the others forward. Or backward if he wasn't careful.

#

PROMETHEUS

One by one the gods and titans came through Zeus's quarters to gawk at Athena and Prometheus locked in a cell guarded by the best of Zeus's men. Each one of them heard a different story about why they were in their situation. Poseidon heard Athena had betrayed Zeus by allowing Prometheus on the premises. Apollo was told Prometheus was trying to steal things. It didn't matter to either Prometheus or Athena what any of them thought they'd done to be locked up there. They just wanted someone, anyone, to help them get out. And one by one the gods and titans claimed they were unable to get them freed.

"We're going to have to rely on one, or all, of your new friends," Athena said with a sigh.

"Which would be fine if I could tell them I'm up here," Prometheus sighed back.

Prometheus wondered which of them could even help them up here. The angels,

definitely. Tyler would have limited access and limited time here. The mortal, Jonathan couldn't step foot anywhere near the palace. Azazel was a definite no. As he ran through the options he heard footsteps approaching. When the door opened it was Zeus.

Prometheus lunged for him. Zeus barely lifted a finger and threw the titan across the room. He grunted as he hit the wall hard. "Hurts to be mortal, doesn't it?" Zeus teased.

"I demand you release us," Athena stood tall in front of the god.

"I thought about it," Zeus said with a smile. "Honestly, after I moved Hope to a new location you'll never be able to find, I considered letting you go. But I don't think I will. I'd like to see one of your new friends try to mount a rescue," Zeus said. And with that he turned his back on them and walked out of the cell making sure the door was locked behind him.

#

TYLER

Tyler could tell Alexis was having to concentrate on his own calmness more than usual. He knew he was more unfocused than ever, but for some reason his concentration was almost non-existent now. He centered himself, focused his breathing, tried to push out his aura onto the room, and it just died in the air. He'd break his concentration with questions, concerns, even a few wanders into his parent's deaths and what the dragon might know about them.

"I can't help you if you're not willing to try," Alexis snapped at him.

"I am trying," Tyler said back. "Something is wrong. I got damaged somewhere along the way."

The room laughed. He stared at them. "Haha, yes, I know, I have always been damaged, but this is different. Something's wrong."

“I’ll work with Adina a few minutes,” Alexis finally said.

“Good,” Tyler agreed and the two parted ways. He wanted nothing more than to watch as Alexis helped Adina hone her transformation skills. But he really did feel like something was off about him. “I need to talk to Prometheus. Can you contact him?” He asked Gemma.

“Sure,” Gemma said and closed her eyes.

After a few moments she opened them again. “You’re right. Something is wrong,” she said.

“What is it?” Tyler asked.

“I can’t find him,” Gemma said.

“What does that mean?” Tyler said.

“It means she can’t find his signal,” Abby told him.

“No I understand that,” Tyler said. “I meant, what does it mean when you can’t find someone telepathically?”

“Nothing good,” Gemma told him. “I’ll go check with my mother.”

“I’ll go with you,” Tyler suggested. He needed to get out of that room.

Gemma nodded and the two of them teleported away.

#

TYLER

Other than Lucifer, Pandora was about the last person Tyler wanted to ever see again. He hadn’t forgotten her role in Lucifer’s attack on Los Angeles. So when he and Gemma showed up at Pandora’s front door he wasn’t surprised by her reaction to him being there.

“Well this is a pleasant surprise,” Pandora greeted Gemma warmly. “Tyler,” she said his

name with a little less warmth and a lot more confusion.

“Pandora,” Tyler said with the same lack of warmth.

“Hi, again.” Gemma tried to defuse the tension.

Pandora led them into the living room, which seemed to be the usual meeting space these days. Tyler remembered back to the last time he’d been there. When they’d found out Epimetheus had been holding Yahweh hostage.

“What’s going on?” Pandora directed the question at Gemma.

“We can’t find uncle Prometheus,” Gemma told her.

“I see,” Pandora said.

“Any idea where he might be?” Tyler asked her.

Pandora seemed to be contemplating her answer. Her face was going through several different expressions and she was wringing her hands together in her lap.

“Last time we spoke he was heading to the palace, up there,” she pointed to the ceiling.

“To retrieve something.”

Tyler wondered if Pandora was being vague on purpose or if she didn’t know what it was Prometheus had gone to get, up there. He looked up at the ceiling for no apparent reason.

“I thought Zeus had forbidden him from returning to the palace,” Gemma said.

“He was,” Pandora agreed. “But Athena was able to convince Zeus to allow Prometheus a visit just this once.”

“Are you being vague on purpose or do you really not know the details of why Prometheus would return to a place he’d been forbidden from?” Tyler jumped in.

Pandora took a long pause. “The why isn’t important, right now.”

Tyler shook his head. He was about to lodge a complaint about being left in the dark when Epimetheus appeared in the doorway that led to the kitchen.

“Oh. Hello.” The presence of Tyler and Gemma clearly took him by surprise.

“Hi,” Gemma tried to sound happy to see him. They’d never had a great relationship.

Tyler knew the feeling.

“It seems Prometheus has gone missing,” Pandora told him.

“Zeus has him,” Epimetheus announced with more joy than Tyler expected.

“What do you mean he has him?” Tyler asked.

“Prometheus and Athena are currently locked in a cell in Zeus’s living quarters at the palace,” Epimetheus still sounded delighted by this news.

Tyler turned his attention to Gemma. “Can you get us into the palace?”

“You can actually travel there on your own,” Pandora answered him.

“I’ll be fine, mom,” Gemma retorted.

“I can go alone, if it’s a problem,” Tyler told her. “I just need to get an idea of the layout so I know where to find them.”

“It’s not a problem,” Gemma said.

“There are four of Zeus’s men guarding the door at all times,” Epimetheus cut in. “Also, you should know. Zeus has both Athena and Prometheus’s powers blocked. They won’t be of much help to you.”

“How do you know all that?” Pandora asked her husband.

“I just came from there,” Epimetheus said.

“You were up there and you didn’t try to help them?” Pandora yelled at him. “After all

he's done for you?"

"There's nothing I can do," Epimetheus argued. "Zeus put out a warning. If any of us try to help free Athena and or Prometheus there will be severe consequences."

Pandora made a face at him.

"I was going to contact the Omphalos as soon as I got back," Epimetheus continued to argue his position. "Luckily he was here already."

"We should go," Tyler suggested to Gemma.

"It might be a good idea to bring Abby and Gabriel into this," Gemma suggested. "We don't know what to expect once we get up there. Reinforcements might be necessary. I can get us all into the palace from Los Angeles."

"Okay." Tyler wasn't actually okay with any of it. He didn't really have time to go on a rescue mission. But this was Prometheus and as much as Tyler didn't want to admit it, the titan was important to him.

#

Tyler and Gemma reappeared in the training room, startling everyone. "Sorry," they both said when the group collectively screamed and gasped.

"You could have warned us," Abby said, smacking Tyler in the back of the head. "Adina was just about to show us her progress."

"I said sorry." Tyler rubbed his head. "We didn't have time to send a warning. We found Prometheus."

They all looked around, thinking Tyler meant he brought the titan with him.

"Where is he?" Jonathan asked.

Tyler pointed up. “Locked in a cell in the Greek palace up in the clouds,” he answered. It continued to amaze him how words like that flowed right off his tongue as if they were normal.

“Why?” Abby asked.

“That is unclear at the moment,” Tyler told her. “But it means we’re going to have to put the training on hold and go on a rescue mission.”

“Not all of us can get up there,” Azazel chimed in.

“That’s why you’re gonna stay here and continue to work with Adina,” Tyler told him.

“We really just need Abby and Gabriel,” Gemma said.

“Understood,” Azazel said with a nod.

“Do we have a say in this?” Gabriel asked from the back of the room.

“You do,” Tyler told him. “But I’d really appreciate if you helped.”

“We’re going to help,” Abby said with authority, throwing a long look at Gabriel, daring him to challenge her.

#

“The palace is built like a maze. It’s meant to confuse anyone traveling there uninvited,” Gemma told them. “As long as you stay with me you won’t get lost. Zeus’s quarters are the most heavily guarded. My father mentioned Athena and Prometheus’s powers had been blocked. They will be of no help to us if...when we get them out of their cell. That’s about all you need to know.”

“In other words, the odds are against us, as usual,” Tyler chimed in. “So who’s ready to go rescue a titan and a god in a floating palace in the sky?”

#

PROMETHEUS

“It just goes to show, if you had paid more attention to your own people instead of putting so much of your focus on mankind, your precious creation, you might have some actual allies up here.” Athena was whining. Prometheus had never heard her whine before. It was unsettling. He estimated they’d been in the cell less than two days. It wouldn’t be much longer before Athena would lose her mind completely. She wasn’t used to be locked up, without use of her power.

“What about you?” Prometheus retorted. “Why isn’t anyone trying to rescue you? Where are all your guards?”

“You know I never had any desire for an army,” Athena countered. “Zeus is the only one who has one now. The rest of us gave up that tradition years ago. Who does Zeus think is going to attack us up here?”

Athena had a good point. There hadn’t been a war between the greeks and, well, frankly anyone in hundreds of years. And the last war had severe casualties. He remembered his son, Deucalion. His thoughts turned to the present, to Gemma who had been Pyrrha, Deucalion’s wife who’d fled the war when she’d lost the love of her life.

“Everyone is loyal to Zeus. He’s still ruling the palace like he did when it mattered who was in charge here. The rest of us moved on with our lives, happy to take a backseat to the mortal leaders, down there.” Athena continued to drone on. She sat forward. “Epimetheus,” she exclaimed.

“Where?” Prometheus looked around. His brother had been the only titan who hadn’t come to see them yet.

“Surely he’s heard we’re locked up here,” Athena said. “Maybe he’ll get the news of our capture to one of your friends?”

Prometheus laughed. “Epimetheus would cut off his own arm before getting in contact with any of my allies. Did you know he was holding the leader of the upper plane hostage for years and years? And then there’s Pandora. She set this whole madness in motion, before getting herself caught up in the trade of black magic.”

“I don’t understand what any of that means,” Athena said with a sigh. “It really is too bad you’ve alienated everyone though. We could use their help right now.”

Prometheus knew there was no arguing with Athena in this situation. Everything had been his fault before they got locked up here.

#

TYLER

“Close your eyes,” Gemma said to Tyler. He obliged. He could feel her step closer to him. She put her fingers against his temples and he saw an image. It was a beautiful garden. Green and colorful and quiet. “Open them,” she said.

“That’s Prometheus’s garden. That’s where we’re going. I know how to get around the palace from there. It’s where I spent a lot of my time,” Gemma told him.

There was sadness in her voice. “We can figure out a different way, if it’s going to be too hard for you to go back there,” Tyler said.

Gemma shook her head. “A former life,” she said and tried to smile.

Abby and Gabriel reluctantly allowed Gemma to project the image of Prometheus’s garden to their minds as well. This was new territory for them. Being guided rather than being the guides. “Ready?” Gemma asked them.

They all nodded. Tyler closed his eyes and pictured the garden just as he’d seen it in

Gemma's memory. When he opened them again he was standing in the middle of it. A few short seconds later Abby, Gabriel and Gemma appeared next to him. "So far so good," Tyler whispered. "Where to?" He asked Gemma.

"This way," she said as she stepped forward onto a pathway. Nice of them to make it easy, Tyler thought. But he knew better than to assume it was going to be that simple. As the thought crossed his mind Gemma stopped in front of him.

"Damn," she whispered.

"What's wrong?" Tyler asked.

"They changed it," she said. "We just went in a circle."

#

LUCIFER

Lucifer led the Omphalos's parents from their holding cell, up a set of stairs, and into his library. A change of scenery had done wonders for them and they were already beginning to speak in full sentences. As soon as they stepped inside the room the questions started.

"What is this place?" The woman asked.

"Hell, we're in Hell." The man said.

"It can't be, we don't belong there." The woman protested.

"Oh but you do," Lucifer said in a sing song voice. "And I'd like to hear, in great detail, the events that led to you being sent here. But first. Tell me your names."

"I'm James. This is Patty," the man spoke for them both. "Who are you?"

Lucifer laughed. "I go by many names, I suppose. But you can call me Lucifer."

His guests didn't flinch. Lucifer couldn't decide if he was fascinated or annoyed by their

utter lack of disinterest in fearing him.

“Do you remember anything about what happened before you woke up here?” Lucifer asked.

A flicker of clarity flashed in Patty’s eyes. She felt her forehead. The bullet hole was still there. She flinched and dropped her hand to her side.

“We were at church. There was a shooting,” James said, not looking at his wife. He had put his hand on his side where a similar bullet hole had punctured him.

“Good,” Lucifer said. “Your mind is returning. Soon you will remember everything about your life. Please, have a seat.” He motioned to two new red leather seats he’d conjured up. The fire in the fireplace flickered wildly. It seemed to enjoy the added company.

James and Patty sat in silence, staring at the fire. Lucifer watched them closely. He hadn’t realized how much he’d observed the Omphalos in their short time together but he could see they had similar features.

“We don’t belong here,” Patty whispered to James.

She truly believed this. Lucifer could see it in her eyes. In her demeanor. Whatever they’d done on the mortal plane had been perfectly within reason to her, it seemed. Lucifer was evil incarnate. They named the word after him. But even he had limits. And what they’d done to their only son had been beyond even his imagination.

#

TYLER

No matter what direction Gemma led Tyler, Abby and Gabriel in they ended up right back at the center of Prometheus’s garden. And although Tyler was enjoying the tour of the greek

palace, he was pretty sure they didn't have time to be wandering around it. He started to say something but stopped himself. Gemma's sighs grew louder and more forceful every time they found themselves amongst the colorful flowers and greenery of the garden they'd started from.

"Zeus!!" She screamed out at one point. It echoed through the garden and off the marble floors in the hallway just ahead of them. A few of the gold statues rattled in place and Tyler was pretty sure if there were any windows they'd have shattered.

If Zeus didn't know they were there before he did now. Tyler hadn't really been around Gemma enough to know if she had a temper, but her anger in this moment reminded him she'd been a fierce warrior in her former life here.

"We'll figure it out." Tyler tried to calm her.

"He's toying with us," Gemma said in a lower tone.

Abby and Gabriel had been unusually silent through the journey around the floating greek palace in the clouds. Tyler wondered if it was similar to where they came from, or if it was so different they were fascinated by it. He started to ask but Gabriel stepped forward and whispered something into Gemma's ear.

"We're not doing the 'let's split up' thing," Tyler said, assuming that's what Gabriel had suggested.

"No, we're not," Gemma agreed loudly.

"Where is everyone?" Tyler asked.

"Zeus and Athena are the only gods that live her now," Gemma said. "Everyone else lives amongst mankind on the middle plane. Athena couldn't handle living in the mortal world. There was too much pain, strife, fighting. So she retreated back here, where she only sees what's

happening on the middle plane when she chooses to. And Zeus, he just wanted to rule something. So he stayed here and proclaimed himself king of the castle.”

“I know I brought us on this mission and I know it’s important that we save Prometheus, and Athena, but we really don’t have time to be wandering around the palace. Is there any way at all that we can get past Zeus’s tricks or should we consider this mission a failure and go home?”

Tyler asked the group.

“We haven’t failed,” Gemma told him. Just as she said it a new pathway opened up. She looked at Gabriel and nodded. “This way,” she said. But instead of walking toward the open path she turned and started in the other direction. Tyler nearly missed the change but caught up to the group as they entered a long hallway. The floors and ceiling were marble just like all the others he’d seen. Paintings on the wall depicted battles between greek warriors and what looked to be mortal men. All of them featured one thing Tyler recognized. Prometheus.

“Prometheus lived here before he created mankind,” Gemma said as she led them down the long hallway. “Zeus despised him. Banished him to the mortal world. Forbid him to return to the palace. But Zeus is a traditional god if nothing else, and he made sure to keep Prometheus’s section of the palace as pristine as it ever was.”

Tyler marveled at the fact that even the gods and titans fought like family. He knew all too well the battle between a father’s will and a child’s disobedience. Except in this case the stakes were much higher. All Tyler had to fear was a spanking. And the occasional electrocution.

Gemma stopped them at a large wood door adorned with gold handles and a large doorknob. She turned the knob and the door opened. Tyler followed her inside. The room was huge, filled with wood tables, wood shelves, gold everywhere. And books. Hundreds of books.

“Prometheus’s library. Every book in here is a written history of our world, your world, and Prometheus’s life in the palace up until he was banished from it,” Gemma told them. “Like I said, Zeus is a traditionalist. As much as he’d like to destroy everything in here, he won’t do it. So he ignores its existence instead.”

Tyler wanted nothing more than to go through every book he could get his hands on and find out more about this world, and his own. But he knew they didn’t have time for that. He made a mental note to try to return to this place as soon as he could. If he could.

“This way,” Gemma nodded in the direction of a large shelf that went from the floor to the ceiling.

There was no way this was going to be a hidden door behind a bookshelf situation, Tyler thought to himself. That was even too straight out of a storyline from a comic book, television series or movie for him. Then again, everything in his life for the last six months had felt that way so why not now.

Turned out, it wasn’t a hidden door behind a bookshelf thing. Tyler was slightly disappointed. But what happened next wasn’t any less magical. Gemma picked up a random book, opened it, ran her hands over the page, and opened up a doorway. In the book.

“After you.” she waved at Tyler. He hesitated. Gemma pushed him forward. He looked back at her and found himself in a doorway. Gemma, Abby and Gabriel followed him through it and they were standing in a new hallway, decorated much like Prometheus’s. Except in the paintings on these walls there was a different victor standing over piles of fallen soldiers.

“Zeus,” Gemma whispered in Tyler’s ear.

Just as she’d said the name they heard footsteps. “Stay where you are!” A voice

commanded. They all turned in the direction it had come from. Standing there, holding swords and dressed in uniforms straight out of a film about gladiators were four men. Gemma smiled. It seemed an odd gesture in the moment.

#

TYLER

Tyler put up his hands, readying himself for battle. Abby and Gabriel surrounded him. Gemma stepped in front of Tyler and held up her hands.

“Stop,” she commanded.

To Tyler’s surprise, the men stopped in their tracks. A wave of recognition seemed to wash over each of them. They may not have known her by her outer appearance but they knew her tone.

“Tell Zeus Pyrrha is here to see him,” she ordered.

The lead guard nodded and started to break from the formation.

“Oh he knows.” A voice boomed behind Tyler.

The guards stood at attention, Tyler, Abby, Gabriel and Gemma spun around.

Where Prometheus had taken the time to make himself look like he fit into the mortal world, Zeus made no attempt at looking like anything but a Greek god. Then again, he didn’t need to fit in anywhere but the palace, which as Gemma had described, was deserted anyway. The sight of him startled Tyler more than he expected it to. His mind had gone stereotypical Greek garb, meaning a toga. Zeus was dressed head to toe in battle gear.

“Look at you, all geared up,” Gemma said with a smirk. “You expecting a fight?”

“You showed up at my palace with three of Prometheus’s strongest creations. Who am I to deny the warrior daughter of one of the weakest titans in Greek history a fair fight,” Zeus taunted her.

Tyler didn’t know whether to be offended by Zeus’s calling out of Prometheus as the weakest titan or proud that this Greek god considered him to be one of the titan’s strongest creations. Either way he had a sudden urge to punch something, or someone. His hands began to glow. He clenched them to keep them from showing.

“You know, if you just let Athena and Prometheus go we can avoid all the death and destruction, I mean, the palace is pristine and these men, how many are left these days?” Gemma gave it right back to him.

“I can’t just let them go,” Zeus told her. “I mean what kind of an example would I be setting if I set my prisoners free because someone asked me nicely?”

“Fair enough,” Gemma said.

Tyler was waiting for Gemma to signal an attack, but it didn’t come. Instead she turned to Zeus’s own men and ordered them to charge at the god. To his surprise, they obeyed.

“Halt!” Zeus commanded his men. They didn’t listen. They continued to ascend on him, swords drawn. “Point taken!” He screamed.

“Stand down,” Gemma said calmly.

The guards stopped and lowered their swords at their sides.

Gemma turned to Tyler and smiled. “The thing about insisting on being the ruler of a palace is that you designate your military duties to someone else. I was the commanding officer back in my day. These men will always follow my orders.”

Tyler had a great deal of respect for Gemma from the beginning, but in this moment he was in awe of her. He hoped he could be half the warrior she was when it came his time to battle his enemy.

“This way.” Gemma pointed in the direction of a dimly lit hallway.

#

There were no paintings on the walls, no statues depicting heavily armed and regal men and women. It was clearly a place no one wanted to be and no one really visited. So it wasn't surprising when Tyler realized it was Zeus's version of a jail. Also not surprising was the presence of more guards.

“If you didn't need us here, why did we all have to come up?” Abby whispered to Gemma.

“For show,” Gemma said. “I can certainly manage on my own but Zeus might have challenged me further had you not been here to back me up. Don't take his reluctance to fight me or his own men as weakness. Your presence here made him think twice about attempting it.”

The guards stood in formation as soon as they saw the four of them coming. Gemma stepped forward “At ease gentlemen,” she said in her strong military tone.

Just as the first set of men had done these four recognized the voice and did as she commanded.

“Pyrrha?” A female voice came through the closed door just behind the soldiers.

“I'm here Mother,” Gemma answered her. “Open it,” she commanded one of the officers. He stepped forward and slid the bolt on the door.

Tyler thought it was odd that there was just one simple lock holding Athena, a powerful

Greek god, and Prometheus, one of the most notable Titans inside. But then he remembered Zeus had taken away their powers. Would they get them back?

The door opened and a ragged looking Athena stepped out of it. She hugged Gemma as soon as she saw her. Prometheus followed behind her, looking much less worse for wear. The vast difference between someone who had been living inside a mountain amongst mankind for centuries and someone used to living in a spacious palace where she could roam the hallways at will.

“Tyler,” Prometheus greeted him. The titan did not offer up any hugs.

“Let’s get out of here,” Gemma suggested.

“We can’t go yet,” Prometheus announced.

“What? Why?” Tyler protested.

“Zeus is holding someone else prisoner, we need to save her,” Prometheus told them.

“Who?” Abby asked.

“I can’t explain it right now, just know that she’s important,” Prometheus said.

Tyler stared at the titan. Even now, being rescued from a tyrant of a god, the man was being vague with the information.

“Trust him,” Athena said before Tyler could argue. “I didn’t just come to the palace looking to get locked in one of Zeus’s jail cells. I had a reason. Please just give me this one, and don’t ask any more questions.” Prometheus was begging. Tyler hadn’t ever heard the titan speak with such desperation.

“Where to?” Tyler asked him.

#

The only way out was back the way they came. They all knew Zeus would be waiting for them when they exited the hallway. “I’m sure he brought in reinforcements, if he has any left,” Gemma suggested. “I’ll handle them, you just make sure to shield Athena and Prometheus. They won’t be able to fight for themselves.”

“Will their powers return at all?” Gabriel, who had been surprisingly silent through the whole ordeal, asked the question everyone else was wondering about. At least that’s what Tyler was most interested in.

“Yes, as soon as we leave the palace everything will be back to the way it was,” Prometheus said.

#

Gemma stepped into the throne room first. Tyler followed her watching behind him as Abby and Gabriel held back Prometheus and Athena just slightly, until they knew the coast was clear.

Gemma gasped in front of Tyler which made him look in her direction. Zeus stood in front of them holding a long chain in one hand and a sword in the other. Attached to the chain was a frail young woman.

“Who’s that?” Tyler whispered into Gemma’s ear.

“Hope.”

#

LUCIFER

Lucifer was endlessly fascinated by how many times his new friends, James and Patty Jones, were insistent that they didn’t do anything in their lives to warrant a trip to the lower plane. They truly believed that being messengers for the leader of the upper plane, or being

God's children, as they put it, was a free pass to treat others poorly. Lucifer had his own set of issues with Yahweh, but the man he knew, even today, was not full of the hate these people insisted on finding in his words.

"It's your fault," Patty said pointing a finger in Lucifer's direction.

"How do you figure?" Lucifer asked her. "You made our son gay," she said.

It wasn't the fact that she accused Lucifer of her son's gayness that made Lucifer take pause. It was that she said it in a way that made him feel he'd committed the worst kind of crime against her precious little boy.

Lucifer contemplated his response. In the mortal world he was responsible for all the evil things and Yahweh was responsible for all the good. He'd made peace with that long ago, even embracing it as he lashed out at his brother for keeping him prisoner underground. He didn't fault these two for being staunch believers. In fact it gave him a sense of pride that they credited him with things he didn't have any part in creating.

"The thing is, Pat. May I call you Pat? You think I took your boy away from you by 'making him gay,'" Lucifer said. "You pushed him away on your own. Homosexuality isn't good or evil. It's human."

Patty folded her arms against her chest and made a face at Lucifer. He looked at James to see if he had anything to add to the argument. He remained silent.

Lucifer was beginning to wonder if he'd been mistaken about resurrected these two. It would certainly shock the Omphalos seeing his parents at Lucifer's side, but would it render him unable to fight back? They weren't exactly winning him over with their worship of the upper plane and their misinformation about who made humans into what kind of people.

One thing this did for him though, was prove that mankind needed a reset. He may not have created them in their current incarnation but he'd certainly create them in the new world.

"I thought you'd like to know, that distraction we've been looking for on the middle plane has happened much faster than we predicted it would," Uriel's voice interrupted Lucifer's daydreams of a newer, less human world.

"Oh?" Lucifer answered him.

"The Omphalos and a few of the others, including the angel and Gabriel, are off on a rescue mission. Hades has reported that they've run into a significant road block and may not return to the surface for quite a while," Uriel told him. "I've opened one of the gateways to the middle plane. The one through Purgatory and Salvation."

Lucifer contemplated this news. He'd really been hoping for a fight. Not to just walk onto the middle plane and take it over.

"Oh it's still going to be a fight," Uriel said. "Your brother and your daughter are still in play."

#

Lucifer didn't need much more motivation than the prospect of facing off against Azazel in battle and the possibility of convincing his daughter that his side was the one to be on. Uriel tried to remind him that that wasn't part of the mission. "Understood," he'd told the archangel. But there was always a hope. Lucifer paused on the thought. Hope. Was this a trap? Uriel promised there had been no sight of Hope on the middle plane since Hades insistence that she was a living, breathing being. Uriel still believed it to be a hoax. Either someone playing games with Hades or Hades playing games with Lucifer's head. Then again Uriel would want to deny her existence,

Lucifer reminded himself. He shook off all thought of it and focused on the task at hand. He led a small group of demons, and James and Patty, for reasons Lucifer still couldn't figure out, through Purgatory and to the gateway to the Middle Plane. As Uriel said, it was open. Lucifer stepped through it and right into the kitchen Salvation Bar & Grill. As soon as his small army was safely inside the tiny kitchen Lucifer snapped his fingers and transported them to an alleyway in the middle downtown Los Angeles. In front of them a sign for the Esesa Jane hung on a steel door. He didn't know how or why he knew that's where Azazel and Adina would be, he just felt it.

“Adina!” He screamed his daughter's name.

Nothing happened. He started to call her out again but the steel door swung open.

“How?” Azazel greeted him.

“Friends in high places. I hear the Omphalos has seen fit to leave you here alone,” Azazel said with a smile. “Good to see you too brother. Where's my daughter?”

“Safely hidden away,” Azazel told him. “Is this your army?”

Azazel was clearly mocking him. “My audience,” Lucifer said. “I promised them a good show. What do you say brother, shall we tussle?”

Lucifer didn't expect Azazel would actually take on the challenge. He wasn't much of a fighter. But the demon stepped out from the doorway and let the steel door close behind him. “You're not going to get anywhere near her, Lucifer,” Azazel growled at him. “Despite what your friends told you, I'm not alone up here. I'm just the one who volunteered to face you first.”

Lucifer lunged forward. Azazel put up his arm to stop him. Their bodies slammed into each other and shook the ground as if there were an earthquake. As they continued to push and

swing at each other the steel door opened again. A large man stood inside the doorway, blocking out the noise that had been coming from the inside. Azazel landed a blow against Lucifer's jaw in the distraction. Lucifer swung back and missed, then swung again and hit Azazel square in the chest. The demon shattered into pieces. By the time they hit the ground it was dust.

Lucifer didn't have time to revel in the victory or mourn the loss of his longest serving lieutenant. The giant of a man was charging at him from the doorway. Just as he reached Lucifer the man turned into a dragon. A wave of recognition washed over Lucifer. The creature let go of a fiery breath that nearly caught Lucifer. He ducked under it and the flames wiped out half the demon army he'd brought with him. "I thought you were on my side!" Lucifer screamed at the dragon.

"You thought wrong," the dragon roared and let out another stream of hot fire.

Lucifer reached behind him and pulled out his spear. He lunged forward and drove it into the chest of the dragon. The creature fell to the ground, transformed back to a man and took his last breath.

"Adina!" Lucifer screamed out again.

The steel door opened. Lucifer expected to see his daughter standing in the doorway. It was Phenix. She held two blades, one in each hand. Her eyes scanned the area. They flickered with anger when she caught sight of the fallen dragon. Phenix charged forward.

Lucifer blocked her with his arm, his spear, with everything he had. She was a more formidable opponent. But alas, even she couldn't defeat him.

Standing over his fallen foes he started to call out to Adina again. But he didn't need to. She appeared in front of him.

“Alright, I’m here, please stop killing all my friends.”

#

TYLER

Chaos broke out in front of and behind Tyler. Gemma lunged forward to try and free Hope from Zeus’s hold. He brushed her aside like she was a gnat. Prometheus pushed past Tyler and stopped before he got the the god. “Zeus, think about what you’re doing,” he pleaded. “You destroy Hope and you destroy all of us.”

“What’s going on?” Tyler asked Abby telepathically.

“They lied,” Abby answered him out loud. “Hope is not supposed to be out of the jar. We need to make sure Zeus doesn’t kill her. If Hope dies Lucifer wins.”

Tyler stepped forward and stood next to Prometheus. He was ready for battle. Whatever it took he’d do it. Lucifer was not going to take over the middle plane on Tyler’s watch.

Zeus laughed. “Your human pet thinks he can help you fight me? You should have taught him better.”

“What good will it do, killing Hope?” Prometheus ignored the taunt.

Zeus ignored the titan and continued to address Tyler. “When I captured Hope from Pandora’s blunder, opening a jar she was meant to keep on her shelf and never touch, I meant to balance things out. Hope and Lucifer are the perfect foils. You think I am going to destroy her? No. Mankind has been slowly killing her since you stepped foot on the middle plane. When Prometheus created mankind he forgot to instill gratitude. He forgot to teach you how to treat each other. How to treat your planet. I’m not going to destroy Hope, you’re going to do it for me.”

Tyler couldn't find a good argument for the god's assessment.

"They're learning," Prometheus said before Tyler could find his own words. "You don't kill off your children because they disobeyed you. You help them."

"I am not speaking to you." Zeus pointed at Prometheus with a long bony finger. Tyler wondered if lightning was going to shoot through it.

"He's right though." Tyler didn't know where his sudden bout of courage was coming from but he made sure to hold on to it. "You're both right, really. We're making mistakes. But we're trying to correct them too."

Tyler was about to continue, but something in Hope's expression stopped him. "What is it?" Both Tyler and Prometheus said.

"It's too late," Hope's voice was weak. But the words travelled through the room and echoed off the walls anyway. A swift breeze blew through the room with her words. Behind him Abby and Gabriel disappeared. He couldn't see them, he just felt a sudden loss of connection between he and the angels. "What's happening?" He spun around.

"I sent them to the surface," Hope's voice was stronger. Zeus had loosened his grip on her neck. "Lucifer has ascended. Your friends are dead, I'm sorry."

Tyler's heart dropped. "What?"

#

LUCIFER

Two figures appeared in the alley out of thin air. Lucifer was disappointed to find neither of them were the Omphalos. "Too afraid to face me yourself?" Lucifer called out, hoping the Omphalos heard him. The angels would be harder to destroy, but Lucifer was happy to do it

anyway. He stepped forward, holding his spear in front of him.

“No.” Adina grabbed Lucifer’s arm. “You will not kill anyone else,” she demanded.

Lucifer stepped back from his attack position and let the hand with the spear in it fall to his side.

“Where is he?” Lucifer asked the angels. “Hiding?”

“Gathering reinforcements.” the young angel responded.

“Good.” Lucifer smirked at her. “More for me to destroy.”

“Father,” Adina said with a deep sigh.

#

TYLER

“What do you mean my friends are dead?” Tyler stepped toward Hope. Zeus tightened his grip around her neck causing her to choke. Tyler stepped back.

“Please, Zeus,” Prometheus pleaded next to him.

“I’m sorry, I couldn’t stop him,” Hope whimpered.

“It wasn’t your job to stop him,” Tyler told her. “It was mine.”

“Tyler, you need to go now,” Prometheus said next to him. “I promise I won’t let anything happen to Hope.”

Tyler was torn between his duty to protect the middle plane from Lucifer and his mistrust that the gods wouldn’t try to tear down the entire world. He also knew without a doubt, that if anything happened to Hope it would all be for nothing anyway.

“You’re going to have to trust me Tyler,” Prometheus whispered.

“He has Adina,” Hope called out to him.

It was in that moment Tyler realized he was in a no win situation. Either way someone was going to destroy the middle plane. Whether it was Lucifer on the surface or Zeus up here in the clouds with his hands around the neck of Hope. The only reason mankind has survived this long.

“I’m sorry, Prometheus. But I can’t leave you up here without a weapon. Gemma is injured. You and Athena have no powers. You’re right, I’m going to have to trust someone. And right now I’m trusting Adina.”

#

LUCIFER

“Bring them back,” Adina demanded. “All of them. Phenix, Azazel, Alexis.”

“Who’s Alexis?” Lucifer asked her.

“The dragon,” Adina said. Her hands were on her hips. Lucifer saw his own fire in her eyes. And her mother’s stubbornness in her words.

“I can’t do that,” Lucifer insisted.

“You can, and you will,” Adina demanded.

Lucifer glanced in Adina’s direction one more time, her eyes flashed with rage, determination and love. He knew instinctively that love wasn’t for him. Despite that, he wanted to do what she asked of him. He snapped his fingers in front of him and reversed the damage he’d done. Azazel, Phenix and the dragon reappeared in full form, healthy and ready for a fight.

Adina stepped forward. “It’s ok.” Her voice was as gentle and quiet as Lucifer had ever heard anyone speak. “Daddy,” she called out. Lucifer twitched. She wasn’t calling for him. The steel door opened behind him and Jonathan stepped into the alley.

Adina was almost as tall as the mortal. She put her hand on his cheek and smiled. “I’m going to go now. I will keep Lucifer on the lower plane, you make sure to take care of dad, and yourself. I’ll try to visit when I can.”

#

#

TYLER

“You are an interesting creature.”

Tyler wasn’t sure if Zeus meant it as a compliment, but he was going to take it as one. “Thanks.”

Zeus shook his head. Tyler kept his eyes on Hope, making sure the god’s hands weren’t tight around her neck. “Believe it or not, I understand where you’re coming from. I sometimes wonder if a complete reset isn’t actually a good idea right about now. But we’re young, we’re growing. We need time to make mistakes and correct them,” Tyler kept the god distracted.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw movement. Zeus didn’t seem to catch it. So Tyler continued. “It would be fun to get to use a reset button every time we do something dumb, wouldn’t it?”

“Isn’t that what you people do, every night, when you get on your knees and pray for forgiveness for the sins you committed that day and promise to do better the next one?” Zeus pondered.

“I suppose, but we’re not asking for a complete wipe of everything we’ve ever done,” Tyler said. “We’re just acknowledging we did something stupid and promising to do better.”

Zeus seemed to be considering this. Tyler kept his eyes on Hope despite knowing activity was occurring next to them. He was doing everything in his power not to alert the god that something was amiss.

“Zeus,” a voice called out. Tyler finally looked to his side and saw a woman, tall, dark features, dressed in traditional warrior garb.

Zeus snapped his head to the side. “Pyrrha.” He didn’t seem to be surprised by her appearance. Tyler, on the other hand, was mesmerized. All signs of Gemma had disappeared. This was one hundred percent the living, breathing soul of the greek daughter of Pandora and Epimetheus in full form. Tyler tried not to stare at her. She smiled in his direction. He turned away, embarrassed.

“I too understand your misgivings with mankind.” Pyrrha walked toward Zeus. “Although you seem to have forgotten the last time you tried a reset, Father.” She continued to move closer to the god still firmly perched on his throne.

There didn’t seem to be fear in Zeus’s outward appearance but he had gone quiet and he was no longer paying attention to anything but the warrior approaching him. It took under three seconds and Tyler would have missed it if it not for Hope’s frail body flying toward him. In one swift motion Pyrrha freed Hope from Zeus’s grasp and pushed her gently toward Tyler. He caught her before she could land on the hard marble floor.

Pyrrha stood directly in front of Zeus now. “You left it up me and Deucalion to rebuild the middle plane. If you have a problem, it is with me, not with them.”

Zeus remained silent.

Tyler had moved Hope behind him shielding her from any retaliation, should Zeus decide

to move on them. Prometheus and Athena flanked her, which Tyler found admirable.

“Here’s how I see it. You’re going to restore Prometheus and Athena to their full strength, you’re going to allow Prometheus full custody of Hope. He will remain with her on the palace grounds so that you may keep an eye on them, of course.”

Tyler marveled at how Pyrrha was commanding Zeus’s attention.

“I am going to accompany the Omphalos back to the middle plane and help him send Lucifer back where he belongs,” Pyrrha continued. “I understand your world has been turned upside down with how much imbalance there has been lately. I promise you I will restore that balance and return home as soon as my job is done. Whether that be today or a hundred years from now. Deal?”

Zeus finally broke his eye contact with Pyrrha and scanned the room. Tyler reached behind him and gently moved Hope further behind him. Zeus paid them little mind. It seemed his attention was on the doors. Guards stood at attention at each of the four doors that led in and out of the throne room. Tyler hadn’t even noticed them move into place. There was no doubt they were there keeping Zeus in.

“Alright Pyrrha,” Zeus finally spoke. “But should you fail, I will destroy you along with mankind. Understood?”

“I wouldn’t expect anything less,” Pyrrha answered.

Zeus waved his right hand in front of him. Tyler thought he was dismissing Pyrrha but she didn’t move. Behind him there was a surge of energy. Tyler glanced back to see both Prometheus and Athena looking much less frail.

This seemed to satisfy Pyrrha who backed away from the god. She continued to face him

as she pushed Tyler and toward one of the exits. Her guards parted to allow them through. Once they were safely in a hallway Pyrrha turned her attention to them.

“We should move quickly, Zeus is not the kind to be patient,” she suggested.

Without the god messing with the layout of the palace they made their way to Prometheus’s living quarters easily.

“Thank you Pyrrha,” Athena hugged the warrior.

“Keep an eye on them.” Pyrrha spoke to Athena in a much gentler voice. It wasn’t a command. Tyler looked away, feeling guilty for eavesdropping on the moment.

Prometheus approached him. “I’m sorry I won’t be down there to help you,” he said in a low voice.

Tyler nodded at him. “I think we’re going to be okay.”

#

Standing next to Pyrrha Tyler felt small. She was a warrior in every sense of the word. He tried to make himself taller by standing up straighter. Pyrrha smiled at him. “Ready?”

“Yes,” he said with confidence. And for the first time he actually felt like he was.

#

LUCIFER

Adina continued her tearful goodbyes as Lucifer waited nearby. She hugged the angels, the phoenix, the dragon. She even managed to get Azazel to embrace her. Lucifer could practically see his previously happy mood leave his body with each sickening gesture. Each one of them was trying to convince the girl to stay. Adina insisted this was the best way. Lucifer could hear them promising to keep the middle plane safe, blah blah. Behind him James and Patty

stood quietly. The only non casualties of his ascension from the lower plane. The other demons had been vanquished quickly. He was reminded that Adina hadn't asked for them to be resurrected. No one seemed to pay attention to the two humans, however. Not that it mattered. The only being he was interested in showing them off to was the Omphalos and he wasn't even there.

His daughter finally returned to his side. Her face was tear soaked, but she smiled at him anyway. It made him feel guilty for what he was about to say. But only slightly. "You know I'm not going back to the lower plane with you," Lucifer said emphatically.

Adina's smile grew wider and her tears dried up instantly. "I know, father. I was just giving them enough time."

Lucifer didn't have long to wonder who Adina was referring to. The sky opened up and two figures fell from it. The Omphalos and a female warrior landed on their feet right in front of him.

"Lucy, we're home," the Omphalos quipped.

Adina stepped forward and hugged the Omphalos. "Who's this beauty?"

"Pyrrha, or Gemma as you used to know me," The warrior opened her arms to the girl.

"Oh!" Adina exclaimed and stepped into them, hugging the warrior tightly.

"Alright enough if this silliness." Lucifer wasn't there to watch a reunion, he was there to fight. He also was trying to get the Omphalos's attention. He hadn't seemed to take notice of the two people behind Lucifer.

Adina stood on the other side of the Omphalos, flanking him like a warrior would her general. The young angel joined them, blocking the Omphalos from the front. The phoenix, the

dragon, Azazel and the Archangel made a second line of defense.

Lucifer looked behind him to check on his companions. They were still there. Yet the Omphalos hadn't indicated he'd seen them at all. "I have some people I'd like you to meet," he pushed the two beings forward.

"This is James and Patty Jones," Lucifer announced. There was a flicker in the Omphalos's eyes but it didn't register as recognition.

"All I see are two demons and the leader of the lower plane," the Omphalos announced. "If this is your army, you've greatly underestimated this battle."

"I seem to have underestimated you, Omphalos, but not for your ability to fight against me. Your hatred for your family is admirable. We're a lot more alike than I thought," Lucifer retorted, shooting a glance in Azazel's direction for extra emphasis.

"You're going to take whoever these two creatures are, and you're going to return to the lower plane where you belong." The Omphalos ignored his comment. Lucifer didn't blame him.

"No, I don't think I'm going to do that."

Lucifer snapped his fingers into the air. Once again the sky opened up and two figures emerged from it. "I have lots of surprises for you," Lucifer taunted. The figures stepped forward to reveal themselves.

A collective gasp erupted on the other side. "Hades," the warrior whispered. While the Archangel and the angel both called out "Uriel."

Although the reunion between the Omphalos and his parents was a disappointment, the ripple effect of the angel and the god showing up on Lucifer's behalf made up for it.

"I should have known you'd be in on this," the warrior snapped at Hades.

The angels remained silent, though there may have been a conversation going on between them, telepathically. The stare down between the three of them was quite intense.

“That’s more like it,” the Omphalos called back his attention.

“I’m not done yet,” Lucifer assured him. Just as he said the words several human like demons rounded the corner and entered the alleyway. “My creatures are all over the city now,” Lucifer announced. “They’ll lay waste to it in no time. If you’d like to stop all this nonsense feel free to surrender.”

“Not a chance,” the Omphalos said as he raised his palms toward Lucifer. A blast of hot energy shot from each palm, just missing him on either side.

“You missed,” Lucifer laughed.

“Warning shots,” the Omphalos shouted. “The next ones will hit you.”

“She’s not here,” Hades called out to Lucifer.

“Find out where they’re hiding her?” Lucifer tried not to sound like it was a command, more like a suggestion. Hades nodded and disappeared.

“I’ll go help him,” Uriel said and flashed out of sight before Lucifer could say anything.

Lucifer turned his attention back to the Omphalos. He pulled his spear from the sheath at his back and held it in front of him. “Go,” he commanded his demons.

Just as Lucifer had shouted the command, Omphalos had shouted his own. His allies spread out, some of them disappearing altogether. Everyone but the warrior, the young angel and his own Adina stood with the Omphalos in the alley.

“They deserted you,” Lucifer taunted.

“They went to where they were needed,” the Omphalos told him. “I told them I could

take you on myself but they insisted on staying by my side.”

The women flanked the Omphalos once again, forming a shield around him. Lucifer tried to not take it personally that not only did his demons refuse to shield him in the same way, but that his own daughter was one of the shields for his enemy. Lucifer charged forward and the demons followed suit.

#

TYLER

Balance. The idea had been drilled into Tyler’s mind so much that’s all he thought of when Hades and Uriel turned up on Lucifer’s side. Despite the reaction by his own allies, Tyler wasn’t at all surprised. There was no way the universe was going to let Tyler’s side win by a landslide. Oh he was certain they’d win, eventually. But not without a fair fight.

After a brief exchange with Lucifer both Hades and Uriel had disappeared into the sky.

“They’re going after Hope,” Tyler telepathically relayed to anyone listening.

“Prometheus will handle it,” Pyrrha assured Tyler out loud.

Tyler didn’t have time to wonder how that was going to be possible. Lucifer had commanded his demon army to charge. Tyler did the same, dispatching Phenix, Alexis, Gabriel and Azazel to all parts of the city while Adina, Abby, Pyrrha and he remained to handle the immediate area.

Tyler blasted beams of energy in Lucifer’s direction. Asphalt kicked up around the area Tyler had aimed for. He had yet to try and hit the demon with any of them he just wanted to keep him from getting closer. It was working. Lucifer stopped just a few feet in front of Tyler.

Although Lucifer had introduced the two demons flanking him as Tyler's parents, there was nothing that indicated that statement had been true. They looked like any other creature in Lucifer's army. Distorted, rotting, dead. Not unlike a zombie. If Lucifer had been trying to throw Tyler off by bringing his parents to the surface with him, he'd failed. The ruler of the lower plane was right about one thing though. The acidic hatred that built up in his stomach and throat when Lucifer said his parent's names was still stuck on his tongue. He struggled with the intense desire to blast them with his energy beams. He refrained, for now. Lucifer tried to move forward again. Tyler shot a blast of energy at his feet.

All around him Tyler could see Abby, Adina and Pyrrha capably eliminating any and all demon creatures Lucifer had brought with him. While the rest of the crew were all over the city taking care the ones that were escaping from whatever gateway Lucifer had used to enter the plane. Tyler was getting updates every few minutes.

"Hell hounds on Pico near the Fox studios," Jonathan announced.

Again? Tyler thought. Those creatures seemed to be obsessed with that area.

"I'm on it," Azazel checked in shortly after the announcement.

Tyler turned his attention back to his own location.

"Seems like you need more practice." Lucifer chuckled.

"I'm still not trying to hit you, Lucy," Tyler shouted back. The growls and grunts of Lucifer's demons being vanquished were loud but growing quieter.

"On your left!" Tyler heard Adina shout. Tyler snuck a quick glance in her direction in time to see Abby light up a demon with a quick shot to the creature's head.

"All clear," Pyrrha announced.

All that was left now were Lucifer and the two demons posing as Tyler's parents. Lucifer nodded in each of their directions and they lunged forward. Without hesitation Tyler blasted them squarely in the chest dropping them to the ground and turning them into dust. Just for good measure he shot another blast at Lucifer's feet. It put a hole the demon's left shoe. Lucifer shook his head. "I liked those shoes."

"They were using the gateway at Salvation. It has been secured," Gabriel's voice rang through Tyler's mind. "No other creatures will be able to enter the plane. Now would be a good time to get Lucifer back here."

It was the only part of the plan Tyler hated. The only way to get Lucifer back onto the lower plane was to lure him to one of the two remaining gateways. There was no simple way to get the demon to comply. Even as confident as Tyler knew Lucifer was, there wasn't a chance he'd consider getting near the one place that could send him back to where he came from.

"I have an idea," Pyrrha sent out telepathically. "You're not going to like it but it might be the only thing that works."

"What is it?" Tyler answered her the same way.

"Bring Hope there."

"You're right. I don't like it. Prometheus has reported no sign of Hades or Uriel. Now you're suggesting we bring Hope right out in the open. We're up against a god, an archangel and the leader of the lower plane now. It's not just Lucifer anymore," Tyler argued.

"We can protect her," Abby, Adina and Pyrrha said in unison.

Tyler had all the faith in the world that his warrior, his adoptive daughter and his best friend could protect Hope. He also knew that Prometheus wouldn't let anything happen to her.

But it was a tempting proposition, dangling the only thing in that could eliminate Lucifer in front of him. Would he even take that bait? And with both Hades and Uriel on the hunt for her, was the risk greater than Tyler's need to scare Lucifer into obedience? Deep down he knew Pyrrha was right. There was no way Hope would stay in the palace safely out of play. She was the only one of them to get Lucifer back onto his own plane.

"Prometheus," Tyler called out in his mind. "Meet us at Salvation. Bring Hope."

#

LUCIFER

Lucifer was surrounded by the Greek warrior, the angel, Adina and the Omphalos. His demon army had been destroyed. The Omphalos took quick action against his own parents, turning them to dust without hesitation. He'd clearly not taken into consideration the amount of hatred built up in the Omphalos's heart. He couldn't blame him. Though it frustrated Lucifer to no end that his plans were backfiring. Well, not all of them. Hades and Uriel were still off on their mission to find Hope for him. He would take great joy in destroying her in front of the Omphalos and his allies.

"It's not nice to talk about people when they're standing right in front of you," Lucifer suggested when he realized the four of them had gone silent.

"We were just trying to figure out the most painful and least efficient way to torture you into going back to your own plane," the Omphalos told him.

"By all means tell me how that's going to work." Lucifer smiled at him.

"I wanted to start blasting holes in your body from head to toe but she wouldn't let me," Tyler said.

Lucifer didn't notice where the Omphalos had pointed. He just assumed. "My daughter wouldn't let that happen," Lucifer said to Adina.

"I said that sounded fun." Adina's words cut deep. "Pyhrra said we couldn't do that." She pointed at the warrior.

"I still think we should take him inside and subject him Phenix's karaoke night patrons." The angel said.

Before Lucifer could form any sort of retort Hades's voice popped into his mind. "We found her."

"Where?" Lucifer said it out loud, for some reason.

"Salvation," Hades answered.

"It's probably a trap," Uriel suggested.

"Oh it's definitely a trap," Lucifer responded silently. "Clever plan," he said out loud.

"No, even I wouldn't subject you to karaoke night," the Omphalos said.

Lucifer paused to consider a retort. But he had more pressing things to discuss with the Omphalos. "My friends have found the weapon. It seems the titan has brought her to the open gateway. I know what your thought process was. Lure me to the one place you need me to be by placing the thing I've been looking for there. Did you really think I'd fall for that?"

"Truthfully, Lucifer, I counted on it. And you will. You're definitely the kind of creature who orders others to do your dirty work for you. But in this case, you want to see it for yourself. You're too curious to not know what this weapon looks like. She's pretty spectacular, Hope. But maybe I'm biased," the Omphalos told him.

"I could just have them bring her here," Lucifer retorted.

“Hades won’t fight against Prometheus and Uriel is forbidden to engage in combat. Why do you think they’re so willing to do your errands for you? It’s not because they’re obedient. If it means being away from any action, they’ll take on whatever task you ask them to. The punishment for helping you get onto the middle plane is light compared to what would happen if they were caught fighting on your behalf.”

Lucifer couldn’t argue with the Omphalos’s assessment. Hades had told him from the beginning that he couldn’t be part of any battles. And Uriel, there was no way the Archangel was putting his status on the line for Lucifer.

“Especially now,” Uriel said in Lucifer’s head.

“None of us knew Hope was out of her jar,” Hades added.

“So essentially you’re saying now that you know Hope is a living being you’re not sure I can actually win?” Lucifer asked them.

“We’re saying the landscape has changed and we’re not willing to take the risks we were willing to take before this new development,” Hades told him.

He hated that he was like this, but he was going to let the Omphalos lead him right back to the one place he didn’t want to return to. But if they thought he wasn’t going to put up a fight when he got there, they were mistaken. “See you at Salvation,” Lucifer said with a snap of his fingers.

Lucifer appeared outside the front door of the bar even though he’d tried to appear just inside it. When he tried the door it wouldn’t open. He considered walking to the back to see if that door would open for him, but it meant being that much closer to the gateway and he wasn’t going to even consider making it that easy for them.

#

TYLER

“He’s on his way to you,” Tyler relayed to Prometheus telepathically. “Let’s go,” he said out loud to Abby, Adina and Pyrrha. He knew his friends at Salvation could handle Lucifer until they got there, but he still felt like he should hurry. He reached out to take Adina’s hand in his to bring her along with him. She let him although she’d glanced in Abby and Pyrrha’s direction before taking it.

Tyler and Adina arrived inside the bar area at Salvation just as Abby and Pyrrha were arriving. It disappointed Tyler a little bit that no one in the bar was surprised by their appearance. It was filled with his allies and friends. And they were expecting him.

“He’s outside,” Jonathan approached Tyler. The two of them hugged briefly before Jonathan let go to take Adina in his arms. Tyler hadn’t realized how worried he’d been about his mortal boyfriend. It was a relief to see him alive and unharmed. Jonathan led them into the back room where Prometheus was holding Hope safely away from the windows and doors. Phenix, Alexis and Azazel sat scattered through the room. It was as if they were children separated for being bad, or on time outs. But when he entered the room they all came together.

“We didn’t know if the hold on the doors would work,” Azazel explained. “So we spread out,” he said.

Tyler nodded at him. “Lucifer caught on pretty quick, he knows we brought him here because we need him at the gateway if we have any chance to send him back to the lower plane. But we were right in thinking he’d be too curious to stay away.”

“There’s no sign of Hades or Uriel anywhere here,” Phenix told him. “Alexis and I have

been checking the perimeter every few minutes.”

Tyler wondered if any mortals had noticed a phoenix and a dragon flying around the area. He figured they were too busy looking at their phones or screaming at each other in their cars to pay attention to anything else.

“They probably went back to where they came from,” Prometheus suggested. “Did you send them back?” He asked Hope.

“I don’t have much control over things right now,” she said.

Tyler had told Lucifer that Hope was spectacular. It was an exaggeration at the time. But he’d been right. Her face was less sunken in and her hair less stringy. Prometheus had found her better fitting clothes that weren’t raggedy and filled with holes. If you saw her on the street you’d assume she was coming off a movie set or from a modeling gig.

“Thank you for this,” Tyler addressed her directly. “I swear on my life nothing is going to happen to you.”

“I have faith in you,” Hope said the words and Tyler knew she meant it.

#

Tyler walked to the front of the bar and opened the door. Lucifer stood in the hot Los Angeles sun. “Took you long enough,” the demon quipped.

“The back door is wide open,” Tyler told him.

“I told you, Omphalos, I’m impulsive, but I’m not stupid,” Lucifer replied.

“We’ll see about that,” Tyler said, stepping aside to let the demon enter.

#

Tyler led Lucifer into the back room where his friends were waiting. Hope stood tall in the

middle of it flanked by Abby, Adina and Pyrrha. It made Tyler proud at how formidable they looked as a group. His army was badass.

Lucifer stiffened next to him. It was the common reaction to the realization Hope was in fact real. His eyes widened at the sight of her. Tyler wondered if Lucifer was falling in love with her or fearing her. Maybe a little of both.

Hope stepped forward. "Hello Lucifer."

Lucifer reached back and unsheathed his spear. The entire room went into defensive mode, except Hope. She continued forward. Lucifer stood rooted in place. Hope reached out and wrapped her hand around the spear. It melted.

Lucifer had the good sense to take a step back now.

"I'm not going to hurt you," Hope said gently. "I just wanted you to know that I can."

#

Abby and Pyrrha stepped forward and took Lucifer by the arms. With Adina, Tyler and Jonathan following close behind they led the leader of the lower plane to the kitchen. Abby let go of Lucifer's left arm and Adina took her place. "I'll just keep coming back," Lucifer promised. "And I'll keep sending you back home," Hope said from behind them.

Abby pulled the handle to the refrigerator and opened it to reveal the gateway to Purgatory. Lucifer walked through it on his own.

#

ONE YEAR LATER

"Tell me a bedtime story," the boy said emphatically.

"Which one do you want to hear?" Jonathan asked him.

“The usual,” the boy said flopping down onto the bed and laying his head on a pillow.

Jonathan looked up catching Tyler’s eye. “Yes, please tell us a bedtime story,” Tyler said with a smile.

“A long time ago,” Jonathan started tucking the boy into the sheets.

“A year ago,” Tyler corrected him as he stepped further into the room.

“Do you want to tell the story?” Jonathan teased.

“No, dada,” the boy protested. “I want daddy to tell it.”

Tyler put his hand over his heart.

“Ah, Alec, you hurt dada’s feelings,” Jonathan teased. He and Tyler exchanged another smile.

Alec jumped up and hugged Tyler tight. “Sorry,” he said in his small voice. Then kissed Tyler’s cheek.

“You’re right though,” Tyler agreed as he laid Alec back on the bed. “Daddy tells the story better.”

“A long time ago dada and I met four remarkable women. Each one of them special in their own ways,” Jonathan started.

“Abby, Adina, Pyrrha and Hope,” Alec chimed in.

“That’s right. With their help we were able to save mankind from a terrible monster that wanted everyone to go away forever.”

“Naughty, Lucifer,” Alec said the name and shook his head.

“That’s right,” Tyler nodded at him.

#

“I can’t believe we keep telling him that story,” Jonathan said as he and Tyler stepped out of Alec’s room.

“Why? It’s a good story with a happy ending,” Tyler protested.

“Five is too young to know Lucifer is real and trying to take over the middle plane,” Jonathan argued.

“But it’s not too early to learn about angels and gods?” Tyler retorted.

“Point taken,” Jonathan kissed Tyler on the forehead.

Tyler wrapped his arms around Jonathan’s neck. “I just want him to know the things I didn’t,” Tyler said quietly. “I don’t mind you teaching him the bible. But he should know the parts that aren’t in it too.”

“I know, Ty, I just worry we’re gonna give him ideas,” Jonathan said.

“I already told him he could come demon hunting with me,” Adina called out from behind them.

Tyler and Jonathan spun around in unison. Adina laughed. “I’m kidding,” she said with a wry smile. Tyler reached out to bop her on the side of the head but she dodged him by turning into a butterfly and fluttering away.

“I’m never going to get used to this,” Tyler said as he and Jonathan headed to their own bedroom.

“Having a daughter who’s a shapeshifter?” Jonathan asked.

“Being a parent to two kids,” Tyler answered him.

#

Hope sat in her room with her feet lazily resting on a large table. She was surrounded by

monitors and screens. The walls were bright white and windows surrounded the entire room. Natural light from the sky was beaming into her room. The room was filled with plants and a fish tank bubbled in the corner.

“Report?” Pyrrha’s face appeared on the screen directly in front of her.

“Everything is as it should be.”

#

ALTERNATE ENDING

There was a low hum just behind him that he couldn’t quite place. He tried to open his eyes but they wouldn’t cooperate. His breathing was steady as was his heartbeat. The strong smell of antiseptic filled his nose with each intake. The air was cold and crisp. He was having a hard time remembering where he was. In fact he was having a hard time remembering much of anything. He tried opening his eyes again. They seemed to be glued shut. Why would someone do that? He went to lift his hand to his face and found it wouldn’t move either. Come on Tyler, he said to himself. Where are you? What happened?

“I think he's coming to,” a voice said next to him.

“Lower the dosage.” Another voice said.

Cold air. Machines humming. Antiseptic smell. Dosage. He was in a hospital.

Okay, good. He knew the where. Now, to figure out the why. He still couldn’t remember anything.

A slow growing warmth began to travel through his veins. His eyes fluttered. He still couldn’t move his arms. He wanted to know why. He willed his eyes to open and they did. The

brightness of the room startled him and he closed them again. After a beat he tried again, slowly, one eye at a time.

A male figure stood next to his bed. The man looked familiar. “Jonathan?” Tyler thought that was the man’s name, for some reason. There was no response. He slowly turned his head to look directly at him. He was wearing dark blue scrubs, a nurse. A lanyard hung from his neck. Tyler blinked his eyes several more times and tried to read it. Corey was all that came into focus.

“Tyler,” Corey spoke to him. “You’re okay. It was close but we got to you just in time. What’s the last thing you remember?”

Tyler blinked his eyes again. No matter how many times he tried to clear them the man next to him looked familiar. The last thing he remembered? Visions started flashing through his head. He was standing in the kitchen at Salvation, where he worked as a bartender. There were several people in the room with him. He only recognized one of them. Abby. His coworker. She opened the door to the industrial sized refrigerator. It was a doorway, with a gate. Two of the other women in the room shoved one of the men through the gate and closed it. “We won,” Tyler told him.

“Won what?” Corey asked.

“I don’t...” Tyler trailed off. Everything he could think of to say in the moment sounded insane. “What happened to me?”

“You were at work, someone stabbed you, left you in the alley to die. Luckily your coworker went looking for you and was able to call 911,” Corey explained. “Paramedics got there just in time.”

Tyler knew the exact incident Corey was referring to. He had been taking out the trash in

the back of the bar. He'd been holding two giant bags of trash when a group of men approached him. They were looking for money. He didn't have any.

"The back door locks automatically when you close it. We use a code to get back in," he'd told them when they demanded he open the door.

"Well enter the code then." One of the men, a burly guy with arms bigger than Tyler's thighs said in a booming voice. When Tyler refused the man pulled a knife and plunged it into Tyler's side. The pain. He remembered the pain of the blade puncturing his skin, digging itself into his side. He tried to feel for it now but he couldn't move his arms.

"Why am I in restraints? What day is it?" Those questions didn't make sense together, but nothing about this made sense to Tyler right now.

"You were thrashing around and you kept re-opening your wound. We had to give you some powerful drugs to calm you down. The restraints were a precaution in case you woke up and tried to escape again. Oh, and it's Friday the 12th of November," Corey said.

"What year?" Tyler clarified.

Corey didn't seem to be at all confused by Tyler's questions. "2010," he said.

Tyler's heart fell. What did they do to him?

#

THREE DAYS LATER

No one had come to visit him in the hospital. The only company he ever had were random doctors who kept asking him how he felt and Corey. There were no other nurses who came through his room unless he just didn't see them, when he was sleeping. Corey swore there were more on duty when Tyler had asked him about it.

Tyler had stopped asking the nurse any questions. He feared they'd keep him in the hospital longer, or send him to a mental ward.

By the time Tyler signed all his release papers it was late in the afternoon. The nurse at the desk handed him a bag with his belongings in it and wished him luck. Tyler hadn't seen Corey that day. He looked around to see if he was around but couldn't find him. Somewhere in the back of his mind he had a feeling he'd see him again.

The sun was bright and warm and Tyler took a minute to adjust to it. It surprised him that the hospital would just release him without making sure he had somewhere to go first. He reached into the bag they had handed him and found a cell phone. Who would he call?

When he'd left Minnesota someone had suggested he enter his own phone number and address into his contacts under Emergency Home in case anyone ever found the phone, or found him and he couldn't tell them where he lived. He silently thanked that random stranger on the bus from St. Paul to Los Angeles for the sage advice. He looked at the contact list, found the entry for his address, and was relieved to find it was still listed as the apartment he'd rented when he got to the city.

#

As the cab drove through the city taking Tyler to his apartment building it occurred to Tyler that the buildings were all in good shape. There was little to no construction. In the back of his mind he saw destruction, fire, chaos. Those flashes were getting more frequent and making less sense every time they happened to him. The cab dropped him off just in front of his building and he slowly made his way to his apartment. He didn't know what he expected to find inside but it was exactly as he'd left it the day he went to work and landed in the hospital.

#

Tyler couldn't sit still anymore. He stood up slowly, trying not to break open any stitches holding his side together. It still ached. It should, it had only been a week since he'd been stabbed. Tyler walked the seven blocks it took to get to the Salvation Bar and Grill. He wanted to head straight for the kitchen as soon as he was inside the front of the bar but Abby stopped him.

"What are you doing here?" She asked him. "You almost died, shouldn't you be in the hospital or, in bed?"

Tyler stared at her. He seemed to be trying to find something about her that would tell him that he wasn't crazy. An aura. Wings. Something. But she was just a girl.

"I got bored," Tyler said with a shrug. It was partially true.

"Well I don't think they're going to let you work today," Abby said.

"Yeah, you're probably right," Tyler agreed. "I just need to do something."

Tyler head to the back where the kitchen was. Abby followed close behind him. "Are you okay?"

Tyler ignored the question. He stepped inside the kitchen and stood in front of the industrial refrigerator. He closed his fingers around the handle and pulled it open. It was just a refrigerator. He closed the door and opened it again. Same result.

"Can you do me a favor?" Tyler asked a bewildered Abby.

"Call you a doctor?" Abby asked him sarcastically.

"Stand here," he moved her into his spot. "Open this door," he pointed at the steel handle.

Abby made a face at him but obliged. The door opened. Still a fridge.

"What are you looking for?" Abby asked as she looked inside the cold box in front of her.

“I,” Tyler started. “I don’t know.”

“Maybe you should go back to bed?” Abby suggested.

“Yes, I think that’s a good idea,” Tyler said. He wasn’t sure why he did it but he chose to walk out the back door rather than go through the front. As soon as he stepped foot in the alley he could see the events from the week before as if he was watching them from afar.

#

Four burly men surrounded him. He stood his ground. The sound of a switchblade opening rang through the air. He felt the pain of the blade going through his skin. Instinctively he put his hand to the wound. It ached but the stitches were still in tact. No blood. He looked up to see himself fall onto the black concrete. The men ran. He was alone, in pain, getting cold. Standing there now, watching the scene unfold, Tyler called out to himself to hold on. The back door opened and Abby ran to him. She leaned down and whispered in his ear before pulling out her phone. The scene faded away.

#

Tyler, the present one, walked back around to the front door of Salvation and walked inside again. Abby shook her head at him. “I thought you were going home.”

“What did you say to me?” Tyler asked her.

“I said I thought you were going home,” Abby repeated.

“Not just now, when you found me, in the alley,” Tyler said.

Abby cocked her head to the side. Deja vu coursed through Tyler’s body. She was so familiar to him despite Tyler having only worked at Salvation for two weeks before the incident.

“Spem vivam servare,” Abby whispered.

“What does that mean?” He whispered back.

“Keep Hope Alive.”

#

THE END.

* * *