

## PROMETHEUS

Prometheus wasn't used to having visitors. Especially not surprise ones. He lived in a carved out dwelling in the side of the largest mountain in Greece, and he was the god of premonition. So when a demon showed up at his door he was naturally on the defensive. He stood taller than usual and scowled at the creature in front of him, assessing she was female. He ruled out anyone in Lucifer's court. He wasn't much for having female demons do his bidding.

"I am here on behalf of Chloe, who has sent me to request an audience with you," the demon spoke as if she had rehearsed her lines over and over and didn't want to mess them up.

Prometheus tilted his head side to side, what could Chloe possibly want to see him for? Last he'd heard she had lost what remained of her humanity. "Did Chloe happen to tell you why she has requested this?" It frustrated him that he had not seen any of this coming. Was he losing his touch?

The demon froze. She was clearly not expecting to have a conversation. She shook her head no and looked down at her feet. Which were bare, and scaly, and clearly used to walking on the type of terrain Prometheus's mountain dwelling sat on.

Prometheus was certain Chloe had commanded this demon to summon him and not take no for an answer. He wondered if he should continue to torture her or let her off the hook. He was clearly too curious to pass up going to see what Chloe wanted from him. "Did she give you any idea as to where we are supposed to have this meeting?"

"Chloe has been taken to a hospital on the middle plane, she is in the care of human doctors, she was having complications our kind can not resolve," the demon continued to stare at her feet. "I have been asked to take you there."

The god shifted his weight from side to side. There really wasn't any harm in visiting a human hospital, even one likely protected by demons much less timid than the one standing in front of him now. How Chloe managed to find one of the few feeble creatures on the lower plane, was something he would probably ask her when he saw her, which he knew he was going to do, but he didn't much

care to let this demon know that, yet. “How about you tell me where she is and I’ll make my way there if I decide it’s worth my time.”

Another flinch. “St. Johns, Santa Monica, California,” the demon answered and disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Prometheus wasn’t due to visit Tyler in Los Angeles for several hours. He wondered if he should make Chloe wait on him, but from the way the demon described her condition, she may not have that long. A flash of Chloe’s meeting with Lucifer reminded him that the human had given up her right to die in exchange for eternal life and what ultimately became slavery to Lucifer’s will. It saddened the god, briefly. She could wait.

## TYLER

Tyler held his hands in front of him and focused his mind on the wood target fifty feet away. He could feel a ball of energy travel from the center of his chest into the palms of his hands. It was working. His heart raced, he tried not to lose focus. The energy built up in his palms and he pushed his hands forward focusing energy at his target. A bolt of light shot from his hands and faded out two feet from where Tyler had intended it to go. He screamed out an expletive and stared at his hands as if they were to blame for the miss.

“You’re losing focus before you can get a clear shot at the target. Clear your mind of everything else, focus on only the thing in front of you,” Phenex tried not to show her frustration. They’d been at this for hours already and Tyler was no closer to hitting the target than he had been when they began. She couldn’t blame him. The world was falling apart and it was up to Tyler to fix it.

“I don’t know if I can do it,” Tyler rubbed his hands on his jeans and stared at a wood cut out of Lucifer, the target he had been trying to hit and failing at. It was a damn good likeness of him and Tyler couldn’t figure out why it was so hard to blast the hell out of it. No pun intended.

“You can, Tyler. You have to,” Abby spoke up from the back of the room.

Tyler didn’t hear her come in. He was losing focus everywhere. Feeling the angel’s presence had been the one part of his training he had gotten good at. He

sighed. "Any news?"

"Lucifer moved her. To this plane," Abby stepped closer to Tyler and Phenex to deliver the news of Chloe's current status.

Phenex knitted her brows together. "The situation must be dire if Lucifer is trusting human doctors to take care of his demon spawn, and its vessel."

"Gabriel says that word of Chloe's full transition to demon was premature. There is still a small part of her that is human and she was starting to reject the, creature, inside her. Lucifer reluctantly brought her to this plane."

"It must frustrate him to no end that he must rely on the very people he's trying to destroy," Tyler cracked a slight smile at the idea of Lucifer having to bow to his own pride and allow humans help him, again.

"Don't get it twisted," Azazel's voice came from the back of the room. "Lucifer might not enjoy asking for human help, but he does very much love bending them to his will. If they're helping him, and Chloe, it's not under their own volition."

Tyler tried not to show his growing frustration with it all. Not only had he failed to hit a target with his magic light beams, he had failed to recognize that an angel and a demon had entered the room. No one else seemed to notice. They were too focused on what the news of Chloe's failing health had to do with their current situation.

## CHLOE

Chloe's eyes had turned a dark grey. She hardly recognized herself in the reflection she caught in the silver tray of uneaten food sitting on her hospital bed table. She averted her eyes and caught a glimpse of the demon she had sent off to speak to Prometheus. She looked around to see if he was with her. He wasn't. "What happened?"

The demon bowed her head. "I delivered your message. He asked where you were, stated he would see you if he deemed it necessary."

Chloe's anger threatened to surface, but her feelings of desperation took over before the anger did any damage. "Thank you," she didn't mask the fact that she

wasn't really appreciative. It wasn't the demon's fault Prometheus has his own agenda, but someone needed to take the blame.

"If he deemed it necessary. What did that even mean? He doesn't know what I want to talk about," Chloe said into the empty room. Then she remembered it was Prometheus, god of premonition, and worried that he knew exactly what she wanted and was in no way going to give it to her. Her desperation intensified making the machines she was attached to beep and blare and alert the nurses who came running to see what had caused the distress.

"You have to calm down miss, you're going to lose the baby."

If only. Chloe thought to herself.

Lucifer paced his library in a state of worry he'd not felt in a very long time. Chloe's volatile health had him in a panic. "Stupid humans." He screamed at the ceiling, hoping someone on the middle plane would hear him. He knew it was unlikely, he was deep on the lower plane and no one up top was listening.

"Is everything ok master?" Lucifer's guard popped his head in to see what the commotion had been.

"Yes. Any news from the middle plane?" Lucifer asked impatiently.

The demon shook his head no and backed out of the room, knowing full well no news was not a good answer for Lucifer these days. He faintly heard his master scream "Find some!"

## JONATHAN

Jonathan hated that he regretted going to the training facility every day. He loved being there for Tyler, but his growing feelings of inferiority were threatening his resolve to stick by Tyler's side. Deep down he knew his presence made Tyler calmer, which was a feat no one else could accomplish. But being a calming force in your boyfriend's life when the world is being threatened with destruction isn't exactly how Jonathan saw himself being helpful. He pushed through the glass door at Phenex's restaurant he took a deep breath and enjoyed the immediate satisfaction as the smell of Chinese food overtook his senses. At

least he knew he'd have a good meal. He headed toward the back of the dining room and stepped into a room no one knew existed. He was not surprised to see Tyler, Abby, Azazel and Phenex in deep conversation. Tyler immediately looked in his direction and flashed the smile that finally broke Jonathan's vow to never let anyone take his heart again. Tyler always knew when he was there. The feeling of dread waned for just a moment.

"Something happen?" he asked the group.

"Lucifer moved Chloe to a human hospital in Santa Monica. We're contemplating a rescue mission," Abby answered.

"Or maybe a mercy killing," Tyler said under his breath.

"She can't die," Azazel and Phenex said in unison.

"I know!" Tyler screamed back at them.

Jonathan put a hand on his shoulder. "Is it a mercy killing if she deserves it though?" he whispered. Tyler smiled and shrugged.

## PROMETHEUS

The hospital was definitely under demon surveillance. Prometheus had to sneak into a back entrance and wait until the two guards standing outside Chloe's door changed shifts to slip into the room. He was about to make a remark that whatever Chloe wanted from him better be worth the effort until he saw the number of machines she had hooked up to her. They were all making different noises. Suctions, beeping, a steady drip of some clear liquid coming from a bag hanging on a hook over Chloe's bed. Her eyes opened slowly and Prometheus was shocked by how gray they were. They had been a caramel brown in her human life. They should be dark black now. She stared at him and he wondered if she recognized him or if her decent into full demon had finally taken place. Chloe nodded in his direction and gingerly put her finger to her mouth to make sure he stayed quiet. She then motioned for him to get closer. He was reluctant but there was little Chloe could do to him to cause harm.

“Kill me,” she whispered in his ear.

Prometheus moved his head to look Chloe directly in the eyes. “You know I can’t do that,” he whispered with a slight hint of question.

“You can. You’re a god. I’m a threat to humanity. It’s your duty to eliminate the threat,” she retorted.

She was clearly not in as bad shape as she appeared. Or at least her mind wasn’t gone, yet. “Point well made, however, you made a deal with Lucifer that overrules whatever my duties may be.”

“There has to be something you can do,” Chloe’s desperation made her voice crack.

“I’m sorry but there isn’t much I can do for you. The only way you can, get what you want, is to break your contract with Lucifer.” Prometheus had a moment of brief guilt when he felt Chloe’s body sink further into her hospital bed. He knew there was little chance Lucifer would agree to break this contract. Chloe was under his control for eternity.

“Go,” Chloe dismissed him.

Prometheus wanted badly to retort with snarky “you’re welcome” responses and remind her he went through a lot of trouble coming to see her, but the point was moot. She was already as miserable as a being could be. Carrying a demon spawn that was slowly taking her humanity out of her, unable to die even if she wanted to. He peeked out the sliver of a window in the door that led to the hallway. The demons guarding Chloe were definitely not the most efficient in Lucifer’s army. He was able to slip out the door without so much as a head turning in his direction. It was either negligent or necessity on Lucifer’s part. Prometheus figured it was the latter. If he could Lucifer himself would be standing guard outside his vessel’s door. But as he had burned his one middle plane visit on creating her and the demon spawn she carried, that option was out.

Los Angeles was slowly getting back to normal after Lucifer's destructive demons were able to lay waste to so many of the streets just a few months ago. Prometheus was always fascinated by the adaptations the human race had been able to use to continue to survive even in the worst circumstances. Construction was underway fixing the broken down buildings all over the city. New trees were being planted. The burned out husks of cars and trucks that had littered the streets were gone, rotting somewhere in a junkyard miles away from the city. He made his way toward the Esesa Jane Karaoke Bar and Pan Asian Restaurant, Phenex's place, where the Omphalos and his merry group of misfits were waiting for him.

The training room sat at the back of the restaurant in a hidden space Phenex had created for this exact purpose. She somehow knew these times were coming. The smell of Chinese and American fusion cuisine wafted through the room. The karaoke machine sat quiet on the stage made especially for it. There were scattered tables filled with patrons, likely on their lunch breaks. No one paid Prometheus any attention as he made his way to the back of the restaurant and it didn't even cross anyone's mind that he simply disappeared behind a door they couldn't see.

There was always an uneasy tension in the air when he entered the room. It wasn't surprising they had a hard time getting along. It was a ragtag team of varying creatures never meant to be working together, but times were different and here they all were. Tyler, the Omphalos, a human who wanted nothing to do with being the chosen one, stood with his human counterpart Jonathan and the upper plane's rebel angel, Abby. Lucifer's former right hand man and brother, Azazel, who Prometheus was certain only stayed around because he had a thing for Phenex - a shapeshifter who took female human form and male phoenix form, stood together on the other side of the room. It was Phenex's task to teach Tyler how to fight. This didn't sit well with her, she had left that life behind long ago. The dragon, Alexis, also a shapeshifter, brought in to teach Tyler how to use

his mind more efficiently, stood alone, in his towering human form, in constant observation.

Then there was Prometheus. God of premonition, creator of humankind, cast out because he loved his creation more than his fellow gods, only allowed to be here because times were just that dire. He was never going to get used to seeing the wood replicas of Lucifer's form set up around the room for Tyler to be training his growing Omphalos powers toward. He noted there were no visible signs of damage on any of them. Not quite there yet, he thought.

He wasn't sure how much he wanted to tell the group about his meeting with Chloe. They were already on edge with the lack of movement in the coming war. The upper plane had gone completely quiet. No one was surprised about this. But Lucifer's focus on the birth of his, child, and little else, was disturbing to all involved. The middle plane was simply moving on as if hellhounds and demons of all sorts invade their space all the time. The only humans who knew what was coming were in that room.

#### TYLER

"I'm no closer to knowing what my powers are than before I knew I had powers," Tyler complained.

"It's only been two months," Abby retorted.

Jonathan stayed silent. Tyler was grateful for it.

"That'll go well. Hold on Lucifer, it's only been two months and Tyler hasn't figured out how to use his powers yet," he whined.

"Remember that time you stopped being a child and embraced your role in all this? That was a good time. Let's go back to that time," Abby stayed right with him. It annoyed Tyler even further.

A loud "ahem" sounded at the front of the room. He hadn't noticed Prometheus enter.

"I have embraced my role in all this," Tyler snapped back quietly.

The weekly meetings were not getting any better. There was no real news to report and Tyler's training was slow going. He hated having to do a progress report, especially when there wasn't any. But he reluctantly listened as Phenex told the group about Tyler's lack of focus and Alexis reminded them that a human mind could only hold so much information at one time. He sat back, arms folded, and let them talk about him, around him, and just nodded and shrugged. He had nothing much to say.

"It seems Chloe has been moved to a human facility on this plane," Azazel changed the subject.

"Yes, I went to see her this morning," Prometheus announced.

"On purpose?" Tyler asked, more earnestly than he meant. It was supposed to come out sarcastically.

"She asked for me, sent a very timid demon to my home," he told the table. "She's in bad shape. Machines hooked up everywhere, monitoring her, monitoring the, baby. In human terms she'd be on her death bed, if she could die. Which is what she wants. To die."

Tyler almost told them he knew how she felt. He couldn't die either. It was an Omphalos thing. I mean, he could die, he'd just come right back to life. Prometheus had made sure of it. "She asked you to kill her?"

"Yes. I told her the only way she can die is to break her contract with Lucifer. Which, is a lie."

This gave Tyler more pause than he expected it to. He knew Prometheus had created him, he just hadn't thought about it going the other way. It was truly a

case of I brought you into this world and I can take you out of it. “Why lie? And why not give her what she wants?”

“Whether she lives or dies, the baby will be born. It can either be raised by a half demon/half human mother who hasn’t lost all her humanity, or raised completely by Lucifer. There is something about her, something that is keeping her from completely giving in to the demon side of her. The ritual should have taken all the human out of her,” Prometheus explained.

“Not all humans deserve to live,” Tyler wasn’t sure why he was arguing this point. Chloe wasn’t exactly his favorite person but he didn’t really believe she should die. Actually he hoped she’d have to live with her choices forever. A flash of the two of them being the last people alive in a world of destruction made him shudder..

“That is something she will have to take up with Lucifer. I cannot wade into those waters. The gods have allowed me to participate in the coming war, not alter its outcome,” Prometheus reminded Tyler.

“As you’ve said, many times over,” Tyler said under his breath.

## LUCIFER

Lucifer paced his library, a habit he was growing tired of. His vessel’s status hadn’t changed and his child was still not ready to be brought into the world. A boy. He could feel it in his bones. It was definitely a boy. One he could train and mold into his very own right hand man. Better than Azazel, he thought.

Adding to the stress was the absolute lack of movement on the upper and middle planes. He knew there was no way they were letting this event take place without a fight, but so far his minions hadn’t turned up any information. He wondered if he had sent the wrong demons for the job. But all the good ones had

either been destroyed by the Omphalos and his group of, terrorists, and those that weren't destroyed fled to places even he didn't know about. He had made every effort to make more, but they were young and reckless and did him no good.

The flames coming from the library's steel grated fireplace flickered. It caught Lucifer's attention immediately. He turned to face the fire and waited for something, someone, to appear. He was utterly disappointed to find it was Epimetheus. The god appeared in his library looking disheveled and distressed. This brought Lucifer much joy, and then fear. If the god was frantic it definitely had something to do with his wife, Pandora, who had started this whole mess he was in.

"Yes?" Lucifer stared at Epimetheus in wonder at just how out of sorts a god of his stature could be.

"She's gone," Epimetheus breathed out.

Lucifer's heart fell for a moment until he realized Epimetheus wasn't referring to Chloe, the vessel. "And?"

"She took everything."

"Look, Epi, I gave up vengeance against fleeing wives a long time ago," Lucifer snapped back. Why was this his problem?

"I'm not looking to get my wife back, you idiot, I'm looking to get the stuff she took. One item in particular. Go see your dragon friend down in the dungeons, he can tell you more. I've already said more than I am allowed," Epimetheus found just enough breath to spit that out before disappearing back into the fire.

Lucifer stared into the smoke the god had left behind and shook his head. He didn't have time to go searching for a runaway immortal who took her husband's things. But the words intrigued him.

Lucifer wasn't a big fan of visiting the dragon or the dungeon. There was too

much clutter and chaos that went to depths even Lucifer couldn't fathom. The dragon slept on top of a mound of treasures collected over thousands of years. He stirred when Lucifer entered. The dragon was the one creature Lucifer was intimidated by, on his own plane. He didn't let the beast know this, however.

"What can you tell me about Pandora?"

"You looking for some good music to do your lower plane business to?" the dragon was in a snarky mood. He'd just spent more time than he'd prefer on the middle plane dealing with humans and gods and he just wanted to nap. For eternity.

Lucifer had no idea what the dragon was talking about but didn't want him to know it so he just clarified. "Pandora, the immortal, she has apparently disappeared, taking her belongings, and her husband's, I've been told."

The dragon stirred. He clearly knew what Lucifer was talking about even though the demon had no clue. Giant wings darkened the room briefly as the dragon took flight and headed up. Lucifer lost sight of the creature somewhere around the shelves of information on the upper plane.

A few moments later a small book dropped at his feet. It was worn and tattered, pages yellowing and dusty. No one had paid this text much attention in hundreds of years. If not longer. Lucifer picked it up and gently opened the cover, hoping it didn't disintegrate in his hands. The dragon returned to his sleeping perch and curled up into a ball. A giant, scaly, ball. Lucifer took his reading material and backed out of the dungeon keeping an eye on the sleeping giant.

Back in his library Lucifer opened the book gingerly. Handwritten text in Greek letters lined the pages. He touched the page gently and they translated to words he could understand. He let out an audible gasp, which alerted his guard. "Everything ok master?" the guard asked timidly.

"No. It is most certainly not."

## PROMETHEUS

Another unannounced guest. Prometheus was beginning to wonder if part of his deal with the gods was a dampening of his premonition skills. The knock at the door intensified and Prometheus rolled his eyes at the sound. He was less annoyed by his lack of seeing it coming and more annoyed by the frantic nature when he opened the door to see his brother, Epimetheus, standing in front of him. The god looked awful. A small pang of guilt surprised Prometheus momentarily, but it all passed.

“Pandora is gone, she just disappeared,” Epimetheus spoke entirely too quickly.

“How does one just disappear?” Prometheus asked.

“I have no idea but she took all of her possessions and just, vanished.”

Prometheus understood those words, and what they meant. “All of her possessions?”

“Yes, brother, all of them.”

“Who else knows?” Prometheus knew he’d never in a million years be the first person his brother would turn to for help. So the answer didn’t surprise him in any way.

“Lucifer.”

Prometheus sat in his study and looked for signs. Things that might be coming, things that he might have missed. There was nothing. “Did you do something to me?” he screamed out into the air, wondering if anyone would even hear him. No one answered.

### ABBY

The angel was surprised to find Gabriel waiting for her when she entered her apartment on the middle plane. In all the time she’d been living here the archangel had never once visited her in her home. “What is it?” she didn’t say hello.

“Pandora has fled. We can no longer see her. We are unsure how she’s keeping herself hidden. But whatever it is it cannot be good. She has her,

possessions, with her.”

Abby paused for a moment. Why was he telling her this and what did it matter? She thought about her teachings of Pandora. The old gods created an immortal woman to keep Epimetheus busy. But they did so with a catch. She flashed on a page from a book she read, Pandora held a decorative jar. The top of it was open. In her image Abby could see Lucifer, looking as he did today, standing at Pandora’s feet. She had unleashed his evil.

“There is something else in the jar, Abby.” Gabriel’s deep voice broke her concentration. “When she saw what she had done she replaced the lid and she trapped something...someone inside.”

Abby tilted her head as she did when she was curious. “Who?”

“Hope.” Gabriel was matter of fact.

“I don’t understand.” Abby was honest.

“The gods gave Pandora a jar full of evil and the Hope that could keep it at bay. They tested her. She failed. But when she opened the jar it was only long enough for the evil inside to escape. She closed the lid before the counterpart could be released. She still has the jar. She knows what’s inside.”

Abby stared at him as her anger grew. “You know this all along!” She could already hear the bullshit answer he was about to give her, instead of sticking around, she disappeared into thin air, leaving the archangel sitting on her couch.

## PANDORA

The jar sat on a mantle just as it had thousands of years ago. It showed little signs of its age. Still as vibrant and beautiful as ever. She tried not to admire it too closely, again. How she was able to recreate the room where Epimetheus had held her in Greece all those years ago was still beyond her imagination. It was dangerous, what she was doing. Running from her husband, taking her weapon with her. That’s what it was. Her jar. It was a weapon. It could destroy the world as she knew it. Her world. Their world. She felt powerful. If only briefly. It was those brief and powerful moments that brought her to this place. Running. Relying on dark magic to stay hidden. It was sinister, the humans who had been

such a thorn in her side had now become her only way out. It fascinated her to no end that they had learned to adapt their surroundings so much they could manipulate reality. Right under the noses of the gods. Old and new. She only hoped they were right, that even the devil couldn't find her.

She knew it was her choices that had gotten her in this mess, from the beginning of her existence. Losing her will to the curiosity, opening the jar in the first place. And the years of holding on to the hope inside of it. The only thing that could reverse all the tragedy in the world. But why should she care? These people meant nothing to her. So why did it matter if she could take all their problems away?

Power. It all came down to her needing to feel that power. That's why she went to Lucifer and set his plan in motion. She didn't even need to threaten him with what she had in that jar. He needed little prompting to carry out her plan. He was just desperate enough to do what she said without questioning why. The fact that he had gotten out of hand was more of a burden than she had planned for, but she had felt the power of her own persuasive nature and that was all that mattered. But the consequences were becoming harder to deal with. And so she fled. And she would stay hidden as long as the dark magic could hold her.

## TYLER

Tyler spent the drive downtown promising himself he'd hit his targets today. He was tired of leaving the training room with those damned wooden standees still fully in tact. He swore one of them would lose its head today. The Esesa Jane was eerily quiet in the early hours of the morning. The restaurant usually had a buzz of activity, but most patrons who were loyal to Phenex were at his diner next door. He chuckled to himself as he pictured Azazel in full uniform cooking mortals their meals. If those lawyers, cops and judges only knew who was making their eggs and bacon every morning.

When he entered the training room he found Abby sitting quietly among the wood Lucifers, maps of the middle plane and varying whiteboards with notes and cork boards with pictures mapping out all of their plans for the coming war. His usual training session with the angel wasn't until later in the day, he had gotten an early start to try to kill some of those Lucifers on his own. Abby barely noticed him enter the room.

"Everything ok?" he asked into the quiet.

She looked up at him with solemn eyes and a frown Tyler hadn't seen in a while. "You're not going to like anything about today."

As she said this Gabriel entered the room, followed by Prometheus looking less of a god and more of a mortal who had done something terribly wrong.

Abby's words "you're not going to like today" echoed in his mind. Any day when Gabriel made an appearance was a bad day. It usually meant he had information to share that nobody was going to like. Abby already knew what that information was, and if she wasn't happy about it, Tyler was going to hate it for sure.

"There's been a development," Gabriel didn't waste any time.

Tyler wanted badly to retort with sarcasm. No shit, I thought maybe you were just here for a visit and maybe some wontons. He refrained from saying it out loud.

Gabriel looked at Prometheus who nodded at him. "Pandora has disappeared," he said it like that was important information. It meant nothing to Tyler. Gabriel continued. "She took everything with her and just vanished. None of us can find her." He looked at Prometheus who nodded again.

“I don’t understand what that means,” Tyler said with a tinge of anger. He knew Pandora had been part of Lucifer’s disastrous middle plane attack, and that she was Prometheus’s sister in law. That was all he knew. What did it matter that she’d gone missing?

Abby was staring a hole through Gabriel. The part of this new development Tyler wasn’t going to like was clearly not out in the open yet.

Gabriel sighed. It was a strange sound coming from a usually stoic archangel. “Pandora has something with her that can destroy Lucifer.”

“How long has she had this, thing?” Tyler was beginning to understand why Abby had warned him. He asked the question knowing he wasn’t going to like the answer.

“All along Tyler,” Abby echoed the answer already ringing in his mind.

Prometheus stepped forward. “I understand your anger,” he put a hand on Tyler’s shoulder.

“I’m not so sure about that,” Tyler pulled away from him. He did his best to tamp it down for the moment. “Explain to me, in plain and simple terms, what she has, and why this information is important today and wasn’t before now.”

“I’m sure you’ve heard the term ‘Pandora’s Box?’” Prometheus started. Tyler acknowledged he knew the term. “It is true, when Pandora opened the jar, not a box, in fact. Right, not important,” he said off of Tyler’s death stare. “She unleashed evil - essentially creating Lucifer and the lower plane.” He paused again. Tyler kept his stare focused on the god. “When she saw what she’d done she closed the lid and placed the jar back in its spot on her mantle. With the only

thing that can destroy Lucifer trapped inside it.”

Tyler seethed. “What could possibly defeat the devil himself?”

“Hope,” Prometheus said plainly.

His next sentence was cut off by Tyler’s outburst of anger. He stepped forward ready to punch something, or someone, he didn’t know which yet. He trained his palms at one of the wooden Lucifer standees and blew it’s head off with a blast of light. “I’m all out of hope!” Tyler screamed out and shot another blinding light at another Lucifer standee. It exploded.

“Tyler!” He heard Abby say his name loud in his head. He turned to look at her, palms raised, face red with heat.

“Hope is a person,” she said this out loud, holding her hands up to deflect any energy Tyler might throw her way.

Tyler lowered his arms and balled his hands into fists at his side.

“We are not sure how she’s done it but Pandora found a way to become completely hidden to all of us,” Prometheus looked to Gabriel who’s turn it was to nod in agreement.

“There’s one more thing,” Prometheus cut into a long silence. “Epimetheus went to Lucifer before coming to me with the news of his wife’s disappearance. He will be looking for her. We need to find her and the jar before Lucifer does.”

Several hours later Tyler hadn’t lost any of the fire burning inside him. He had destroyed the remaining Lucifer standees, the remnants still scattered throughout out the room. At least there was one thing he could use as a positive.

He found his focus. And as usual it was his rage that made him get it right. Abby, Prometheus and Gabriel, who had surprisingly stuck around despite delivering his message, each tried to talk to him, but there were no words that could be said to make things better now. There was a weapon that could destroy Lucifer. It has been existence all along. The gods, old and new, were aware of it. And it wasn't him.

The room began to fill with the remainder of Tyler's Lucifer hunting squad. All of whom were unaware of the things that had transpired earlier in the day. Phenex had been managing things at the diner while Azazel worked the kitchen. Jonathan had been at his day job running a youth shelter. And Alexis was likely sleeping on a pile of treasure in the depths of the lower plane, Tyler assumed.

Jonathan approached him with a look of pride and wonderment washed on his face. It slowly faded as he got closer and noticed Tyler's mood was nowhere near any of those emotions. "There's been a development," Tyler said through his teeth.

"I see," Jonathan pointed to the destruction.

"Yeah that's not even a little bit of what's been going on here," Tyler told him.

When everyone had settled into seats around the room it was Tyler who stood up to speak to them. He'd had enough bullshit to last a lifetime. "It appears that there is a weapon out there that can destroy Lucifer," he began.

"Right?" Jonathan said with a tinge of confusion. Tyler was the weapon, they all knew this already.

Tyler stepped to one of the whiteboards. "Here's the information we've been basing our strategy on. Lucifer, at the behest of the immortal being Pandora and

her husband, Epimetheus, stormed the middle plane with the mission of destroying it. In the process he found himself in the possession of a human slave which he promptly impregnated. Pandora and Epimetheus, happy with the chaos they had unleashed, went back to their home in Greece.” Everyone was staring at him. “We’ve been focusing on taking care of the immediate threat: Lucifer, Chloe and the impending birth of their demon spawn,” he stopped again doing his best to hold down the anger that was threatening to resurface. “I’ve been training to become the weapon that can prevent the middle plane’s destruction once the spawn has been born. With slow results.” Another pause. “I am not the weapon we should be looking for.”

“You are not the Omphalos?” Jonathan asked quietly.

Prometheus stood. “Tyler is the Omphalos, and he is the only weapon that can fight against Lucifer in this upcoming war. But Tyler’s abilities and purpose have only been to defeat Lucifer. Ensure he stays on the lower plane and limit whatever destruction the birth of this child may create.”

“Mincing words. That’s always been the issue with you and your kind,” Tyler said in both Prometheus and Gabriel’s direction. “What Prometheus is trying to say, and what I’ve been informed, is that I am meant to DEFEAT Lucifer. Simply put I am to spank him and send him back to his room. But there is something that can DESTROY the devil in total. Take out him of existence, forever.”

“What could possibly do that?” Azazel asked with a slight concern in his voice.

“Hope,” Tyler said the word with as much disdain as he felt about it.

Azazel laughed. “Excuse me?”

If Tyler wasn't so angry he would have smiled at Azazel's reaction. Leave it to the demon to take everything with the sarcasm and silliness Tyler felt. It was all so ridiculous. Instead he continued with the task at hand. "Apparently Hope is a who, not a what. And she's trapped in Pandora's jar. You know the one they teach us about opening to scare us from having too much curiosity? Well it's real, and, because this is the world we're living in, Gabriel and Prometheus knew the location of until today. And has become suddenly extremely important to find, because the cat's out of the bag, and everyone knows about it's existence now."

"Can I ask a stupid question?" Jonathan said timidly. Tyler nodded to him. "How do we find someone who has managed to hide herself from the archangels, the god of premonition and the devil himself?"

Tyler looked at him and folded his arms against his chest. "I guess we're about to find out."

#### TYLER

The Esesa Jane was once again eerily quiet. Phenex had reluctantly closed the restaurant to all patrons for the afternoon so that Tyler and Prometheus could meet with Epimetheus. The tension between Prometheus and his brother could cut through steel, as could the stare they were sharing. Epimetheus had been brought here, against his will and was being extremely evasive. The table was filled with dishes of varying kinds. No one had touched any of it.

"Explain to me how Pandora just suddenly went missing," Tyler said this for about the thousandth time.

Epimetheus kept his arms folded over his chest, resting them tensely on his round belly, which betrayed his act of stoicism as it bounced up and down with

his heavy breathing.

“We didn’t bring you here to punish you, we just want to know where your wife went,” Prometheus ensured his brother.

Epimetheus chuckled. “It isn’t nice to lie, brother. You and I both know this is punishment.”

“Don’t act like you don’t deserve it.” Tyler sat forward and stared right at the god, who did not return the glare.

“As I’ve told you many times, I don’t know where Pandora is,” Epimetheus kept his eyes fixed on Prometheus. “If I knew, I’d tell you.”

“Now who’s lying?” Prometheus didn’t break his eye contact with Epimetheus either.

It was the ultimate staring contest. If it weren’t so important to get information from this being Tyler would be impressed by how long both of them could go without blinking. “Did she meet with anyone before she went missing, or do anything out of the ordinary?”

Chills ran down Tyler’s spine as Epimetheus slowly turned his head toward him. “Disappearing into thin air without a trace is pretty out of the ordinary, wouldn’t you say?”

Tyler pushed his chair from the table and walked toward the back of the room. He slipped into the kitchen where he knew Abby, Phenex and Azazel were waiting, watching. “He’s not going to be of any use but Prometheus is sure his brother knows something. They’re equally stubborn and at this point it’s more of a staring contest they’re both winning. We could be here all day.” He

shrugged a silent apology at Phenex who had gasped.

“You are wasting my time, and my food,” Phenex snapped at Tyler as he handed him a fresh plated of fried wontons.

“Is it at all possible he really doesn’t know anything?” Abby asked.

“Sure. It’s entirely possible Pandora would keep her location secret from even her husband. Prometheus is certain Epimetheus will give us clues even he isn’t aware could help us, so we continue this game,” Tyler sighed and headed back out to the table carrying the plate back to the table. The smell of the fried dough made his stomach grumble.

The two gods sat in complete silence, lips pursed, arms folded, eyes unblinking. They didn’t notice Tyler return to the table until he slid the plate of food in front of them. “You must be hungry, it’s a long journey from Greece, even if you can appear out of thin air whenever and wherever you want to.”

“Food is not going to entice me to speak any words I don’t have, mortal,” Epimetheus spit out at him as he grabbed a wonton with his fingers and popped into his mouth. “Unless you put something in these?” The god’s eyes were suddenly wide.

“The thought crossed my mind,” Tyler admitted, “But I didn’t think there was any kind of serum in existence that could work on a god so I just had the cook make these sans magic potions.”

There was a twitch in Epimetheus’s eye that caught both Tyler and Prometheus who said “Black magic” as if a revelation had just hit him. The words made Epimethues squirm.

Tyler was about to insist black magic wasn't a thing but he realized the world he was living in. "Is there someone, or something, that could perform enough black magic to hide an immortal being from anyone looking for them?"

Prometheus nodded.

## CHLOE

On the plus side, being in a human hospital on the middle plane gave her a reprieve from Lucifer's physical presence. The down side was it meant he was spending a lot more time talking to her through telepathy. She didn't like being in her own mind, let alone having someone else rummaging through it. But today, she had asked for him.

"Is something wrong with my son?" Lucifer's voice had a concern to it.

Chloe rolled her eyes. "She's fine," she said it out loud, it made it easier to keep her thoughts in control, even if it made her feel ridiculous talking to someone who wasn't there, but was. Lucifer sighed. Chloe knew it was because he was certain the being inside her was male. "He or she seems to be strong and healthy," Chloe tried to calm herself. She needed something from him, and she knew he'd be less inclined if she used her usual snarky attitude to get it. "It's me that has a problem," she admitted. Lucifer didn't answer her. "Hello?"

"What is it I can do for you, Chloe?" he didn't sound like he was in the mood for much.

She cleared her throat. It was obvious Lucifer was distracted or he'd have already figured out what she'd called on him for. But she said it out loud anyway. "I want out of my contract." Another long silence. "Lucifer?!" she screamed it so loudly she wondered if it alerted any of the nurses just outside her door. She watched for it to open, but it didn't.

“I heard you,” Lucifer answered. “I’m just trying to figure out why you would want to break such a deal. You understand what that means, don’t you?”

She did. She understood all too well. It meant she would return to the state she was in when he had come to her. Dying of brain cancer, hooked up to machines keeping her barely alive. Much like she was now, except at the end of that reality she would die and at the end of this one she’d be a shell without a soul who couldn’t die, ever.

“You were a shell without a soul before I met you,” Lucifer said in her mind.

“Oh now you’re paying attention,” she quipped.

“I’m always paying attention, Chloe. I’ll make you a deal. A new one. You carry my son to term, and watch after him until he is old enough to rule by my side, and I will do whatever you’d like. If that means choosing to die, so be it.”

Chloe was surprised by Lucifer’s willingness to agree to a new deal, but she knew it simply meant he was getting what he wanted out of it. It didn’t sit well with her, having to live longer than she’d wanted to. And what did she know about raising a demon spawn? She contemplated the idea of it. It was not a pretty picture. But she knew from her current situation that a demon matured much faster than a human. The blood ritual had only been two months ago, and she’d likely give booth in another two months, at most. He wasn’t asking for 10 more years. She was looking at more like 4 or 5.

“Deal,” she said in her mind and felt Lucifer’s presence disappear.

## TYLER

Long after Prometheus had returned his brother to Greece and reappeared at

the table where he'd left Tyler contemplating the existence of black magic, the entire group of misfit creatures sat around it as patrons filed in around them. Phenex was in a much better mood now that his business was back to its normal buzz of activity. But there was still as solemn nature to the meeting. Epimetheus hadn't given them much. And what he had given them was more confusing than anything Tyler had been through in the last few months. That worried him.

"I thought black magic was the devil's doing?" Jonathan asked after Tyler had explained the possibility that Pandora was using those means to stay hidden.

"One of many misconceptions," Azazel said. "Black magic is strictly a human thing. It's not about good and evil, god and heaven, or Lucifer and hell for that matter. In fact it is important that they don't believe in anything but themselves. They use the term black magic to explain it, but to put it simply, it's as easy as not being aware that it's all real."

"So you're saying all atheists can deal in black magic," Tyler wasn't convinced that was true. He had been an atheist his whole life, and not once was he able to use any sort of magic on anyone or anything. And he'd tried.

"Azazel is oversimplifying it," Prometheus chimed in. "People who delve in magic of any kind have to learn the skill. And have a certain predisposition to do so. You don't just decide you don't believe in heaven and hell and become a wielder of magic. It takes a certain kind of mind. And a lot of training."

"Please tell me there's a place somewhere in the world, easy to travel to, that has all those kinds of people gathered in it." Tyler knew it wasn't going to be that easy.

"You mean like Hogwarts?" Jonathan suggested.

“Hogwarts isn’t real, Jonny, you can’t believe everything you read in a book.” This statement made Tyler laugh much harder than he meant to.

“You two done?” Phenex broke up the fun.

“I’m sorry but this is all getting to be ridiculous. Well, more than usual, anyway,” Tyler said. “What I meant was, can it be as easy as going to one part of the world to find the person hiding Pandora or are we about to have to go on a wild goose chase?”

“You are right, there is no Hogwarts,” Prometheus answered.

It both confused and delighted Tyler that the god even knew the reference in the first place. “So, wild goose chase it is then. Any idea where we begin?”

#### TYLER

The maps and boards had all been erased and moved around. Tyler was staring at the remnants of ink on the whiteboard from previous plans either failed or never carried out. He silently hoped this wouldn’t be another failure. In bold ink in the middle of the board read “Find Hope.” Tyler had lost that sentiment long ago. Although it was slowly getting back to him in ways he hadn’t imagined.

“Let’s go home,” Jonathan’s voice came from behind Tyler. Just one of the things that had Tyler believing in hope again. Barely.

Tyler was still getting used to the idea of living with Jonathan. He knew he was in love with him. He had zero doubts about that. But living together just two months into his first real relationship seemed, quick. Jonathan’s hand on the small of Tyler’s back took away the fear and replaced it with goosebumps. Yeah, he definitely was in love.

They had only one rule. Never talk about Lucifer and the coming war in bed. Only when Tyler woke up suddenly from nightmares involving death and destruction were they allowed to even say the demon's name. So most of their conversations about it took place in the car ride home. On a good day it was a 20 minute ride. This was not one of those days.

"If Lucifer's goal was to make life so difficult we'd start picking each other off on the highways it worked," Tyler said dryly. He was pretty sure Lucifer had total and utter destruction in mind with no intention of leaving humans alive long enough to go crazy sitting in traffic. If he knew he'd probably find it a nice bonus, but Tyler was certain Lucifer wasn't so keen on the fact that all of the humans had survived his attack on Los Angeles.

"Do you really think it's a good idea to start the search in Greece?" Jonathan ignored Tyler's comment completely.

"I don't know, Prometheus seems pretty convinced there's some sort of clues at Epimetheus's estate, so I guess it's as good a place as any," Tyler answered. "You have somewhere else in mind?"

"I mean no, but I feel like it's too easy. If Pandora went to the trouble of hiding herself, why would she leave clues behind in her own home? Don't you think maybe Prometheus just wants us to further annoy his brother?"

"I'm sure that's a big part of it, but you can't say he doesn't deserve it. He had the ruler of the upper plane hidden away in his basement for 100 years. And you can't say he's not been careless about hiding his dumbassary. Sometimes the best clues are right where you think they are," Tyler tried to justify the whole thing, but even he knew it sounded flimsy.

There was no further conversation as the two slowly made their way toward home. Tyler stared out the window and wondered how many of the people working to rebuild the ruins Lucifer's demons left truly believed that's what had happened. The news had started questioning whether or not California had been hit by some sort of natural disaster. An earthquake not registering on the Richter scale. For a base of people who made a point of having thoughts and prayers every time a disaster hit they were sure quick to dismiss the possibility that everything they believed in was real.

The traffic finally opened up just before they got to their destination. He and Jonathan had decided to stick with an apartment close to the place where everything had begun for them. The Salvation Bar & Grill was still in business, just a few blocks from where they'd found a cute place with all the Los Angeles charm it could muster. They hadn't been back to the bar since closing the portal to the lower plane there. Mainly because it was just a regular old hangout for people on their way to or from the airport and no longer a draw for underworld creatures who might were secret residents of the city.

Tyler and Jonathan had chosen a ground floor apartment for two reasons. One, if they had to leave in a hurry they could just walk out the door. And two, neither of them wanted to carry the other up or down the stairs ever again. Been there, done that. The interior was a mixture of furniture they had both insisted on keeping. Jonathan had very particular taste, where Tyler was willing to sit on any couch or chair that still had filling in it. So it was Jonathan's couch that won out in that contest. Tyler's hand me down coffee table sat in front of it. Remnants of research done prior to this new plan sat in the middle of it. Tyler looked at it and sighed. He gathered it up into a pile and set it on a shelf next to their TV. Which was rarely on these days. He was so tired of watching the news. It was depressing.

"Let's see what we can scrape together for dinner," Jonathan called from the

kitchen. Tyler shuffled his way in to see if they had anything good there. He slipped his arm around Jonathan's waist and rested his chin on his shoulder as they both stared into the open fridge. It was pretty much empty save a few condiments and a box of Chinese food from the Elesa Jane that they probably should have thrown away days ago.

"Pizza?" Tyler patted Jonathan's stomach and backed away so he could close the refrigerator door. Tyler had a brief moment of wanting to open it back up to see if it had a portal to the underworld inside. But he knew it didn't.

Tyler had his laptop open to a wiki page on black magic. If there was any information to be gathered about anything it would be on the Internet. Some of it was untrue, but more often than not it was astounding how on point the entries were. For instance on Lucifer's page under "weapons that can do harm" it said "see Omphalos." Tyler wasn't sure who had made the entry on that page but whoever it was knew a lot about it.

"It says that there are sometimes anomalies that can be found after someone uses black magic," Tyler pointed at his screen. "To the untrained eye these abnormalities look like nothing in particular but to anyone who knows the practice they can be obvious signs someone has been dabbling in the art. Excessive dust and dead plants, while normally signs of neglect, may be more telling than that. Sensations such as *deja vu* or the feeling of being watched can also be signs that dark magic has been used in that particular room."

"So all we have to do is go into every room in Epimetheus's giant mansion and look for dust, dead plants, or see if we feel like we've been there before," Jonathan quipped. "No big deal really, I'm sure that old woman who looks after the house is right on top of the dusting and plant watering on the daily."

Tyler let Jonathan be snarky. It wasn't often he used his wit to deal with the

ridiculousness of their life. That was Tyler's usual MO. "I wonder though, if that has some validity to it. I mean, it can't be as easy as walking into Pandora's room and checking for dust, dead plants of *deja vu*, can it?"

"The thing is, we're not looking for signs she used black magic, we're pretty certain she has, right? Aren't we looking for where that magic has taken her or, more specifically who helped her hide herself?" Jonathan was back to being his usual thoughtful self.

"Yeah I'm still getting to the 'once you know magic has been used' section," Tyler went back to reading the wiki entry. "Well, that's promising," he said with his usual sarcasm. "It is one thing to determine whether or not black magic has been performed in the area in question, it is another thing entirely to find the person who performed it. In fact it is nearly impossible to detect such a person unless they identify themselves to you. Which is highly unlikely as the art has been illegal worldwide for centuries."

"We knew it wasn't gonna be easy," Jonathan leaned forward and pulled Tyler closer to him. "You know I'm the first one to insist we research and plan everything to the letter but we need to get some sleep, we'll relay what we've learned to the group tomorrow, there's no use in confirming what we already know."

Tyler couldn't argue. He was tired. From lack of sleep and from the feeling of either constantly waiting for the next bomb to drop or chasing his tail looking for something that didn't want to be found. Like his family. Who he'd lost touch with when he moved to Los Angeles and had apparently, like Pandora, fallen off the face of the earth. Maybe they were using black magic too. The thought made Tyler shudder. He was reminded of the darkness he had felt, dying on a table in a church after another round of shock therapy his family was certain would take the gay right out of him. He shook his head to get rid of the thoughts. And like

the perfectly good man he was, followed his boyfriend into the bedroom they shared.

His dreams were more intense than usual that night. Chloe was giving birth, Tyler was somehow there to witness it. The demon spawn came out of Chloe as a fully grown human. Female, naked head to toe, with dark black hair, Chloe's caramel eyes, and Lucifer's creepy smile. The thing that scared him most, the thing that made him sit up and stifle a scream, were her words. "Hi, Dad." In his dream he was looking around, trying to find Lucifer, but no one else was there.

### LUCIFER

There was no way he was going to find someone to help him who was capable enough to get the job done. This made him even angrier that Azazel had betrayed him. For all his bullshit at least his brother could do what was asked of him without having to be told more than once. The thought of Azazel brought him to wondering if his brother and the group he and the Omphalos were a part of knew about Pandora and her disappearance yet. More importantly did they know what that meant for him, and them?

"I have a simple task for you," he told the guard who had been waiting outside his library door. "I need to know what the Omphalos is planning. Travel to the middle plane and see what you can find out."

The demon looked down at his bare feet. His shoulders slumped and his breathing quickened.

"What is it?" Lucifer said with a sigh.

"Master. There are no more open portals onto the middle plane. They, closed them all," the demon barely looked at Lucifer as he said it.

“Right,” Lucifer said with a wave of his hand. The demon guard returned to his post outside the library door. Lucifer stepped to the foot of the fireplace. He had been so focused on the pending birth of his son he had forgotten about the portals being destroyed after he’d visited the middle plane. He tried to think, who could he contact through fire message that would get him answers. Phenex, Azazel, they had both chosen the, wrong side. The dragon. He would have to visit the dungeon again. His least favorite place. But the dragon was incapable of choosing a side. He had to stay neutral, which meant helping both sides when called upon.

Lucifer made his way through the long and winding hallways down to the dragon’s lair. As usual the creature was snoring heavily atop a pile of treasures that went higher than Lucifer could see. The only way he knew the dragon was there was the sounds of his snorts and the puffs of hot air coming down from the top of the room. Lucifer cleared his throat and the dragon stirred. His giant head coming to a stop right at Lucifer’s chest.

“Two visits in one day,” the dragon snorted. “What a treat this is.”

Lucifer was pretty sure the dragon knew nothing of sarcasm but it didn’t much sound like he was delighted to see him. “What can you tell me about the progress the Omphalos is making?”

“His mind is distracted, he is unable to focus his powers, Phenex is losing patience,” the dragon answered honestly, as was his duty. “However, I have not been back to train him in several days, if there have been any changes I am not aware of them.”

Lucifer’s heart fell. It was only recently that he learned of Pandora, Hope and the jar in her possession. If Azazel and the Omphalos knew about it the dragon would be of no help to him.

“I’m sorry for waking you,” Lucifer backed out of the dragon’s lair without looking behind him. The dragon’s giant head disappeared into the darkness of the room and a puff of hot air indicated he’d gone back to his nap.

#### TYLER

Jonathan’s hands were immediately at the small of Tyler’s back. “Same one or something different?”

“A new one,” Tyler tried to get his breathing back to normal. “And the scariest one yet.”

Jonathan turned on a lamp from the bedside table. “Wanna talk about it?”

Tyler looked at him, though his breathing changed slightly his heart raced for a new reason. He shook off the feeling of need and told him, “She called me dad.”

“Who did?” Jonathan cocked his head to the side and it made Tyler smile at how much it reminded him of Abby.

“Lucifer’s spawn. She came out of Chloe’s womb full grown and when she saw me she called me dad.” Tyler watched as Jonathan’s face showed a bunch of different emotions.

“As much as I’d love to unpack what that means, we have to get some sleep, we only have a couple more hours before we have to be at the Esesa Jane,” Jonathan said as he turned the lamp back off and laid back down.

Several hours later Tyler was still playing the scene back in his mind. He was also surprised by Jonathan’s reaction to it. These days their communication

skills had taken a back seat to their need to stay on task, so Tyler hadn't brought it back up, and neither had Jonathan. They quietly made their way downtown where Phenex, Abby and Azazel were waiting for them.

"I just feel like if we need more information we should be getting it from a reliable source," Tyler was insisting. "I mean Alexis is a walking Google search engine. Shouldn't we be talking to him?"

"It isn't that we don't want to include him," Phenex responded. "But the less he knows about our new plan the less Lucifer knows. This way if Lucifer asks him for information he won't have any to give."

"It's the dragon's nature to always be honest. Haven't you noticed how quick he is to answer every question asked of him pointedly? It isn't a loyalty thing. It's a dragon thing. Lucifer has no other sources of information these days. We closed the portals to ensure he was kept on the lower plane, which also means he can't send anyone here either. He's completely cut off from anything on this plane. If it were me, I'd go see the dragon when I needed to know things," Azazel pointed said. "And Lucifer's the one who trained me, so..."

"Okay, I got it," Tyler threw his hands up in defeat. "Let's get this over with."

Abby, Jonathan and Tyler locked hands. Phenex stood behind them and waved as the three disappeared into thin air. When they appeared again they were at Prometheus's front door. Abby let go of them but Tyler held tight to Jonathan's hand. Being a mortal man it took a lot out of Jonathan to travel through teleporting. Tyler squeezed Jonathan's hand with gentle pulses.

"I'm good," Jonathan assured him, but he didn't let go of Tyler's hand.

Prometheus opened the door and greeted them with a smile. "Come in."

The living room was the same as Tyler remembered it. Oddly decorated with furniture the god had collected over time. Tyler thought back to the last time he was there. Finding out about who he was and what the world had in store for him. Had it really only been two months since then? It seemed like a lifetime ago.

“Epimetheus is still at home,” Prometheus announced. “He doesn’t seem to be in any hurry to find his wife, for as desperate as he seemed to be when he made sure we all knew she had gone missing.”

“Do you think he knows more than he’s letting on?” Abby asked him.

“That’s always a possibility,” Prometheus answered. “Can I get anyone anything?”

Tyler wondered if they really had time to sit around and sip tea but that’s what they were doing. “Do we have time for this?” he asked no one in particular.

“For the moment,” Prometheus assured him.

## LUCIFER

The ruler of the lower plane once again found himself pouring over books in his vast library looking for anything, a small clue, an incantation, something that could get him another chance at visiting the middle plane. Everything he had come across seemed to indicate he had used his one opportunity. It frustrated him to no end, but a flash of the vessel and what she carried reminded him it had not been a lost cause.

He hated having to do it, but Lucifer stood at the edge of his fireplace and spoke into the flames, summoning the only person he could think of to help him

here. Epimetheus screamed as he was pulled through the fire and into Lucifer's library. He brushed off his clothes and stared at the demon with an anger Lucifer had not seen from the god before now.

"My brother is watching me," Epimetheus spit out.

"It doesn't matter," Lucifer said it and thought it. "I have a deal for you."

Epimetheus laughed wholeheartedly. "You cannot seriously think I, Epimetheus, god of afterthought, am going to make a deal with the devil. My wife may have been careless enough to do so, but she is no Titan. You will find that I will not be manipulated as easily."

Lucifer laughed at this statement. "Your wife is much less careless than you think, my friend. You have forgotten it was she who came to me, and she made no deals here. She is as free to live on as she ever was."

Epimetheus shook his head. "What could you possibly offer me that I could not get for myself?"

"Your wife back, for starters," Lucifer told him.

"You know where she is," Epimetheus lunged forward, Lucifer avoided any contact.

"No, I have no idea where she has run off to, but I have extreme confidence your brother and his friends are going to find her. All we have to do is wait for them to locate her for us, and get to her before they do." Lucifer watched as varying emotions washed across the face of the Titan.

"What is it you need from me," Epimetheus asked.

“Help them in any way you can when you are called upon,” Lucifer said. “Evading them only prolongs their ability to find Pandora, and her belongings.”

Epiemtheus stood silently for a moment. “You must be desperate, to be trusting me to find Pandora’s jar before my brother does. How do you know I won’t use it on you?”

“I don’t, but sadly, Epimetheus, you are my only, option,” Lucifer stopped short of saying Hope. That’s the exact thing he was trying to avoid.

### CHLOE

The nurses looking after Chloe were unusually talkative and had a much better attitude than they had since she arrived at the hospital. It wasn’t long before she figured out why.

“I don’t know, they just left,” the nurse changing the bag on her drip said to the nurse who was checking Chloe’s vitals. They spoke to each other like Chloe wasn’t there. They barely even looked at her either. But their demeanor was clearly less, stressed.

“Those guys creeped me out,” said the vitals nurse.

“Demons will do that,” Chloe whispered under her breath.

The nurses finished their tasks and left Chloe alone. Neither asked how she was or if she needed anything. If Lucifer knew the shitty care she was getting he’d ensure they both of made their way to the lower plane when they died. He’d probably make it sooner than their expected expiration dates too. She was only slightly disturbed by the joy that thought brought her.

When her moment of vengeance passed she found herself wondering where her guards had run off to and if they had left on their own or on Lucifer's order. Another round of vengeance passed through her, imagining the terrible wrath Lucifer would bring down on two incompetent demons who were meant to be guarding her because he can't.

"If I didn't know any better I'd say your soul had completely gone to the lower plane," Azazel's voice in her mind scared Chloe half to death. "You're already half dead. I'll have to try harder next time."

"I thought I had gotten rid of you," Chloe said out loud. "If Lucifer finds out you're bothering me..."

"Lucifer is preoccupied at the moment," Azazel told her.

"What have you done with him," Chloe's voice came out worried. It surprised even her to hear the concern in it.

"Don't you worry your little demonic heart Chlo," Azazel laughed. "Nobody has done anything to Lucifer. He's just found himself in quite a predicament."

"Why are you telling me this?" Chloe wondered out loud. Why would Azazel be telling her anything? What game was he playing here?

"No games. Since it appears we are still able to be in communication, I was wondering if I could get you to do something for me?" Azazel's voice was suddenly soft and almost kind.

"Don't do that," Chloe snapped at him. "Don't talk to me like you care about my well being. How about you just tell me what you need and I'll let you know if I've got the time or the desire to help you."

“Sorry, I thought you enjoyed our little chats, I’ll refrain from any further banter,” Azazel’s voice was all business. “Because Lucifer won’t tell you this, I found it important that someone did. The others didn’t want to keep you in the loop. Anyway. You may find that over the next several days Lucifer is decidedly distracted. There has been an interesting development in all of our plans. There is an item Lucifer is seeking that can destroy him. We are trying to find it first. We need you to find out what he know, when he knows it.”

Chloe tried to make sense of all of the words Azazel had just said to her. She had so many questions, but she went with the easiest one. “Why would I help you?”

“Because there is still something inside of you that wants to be good. And it’s not the creature in your belly. You came to Tyler for help before, he’s hoping you remember what he did for you and return the favor.”

Chloe laughed heartily. “What he did for me? Have you seen me? I’m pregnant with Lucifer’s devil child!” She screamed out in her mind. She didn’t want to alert the nurses and bring them into her room where she was talking into the air like a madwoman.

“I told him you’d say that, but Jonathan said he has faith in you, and it gets tiring trying to argue with a preacher, so I agreed to contact you.”

“Why is it you’re still able talk to me?”

“Because you are allowing it,” Azazel answered pointedly. “There is still a part of you that needs to be connected to someone other than Lucifer. So you keep your mind open to me. I’m not being an asshole Chloe, it’s just truth.”

She knew he was right, and it annoyed her to no end that she'd never let go of their connection. As long as she could keep an open line of communication with Azazel, she'd know that someone was out there doing something about Lucifer.

"Yes, exactly," Azazel said. "And if you keep us in the loop with whatever you can find out, it will help us find the item before Lucifer does. If he is able to find it and destroy it, he will never be defeated. The Omphalos will be able to keep him out of the middle plane but Lucifer will never stop trying, and you know he will use that baby inside you as a weapon. You know that for a fact."

Chloe did know. So she agreed. "What could possibly be out there that can destroy Lucifer?" she finally asked the question she'd really wanted the answer to.

"Hope." Azazel's voice faded away leaving Chloe to contemplate this as machines beeped and gurgled around her.

#### TYLER

"I think we've had enough tea," Tyler said putting his cup back onto the table in front of him. "I don't understand why we're not at Epimetheus's front door right now." He looked around the room. Everyone was oddly calm. He wasn't truly in a hurry to get to the god's palace, he just wanted to get back to LA and continue his training. Last he'd checked Chloe was still very pregnant and Lucifer, though distracted now, was still planning on taking over the middle plane.

"Relax Tyler," Prometheus said. "We'll get to it. Besides, Epimetheus isn't home at the moment. It appears Lucifer has called on him and he is currently on the lower plane."

“You can see him?” Tyler stared at the god with wide eyes.

“No, it seems Atlas has decided to keep me in the loop for once,” Prometheus said loudly. “He couldn’t tell me what they are talking about but Epimetheus was summonsed by Lucifer, against his will, which delighted Atlas to no end. He has very little love for our brother.” Prometheus was still talking loudly, as if Atlas was there in the house with them.

Tyler looked around the room to see if indeed there was another Titan in the room. There wasn’t.

“At least we know how he’s staying connected to the middle plane,” Abby mused. “We should ask him about it when we visit him.”

Tyler sat back against the couch and folded his arms against his chest. There was no telling how long Lucifer would, or could, hold Epimetheus on the lower plane. Tyler’s abilities only allowed a few short minutes. But a Titan god is not the Omphalos, so it could be hours. The thought made Tyler even more anxious. “I can’t just sit here and wait on Lucifer to release Epimetheus back to the middle plane. I need to train, or do something useful other than sip tea and wax poetic about what could be happening...dammit,” he stopped mid sentence and closed his eyes. “Be right back.”

Tyler made sure to concentrate hard on where he wanted to be on the lower plane. He had no intention of making his presence known to either Lucifer or Epimetheus, so he intentionally appeared just outside the library door. He was surprised to find it unguarded. Tyler put his ear to the door but heard nothing. He leaned further into the door, doing his best not to push it open. Tyler felt his pulse race as his body caught up with the fact they were on the lower plane again. He tried to calm himself, he was there under his own volition and not a prisoner as he had been before. He focused on the task in front of him.

Information. He closed his eyes and tried to picture Lucifer inside his library, without accidentally teleporting himself into the room.

“Can you trust him?” a voice came through the heavy wood, finally.

“Probably not, but it’s a chance I have to take. Is there any news from the vessel?” Lucifer asked.

“Her guards have been removed as per your order. So far there has been no activity. No one in or out of her room aside from her nurses,” The unknown voice answered.

“Thank you that will be all,” Lucifer dismissed whoever it was.

Tyler quickly disappeared back to Prometheus’s living room.

“What did you find out?” Jonathan was immediately at his side.

“Epimetheus isn’t there anymore, and Lucifer has removed his guards from Chloe’s hospital room. Not sure why he’d do that, but maybe he’s hoping one of us will go visit her?” Tyler told the room.

“Doubtful, I’m sure he’s given them a new task,” Prometheus said. “I suppose we should get to Epimetheus’s palace after all.”

“Maybe we’ll catch him in a vulnerable moment and he’ll tell us what Lucifer wanted from him,” Jonathan suggested.

Prometheus laughed. “He’ll tell us anyway, he’s not the brightest of the titans, and he’s not the biggest fan of Lucifer. The demon is right not to trust my brother. Whatever it is he wants Epimetheus to do, he’ll do the opposite.”

Tyler smiled at Prometheus's assessment.

"Yes, he reminds me a lot of you," Prometheus returned the smile.

"The good news is my teleporting skills have improved," Tyler announced. "The bad news is I still can't make it any easier for you," he squeezed Jonathan's arm before taking him by the hand.

"Remember we want to appear cordial, let's not appear right inside Epimetheus's living room, we'll give him the opportunity to invite us in," Prometheus suggested.

#### TYLER

They managed to reappear just outside Epimetheus's compound. Tyler held Jonathan's hand tight, trying to center him from a second teleportation in such a short time. Maybe they should have had more tea. The green color Jonathan's face had turned said differently. He may have had too much. He stood still trying to keep his stomach from unloading itself at the edge of Epimetheus's driveway.

Prometheus was standing at the guard station talking to the occupants, trying to glean any information they might have about Pandora's disappearance. Tyler could hear the god explain that there was no reason to assume the worst. "Would you be so kind as to let my brother know we are here," he tried to keep his voice even and courteous.

One of the guards picked up a phone and spoke lowly into it. Tyler couldn't

hear what was said. The guard nodded, a gesture Tyler found funny in every situation. He hung up the phone and turned back to Prometheus “Go ahead.”

The four of them walked slowly up the long driveway, looking around for any clues that may be hidden in plain sight. It was unlikely any remnants of black magic would be present outside. Wind and elements would have washed it away by now. The thought stopped Tyler in his tracks.

“What is it?” Jonathan stopped next to him.

“Pandora is too smart to leave traces in her own home, she’d have gone somewhere else, and if she met with a witch or wizard outside, there would be no way to track the magic back to them. I’m all for annoying the hell out of the gods but we’re wasting time.”

Prometheus turned to face them. “I’m not wasting your time, Tyler. You’re right. Pandora is smart. But dealing in black magic is dangerous and there are always signs left behind. She may have taken certain possessions with her but not all of them. And someone in this house knows something, or my brothers and sisters would have guided us in an entirely different direction,” he assured them.

Tyler wasn’t so sure about the gods part, but despite it all he trusted Prometheus’s instincts. He couldn’t tell why he was so on edge. Maybe it was not knowing what they’d find inside. Last time they had visited this compound they had found a very disheveled ruler of the upper plane being held hostage by its occupants. Now they were dealing in the use of black magic and it made Tyler nervous. He followed Prometheus to the front door and waited.

The old man who took care of the compound was too old to be taking care of such a large house. Tyler had asked about it the first time they’d been here.

Prometheus said Epimetheus didn't trust anyone else to take care of things at the house. Tyler felt that was unfair to the man, but he didn't seem to be complaining about it. He opened the door slowly "Please come in," his shaky voice greeting them with neither happiness nor annoyance. Just a general sense of meh.

Tyler's head was on a swivel as they made their way into the living room. A place they'd been just a few short months ago looking for Him. Now he was looking for traces of black magic. Which he still wasn't even sure he knew how to detect. There didn't seem to be anything out of place in the foyer. Or in the hallway that led to the vast living room. He and Prometheus were exchanging glances, shaking their heads at the lack of evidence as they went along.

Epimetheus was perched in his usual armchair sipping a delicate cup of tea. He barely acknowledged he had guests. Tyler felt an immediate sense of déjà vu. He looked to Prometheus who was shaking his head 'no.'

"What brings you to my humble abode," Epimetheus asked over his teacup.

Tyler wanted to snap at the Titan but he refrained. Prometheus answered instead. "You know why we're here, brother. Let us look around and maybe we can find a way to locate your missing wife."

Epimetheus set his cup on its saucer. "It seems everyone is offering to find my dear Pandora for me. Lucifer has offered to waive his usual fee for entering into a contract with him. What are you offering?"

Prometheus had been right. His brother did nothing to hide the fact that he'd met with Lucifer earlier that day. Tyler was about to say something really smart and snarky to the Titan but the feeling of déjà vu hit him again. He looked around the room, not sure exactly what he was looking for, and noticed the old

man had come in to retrieve Epimetheus's empty tea cup. As he looked at the man further he noticed a dark aura around him. Tyler alerted Prometheus telepathically. "Are you seeing that?"

"I see it," Prometheus answered him, also telepathically. Out loud he spoke directly to the old man "Sam, how are you feeling these days?"

The old man barely looked up from his task of cleaning Epimetheus's table area from its crumbs and spilled tea.

"My brother asked you a question Sam," Epimetheus said loudly. "He's gone deaf," he whispered to Prometheus.

The man looked up and his cloudy gray eyes met Tyler's briefly before landing on Prometheus. "I'm sorry sir, what was it you asked?" His shaky voice asked courteously.

"Oh I was just asking how you are doing Sam," Prometheus practically screamed it.

"All is well, thank you for asking, sir." Sam half bowed, which was an easy gesture being that he was already hunched over with age. He flashed a quick smile in Prometheus's direction and slowly shuffled out of the room rattling the tray of dishes he was carrying. It fascinated Tyler that the man was able to balance the tray without dropping it.

"Since when do you have a concern for Sam's well being?" Epimetheus asked. Not as clueless as the wikipedia page Tyler read about him suggested.

"Your dear servant has either been performing or been near someone who has performed black magic." Prometheus was honest with him. It frustrated

Tyler that he was giving his brother so much credit. How could they be sure Epimetheus wasn't going to report right back to Lucifer when they were gone?

The statement made Jonathan and Abby sit forward in their seats, and made Epimetheus laugh whole heartedly. "That man is older than dirt. The only thing he's been practicing is naps. What would possess you to think he's involved in such things?"

Tyler tried to stop Prometheus from giving Epimetheus any further information but it was too late. "He has an aura about him that suggests he's been in the presence of dark magic. Doesn't mean he's the one using it, but he knows who did."

"Well it certainly wasn't me," Epimetheus said quickly.

"I'm not accusing you brother," Prometheus told him. "You can't utilize your own abilities, I'd never assume you could learn new ones. Especially not ones this complex, and dangerous."

"Are you two done? We should maybe go talk to Sam and find out what he knows, yes?" Abby finally chimed in.

"Do we have your permission to speak to him?" Prometheus asked his brother.

"Feel free. I'd be curious to see if he remembers what he made me for lunch today let alone if he was in the presence of a practitioner of dark magic," Epimetheus said with a wave of his hand.

Tyler followed Prometheus into the kitchen. Jonathan and Abby followed close behind them. Sam was loading dishes in to a dishwasher. It seemed like an

odd task for such an old man, in a compound occupied by an ancient god. The man never looked up from his task. Prometheus finally stepped forward and stood directly next to Sam, putting a hand on the man's shoulder. Sam growled at the interruption.

"Why don't you just tell us about Pandora's disappearance and we'll get out of your way," Prometheus said gently.

Sam dropped a spoon into the sink with a clatter and growled again. "I don't know anything about that," he said with a great deal of anger.

"The thing is, Sam, whenever one uses dark magic, it leaves a trace. We can see traces around you. So either we can assume you've been dealing in the illegal practice or you can tell us who has." Prometheus shrugged at the man as if to push home that there were only those two choices.

Sam's face dropped.

"We're not looking to punish or turn in the person who used the magic," Tyler assured him. "We just need to find Pandora. It is very important, for a lot of people, that we find where she is and bring her home."

Sam contemplated this for a few moments. "You promise me no harm will come of anyone? Including Pandora?"

This time it was Abby who stepped forward. "I know that there have been a lot of things going on in this house that might be considered grounds for punishment. But you can be sure we are not here to cause anyone harm. Do you think I would have returned to the place where my father was held captive if it wasn't important?"

Sam blanched at this. “I am sorry I did not tell anyone he was here. I told Epimetheus he was making a big mistake holding the ruler of the upper plane hostage like that. I did my best to take good care of him.”

Abby smiled at the old man “I am certain my father came home in better shape because you were here for him.”

“I said things, when I thought no one was listening, that Pandora overheard. Things about my wife and her, abilities. I wished she were here so that she could put spells on Epimetheus. Pandora approached me, I thought to punish me for speaking so terribly about her husband. But she asked if she could meet my Deanna. She begged. And so I gave in.”

“And she asked you and your wife to help her disappear? I am sure you had every reason to believe it was the right thing to do,” Abby patted him on the arm.

“Do you think we could talk to Deanna?” Tyler asked as gently as he could. He was excited at the prospect that there might be an actual clue to Pandora’s location this easily.

“You can talk, she may not cooperate, but you are welcome to try,” Sam said.

#### TYLER

Sam and his wife lived on the grounds at Epimetheus’s compound in a small guest house just past a giant pool behind the main house. The old man was leading them across the grounds slowly. Tyler wondered how much of it was his age and how much was his wanting to prolong the meeting as long as possible. They had insisted on visiting his wife immediately, both because they really were anxious to get answers, and because they didn’t want Sam to be able to give Deanna any kind of warning.

“Darling?” Sam called out when he opened the front door.

“What are you doing home so early?” A voice came from the back of the house.

“Some people wanted to see you,” he called out to her and invited the four of them in.

The place was small but sufficient considering Sam had the run of the entire mansion at any given moment of the day. Sam led them into a modest living area with one small couch and a small television and not much else. Tyler could sense no further signs of dark magic anywhere other than the aura surrounding Sam, which was still present, even more now that they knew it was what they had been looking for.

“Let me bring in some chairs,” Sam offered as they crowded into the room.

“We can stand,” Prometheus told him.

Deanna, a small woman about as old as Sam, entered the room straightening out her sweater and pushing a pair of horn rimmed glasses up on to her eyes. Tyler secretly wondered if the woman was putting on a show, surely someone who could use dark magic would be using it to look younger. Or see better. He shook off the thought as he realized how insensitive it was to old people. And the blind. Maybe she was just fine living with the effect of aging. He shook off the thoughts and smiled as the woman looked at each of their faces, seemingly trying to see if she recognized any of them.

“Prometheus,” she said with a toothy smile. They exchanged warm hugs. “What brings you to this side of the compound?”

“Deanna, you’re looking beautiful as always,” Prometheus said with a smile. It freaked Tyler out that the Titan seemed to be charming the woman. “These are some friends of mine, this is Tyler, Abby and Jonathan.”

It seemed to be an odd gesture, introducing them so formally like they’d come to have dinner and a chat. But as soon as Tyler’s hand touched Deanna’s he knew why Prometheus had done this. A spark of shock travelled from his fingers to his spine and he knew what she was. Witch, wizard, warlock, whatever the correct term was, she was one of them. “Nice to meet you,” Tyler greeted her with a smile. In his head he spoke to Prometheus. “She’s the one.”

After they had all shook hands it was Sam who got to the truth of why they were there. “Darling, Prometheus and his friends are here to talk to you about Pandora.”

As soon as he said this Deanna’s demeanor turned rigid and her welcoming nature turned to annoyance at their presence. She directed most of her anger at her husband. “And why would I know anything about Pandora?”

Sam’s already cloudy eyes turned sad with guilt.

“As we told Sam, we’re not looking to punish anyone or bring anyone any harm. It’s important we find Pandora and bring her home. She has something with her that could be very dangerous if it got into the wrong hands,” Prometheus told her.

“If Pandora has gone missing she had a reason, and how do I know you are not going to bring her or anyone else any harm? Who’s to say your hands are not the wrong ones?” Deanna spat out at them.

“Deanna!” Sam’s voice raised at his wife. “This is Prometheus, he has always been good to us!”

“Then why has he brought these people into our home? Do you know who this one is?” Deanna pointed at Tyler but kept her eyes on her husband.

“Yes, this is the Omphalos, the only being on this plane who can prevent a war between the lower plane and the upper one. The one who helped save Him from Epimetheus, the one who will defeat Lucifer and keep him from destroying this plane,” Sam’s voice was strangely clear as he said all this.

It baffled Tyler that the man knew so much about him and what was going on between the planes. But he figured taking care of a Titan as boisterous and braggy as Epimetheus he’d get a lot of information even if no one thought he was listening.

“You’ve been reading too many books,” Deanna retorted.

“Your husband is right, I promise you,” Tyler told her. “Would you like to play a game of I’ll show you what I can do and you show me what you did to help Pandora escape to wherever it is she’s hiding?”

“I think I’ll pass, and I’d like you to get out of my house,” Deanna answered dryly.

Tyler’s first instinct was to keep pushing but Prometheus suggested they give her a little time and come back again when she was less combative. Tyler wondered when that would be. “If we leave now she’ll likely attempt to contact Pandora to warn her we’re looking for her,” Prometheus insisted. Tyler hated arguing telepathically. He felt like his inner voice wasn’t communicating what he really felt, but he agreed anyway.

As they were leaving Prometheus put a hand on Deanna's shoulder. "This is not Sam's fault. He is only trying to help. Do not take your anger out on him. If you want to be angry at someone, I am the one who coaxed the information out of him. Be mad at me."

"Oh I am plenty mad at you Prometheus. Coming into my house, accusing me of such terrible things. And taking advantage of my husband's trust in you. It is unbecoming of a god such as yourself," Deanna told him.

"You understand the importance of what I am doing here, if you can see that I have gone to such great lengths for it. Think about that, and decide which side of the war you want to be on. Because it is coming sooner than you think, and no amount of magic, black or otherwise will save you and your husband from Lucifer's plan to bring Hell to the middle plan, no matter the cost of life," Prometheus warned.

## PANDORA

Pandora was beginning to question her decision to disappear from the mortal plane by herself. There wasn't much to do in the world between planes. She had to mostly keep to herself and to her own space so that no one knew she was there. Deanna had helped her come up with a story about who she was, including a new name, Dora, not so clever but it worked for her. She told anyone who asked that she was a trying to say hidden from an abusive husband who had threatened to kill her. It might have been a bad idea to go that dramatic. Everyone was offering to help her come up with potions and spells to kill him before he killed her. So staying inside was better. But she was bored and that was never a good thing. Curiosity and boredom got her into this predicament. As a matter of fact they had been problematic her entire existence.

A ripple in the air caught her attention and she watched as Deanna appeared

out of thin air. “My husband tells me there are several people looking for you,” she said as a greeting.

“Epimetheus?” Pandora would be surprised if he was leading the search party, but she asked anyway.

“Prometheus, the Omphalos, an angel, and a mortal,” Deanna listed them off, “And Lucifer.”

None of those names surprised Pandora. Especially Lucifer who was probably looking for revenge against her for her part in his failed attempt to take over the middle plane. He’d gotten something out of it. The only she’d gotten was annoyed. The distraction wasn’t at all what she had hoped it would be. Death and destruction were the best cure for boredom and the only thing that happened was Lucifer lost a bunch of demons he could recreate in less than a minute. In fact he’d been the only one to benefit from the experiment.

“You’re certain I cannot be found here?” Pandora asked Deanna with a hint of concern.

“Mostly,” the woman answered.

“What do you mean mostly? I’m either hidden or I’m not,” Pandora stood up at this revelation.

“The only way you will remain hidden is if you continue to move around the different planes. You asked me to hide you and I did. You did not specify how strongly hidden you wanted to be,” Deanna suggested.

Pandora wasn’t happy about having to move around the planes. It had been traumatic enough traveling to this one. It had taken her two days to stop feeling

like the ground was falling out from under her. How much further into the depths of the hidden planes would she have to go to be completely hidden, and was she really willing to keep moving to do so. The prospect of being further alone, and deeper into the odd world of witches and wizards was frightening. “Thank you for the warning. I’m going to take my chances here for the time being. I will consider moving if anyone comes close to finding me here.”

“As you wish.” Deanna didn’t argue with her.

The air flickered again and the old woman was gone. Pandora was once again left alone in her room. It was even more important that she stay in her own space now, limiting the number of people and places she visited on this weird in between place they called Interplanum.

## LUCIFER

Lucifer thought of Azazel more often than he liked. Mostly because everything his brother had been tasked to do on the lower plane was now left to Lucifer to deal with. He had tried to find another demon to take care of the stuff he liked least. Like moving the souls stuck in limbo, a space that held people who were between absolutely belonging on the plane, and those who straddle the line and are waiting for a final verdict, to wherever they were to go when that decision came in. He didn’t take well to the begging, those who thought their sentence to the depths of the plane were some kind of mistake. He especially hated the ones who thought they could run. There was nowhere to go here. Some of them even tried to run before they were placed in their cages. Those were the ones that baffled Lucifer most. Why would they run? Now they were guaranteed to be stuck in this place forever.

The cages were especially rowdy when Lucifer made his way down the long

hallway that housed them. He could hear loud chatter through the steel door. Loud voices were bouncing off the rock walls, mostly coming from the back of the room. The occupants of the cages he passed by to get to the chaos stepped away from the bars and stood flat against their cell walls. Despite the annoyance of having to do such a menial task, Lucifer was reminded of how much power he wielded. He had forgotten these last few months, having been stuck on the lower plane without so much as a lifeline on the middle one. Except Epimetheus. And he was an idiot. "Hey!" Lucifer yelled out as he neared the area where the voices were coming from. They went silent and as Lucifer passed each cell the occupants did as the others had, cowered against the walls. Except one. She stood defiantly against the bars staring out at Lucifer. He cocked his head to the left and kneeled his eyebrows together. She did not move. A steely stare of blue eyes and dark black hair met him. He stepped forward. She did not move.

"Was that you making all that noise?" Lucifer asked with an air of wonder.

"Maybe," she answered, a hint of a smile forming on her lips.

It had been a long time since anyone had been so un-phased by his presence. Not since, Azazel. The thought gave him chills. "Are the accommodations not up to your standards?"

She rolled her eyes at him. It delighted Lucifer somewhere down in his dark soul that she was unafraid and un-phased by him. "One star, would not recommend," she kept her half grin as she put as much sarcasm into her words as she could muster.

"Well that's not going to do, I cannot have you affecting my Yelp rating," Lucifer felt proud that he understood her reference. "What is it I can do for you?"

“I’m sure you hear this all the time, but I don’t belong here. I don’t know how I even got to this place. Is this Hell? Feels like it,” she spoke quickly but with little distress. She wasn’t begging for release, it was more absolute certainty something had gone wrong.

Lucifer was almost disappointed, she was one of those. But her demeanor intrigued him, so he continued to engage her. “What makes you think you don’t belong here? The lower plane, we call it. Hell hasn’t been used in a long time,” he asked.

“I’m not dead,” she almost whispered it.

The words nearly knocked Lucifer off his feet. The only not dead being to visit the lower plane in, well, ever, had been the Omphalos, and that had been against his will. Lucifer looked around the cell the girl was standing in. She was alone. He looked deeper into her blue eyes and stepped back when he saw it. She was telling the truth. The usual signs of death were just not there. He reached out to touch her skin. She didn’t move away. It felt strong and pliable. “Promise me you won’t try to run from me,” Lucifer said as he unlocked the cage door.

She didn’t run. She let him lead her out of the cell and out of the room, leaving behind screams of protest.

Lucifer lead the girl toward the dragon’s lair. It’s where he went when he needed answers to the most confusing situations, and this definitely qualified. He stepped inside the dark dungeon and was not even a little surprised to find the dragon sound asleep atop his treasures, as usual. Lucifer cleared his throat as he always did when he wanted the creature’s attention. The steady stream of hot air stopped and the dragon’s giant head appeared in front of them. Lucifer noted that again, there was no overt reaction from the girl. A fascinating creature,

whoever or whatever she was.

“Lucifer, what brings you to my humble abode, again?” even the dragon was being sassy today.

Lucifer wondered if something had gone wrong on the lower plane that made everyone go crazy. He shook off the thought. “I found this, girl, in my cells waiting for her sentencing. She is most definitely not dead, and has no idea how she got here.”

The dragon moved closer to the girl, who did not flinch. “Your parents are going to be very happy to see you, Pyrrha.”

Lucifer knew that name. Pyrrha had been Epimetheus’s daughter several hundred lifetimes ago. Last he’d heard she’d gone missing. “Pyrrha has been missing for hundreds of years, you must be mistaken, surely this cannot be her?”

“Clearly this creature is mistaken, my name is Gemma,” the girl insisted.

The dragon’s head disappeared into the darkness. Lucifer and Gemma looked up and silently waited to see if he would return. He did, holding a small box with Greek writing on it. He handed it to Gemma. “This will give you the answers you are looking for,” he said and returned to his slumber.

Lucifer lead Gemma out of the dragon’s lair. As they made their way to his library he explained to her who Pyrrha had been. “As the mythology goes, your mother is Pandora, your father is Epimetheus. You were their only child. You married your cousin,” Lucifer explained.

“That sounds, plausible...” Gemma’s sarcasm was alive and well, just as she was.

In his library Lucifer continued. “If the dragon is right, which I have found he is on nearly all occasions, it would explain why you are alive and yet, are somehow very present on the lower plane. You are immortal, you cannot die. But if your soul brought you here there must be a reason. Maybe that box will tell us, you, what that reason is.”

Gemma set the box on Lucifer’s large wood table and stared at it. Lucifer folded his arms against his chest and tried to silently implore her to open it. “If the dragon is right, and I am the daughter of Pandora, how does it look that I am about to open a box of mysteries?”

“The dragon wouldn’t have given it to you if it wasn’t safe to open it,” Lucifer assured her.

Gemma stepped forward and put her hand on the box. It lit up with Greek symbols and words Lucifer was having trouble translating. She opened the top and there was a single piece of paper inside. She picked up the paper and read it to herself before reading it out loud. “If you are opening this the spell you asked me to put you under has worn off. You are Pyrrha, daughter of Epimetheus and Pandora, wife of Deucalion. You had your memory wiped and started a new life after Deucalion was killed in battle. You asked to resurface as your true self in a place that needed your help in a time when mankind was on the verge of being eradicated. Wherever you have landed, you are a powerful ally and a useful tool. You recreated the human race after the Titan flood wiped them off Earth, then known as Gaea. May whoever finds you in their service be grateful for the power you wield.”

Lucifer was grinning from ear to ear. Could it really be that the daughter of two powerful immortals would be his greatest asset in his coming war for the middle plane? In all his time planning the destruction of the human race he had

not given much thought to how he was going to rebuild it. Now he had the means.

Gemma stared at him blankly. “I have no memory of any of this. If I ever remember who did this to me, I am going to kill whoever or whatever it is. Why would I ever agree to help the Devil rebuild the human race after he’s destroyed it? There’s no way anyone involved in this mess knew it would come down to this!”

Lucifer continued to grin at her. “Nevertheless, that box, and the contents inside, are set in stone. It is your fate, your lifeline. The dragon does not randomly give out boxes without there being a reason for it. So you’re going to help me, Pyrrha, or Gemma, or whatever you’d like your name to be now.”

Gemma shifted her weight from side to side and stared at the box and the paper inside. She picked it up, closed the top, and threw it at the fireplace. The fire turned gold and blue and purple and the box reappeared on the table in front of her.

Lucifer shrugged as Gemma continued to stare at the magical object. “Man do I have plans for you,” he said rubbing his hands together. “And you’re gonna love your first task, I promise you.”

“What kind of task could you possibly have for me that I’ll do both willingly and happily?” Gemma finally looked at him again.

“Find your mother,” Lucifer told her.

#### TYLER

“I still think we should have kept an eye on her,” Tyler argued when they arrived at Prometheus’s front door. “You know she went to warn Pandora.”

“I’m sure she did,” Prometheus answered. “But the only way she was going anywhere is if she knew we weren’t watching. Remember, the more magic she uses the easier it will be for us to trace it.”

Tyler led Jonathan to Prometheus’s couch. “I should have stayed in L.A.,” Jonathan said as he leaned against the back of it.

“I’m glad you didn’t,” Tyler whispered.

Tyler had a feeling he was going to get very sick of drinking tea. He secretly wished Prometheus was offering something stronger, but he knew he had to keep his mind on target, and alcohol made him cloudy.

“We should also be keeping a closer eye on your brother,” Tyler suggested. “I’d be curious to see if he went right to Lucifer.”

“Epimetheus isn’t one to be beholden to anyone, except maybe his wife, I highly doubt he’d go to Lucifer willingly. If he gives any information to him at all it will be because Lucifer drew it out of him. As much as my brother wants his wife back, he’s more likely to help us than the ruler of the lower plane,” Prometheus told him.

“So what are we supposed to do now? Head back to L.A.?” Abby asked.

“Please say no,” Jonathan begged Tyler.

“I need to get back to training, but I suppose we could head back tomorrow,” Tyler nodded at him.

“I’ll stick around here, keep an eye on Sam, Deanna and Epimetheus. From a

distance,” Prometheus suggested.

Sleep wasn't coming to Tyler despite the exhaustion he felt from the teleportation travel and the events that unfolded at Epimetheus's compound. He supposed those events were exactly why he was laying on his back wide awake while Jonathan slept soundly next to him. Maybe he was right, it seemed Abby and Jonathan didn't need to be there after all. Tyler liked having them around, but maybe it was time to figure out when the right time was to travel with him. Surely there were things they could be doing back home. He'd have to talk to them about it.

Every time he closed his eyes Tyler saw the fire in Deanna's eyes. He really hoped she wasn't taking her anger out on her husband. Sam just wanted to do the right thing. You could tell Pandora was important to him. Tyler shook off the thought. Clearly Sam had been a part of Pandora's disappearance and he made that choice on his own.

When Tyler finally fell asleep he was awoken by his recurring dream. Or nightmare. The one where the teenager Chloe gives birth to calls him dad. He woke up in a cold sweat did his best to stay still so that he didn't wake up Jonathan. He told himself his boyfriend needed the sleep, but in truth Tyler just didn't want a repeat of the morning before. Was it really only a day ago? Jonathan had reacted so oddly to his recount of the nightmare. For some reason it didn't hit Tyler until that moment. “He thinks I don't want kids,” he whispered out loud.

Tyler woke up to the smell of coffee and bacon. Two of his favorite things. Speaking of favorite things, Tyler reached over to wake Jonathan up, but he wasn't there. He must have known Tyler had been restless, he didn't usually leave the room without letting him know.

He was the last one to arrive at the breakfast table. For some reason that bothered him. But not for long. He couldn't deny he'd needed the sleep. He took a seat between Abby and Jonathan, who poured him a cup of coffee. "Thanks," Tyler nodded to him. His revelation from the night before came rushing back to him. Now wasn't the time to talk, but he was going to have to remember to discuss it with him.

Prometheus joined them at the table, bringing with him a platter of eggs and bacon. "Maybe we should have brought Azazel. I'm not much of a cook," he said as he set the platter down.

"It's hard to mess up eggs and bacon," Abby said as she served herself a spoonful of eggs. She passed on the bacon.

"Speaking of, I wonder if he had any luck with Chloe." Tyler had forgotten he'd asked the demon to talk to Chloe on his behalf. He hadn't heard back from him, but again, it had only been two days ago.

"I somehow doubt Chloe will turn down the chance to screw over Lucifer by keeping us in the loop," Abby suggested.

"Good point," Tyler said taking a bite of eggs.

Tyler wasn't thrilled about it, but he agreed to wait at least an hour before attempting to bring Jonathan back to Los Angeles with him. He knew it was a better choice than having to clean up vomit. The managed to appear inside the training room at the Esesa Jane, taking Azazel and Phenex by surprise.

"Any luck?" Azazel asked after recovering from the scare.

"We found the black magic dealer," Tyler had decided to stop wondering

which word to use for it. No one would tell him if it was witch, wizard, warlock. So he went with dealer. It fit.

“Oh?” Phenex chimed in.

“The old man’s wife,” Tyler told them. “Unfortunately she was less than willing to help us in any way. Though she didn’t do much to deny her part in it. Prometheus is staying in Greece to see if he can convince her to give up Pandora’s location. How was your visit with Chloe?”

Azazel shook his head and smiled at the same time. “She’s defiant as ever, but she didn’t say no.”

“Good,” Tyler nodded back. “I have to take Jonathan home before I get to any training in, but I’ll be back soon,” he told the room.

Tyler didn’t exactly have to take Jonathan home, but he wanted to. As soon as they were in the car Tyler blurted out “I never said I didn’t want kids.”

Jonathan stared at him with his mouth open, unable to say words.

“The other day, you panicked when I said I’d had a nightmare. It wasn’t the fact that Chloe’s daughter called me dad. It was that she was a teenager at birth.” Tyler explained.

“As happy as I am to hear that, Tyler, I don’t think now is the time to be discussing having kids,” Jonathan said without looking at him.

“I agree. I definitely do not want kids today. Someday, if we survive all this, then yes, but I wanted you to understand what I was afraid of. It isn’t us, or our future and whatever it might hold, it really was just that if my dreams really are

premonitions of things to come...Lucifer's spawn isn't going to be a young child, ever," Tyler said with a shudder.

Tyler walked Jonathan to the door and kissed him gently on the lips. "I won't stay long, I just need to refocus some of this built up energy," he told him. Jonathan nodded and smiled at him. Tyler disappeared into thin air with a warm feeling in the depths of his soul. When he reappeared in the training room it was empty. Tyler noticed that Phenex had brought in more wooden Lucifer standees. Tyler tried to find something to get angry about. There were so many things that could help with that. But Jonathan's smiling face kept creeping back into his mind. Then he had a new thought. He really wanted his family to see how happy he was, in love with a man, saving the world. The thought of his family began to do the job he needed it to. Anger began to build as he thought about their methods of changing him into something he wasn't. He remembered the treatments, remember dying and the feeling of being unwanted in the lower plane and the upper one.

Tyler faced one of the wooden Lucifers and pushed his palms forward. A spark formed but nothing strong enough to do any damage. He was going to have to think of something else. He thought about Pandora and how slow the process of finding her was going to be. That started to do the trick. He let the frustration of not being able to do anything about so many things lately drive him. He destroyed all four new Lucifer standees and a neon sign for good measure. Or by accident, which is what he'd tell Phenex.

When Tyler felt he had sufficiently done enough damage to the training room he teleported himself back to his apartment, appearing just outside the front door. He tried to never appear inside after having done so too many times without warning and scaring Jonathan half to death. He unlocked the door as loudly as he could so that Jonathan heard him come in.

Dinner was spent in relative silence. They had kept to their promise not to watch any more news. When they made their way to bed Tyler was curious to see if he'd have the same dream again. He wasn't sure why his mind would show it to him more than twice, but he didn't know what was going on with the universe these days.

That night he had a new dream. He was in Lucifer's library. But Lucifer didn't know he was there. Inside the room was the demon and someone else. A female. Dark hair, slight build, arms folded over her chest in utter annoyance. "You'll have to forgive me your highness," the girl said through gritted teeth. "I just appeared in a cell in the middle of the lower plane and now you're telling me my mother is missing. How in the world does one misplace an immortal being?"

Tyler didn't hear Lucifer's answer. The dream faded away before the demon spoke. The universe had told him what they wanted him to know.

## PANDORA

The outdoor market was always quietest on a Monday morning. It seemed that the world of dark magic was mostly made up of night owls. So it was the perfect time for Pandora to shop for the essentials she needed to live. She had stayed hidden in her small room just behind the marketplace as long as she could. She was going stir crazy and needed to get out. She walked along the rows of vendors selling items ranging from your everyday fruits and vegetables to rare herbs and talismans meant for dark magic rituals. For some reason at the end of the row she had been perusing, she found a vendor who specialized in fortune telling. She wasn't sure why anyone would need their fortune told in this world, she assumed most of them could do it on their own, but she found herself standing in front of a table filled with the usual items one would find on the middle plane. Things people would associate with fortune telling and cooky magic. Fabrics of all shades and patterns were strewn across the table, a crystal ball sat in the middle of it, and a set of tarot cards.

Pandora smiled at the thought that even the world of dark magic fell for the silliness of modern man's description of what it meant to read one's future. As she stepped away to go on with her business a woman emerged from behind a curtain "It is quite odd, isn't it. A fortune teller in the middle of a world of magic dealers," the woman's voice was calm and steady. "I assure you this is not a hoax. Let me show you what I can do," she suggested.

Pandora smiled as kindly as she could muster and left hastily with a "No thank you" as she tried to get as far away from the woman as possible. She was unsure of what her future held, to be fair, but she wasn't at all interested in finding out either. And then there was the chance the woman would recognize her for who she was and alert someone to her presence. She turned a corner to head up the next row of vendors and was taken by surprise to find herself standing in front of the same table with the same fortune teller behind it. Pandora looked around to make sure she hadn't made a mistake. "You aren't crazy," the fortune teller spoke with the same calm demeanor. "And you cannot escape your own future," she said with a slightly stronger tone.

Pandora approached the woman and spoke in a hushed tone "Look, I don't know who you are or who sent you, but I don't want to know my future and I have powerful friends, so I'd suggest leaving me alone."

The woman laughed wholeheartedly. "I told them you were too smart to fall for this. They sent me anyway."

"Who sent you," Pandora demanded.

"The Titans, my dear child," the woman started. "No, not those ones," she continued as Pandora's demeanor began to show her panic. "Hercules has a message for you," the woman continued. "Oh he knows where you are," she said

as Pandora's face fell in fear. "Do not worry yourself, Pandora. He has no intention of telling your husband or his brother anything about this place. However, he isn't going to stop them from figuring it out on their own either."

"Is that the message? Hercules knows where I am and I should be grateful to him for keeping my secret?" Pandora kept her voice low but the fire in it came through loud and clear.

"Oh no, that's not it at all," the woman smiled again. "Hercules wanted you to know that he has located your daughter..." her voice trailed off as Pandora backed away from her table.

"You're messing with me, I should have known better," Pandora said loudly. "I don't know who you are and where you got your information but you've got the wrong person. I am not who you think I am. Leave me alone!"

Pandora ran back to her room at full speed. The words the woman had said to her kept repeating in her mind. Hundreds of years had past since her Pyrrha's disappearance and there was no way she was even still alive. Pandora had been looking, for years and years she looked for her daughter. The woman was a witch, she was convinced of it. Some sort of dark magic dealer playing games with her head. She double locked the door, knowing in the back of her mind that it was no use. As soon as the last lock was bolted she turned away from the door to find the fortune teller sitting on her couch. Pandora jumped, her heart raced and her anger grew.

"I am not what you think I am," the woman said. "I am not a witch, I cannot yield any black magic. I am exactly what I explained myself to be. I am a messenger sent by Hercules. I will continue to appear wherever you run, until I am assured you have received and understand the message I have been tasked with bringing to you."

Pandora stared at the woman for what seemed to be a very long long time. The woman stayed where she was the whole time. Finally, Pandora gave in. “Fine, I got your message and I understood it,” she insisted. The woman didn’t move. “What? Did he say I had to believe it too?”

“It is important you understand why Hercules has brought this message to you,” the woman said. “He would not have sent me here to deliver it if it wasn’t important. He is not a frivolous sort. If he’s asked me to tell you this news, there’s a reason for it.”

“Oh no, he’s not at all frivolous, he just sends messengers to deliver information to people who have no idea what to do with the information once they have it,” Pandora said with a tinge of annoyance. “Tell the Titan I have received his message and as soon as I figure out why he’s sent it to me I’ll contact him.”

The woman disappeared into thin air. Pandora couldn’t believe that worked. She sat on her couch and went over the words in her mind again and again. She went through all the scenarios. Hercules had located her and wanted to bring her out of hiding. Epimetheus had found her and thought this to be the only way to get her back home. All of her thoughts kept leading back to her having to come out of hiding. “That’s not gonna happen,” Pandora said out loud. A loud knock on her door made her nearly jump out of her skin.

She looked through the peephole in her door and found Deanna standing outside of it. “Oh this day just keeps getting better,” she said out loud as she unlocked the door and led the woman inside.

“You look distressed, what’s happened?” Deanna said as a greeting.

Pandora contemplated whether to tell the woman the truth. "I've been inside this room for far too long, it's driving me crazy," she went with a partial truth.

"Prometheus knows I helped you disappear," Deanna didn't acknowledge Pandora's revelation. "He came to see me. He brought the Omphalos with him. He said something about the coming war between them and Lucifer, said you have something important to the destruction of the king of the lower plane. Do you know anything about that?"

Pandora sat down on her couch and put her hands to her head. This was all getting to be too much. She had no idea what Prometheus was referring to. She had hoped disappearing would mean she could stay far away from the fray when it all came down. But now, with news of her daughter, and Prometheus's accusation, she may not have a choice. "Did he give you any indication as to what that might be?"

Deanna shook her head. "He said that no amount of dark magic would save me and Sam from the coming war. And that you had something in your possession that was important in all of it. He wanted to be sure I knew what I was hiding. And then the Omphalos threatened me. It was all very traumatic."

Pandora tried to hold back a laugh. What did the old woman know about trauma. She shook it off. "I need a little bit of time to process this," she told the woman. "I truly have no idea what Prometheus is referring to and it could all be lies to get me to come out of hiding. I need to figure it out. I promise you I will not let any harm come to you or Sam. I just need a little more time away to get my head around things. Give me one more day and I will have an answer for you then."

Deanna sighed but nodded in agreement. "I will return to see you in 24 hours. It has not been easy trying to get here without Prometheus following me,"

she added.

“I understand, thank you,” Pandora tried to sound as grateful as she felt. She hoped it come through in her voice. She led Deanna to the door and double locked it again. She knew it was silly, but it still made her feel more secure that way.

Pandora stood in the middle of her small room and looked around at all of her belongings. She ran the last few months over in her mind. It hadn't taken much to convince Lucifer to create chaos on the middle plane. And it hadn't been hard to get him onto the plane with the influence she had on her own husband. She didn't even have to threaten anyone with violence or force, they just did what she wanted. Now Prometheus was certain she had a weapon. She had no idea what he was talking about. And then there was the matter of her daughter being found. She knew what this was. It was her punishment. She cursed her own boredom and curiosity. And then it hit her. She stepped to the mantle and put her hand on the jar she had been given by the Titans. She wondered what it could possibly hold that would be a weapon against Lucifer.

“Oh!” she exclaimed as she remembered what was still inside.

## PROMETHEUS

Prometheus went directly to bed as soon as he returned home. It had been a long day. Who knew spending hours watching an old woman tool around her house would take so much energy. Deanna didn't leave her home all day. She spent most of her time sitting in front of her television knitting something Prometheus could only assume was a blanket. He knew that didn't necessarily mean she hadn't left the house to warn Pandora they were looking for her. There were many ways a dealer of black magic could contact someone, not the least of which was telepathy, which the Titan knew a lot about. He only hoped his impassioned speech resonated with the woman. Maybe she could Pandora to

come back home.

As soon as his head hit his pillow Prometheus fell into a deep sleep. There was no restlessness, no struggle to fall asleep after overthinking and excessive worry. He just slept. So when he woke up in the morning to find another unannounced visitor, he stared up at his ceiling and shook his head at it. A crack of thunder indicated the message had been received. Prometheus knew they'd do nothing about the lack of warning, but at least he knew they were listening.

The knocks became more frantic. "Coming! You don't have to beat down the door!" Prometheus yelled at the solid wood door as he unlocked it. Yeah, he knew it was silly to have a locked door for a house that sat on top of the tallest mountain in Greece, but the simple fact that he had been visited by no less than two guests he hadn't seen coming was reason enough to be happy he had them. His breath caught in his throat as he opened the door and saw who was on the other side. "Pyrrha?" He whispered the name.

The young woman standing at the door folded her arms across her chest. "Apparently, although I would prefer Gemma," she answered.

Prometheus was taken by several things. Not the least of which was the fact that his daughter in law was standing at his door. She'd gone missing hundreds of years ago. The other thing that struck him was how young she looked. And then there was the British accent. "Where...um, come in, please..." he stammered. It wasn't often the Titan was flustered.

He led Pyrrha, or Gemma, if that's what she wanted to be called, into his living room. "Can I get you anything?"

"Just answers," she answered as she sat on the edge of an ornate chair.

“You and me both,” Prometheus looked up at his ceiling again. Another clap of thunder. “I don’t even know what that means!” Prometheus yelled up at the sound. “Sorry,” he turned his attention back to Gemma. “I’ll do my best to give you whatever answers I can, but first, can you tell me where you’ve been all this time?”

Gemma shook her head at him. “I know that I am supposed to be this, Pyrrha, but I don’t have any memory of being her. Apparently Pyrrha made a deal with someone powerful and had her memory wiped. The only way it would awaken was if there was some sort of imbalance in the universe. Yesterday I was on a college campus on my way to my psych 101 class and the next thing I knew I was locked in a cell on the lower plane,” she told him.

Prometheus sat forward on his chair. “The lower plane?”

“Yes. I met Lucifer. Charming. He brought me to a dragon who gave me this scroll. The fact that all of the words I have just said don’t terrify me tells me that I must be this woman, this immortal,” she shrugged.

Gemma stood up and tried to hand Prometheus the piece of scroll. He put his hand up and watched her sit back down tentatively. “Only you can read what’s on the scroll. In my hands the paper would be blank,” he explained.

“Oh,” Gemma stared at the paper and looked back up at him.

Prometheus was taken aback by how much she looked like Pyrrha. It made him think of his son, Deucalion. A warrior to the end. The gods may have thought having Prometheus tied to a rock with an eagle eating away at his liver was the ultimate punishment but it was the inability to bring his son back to life that had tortured him most. He shook off the thought and returned his attention to Gemma.

“It pretty much says I’ve been gifted to Lucifer to help him in his fight for the middle plane. Apparently because Pyrrha was capable of remaking mankind, someone found it necessary to hand over that sort of thing to the ruler of the lower plane,” she summed up the scroll in her own words.

Prometheus let this information rumble around in his mind. He gave another glare up at his ceiling but there was no response from the gods. “Does Lucifer know you’ve come to me?”

“He sent me here,” she answered. “Apparently Pyrrha’s mother, my mother, has gone missing?”

“Ah,” Prometheus nodded at her. “Yes, that she is. Although I’m not sure why Lucifer would send you here, I no little about Pandora’s whereabouts,” Prometheus said with a sudden desire to be less than helpful with the information.

“He figured even if you didn’t know anything, you were actively looking for her, so here I am.” Gemma’s demeanor had changed too.

“Whatever she did to hide herself, she did it well, I wish I could send you off with better news,” Prometheus said with a hint that he was done entertaining her.

Gemma took the hint. She stood up from the chair and headed for the door. “I’ll be in touch, in case that changes in any way,” she said it almost as a warning.

“I look forward to it,” Prometheus said as he closed and locked the door behind her. He really didn’t mean it though.

Moments later he found himself in the living room staring into Deanna's dark eyes. "I'm not saying you know where she is, and I'm not accusing you of hiding her, but if either of those things are true, please give Pandora a message for me. Tell her...tell her her daughter has returned to us." His message delivered, the Titan left the old woman to her knitting.

### TYLER

After another restless night of bad dreams Tyler's mind was terribly unfocused. He knew he had the capability of destroying the wood Lucifer standees, he just didn't have the will. His arms were sore from holding them out in front of him, and his frustration with the lack of progress only made things worse. "Why give me these abilities and not let me use them," he screamed out.

Abby stepped in front of him and put her hands on his. "You've got a lot on your mind, Ty, give yourself some slack," she said quietly.

She was right. Tyler was doing more than just training these days. With the new task of locating an immortal being using dark magic to stay hidden now on their plate, the group was less than focused on his becoming a full blown Omphalos. And then there was his own personal mission. To find out where his family had gone after he left them. It should be this hard. It saddened him they had done so well to hide themselves, even without the use of black magic. Though there were times he'd contemplated the idea that maybe they had. But he was certain their religious ways hadn't waned enough to go that route. He was more convinced they just didn't want him to find them.

"Tyler," Abby called his name.

"What?" He snapped out of his thoughts.

“I called you like four times,” she said, annoyed. “Alexis is here.”

Tyler had forgotten what day it was. He thought about telling the dragon that it wasn't the right time for mind exercises but maybe it was. Maybe they were exactly what he needed to get out of his own brain. “Sorry, I drifted.” He smiled at her as he made his way to greet Alexis.

It was a simple enough task. He'd played the memory game over and over again as a child. Turn over a tile, find the matching one. But today he was having trouble keeping the images in his head. His reaction time kept getting slower and slower. “Are you doing something to slow me down?” He asked Alexis in an accusatory tone.

“The only one who's doing anything is you,” Alexis answered matter of factly.

“I don't know what's happening to me today but it's as if my energy has been sapped in some way,” Tyler admitted. “This isn't my normal inability to focus my mind on a task. There's something wrong here.” As he said this Prometheus appeared in the room.

“You're not wrong,” he told Tyler. “Come, sit,” he gathered the whole group around their meeting table. “The gods either have no intention on helping us get a win, or they have a terrible sense of humor,” he started, looking up at the ceiling and rolling his eyes at it. “Lucifer isn't going to be as easy to keep at bay as we once thought,” he continued. “Apparently someone felt it necessary to gift him an immortal all his own.” He stared at the ceiling again. “Her name is Pyrrha and she has many if not all of the same capabilities you do,” he said to Tyler. “So where normal all the energy in the universe would be available to you, now you'll have to share it with her.”

“Pyrrha, where do I know that name from?” Abby asked.

“Books, ancient text, scriptures, however the angels teach their young about history,” Prometheus told her. “She’s Epimetheus’s daughter.”

“Lemme guess,” Tyler said after a long silence. “She came to you wondering where her mother went?”

Prometheus nodded at him. “I told her I knew nothing more than Lucifer did. And I sent her away,” he said quietly. “Hardest thing I’ve had to do,” he added.

“Maybe this is a good thing,” Abby said, ever the optimist. “Maybe this will entice Pandora to come out of hiding?”

“That is my hope,” Prometheus said without irony.

## CHLOE

Chloe was tired of a lot of things. But most of all she was tired of laying in bed, alone, with nothing but machines and a TV that only got news stations to entertain her. Then there was the total and utter lack of visitors. The nurses didn’t count. Especially since not one of them spoke to her except to ask how she was feeling. Most of the time they didn’t even wait for Chloe to answer before they either left the room or talked to each other in codes and hushed voices as if she wasn’t there. Despite all that she had no intention of contacting Azazel unless something actually happened. Lucifer hadn’t checked on her in a while. It worried her. All sorts of scenarios ran through Chloe’s mind as she tried to ignore the five hundredth news report on the conspiracy theory that there had been no demon attack and it was all some sort of Hollywood studio creation for a movie that didn’t exist. The worst of the assumptions was that Lucifer had given up on her and she’d be left to raise a demon spawn on her own. She didn’t want a human baby, now she was going to be stuck with some kind of creature

from hell.

She hated being out of the loop. Even when she was bed ridden in the lower plane she knew what was happening around her. Now she was just isolated in a sterile room away from any and all action. And at least those caretakers actually talked to her when they came in the room. Not that they were the most pleasant beings to be around, but it was something. She was still thinking about how annoying it was to be left alone with a demon creature in her belly that growing at an alarming rate when a voice spoke in her head.

“I apologize for being absent, there have been some developments that have been keeping me occupied, but I assure you I am still extremely concerned for the well being of my son, and you, of course,” Lucifer said.

Chloe rolled her eyes. She couldn't figure out why he was so convinced it was a boy. She had a terrible thought. “If it's a girl are you going to reject her and try again?”

“Oh no, my dear,” Lucifer said it without any of the meaning the word represented. She meant nothing to him. “First of all, the ritual only works once. And truthfully I will be happy if my child is a girl or a boy. I suppose it is unfair to assume this, but I am so hoping he will stand by my side as Azazel did.”

Chloe was surprised by Lucifer's willingness to admit he missed his brother. “What is it that is keeping you busy down there?”

“Nothing to worry your already distressed mind about,” Lucifer said. “Just know that there are things in motion that will ensure that my plan to take over the middle plane as soon as my son, my child, enters the world will not fail.”

He left her with no more information. She contemplated all sorts of nefarious

things, none of which made any sense, and once she felt enough time had passed, she contacted Azazel.

“Lucifer said something about there being things in motion that will ensure his victory in the war, know anything about that?” she asked him.

“It appears that the gods have quite the sense of humor. Or entitlement. Or maybe it’s lack of faith in their fellow gods. Or all of those things. Anyway, they weren’t convinced Prometheus’s Omphalos plan would work, so they created their own counterpart. And guess who’s side she’s on?”

“Lucifer has an Omphalos?” Chloe smiled at the prospect of Tyler being knocked down a peg in his status as the one and only being who could stop the coming war.

“Oh he’s still the only Omphalos,” Azazel said. “She has no powers other than the ability to walk among the planes unharmed. She’s more of a lifeline between Lucifer and the middle plane than anything else. But she’s still an issue. Because if she finds her mother before we do...”

“All hope is lost,” Chloe mused.

## PANDORA

Pandora was hungry, she was tired, she was angry, and she was still unsure the events that had unfolded weren’t a figment of her imagination. Who knew what kinds of herbs and potions were floating around this in between world she was hiding in. There were corners of her mind that knew it was all real. She knew Hercules could, and most definitely did, find her wherever she went. And it was just like him to send a messenger to inform her of such, rather than tell her husband and his brother exactly where to find her. It was the games the Titans played that got her into this mess in the first place. She stared at her jar

again. She tried to remember the events of the night she had opened it. They had told her what she had done. The gods. They had accused her of creating the lower plane and bringing Lucifer to life. But she never believed it. They were just stories to her. But now she was beginning to think the stories were true. If everyone was looking for that jar, something, or someone, inside it was important to them.

On the one hand, if she stayed hidden in this world she could prevent anyone from getting their hands on the jar. On the other hand, her daughter had been found, and she really wanted to see her. She wondered if she was the same. That tall, dark, blue eyed beauty that Pandora had watched walk away with her new husband. Deucalion. She wondered what people would think of her daughter now, in modern times, having married her own cousin. They were different times then. There were no true mortals, and everyone was related in some way or another. She and Deucalion had spent their childhoods together. It wasn't out of the ordinary that they'd fall in love. She wondered if Pyrrha had ever gotten over that loss. Watching her husband die in battle must have been devastating. There were so many questions she wanted to ask her daughter. Not the least of which was where in the world had she been all this time.

She could ask her. It wouldn't be hard. Leave Interplanum and all its weirdness behind. Deanna was convinced it was time for Pandora to come back to the world. She had 12 more hours to decide. Deanna would return and she would have to have an answer either way. But she was still hungry and if she was going to survive those 12 hours she'd have to make her way into the marketplace and find something to eat. She wrapped herself in several layers of fabric, covering her face all except for her eyes. She couldn't take the chance of being seen. She was fairly certain that once the messenger had completed her task she had gone back to the Titan's palace in Greece. But there was no guarantee someone else hadn't followed her into the world. So Pandora hid herself and quietly made her way through the marketplace.

She kept a steady eye on everyone around her. She knew this place was filled with odd people who did odd things, but they were more present as her paranoia grew. She quickly grabbed some fruits and a loaf of bread and scurried back to her room. This was no way to live. As she tried not to shove the whole loaf of bread into her mouth at once she promised herself she'd go home. This had been a mistake.

Pandora watched the clock tick away minute by minute, convinced that it moved slower than any clock she'd seen on the middle plane. Deanna knocked on her door as soon as the 24 hour time frame they'd agreed on was up. Pandora was happy to hear the sound this time. And even happier to look through the peep hole and see the old woman standing outside her door.

"Have you made a decision." The woman was all business.

"I have," Pandora told her, motioning for her to enter the room.

Deanna stepped inside and Pandora closed the door behind them. She looked around the room and then at Deanna. "I will come back with you," she said with certainty. "If..." she paused. "I can do so without bringing my belongings with me."

"I am not sure why you insisted on bringing them with you in the first place," Deanna said. "So it is no skin off of my back if you leave them here."

"Can you assure me they will be safe in this room?" Pandora asked. "I know it doesn't look like much, but some of these items have been with me all my life," she told the woman. "I need to know that if I come back with you they will not be stolen, removed, or bothered in any way."

“This room belongs to me, no one else is allowed in or out. I have been courteous enough to knock when I visit you because, well because I know my manners. But I can assure you no one but me can and will enter this room,” Deanna told her.

“Then I need you to promise me something,” Pandora stared into the woman’s eyes. “Promise me you will not bring anyone here. No matter who is asking or what they tell you. If anyone asks you about this place you will come to me and tell me about it. This is the only way I can leave here,” she said.

“I don’t see why anyone would ask about this place, but yes, I promise to come directly to you if I am ever asked about it. Please let me take you home now. My husband and I would like our lives back,” she begged.

Pandora took one last look around the room. Her eyes fixed on a large box. She had purchased from a dealer at the marketplace who assured her that she and only she could open the lock on the outside of it. She said a small prayer, hoping he had been telling the truth, and followed Deanna out of the room.

## TYLER

It seemed like a simple enough task. Focus on an object, make it float. But it just wasn’t working and Alexis was being especially tough on him, at least that’s how he felt. It wasn’t Tyler’s fault he was so distracted. There had been so much information flooded into his mind lately, it was no wonder he couldn’t concentrate. It just seemed like the dragon was more on edge than he had been in Tyler’s previous dealings with him. He knew if he asked Alexis what was on his mind the dragon would tell him. Tyler wasn’t sure he wanted to know. But wasn’t that his purpose in all this? Listening, deciphering, helping come up with a solution to anyone’s problems.

“Look, I don’t know what’s going on with you but I’m giving you everything

I've got right now," Tyler finally said.

Alexis sighed. "That's the problem. If this is everything you've got..."

"I'm sorry it's not good enough for you. I'm sure you've heard, but there's a lot of shit going on right now," Tyler argued.

"Yes. Believe me, I am aware. But if you can't focus your mind no matter what outside forces are trying to stop you, no matter what's falling apart around you, then you haven't learned anything about your skills," Alexis insisted. "It may not matter to you, but it says a lot about me and my abilities if I can't get you to finish one simple task."

"I'm sorry, truly, I'm not trying to fail you, or make you feel like you're a failure. You aren't," Tyler softened his response. "My destruction powers seem to work off of anger, maybe there's some kind of emotion I need to feel in order to center my mind. In case you haven't noticed, despite what the intention was, I'm not exactly the most zen person. That may be what Prometheus wanted for the Omphalos but I didn't get the memo in time," Tyler suggested.

Alexis had sense enough to smile. At least Tyler was trying figure out a way around his shortcomings. "Okay. Let's go back to the beginning for a bit." Alexis looked around the room. "Contact Abby, and only her."

Tyler nodded. He put all of his concentration on Abby who was sitting at the meeting table with Azazel and Phenex. They were in a heated conversation. Tyler was determined to find out what they were talking about. So he asked the angel. "What's going on over there?" He was happy to see that only Abby's head turned to look at him.

"Oh you know, the usual. Arguing about who's had the rougher time on the

middle plane. Azazel still thinks cooking for lawyers and judges is harder than serving beers to demons in a dive bar,” she answered him. “Phenex says listening to people sing bad karaoke all day beats us both.”

Tyler chuckled. “Fair enough,” he said. “Tell them you’ve been dealing with me for five years which automatically brings you above them in the hardship category.” He turned his attention back to Alexis. “Did you hear any of that?”

Alexis smiled and shook his head.

Abby approached them with a look of satisfaction on her face.

“Alexis and I were going back to the basics for a bit. I didn’t mean to interrupt your discussion,” Tyler said.

“They agreed I’ve had it hardest, so thanks,” Abby laughed.

“Ha, glad I could help, I think,” Tyler said.

Abby nodded at him and left Tyler to return his attention back to Alexis.

“That was good, it’s clear you still have the ability to focus, however,” the dragon paused. “Your connection to Abby makes it easier for you to contact her alone. Let’s try something a little bit harder. Why don’t you try contacting Chloe.”

Tyler thought about arguing, but he knew it would get him nowhere. The dragon was right. It was much harder to focus on someone like Chloe who made him feel immediately angry. He wasn’t exactly on her favorites list either, though. Tyler thought about what Azazel and Prometheus had told them about Chloe’s situation. He pictured a sterile hospital room. Chloe laying in a bed with

machines hooked up to her.

“Are you going to say something or are you just creeping around in my head?” Chloe’s voice came through loud and clear in Tyler’s head. He looked around the room to see if anyone else had heard it.

“Believe me I don’t want to spend any more time than I have to rummaging around in your mind,” Tyler snapped back. “Not that I was in the first place. I’m training. I wanted to prove that I can still annoy you if I concentrate real hard,” he said.

“Congratulations, it’s working,” Chloe said. “Although not as much as it used to. Maybe you’re losing your edge now that Lucifer has his own weapon helping him? You feeling impotent knowing you’re not the only Omphalos in town?”

Tyler knew she was taunting him, and on any given day he’d ignore the implications. But today wasn’t the day. “I told them it was dangerous giving you that much information. They insisted it was in your best interest to help us. I don’t know why I let them talk me into it,” he said.

“Look, Tyler, the most I’ve been in contact with Lucifer was 20 minutes ago when he remembered to check in on his prized spawn growing inside me. We don’t have heart to hearts like you and your squad over there,” Chloe spit back at him.

“Fair enough, but don’t get it twisted. Lucifer may have found himself a new pet, but she’s no Omphalos. And need I remind you that’s not news I’m exactly jumping for joy about. I didn’t want to be this thing in the first place. It’d be no skin off my back if someone showed up and tagged me out,” Tyler admitted.

“You and me both,” Chloe said. “Good talk, I need to get some sleep now.”

Tyler quieted his mind and refocused on the room he was in. “She’s as chipper as ever,” he told Alexis.

Alexis was kept his attention on his task, as usual. “Let’s try levitation once more, just to say we did.”

“Sass from the dragon, I like it,” Tyler smiled and him. The dragon was not amused.

“See the object, feel its weight in your mind, lift it as if you were picking it up with your hand,” Alexis said in a quiet, monotone voice.

Tyler could see the object in his mind. He had held it in his hand a number of times before. It was your standard white Chinese teacup. He let everything else around him fade away. He saw himself reach out and pick it up. It was heavier than it looked. It needed to be since it was held in so many people’s hands. Not important. Bring it to you, Tyler told himself. He pictured himself walking toward Alexis with the cup in his hand. He held it as if it was the most important thing in the world. Right now it was. And it was equally as important that Alexis have the item himself. He set the cup gently on the table in front of him and heard Alexis clap.

“Congratulations, you can serve tea with your mind,” Phenex said from behind Tyler.

“I’m sure that will be a useful skill someday,” Tyler mused.

“You did good,” Alexis told him. “You were given a task and you completed it, despite your doubt in your own skills,” he continued. “We’ll work on bigger things as we go along, but take this as a win.”

Tyler knew the dragon was right. They had been at this for days. Most of them were spent cleaning up spilled tea after Tyler mastered the skill of knocking the cup over hundreds of times. This was a win. And now, he was exhausted. "I need to rest," he said.

Jonathan was in the kitchen cooking dinner when Tyler popped into the living room of their apartment. Another win. Usually he was only able to reappear outside the door. "Hi," he called out so as to not scare the daylights out of his boyfriend.

"Hi," Jonathan greeted him with a smile. "How was your day?"

Tyler returned the smile. They had started the tradition of asking how each other's days were because it was a normal thing to do. And it sometimes took away from the oddity that was their new lives. "I served tea with my mind," Tyler told him.

"What?" Jonathan asked, returning his attention to stirring the pot of food cooking on the stove in front of him.

Tyler leaned against the counter. "Alexis had me trying to move objects with my mind again. I managed to bring him a cup of tea. You should have been there, it was very riveting," he said with little enthusiasm.

"I'm sorry I missed it," Jonathan said without looking at him.

Tyler helped Jonathan bring their plates to the small dining room table. The food smelled amazing. He wanted nothing more than to sit at the table with Jonathan and have a nice, quiet meal. But he knew that wasn't their lives. He hoped some day it could be. And so did his best to fill Jonathan in everything

he'd missed. "I've always felt the lack of trust between the different deities we've come across. Now I'm certain of it. Turns out Hercules and his fellow gods didn't trust Prometheus enough to handle the Lucifer situation. So they put a failsafe in place. Her name is Gemma. She's the immortal daughter of Pandora and Epimetheus. And she's currently keeping company with Lucifer. Because that's where they told her to be."

Jonathan stared at him. "Is she, like you? An Omphalos?"

"No, I'm still the only one of those. So far the only thing she can do is travel between planes without any consequences," Tyler told him. "Naturally Abby, ever the optimist, thinks this could be a good thing. Gemma, or Pyrrha, her given name, disappeared hundreds of years ago. Abby thinks this could bring Pandora back from wherever she fled to."

"I know it annoys you when I say this, but Abby might be right," Jonathan said.

"I hope so," Tyler told him.

## PROMETHEUS

This time he saw it coming. So when the knock at his door came early that morning he was ready for it. He looked up at his ceiling and gave it a sarcastic wave, not so much a thank you but a finally. He thought about making his visitors wait. It would only be fair. But he opened the door after the first knock. As he had predicted, standing at the threshold were Pandora and a very satisfied looking Deanna. Prometheus wanted to tell her there would be no prize for returning Pandora to Greece, but he didn't have a chance.

“Where is she?” Pandora demanded, pushing him aside and looking around the room.

“Please, come in,” Prometheus said as she ran passed him.

He led Deanna to his living room where Pandora had gone looking for her daughter. He offered them tea. Both declined. “Pyrrha came to me looking for you,” Prometheus explained. “I told her the truth. No one knew where you had run off to.” He looked at Deanna with his own satisfied grin. She should be thanking him for not telling Pyrrha about her. “And she left.”

“Why did she come to you and not her own father?” Pandora asked.

“I don’t know, why did you come directly to me and not go home to him?” Prometheus shot back at her. “If you want to find your daughter you should try talking to your underworld pet. It seems she was resurrected to be his partner in crime. Although, it might be a good idea to go home and let your husband know you’re back first,” Prometheus continued.

“Did she say anything about where she’s been all this time?” Pandora asked.

“If I asked you the same thing would you tell me?” Prometheus was in a fighting mood. Pandora didn’t play along. “She didn’t say anything else,” Prometheus answered. “Other than she goes by Gemma now. That was the extent of our conversation. It appears the one and only task Lucifer has given her is to find you.”

Pandora nodded. “You and I both know it’s not me they’re after.”

“Indeed.” Prometheus couldn’t help but agree with her. “Speaking of which, do you have it with you?”

Pandora stared at him as if he'd lost his mind. "No, you think I'm just carrying it around with me? I have more sense than that old man," she said, folding her arms around her chest.

"Where is it?" Prometheus asked her.

"In a safe place where no one can find it," Pandora answered. She shot a look at Deanna who was looking down at her own fingers, probably wondering why she was there in the first place.

Prometheus knew better than to press Pandora for more information. She had given him everything she was going to give today.

#### LUCIFER

Gemma had come back to him with no good news. In fact she'd come into his library with no news at all. Nobody knew where Pandora had run off to and no one was in much of a hurry to find out. Why was he the only one taking her disappearance seriously? Maybe they didn't know what she had in her possession after all? That was impossible, he knew it, the gods knew everything, he'd found that out the hard way.

Oh well. He didn't really think the Titan would tell her anything, really, he just thought it would be fun to show Prometheus where his daughter-in-law's allegiance was held. Firmly in Lucifer's grasp.

"I have another task for you." Lucifer pulled himself out of his own head. Gemma wasn't pleased to hear this, her sour look made Lucifer smile at the prospect of how annoyed she was, and how downright pissed off he was about to make someone else. "St. Johns Hospital. I need you to go there and keep an eye on my vessel. She is carrying an important package and I need to be sure

she's being taken care of properly."

"Whatever," Gemma huffed. "Where exactly is this hospital?"

"California," Lucifer answered. As soon as the word left his lips Gemma was gone.

## CHLOE

Beeps and whirrs and bullshit news reports on the television that never seemed to want to turn off. Nurses who talk in medical jargon near her but never to her. A creature moving inside her that felt like it was going to punch through her stomach at any moment. Terrible food. Those were the things that filled Chloe's time. She was losing her sense of it. It felt like it had been days, maybe weeks since anyone last checked on her. In reality it had only been a few hours.

When the door to her room creaked open Chloe pretended to be asleep. "That wasn't very convincing," a female voice rang through the room. It wasn't one she'd heard before so she opened her eyes to see who it had come from. A mid-twenties woman stood at the foot of her bed. She was beautiful in the most ethereal way, to the point where Chloe thought she was being visited by angels, again.

"What do you want?" Chloe asked her.

"That's no way to greet your new best friend," the woman answered, surveying Chloe's situation and seeming to come to some sort of conclusion about it. Chloe watched as a wash of understanding fell over the girl's face.

Chloe wrapped a blanket around her giant stomach, knowing there was nothing she could do to hide the enormity of it. She was looking for a distraction

but she wasn't quite sure this was it. "Who sent you?"

"Calm yourself, you're gonna go into early labor," the woman pointed at the machines, they had started making more noise than usual. "I'm here on behalf of Lucifer. I'm Gemma."

Okay so, not an angel. But she didn't have any of the qualities of a demon either. Had Lucifer found himself another mortal plaything? It made Chloe jealous. And that feeling made her mad. She pushed it out of her head. "What did you do to get so lucky?"

"I lived," Gemma answered.

Chloe knew the feeling.

#### TYLER

It was Phenex's turn to torture Tyler, but he didn't mind it as much. Although it took an equal amount of focus to do battle, it was much easier for him to find a center and stay with it now that he'd figured out that the source of his strength lied in his ability to be the angriest 27-year-old on the planet. He held that title when he wasn't being asked to save the middle plane from Lucifer's wrath, it came easily to him now. He had destroyed several wooden Lucifer standees and was standing over them, proudly admiring the damage he'd done.

"Now, move one of them to you," Phenex commanded. "Face me."

Tyler brought Alexis a cup of tea yesterday, how hard could it be to move a standee a foot to the right? Harder than he thought, it turned out. He concentrated on the standee just to his left and pictured it moving into his sightline. It wasn't budging. It made him angry, and the angrier he got the more sparks flew from his palms. He was destined to blow his own feet off.

“Feel the energy of each object, Tyler,” Phenex called out to him. “Everything in this room has an energy emitting from it. Not just you. Find the energy of the object you’re intending to move,” he instructed.

Tyler fought his need to rail against the bullshit nature of what he was being asked to do. Phenex wasn’t being a hippy, there really was an energy about everything in the room, Tyler could feel it, most days, when he tried hard enough. But feeling the object’s energy and making it do what he asked it to, were two very different things. He tried to remember how it felt to move the teacup. He could feel it sitting on the table where Phenex was lounging while shouting instructions at him. Tyler felt Phenex’s wild, fiery energy and pushed past it. He remembered Phenex telling him wood was cold and solid. He sought out that energy and found several kinds. A chair moved. Then a table. While impressive, they weren’t the objects Tyler was looking for. And it would do him no good to move everything but what he intended to when faced with this task in battle. He pushed away the feeling of accomplishment and found the thing he was searching for. He pictured it in his mind, felt the coldness of the wood, saw the aura surrounding it and asked it to move. The leftmost wooden Lucifer standee moved into his eye-line. Tyler lifted his hands and blasted it with a shot of his own energy. It exploded into splinters.

Phenex, Abby, Azazel and Jonathan cheered. Tyler nearly collapsed he was so out of breath. “You sound like you’re surprised,” he wheezed out. Jonathan rushed to his side. “I’m okay, just took a lot out of me,” Tyler assured him. “I need a break,” he told Phenex when he made his way to the table to join he and Abby.

Tyler was about to brag about his accomplishments to Prometheus when the Titan arrived to the training room but he could tell by the look on his face now wasn’t the time. “What new hell have you brought me today?” Tyler asked him.

“Pandora has returned,” Prometheus announced.

“Oh, that’s good news, isn’t it?” Tyler asked when the god’s demeanor remained unchanged.

“She wouldn’t tell me where she had been, but wherever it was, she left the jar there.” Prometheus continued.

“So we ask the old woman, Deanna, she’s the one who stashed her away,” Jonathan suggested.

“I did. She’s not cooperating either. In her mind, she returned Pandora, which is what we asked of her, and her job is done,” Prometheus told them.

“Let’s hope Pandora’s daughter isn’t able to convince her mother to give up the location of it,” Phenex mused.

## PANDORA

Pandora knew her husband wasn’t going to be excited to see her but she didn’t expect him to be downright angry about her return. He didn’t ask her where she’d been, or why she’d left. He just berated her for taking the jar with her.

“Do you understand the danger you’ve put me...and yourself in?” Was all he said before storming off into his office.

They didn’t have the most loving relationship, especially after thousands of years together. She couldn’t remember the last time they had an actual

conversation, and even when he was angry with her, like now, all he did was walk away without giving her a chance to defend herself. Pandora stood in the middle of the living room and contemplated her next move carefully. Certain it was the right thing to do, she stormed after Epimetheus and knocked on his office door.

“Epimetheus, let me in,” Pandora yelled through the wood. “At least let me explain myself,” she said when he didn’t answer.

The door crept open slowly and she entered. Epimetheus was sitting behind a large wood desk in the middle of the room. It had been at least 200 years since he did anything close to warranting having this office but it gave him comfort to retreat to it.

“What were you thinking?” Epimetheus asked her.

Pandora sat in a leather chair facing the desk, as if she’d stepped into some sort of meeting. She figured it was a good way to get him to listen. “Truthfully, I thought it was best if I went away until everything blew over,” she told him. “Look at the mess we, I, made of this world.”

Epimetheus shook his head. “Did you know, before you fled, what it was you had in your possession? Is that why Lucifer followed you into this madness in the first place?”

“No,” Pandora answered quietly. She looked down at her fingers and shifted in her chair. “Honestly, it has been centuries, or more, since I last thought about the jar and what it held. That was lifetimes ago. It didn’t take much to convince Lucifer to follow me. He was eager to do anything it took to get himself a ticket to the middle plane.”

“And now you have regrets. Just as you did when you opened that jar and created the lower plane and its ruler. You can’t run from your choices, Pandora. They will always follow you wherever you go,” Epimetheus told her.

“I have many regrets,” Pandora admitted. “Lucifer, or anyone else, can follow me to the ends of the earth, they will not get their hands on the jar, it is well hidden in a place only two of us know about,” she assured him.

“You sure you can trust the witch will not betray you?” Epimetheus asked with a fire in his voice.

“Without a doubt,” Pandora answered strongly. “Deanna and Sam have been in our lives far to long to deceive us now. Isn’t that why you insist the poor man continue to serve you?”

“There’s a big difference between asking a man to serve me tea and hoping a witch who deals in black magic keeps a weapon of grave important secret from powerful forces looking for it,” Epimetheus pointed out.

## CHLOE

“What’s your story?” Chloe asked Gemma after several hours of silence. Gemma stared at her as if she’d asked if she could spare a vital organ. “Or ya know, we can just sit here listening to these machines beep for, how long you gonna be sitting here, till I give birth?”

Gemma took a deep breath and let it out again. “I have no idea how long I’m supposed to be here. And how about you go first?”

“It’s simple really. I was dying. The devil made me an offer I couldn’t refuse. I tried to outsmart him. I lost,” Chloe said pointing at her stomach.

“I can’t believe I’m asking this, but how in the world did you end up pregnant with Lucifer’s child?” Gemma asked.

“Ah, a silver lining, if there is one. A blood ritual. Some prophecy in one of Lucifer’s stockpile of books says this, thing, his spawn, is the key to Lucifer’s desire to take over the middle plane, burn it to the ground and rebuild it to his liking,” Chloe told her. A spark flashed Gemma’s eyes. “What?”

“That’s where I come in,” she told Chloe. “I can create humans out of rocks.”

Chloe almost laughed, but it wasn’t the weirdest thing she’d heard. “Oh,” she said instead.

“My parents are Pandora and Epimetheus, I believe you’ve met them?” Gemma continued. “A battle between the Titans destroyed our land, and killed my husband. After his death I went into hiding. A binding spell on my soul kept me from knowing my true self until the time came when my help was needed. The gods, in their infinite wisdom, decided now was the time to awaken Pyrrha, my immortal side, and for reasons I will never understand, they’ve gifted me to Lucifer, because that makes perfect sense,” she stared at the ceiling as she raised her voice slightly.

“Balance,” Chloe said. “That’s been their excuse for everything, including allowing Lucifer to create a life inside me, and have no intention on preventing the birth of.”

“Some things never change,” Gemma said with a hint of sadness. “It the exact excuse they gave me when they said they couldn’t bring Deucalion, my husband, back to life.”

“That explains why they created this weapon against Lucifer,” Chloe

suggested.

“The Omphalos?” Gemma asked. “I heard mention of him.”

Chloe shook her head no. “He appears to be more of a distraction. Your mother holds the actual weapon in that famous jar she was gifted,” she told Gemma. “Of course it’s a moot point now that she’s gone missing, of course.”

“I thought she let everything out of her jar,” Gemma said.

“Apparently when she realized what she’d done she closed the jar and trapped Hope inside,” Chloe told her.

Gemma knitted her eyebrows and tilted her head to the side. “Leave it to the gods to assume an idea like hope is going to save us all.”

“Oh, no. Hope is a person,” Chloe said.

Another spark of recognition flashed in Gemmas eyes. But before Chloe could ask her about it her nurses came in to check on her.

## TYLER

Exhaustion had set in. He’d moved three wooden Lucifer standees and destroyed them. Tyler sat down at the table where Prometheus, Jonathan, Phenex and Abby were enjoying copious amounts of food and tea as they watched him work. Every so often Phenex would call out instructions, and words of encouragement. Tyler grabbed a wonton and popped it in his mouth. Even cold it tasted good. He was reveling in the satisfaction of having destroyed the fake Lucifers without so much as a single piece of collateral damage. A knock on the training room door put all of them on high alert.

They each looked at each other. Anyone who know about the secret room was currently in it, aside from Azazel who could just open the door and walk through it.

“You’re the weapon, you go open it,” Phenex suggested.

Tyler wondered why a woman who could turn into a giant flaming bird wasn’t more of a threat, but he went to the door anyway. When he opened it he was surprised to see Deanna standing behind it. Against his better judgement he invited her in.

“How?” Prometheus stood up as soon as he saw the old woman.

“I’m a witch,” she answered with a smile. “I could have come right into the room but I thought I’d give you the option of letting me in,” she taunted.

“What brings you here?” Abby asked calmly.

“The weapon, the other one,” she said looking at Tyler, “I know where it is.”

Tyler looked around the room to see if any of them were going to bite. They all stood in silence. So he did. “Please tell me you’re going to bring it to us, tell us where it is, or be helpful in some way that doesn’t require much work?”

Deanna kept her eyes fixed on Prometheus. “At the risk of being at the ire of your fellow Titans, I have every intention of helping you retrieve the item. However, I can only take one of you with me,” she said.

“Fine, great, let’s go.” Tyler volunteered.

“Not you,” Deanna said. “It has to be you.” She pointed at Jonathan.

“No, absolutely not.” Tyler stood in front of Jonathan as if to shelter him from an attack that wasn’t coming. “Why him?”

“You all have work to do,” Deanna pointed at them. “You must continue to prepare for the birth of Lucifer’s spawn. Tell me you can’t feel it coming sooner than expected?” She looked at Prometheus again.

The Titan nodded. “I had hoped I was mistaken,” he said to the others who had been staring a hole through him.

“I’ll go,” Jonathan said from behind Tyler. “You don’t need me to be here right now,” he assured Tyler. “I can do this.”

Tyler stepped aside and let Jonathan move toward Deanna who patted him on the shoulder. “Do not consider this a reflection of your importance here,” she said as led him away. “This is just as important a task, I assure you.”

Tyler caught up to them and grabbed Jonathan’s hand. “I have faith in you,” he told him. He looked Deanna in the eyes, “Bring him back to me in one piece. That’s not a request.” He kissed Jonathan on the forehead and watched as the two of them walked out of the room. “Were you going to share the news with us?” Tyler asked Prometheus when he returned to them.

“What news?” The Titan asked.

“She’s giving birth early? You saw it?” Tyler asked him.

“The gods aren’t showing me much of anything these days,” Prometheus answered. “It’s more of a shift in the way the universe is working. Something is off. I didn’t know that’s what it was until Deanna said it.”

“Well. Guess we have more work to do,” Phenex suggested.

## LUCIFER

Lucifer wasn't sure if he found it comforting or concerning that Gemma hadn't returned from checking on his vessel. It worried him that maybe she'd done as he'd asked and then ran off somewhere on her own. He knew he could check on them in a matter of moments, but he waited. It was only a matter of time before his son would arrive. Lucifer had plans and preparations to make. He went over the pages of text he'd found laying out what he had to do to groom his new prodigy. Although he had the words memorized. He could picture it perfectly, his child ruling over the middle plane, watching his minions tear it down piece by piece. Lucifer wanted nothing more than to be ruling the middle plane with his son at his side, but he knew it would take time. Until that time he'd have to be patient, which was a skill he had honed over thousands of years.

He remembered being released from Pandora's jar like it was yesterday. Until that moment he hadn't been alive. As he heard it explained then, and of course it changed over time, but before the bottle's corked top had been open, he was just an idea. Once Pandora set him free he became more. A living being. Someone born and bred out of rebellion and the need to break all the rules. They, mankind that is, thought that they could counteract his nature by creating beings that were all good. Ones that listened to authority and never questioned why. Angels. They told him he was one too. But he couldn't survive in their world. And he rebelled. And for simply being his true self, he was banished to the dark underbelly of the Earth. And when they discovered they couldn't fix the mortals who's souls came to them in hopes to be cured of their own rebellious nature, they were sent to him.

It was their own fault for telling him he couldn't visit the middle plane, Lucifer mused as he reminisced about the past. They were still trying to cure

him of his own nature. It was still unfair now as it had been then. Lucifer shook off the cobwebs of old memories and reminded himself that he was so close to getting what he wanted now. The pieces were falling into place. If only that last one would do the same. He needed to find that stupid jar and destroy it before anyone else can open it and release the last idea trapped inside. Hope. The one being that could destroy him for good. Men didn't have enough of it. Oh, they tried to pretend they did. But even all the faith in the world in deities and gods and prayers and the like were no match for what Hope would hold. And Lucifer couldn't let that idea manifest into a being as he had.

He had waited long enough. It was time Gemma return to him. He said those words and within moments the girl appeared in his library as requested. It startled him despite having called on her. He was used to visitors traveling through the fireplace.

"How is she doing?" Lucifer asked once he'd recovered.

"Very pregnant, and not very happy about it," Gemma answered.

"What do the doctors say about the timeline?" He asked without acknowledging the comment on the state of his vessel's mind. That's not what he asked anyway.

"They are very confused by the whole matter," Gemma told him. "There's really no mortal manual on the birth of demon babies," she continued. "But they're fairly certain Chloe will not be able to hold this child in her stomach much longer. It's growing at an alarming rate and will likely break the woman in half any day now."

Lucifer could hear the sound of judgement in Gemma's voice, but he chose to ignore it. She had no idea the pain in the ass Chloe was and how much she

deserved to be in this position. Not to mention the fact that she should be honored to be carrying his son. He almost said so but refrained. Instead choosing to change the subject. "If that's the case it is even more important that we find your mother. She holds an item that is the key to the future of my child. How about you go visit your father and see what you can shake out of him," he said with a flick of his wrist, his way of dismissing the girl who was turning out to be more of a nuisance than Chloe ever was.

"As you wish," Gemma said with a bow.

### TYLER

It worried Tyler that Jonathan had just volunteered to walking into who knows what with a strange black magic dealing old witch who they had just met. But he knew he had to trust that his boyfriend could handle himself. Especially since it seemed that Chloe could give birth to Lucifer's spawn any day now and Tyler was only partially ready for it. He knew damn well moving objects with his mind and shooting bolts of energy from his palms were not anywhere near the amount of weapons he was going to need. It was all hands on deck now, and that included Gabriel, who's task it was to teach Tyler how to render someone unconscious by touching them.

But not before Tyler had a few words for the angel. "Don't do that thing you do, that one where you only give me part of what I need to know, give me all of the information, this isn't about me learning a lesson on my own or relying too much on prayer and gods and angels," he told him. "This is about learning a skill I'm going to need to defeat the king of the lower plane. Because you won't do it yourselves," he continued.

"Done now?" Gabriel asked with an edge to his voice.

"Truthfully, I've only just gotten started," Tyler said. "But seeing as we're in a

bit of a time crunch now, I'm going to save it for later."

Gabriel rolled his eyes at him. It always made Tyler smile to know that he was annoying the archangel. "You've learned to find the energy in your palms, now we need you to focus on your fingertips," the angel held up a hand and wiggled his fingers. Light illuminated from them. "Seems easy enough, yes?" He continued. "You wanted me to be thorough, so I will be. The energy in your palms is nowhere near as strong as it is in your fingertips. Your palms shoot out light that can destroy any number of materials including flesh and bone. What you're asking your fingers to do is shut down everything in a living being, mortal or otherwise without the destruction," he said. "You'll find it's much easier to destroy someone than it is to simply render them useless. There will be a time when all you want to do is kill. Your adrenaline will be pumping through you and you will be able to do that with just a touch. But can you learn to control that rage? That's what we've got to work on now."

Tyler knew this moment was coming. The one where he would have to learn to quell an anger he held inside him his whole life. An angry teen grew into an angrier adult. This was going to be a challenge. "Please tell me you're not going to make me practice on actual living beings." Tyler was suddenly horrified by the prospect of having to touch a person or an animal and not kill them.

"I was going to have you work on it with Jonathan but I don't see him around anywhere..." Gabriel cracked a smile.

Tyler's eyes shot wide open. "Gabriel with the snark and sarcasm."

"Unfortunately there is no way we can practice on inanimate objects," Phenex, who had been watching them from afar moved closer to Tyler. "So, I get to be the test subject."

Tyler looked at him horrified that he'd volunteer for such a thing. "What, no, I'm not, no." Tyler stepped back shoving his hands in his pants pockets as if holstering weapons.

"Relax, Tyler," Gabriel said. "Phenex is an immortal being, she can resurrect herself, if you kill him."

"It's true, I can resurrect myself, but it's not a simple process so do me a favor, don't kill me ok?" Phenex said with a nervous smile.

Tyler stood there staring at the two men. An archangel and a fiery bird in the form of a woman. He wanted to run away. But he'd tried that already and still the world found a way to get him back into it. And then he remembered what Jonathan had just done for them. For him. The thought of his boyfriend, someone he loved with all his heart, someone he never saw coming, and he hoped he could use that love to accomplish this thing these crazy people were asking him to do.

Phenex stood with his back to Tyler. Gabriel stepped in front of her. "Find the energy that flows through each of us and differentiate which one is his and which one is mine. You should be able to see them as blue and red," Gabriel told Tyler. "I know, it's cliché, but it works."

"How is this going to be useful in battle?" Tyler asked. "It seems like I'm doing a whole lot of concentrating and not enough spur of the moment exercises."

"It only takes a moment to recognize the different energies that flow between us," Gabriel told him. "Your instincts will kick in after that."

Tyler took a deep breath. He remembered how many times he found his own

energy, focused it into his palms, and missed his target, shattering tables and chairs and putting holes in walls. He was suddenly terrified of doing that to Phenex. "Please don't hate me if I kill you," he said quietly. He closed his eyes and pictured Jonathan, his anchor. Then he saw the witch. And suddenly Phenex dropped to the floor in a pile of ash. "Fuck!"

Gabriel put his hand up "Wait."

Tyler watched as the ashes began to move. They slowly formed the shape of a giant bird. It turned red and orange with a hint of purple. Its head turned and black eyes stared into Tyler's. Phenex cawed and Tyler was certain he could hear the word "asshole" come through the bird's mouth. Within minutes Phenex returned to her human form. Tyler stood in stunned silence as Phenex stepped up to him.

"Do. Not. Do. That. Again," she said through gritted teeth.

As exciting as it was to see Phenex in her true form Tyler didn't exactly want to do that again. "I won't," he promised. "I hope," he added under his breath.

## PROMETHEUS

Of all the things Prometheus should have seen coming, this was the top of the list. He knew better than to trust a wielder of black magic even if they've been serving your family for sixty years. And yet, he was taken by surprise when the woman showed up at his door holding a bewildered Jonathan hostage. In one hand she held an unmarked box. Her other hand had a firm grip on Jonathan's neck. Black marks on his arms told Prometheus the human had tried to fight back.

"Deanna," he said her name tentatively. "I promise you I have never seen that box in my life."

“Liar,” she screamed at the Titan. “I will kill him, you know I will,” she warned as she tightened her grip on Jonathan’s neck. Her long bony fingers turned a shade of purple Prometheus hadn’t seen in a while. He shook his head at Jonathan who had begun to squirm. Prometheus knew he was feeling the intense pain of electricity emanating from the witch’s fingers. He had been in the human’s position at one time himself.

“There’s no need for that.” Prometheus put his hands up to assure her he wasn’t going to do anything rash. “Deanna, honestly, that may well be Pandora’s box, but it is not the one you are hoping it is. I believe what you’re looking for is inside that one.”

The witch shifted her eyes toward the box and back at Prometheus. “Open the box,” she demanded.

“You and I both know I can’t do that,” he told her. Jonathan let out a grunt. He wouldn’t last much longer. “It’s protected by magic Deanna! The only one who can open it is Pandora!”

“Then I suggest you go fetch her,” Deanna snarled. “You better hurry,” she called out to him as he disappeared into thin air.

He reappeared in Epimetheus’s living room, startling his brother and Sam, who had just brought the Titan his afternoon tea. “Where’s your wife!” Prometheus shouted. Sam looked up at him. “Not your wife old man, I know where she is, I need Pandora,” he screamed her name in case she was nearby. “Pandora!” he screamed out her name again.

Pandora came running into the room. “What is it?”

Prometheus lunged at her, grabbing her by the hand. They disappeared from Epimetheus's living room and appeared back in Prometheus's with Deanna and a barely conscious Jonathan.

"Let go of me..." Pandora was yelling at the Titan but when she saw the scene in front of her she trailed off. "What in the world? Deanna what the hell are you doing?"

"Open this." Deanna thrust the box at Pandora.

Pandora took the box from the woman and held it in her hands. "What is it you think you're going to do with what's inside?" she asked the witch. "You gonna give it to the king of the lower plane, tell me you didn't make a deal with him. Did he promise you eternal life?"

Deanna cackled. "You think I'd make a deal with that demon? You're out of your mind. I don't need the devil's contract to live forever. I'm a witch, I've got spells and potions you've never heard of," she laughed.

Prometheus slowly inched forward as Pandora kept Deanna distracted. Some of the color was returning to Jonathan's face which meant Deanna's grip on him had loosened.

"Whatever do you need my jar for then?" Pandora asked again.

"Leverage," Deanna told her. "Lucifer may yet find a way to enter this plane, and when he does, I will have a bargaining chip. He cannot kill Sam and I if I kill him first."

It was Pandora's turn to laugh. "I'm sorry to say, Deanna, the jar only opens for me," she told the woman. "You planning on holding me and the mortal both

hostage? That's a lot of work on the off chance Lucifer gets what he wants out of all this."

Prometheus reached Jonathan just as the witch noticed he had been moving toward them. Deanna's fingers began to tighten on the mortal's neck. "Hey!" Pandora yelled out. Deanna turned her head back to Pandora, who disappeared with the box. The brief distraction allowed Prometheus to grab hold of Jonathan's arm. The mortal disappeared. The witch let out an angry scream and headed for the door. Prometheus blocked it with his body.

"I'm going to let you go, Deanna. You're going to go home to your husband and never speak of this again. If I find out you're looking for Pandora, you can be sure you will not like the consequences." He stepped away from the door and let her pass by him. With a flash of light the witch was gone.

#### TYLER

Tyler stood with his hand on Phenex's shoulder. He could feel her tense up. "I promise, I'm trying," he whispered to her. Gabriel was watching them carefully, nodding with as much encouragement as he could muster without saying the words 'I believe in you Tyler' which would have sent the Omphalos into a fit of rage he was trying to avoid right now. Tyler took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Before he could center himself the room exploded into a flurry of activity. Phenex was suddenly no longer standing in front of him. When he opened his eyes he was horrified by what he saw. Jonathan, black and blue marks on his neck, was crumpled on the floor. Gabriel and Phenex had run to him and were surveying his condition. A bewildered Pandora stood about a foot away. Prometheus was just appearing in the room out of thin air.

"What happened?" Tyler demanded as he ran to Jonathan.

"I'm okay," Jonathan said weakly.

Tyler looked from Prometheus to Pandora. “Who did this?”

“Deanna,” Jonathan answered. He stood up gingerly, with Phenex’s help.

As she and Gabriel led him to a chair Tyler turned his attention to Prometheus. “What is she doing here?”

“Deanna was after the box, and what’s inside, I had to think fast, so I sent them both here,” Prometheus explained.

“What did the witch do to him?” Tyler asked, pointing to Jonathan.

“A magical death grip,” Prometheus said. “Pandora helped save him,” he added.

Tyler’s mind was racing. He was contemplating his next move. Go after the witch? Help Jonathan?

“Tyler,” Jonathan’s weak voice called out to him. Tyler turned toward it. “We have the box, that’s what we were after in the first place. We don’t have time to be angry about the how’s and why’s.”

Tyler nodded. He walked toward Pandora and held out his hand. “You’re going to give me the box. I know this because you’re not stupid. You understand everything that’s been going on around here for the past several months is your fault. I can feel the guilt inside you.” Pandora stood still for a moment. Tyler could see the wheels in her mind turning. Something deep inside him knew she would come to the right conclusion. The box would be safer in his possession. He was about to assure her that he’d keep it locked under whatever spell it was under when she vanished into thin air. Tyler stared at Prometheus wide-eyed.

Prometheus looked up at the ceiling and shook his head. “What are you playing at!” he screamed at it. He looked back and Tyler. “The gods took her,” he told him.

“What would they do that for?” Tyler looked up at the ceiling as he said it.

“Balance,” Gabriel’s voice came from behind them. “They can’t have you holding the only thing that can destroy Lucifer. They don’t want him eliminated. They just want him to remain on the lower plane where he belongs.”

“Seems to me they don’t want us to win,” Tyler said loudly, hoping everyone from the gods to the archangels could hear him. He was about to continue the tirade when Azazel appeared in the room. Tyler was about done with people showing up out of thin air.

“Chloe is about to give birth, we need to get to her before Lucifer can get her back on the lower plane,” Azazel announced to the room.

## PANDORA

Pandora hated being transported between places using teleportation. She had forbidden her husband from using it on her hundreds of years ago. And now she’d been through two jumps in a matter of minutes. She was about to yell at whoever it was that zapped her away from Tyler but there was no one around when she reappeared in her own room. She looked around to make sure it was her actual room and not the recreation in Interplanum. It was. Subtle things that couldn’t be brought to the other realm still existed here. She was still holding the unmarked box tight in her hands. She almost threw it across the room but thought better of it. She set it gently on her mantle without opening the magic lock.

A knock on her door startled her. She straightened herself up, took one last long look at the mantle, and opened her door. She nearly fainted as she was greeted by Pyrrha. Tears filled her eyes and Pandora stepped forward to hug her long lost daughter. Pyrrha stepped back. Pandora's heart fell with the rejection. "You're back," Pandora said tentatively.

"That makes two of us," Pyrrha said.

"What brings you here?" Pandora asked.

"You have something I've been asked to retrieve," Pyrrha told her.

That damn box was going to be the death of her, and probably a lot of other people, Pandora thought. She was about to tell the woman standing in front of her who looked like her daughter but clearly had no memory of such thing about all the ways she was not going to just hand over the box when Pyrrha's attention moved elsewhere.

"What? Now?"

Pandora didn't have time to ask the questions on her lips. Pyrrha disappeared into thin air. It seemed everyone was having that problem today.

#### TYLER

"Get this thing out of me!" Chloe's screams echoed through the corridor.

Chaos had broken out all around the hospital. There were doctors and nurses running toward Chloe's growing screams. Tyler and Jonathan followed the crowd, and the sounds. There was even more chaos inside Chloe's hospital room when they reached it. Tyler couldn't see over the heads of medical staff. Chloe's screams continued.

“Nobody is allowed in,” a nurse announced as Tyler tried to enter the room. He turned to see Jonathan wrap a white collar around his neck. It made him angry, at first, and then he understood.

“I’m her priest,” Jonathan announced to a nurse who was trying to shoo him away. She stepped aside and let Jonathan past.

“Clever boy,” Tyler whispered under his breath. He moved aside to let more of the staff enter the room. It seemed like way too many people for one woman, but then again, this wasn’t your typical birth. Abby, Prometheus, Azazel and Phenex appeared just off to Tyler’s left. It startled him. “They wouldn’t let me in, but Jonathan used the priest card and he’s in there with her.”

“Clever,” Abby smiled.

“That’s what I said,” Tyler said with a proud grin. He turned to see if he could get a look at what was happening. His view was still blocked. Azazel and Abby stood close behind him trying to get their own views.

“Do we know if Lucifer’s new, whatever she is, managed to get in there?” Azazel asked.

“Hostage,” a voice came from behind them. They turned quickly to see where it was coming from. “No she didn’t get inside,” she said sarcastically.

“Gemma,” Prometheus greeted her by her modern name.

“Uncle,” she taunted him. “You know I’m gonna have to take the child with me once its been born, by any means necessary, right?”

“You can try,” Tyler snarled at her. He was about to say more but was cut off by a loud scream. He turned to Azazel “this ‘Chloe can’t die’ thing, does that mean at all, even if she’s split in half?” He didn’t really want an answer to that, so he turned to face the door, hoping someone had moved out of the way enough to see what was happening. He saw Jonathan walking toward him.

“Chloe’s asking for you,” he said to Tyler.

Tyler felt like he was in slow motion as he made his way past nurses, doctors and machines. He was unsure of what he would see when he got to Chloe’s bedside. Was she still, whole? And what did a demon baby look like? And please don’t let this be that moment in the dream where a teenager calls him dad. He was relieved to find Chloe very much intact, despite the large amount of blood around her bottom half. In her arms was a very human baby. Although much bigger than your typical newborn, the child was, normal.

“It’s a girl,” Chloe’s voice was hoarse. “Adina.”

Tyler was mesmerized by the bright green eyes of the child staring right back into his own blue ones. “Hi,” he said through a haze of confusion. He wasn’t sure what he was expecting, but a bright eyed girl smiling at him like she wasn’t going to be the bane of his existence wasn’t quite what he had in mind.

“We’ll need to check her vitals, soon,” a nurse said to Chloe before leaving the room. It was just the three, four, of them now. As soon as the door closed behind the nurse the air in the room shifted.

“I need you to do something for me,” Chloe grabbed Tyler by the arm and pull him toward her.

Tyler pried his eyes away from Adina and looked at Chloe for the first time.

Her eyes had panic in them. It wasn't something he'd ever seen in them before. "What's wrong?"

"Take care of her for me," Chloe said quietly. "Don't let him turn my baby into a weapon."

Tyler's heart was beating fast. The dreams had been premonitions after all. This small, unassuming human was going to call him dad someday. And he was fine with it. He looked up at Jonathan who was staring lovingly in Adina's eyes, mesmerized as he had been. "I'll protect her with every fiber of my being," he told Chloe. A loud crash outside the door pulled them out of their moment and Tyler remembered Gemma was waiting outside. "Lucifer sent his new friend to retrieve the baby," he told Chloe and Jonathan.

Chloe tightened her grasp on Adina. "He thought she was going to be a boy," she said with a smile. "He's gonna be annoyed."

"Be right back," Tyler said before heading out the door.

In the hallway Azazel and Prometheus were holding the arms of a squirming Gemma. Abby was standing firmly in front of the door with her arms crossed over her chest. She didn't look like much but she was fierce. "She tried to get inside," she told Tyler.

"Can you do some kind of thing where you protect the room from unwanted visitors or something?" Tyler asked her.

"I can, but it won't work on her, the rules don't apply to immortal beings," Abby said with a hint of annoyance in her voice.

Tyler shook his head and walked toward Gemma. He brought both his hands

up in front of him. "I'm not gonna hurt you," he said as she flinched. "Unless you try to enter that room. My friends are going to let go of you. You're going to go back to the lower plane and tell Lucifer that his daughter is under the protection of the Omphalos and if he has an issue with that he can take it up with me directly," Tyler said calmly.

Azazel and Prometheus tentatively let go of Gemma's arms. She stood still, contemplating her move. "He's not going to take that lightly," she said.

"Yes," Tyler agreed with her. "I suggest you deliver the message and then get out of the way before he turns his anger on you."

## LUCIFER

Lucifer paced his library. Surely his son had been born by now. Something had to be wrong. What could have happened? He hated not being able to get Chloe back to the lower plane before she went into labor. He threw a stack of books off his table and let out a guttural scream. As he watched papers fly all over the room Gemma's voice caught his attention. He looked around and realized she's spoken to him in his head.

"It's a girl," Gemma said.

Lucifer stood stunned for a moment. He'd been so certain he was having a boy he hadn't prepared for what would happen if it wasn't. "Is she healthy?" He asked.

"Yes," Gemma said. "She and Chloe are fine," she added.

Lucifer didn't much care for an update on his vessel's condition but he kept himself from telling Gemma that. "Bring my daughter to me," he commanded.

It had been at least an hour since Gemma had contacted him and she hadn't brought him his baby girl. And to add to his frustration, she hadn't responded to his attempts to contact her about what was taking so long. He cursed whatever gods had given his new ally the ability to ignore him at will. He was about to call on her again when she appeared in the middle of the room. He looked at her and noticed she did not have a baby in her arms. "Where's my daughter?" He demanded.

"The Omphalos has asked me to bring you a message. He says that your daughter is under his protection and will not be joining you on the lower plane. He said that if you have a problem with that you can take it up with him directly," she said the words and immediately vanished back into thin air.

Lucifer stood rooted in place, anger building fast. He let out a scream that shook the entirety of the lower plane. His eyes turned crimson red, his entire body caught fire and he laid waste to the entire library as he explored in red hot flame.

## PANDORA

Pandora was startled by the knock on her door, again. Twice in one day, she thought as she moved from her bed to see who was calling on her now. She opened the door and was surprised to see Pyrrha once again standing in the hallway. "You came back," Pandora smiled at her daughter. "I hope you're not here for the box again," she added tentatively.

"No," Gemma told her. "I need your help."

Pandora stood in her doorway, stunned that after all this time her daughter would come to her for help. "What is it, Pyrrha?"

"The war is coming, and it's going to be worse than we thought," Gemma

said, stepping inside Pandora's room.

"Worse than Lucifer laying waste to the middle plane?" Pandora asked without irony.

"Do you remember what Prometheus did when the Titans forbade him from seeing Deucalion?" Gemma asked.

Pandora remembered. He destroyed several mountains and was about to destroy Athens before Hercules stopped him. Still, that was Lucifer's plan all along, to destroy the earth and its inhabitants. "Tell me what happened?"

"Lucifer was unable to get Chloe back to the lower plane before she gave birth, so he asked me to go to her and bring his son to him as soon as he was born," Gemma started. Pandora nodded at her daughter. "It's a girl," Gemma said with a smile.

"So Lucifer's angry he didn't have a son?" Pandora asked.

Gemma shook her head. "If only," she said. "Chloe made the Omphalos promise to protect her daughter. He agreed to watch out for her at all costs. He told me to tell Lucifer he'd have to come for her herself if he ever wanted to see her. The anger in Lucifer's eyes when I delivered the message..."

Pandora stepped forward and put a hand on her daughter's shoulder. She knew that anger. Like her daughter, she'd seen it in Prometheus when his son died protecting the Titans. Gemma was right. The war between Lucifer and the Omphalos was going to be worse than they'd imagined.

## CHLOE

Chloe was sound asleep when the room started shaking violently. She woke

up in a panic, watching as fluorescent lights swung back and forth on the ceiling and medical equipment, most of which was hooked to her in some way, feeding her fluids and pain meds, moved away from her and came sliding back with loud crashes, metal against metal. She hadn't been in Los Angeles long enough to have ever felt an earthquake. She was sure she never wanted to take part in one again.

The shaking stopped as suddenly as it had begun. The door to her room burst open and the lights came alive, blinding her momentarily. She was surprised they even worked. She could hear a voice next to her but couldn't figure out what they were saying. She tried to clear her eyes when her ears finally started to work.

"Chloe!" It was Tyler. "You okay?"

"Earthquake?" Chloe asked him.

Before she could get the answer her head erupted in pain. It was like nothing she'd ever felt before. She grabbed at it and screamed to make the pain stop. Tyler was holding her arms, talking to her. She couldn't hear what he was saying. She tried to tell him but the words weren't coming out. She was attempting to contact him, or Azazel, or someone, telepathically but before she could get anyone to respond Tyler stopped shaking her and a booming voice echoed through her head.

"Bring me my daughter!!" Lucifer shouted.

"Go, fuck, yourself," Tyler answered him one word at a time.

"What he said," Chloe added.

“Oh good, you can both hear me. Congratulations, Chloe. Your wish has been granted earlier than planned. Enjoy the cancer, hope it eats your brain slowly and painfully,” Lucifer spit out. “As for you, Omphalos. If you think you can keep my daughter from me, you’re gravely mistaken. I’m coming for you.”

The pain in Chloe’s head lowered to a dull ache. She waited to hear if Lucifer had anything else to say but it appeared he had severed the connection.

“Somehow I don’t think that was an earthquake,” Tyler said out loud. “You shouldn’t have broken your contract, we could have protected you. I would have made sure of it.”

Chloe was about to be respond to him but her doctor walked into the room. “How’s my daughter?” Chloe asked her.

“She’s doing just fine, everything okay in here?” she answered and went about checking Chloe’s vitals while a nurse made sure the machines were still doing their job.

I have brain cancer now but otherwise everything is great, Chloe wanted to say. “I’m fine,” she said instead.

#### TYLER

Adina slept soundly in a small bed in the hospital nursery. She was clearly bigger than other newborns, Tyler could see it in now that she was among other babies, most of which were crying.

“Which one’s yours?” a man next to Tyler asked.

Tyler hesitated for a moment before pointing to her. “Third one from the left, second row,” he said.

“Ah, the quiet one, that’s mine there, the one screaming his head off,” the man said with pride. “He’s gonna be a fighter.”

Tyler looked back at Adina and smiled. “So will she,” he said under his breath. Adina’s eyes opened and found his, they were brown today.

“She’s a shapeshifter.” Azazel’s voice came from behind Tyler.

Tyler spun to look at him. “How can you tell?”

“I came by to check on her earlier. Her eyes were blue then,” he said.

“So is she like Phenex? Or Alexis?” Tyler turned back to watch Adina kick her feet and giggle with happiness. Meanwhile the entire nursery continued to cry around her. Nurses were scrambling to stop the chaos.

“We won’t know what kind of creature she can transform into for a few years,” Azazel answered.

“I don’t know whether to be proud, or worried, about how happy she is,” Tyler said.

“Considering who her parents are, I’d say it’s a good thing,” Azazel pointed out. “Could be worse, she could be lighting the entire nursery on fire,” he whispered as he walked away.

Tyler watched Adina as she went from entertaining herself to falling asleep and back again. A nurse came to check on her every 10 minutes, and when it was time for Adina to be fed, she was wrapped tightly in blankets for the journey to her mom’s hospital room.

Tyler followed them and arrived just after they had entered the room.

“Sir,” the nurse started to protest.

“He’s okay,” Chloe told her.

When the door closed behind them Tyler sat in a chair next to Chloe’s bed. “Azazel says she’s a shapeshifter,” he whispered. Chloe’s face fell and her eyes grew wide. “No, she didn’t transform in the middle of the nursery,” Tyler laughed. “Her eyes keep changing colors.”

“Oh,” Chloe said, looking down at her daughter with a sense of pride. “Promise me you won’t let Lucifer get to her,” Chloe said without looking away from Adina.

“I swear to all the gods, even the assholes who are keeping important information from us,” he said looking up at the ceiling.

## PANDORA

Pyrrha, or Gemma, as she’d corrected her a number of times, was fast asleep on Pandora’s bed. Pandora watched her, amazed her how little the girl had changed. There were differences in her personality, that was clear, but her outer appearance was exactly as Pandora had remembered. Pyrrha had always been the strong one. Even as Deucalion was called to battle. It could have just as easily been her daughter taking up arms and fighting against the army of men. Pandora said a silent prayer for Deucalion, and for the sacrifice he made in order to save her daughter.

She was thinking about what could have been had her daughter not disappeared when her head went cloudy and a dull pain began to throb on her

temples.

“Remember me?” Lucifer’s voice came through in her mind.

“What do you want?” Pandora snapped at him.

“Is that any way to greet your favorite plaything?” Lucifer snarled. “It’s nice to hear from you, Lucifer. How can I help you?” he said in a mocking voice.

“I got you what you wanted. Not my fault you screwed it up by getting too arrogant,” Pandora retorted.

“Oh, I’m arrogant? You set me loose on an unsuspecting world and then vanished without consequence.” Lucifer laughed.

Pandora shook her head. Without consequence. Oh there’d been plenty of that. “Again, I ask, what do you want?”

“I need your help,” Lucifer said with a great deal of strain in his voice.

Pandora nearly laughed out loud. “You must be desperate,” she said, her voice going up about an octave.

“You have no idea,” Lucifer admitted.

“And what makes you think I will help you with whatever it is you’re calling on me for?” Pandora looked around the room, hoping to keep her eye from fixating on the thing on her mantle.

“Desperation,” Lucifer said the word and was gone. Pandora could tell he had severed the tie, she could feel the emptiness. And when she looked around

the room she understood why the feeling had been so strong. Pyrrha was gone, again.

### LUCIFER

“The thing is,” Lucifer said as he paced in front of a holding cell. The walls were crumbling around it, but the cell and its steel bars were in tact. His anger had destroyed most of the area but as this cell was meant to hold the worst of the worst, it stayed standing. “Your mother will come through for you. It’s been proven time and again, the things a mother will do to save their children never ceases to amaze me. If you knew the number of women who have been right where you are, for doing the most terrible things in the name of keeping their children safe.”

“I have no doubt my mother will find me, but you’re out of your mind if you think she won’t bring the weapon with her. You’re right. People do crazy things out of desperation,” Gemma spit back at him.

“Oh I’m counting on it.” Lucifer smiled at her wryly.

Lucifer made his way back to his library, though he couldn’t tell you why he went there, it was completely destroyed. He figured it was out of habit. He stood in the rubble and wondered if there had been any books among the ones he’d destroyed that had answers for the predicament he currently found himself in. It seemed every time he was faced with adversity a book told him something he didn’t know before, and now they were all destroyed. He could go visit the dragon, see if there was any insight the creature had that he’d be willing to give out. Lucifer shook his head. The dragon could only dole out information when it was necessary and Lucifer knew this was not the time.

Pandora wouldn’t disappoint him. He was certain of that. She only just got her daughter back and now he had her hostage. And there was no way Lucifer

was going to treat her right. Too bad he couldn't kill her. He was getting tired of dealing with immortals and their lack of ability to die. At least he was taking care of one nuisance. He hoped Chloe would suffer before she met her end. When he'd found her months ago she was in pretty bad shape. He took solace in the fact that at least one person would suffer for the betrayal against him. And he'd get his daughter back. Even if it meant Pandora unleashing the last of the weapons that could destroy him. Hope. What a small thing to have locked away in a jar. How hard could it be to defeat her. Lucifer stared at the burned down rubble that had once been his library and wondered how it was that another woman could possibly be his downfall.

"I'll raise my daughter differently," he said into the open space.

#### TYLER

It didn't seem right that they were able to take a newborn home a day after she was born into the world. But Tyler knew it was for the best anyway. Adina was growing at a rapid pace and it would only be a matter of time before someone at the hospital noticed she wasn't your typical baby girl. The apartment he and Jonathan shared was small for them. Now, with Adina and Chloe both there, it was going to be a challenge.

Tyler had wanted Chloe to stay in the hospital. She refused. Her doctor released her as healthy and fit to be on her own. Chloe hadn't told anyone about the cancer. And Tyler didn't feel like it was his place to do it for her, so he kept it to himself. He didn't even tell Jonathan. It was one of the few secrets he had from him. He would have to tell him at some point, especially since Chloe's health would decline right in front of their eyes. "I'll know when it's time," Chloe had said. "I won't die in your apartment. I'll say my goodbyes and die on my

own. The way it was meant to happen before all this.”

He felt guilty agreeing to it, but Tyler knew it was for the best. And despite all the civility he was still not quite on team Chloe. She had brought a lot of pain and suffering on him, people he cared about, and herself. There had to be some consequences for that. So he let her make the choice to die, and to do it on her own terms.

Jonathan had spent a lot of time, and probably more money than they had, to outfit their living room with everything he thought Adina would need. A convertible crib, blankets, bottles, and more toys than one kid needed in their lifetime. Truthfully they could run a daycare out of their apartment if they were tight on funds. And wanted to lose their minds.

Adina had fallen asleep as soon as Tyler put her down in her new crib. He watched her lay there, still, peaceful, and wished he didn't know the things he knew were coming for her. He'd let her sleep as many hours as she wanted now, because her future was about to be a rough one.

A knock on the apartment door started them all. To Tyler's amazement the sound hadn't woken Adina at all. She moved slightly and remained fast asleep. He turned to face the door but did not step away from the crib. He kept his hands at his side but was ready to defend against anything, or anyone, who tried anything.

Jonathan carefully opened the door. Behind it stood Pandora. "I'm not going to hurt anyone," she said quietly. "I have a gift for you."

Tyler nodded to Jonathan who let Pandora step inside the room. Tyler's hands were balled into fists but remained at his side. He was doing everything he could to stamp down the anger building up inside him. She had started this

ball rolling. Whatever gift she was offering he wasn't interested. But it was better to let her inside than do battle with her out in the open. He had neighbors. Nosy ones.

"Unless you've come here to give us the weapon that will destroy Lucifer," Tyler started to say.

Pandora held up a pouch. "I'm going to hand this to you, once you take it, it's yours. But let me offer some sage advice. The universe will get what it wants whether you like it or not. If you release Hope you will have a tough choice to make. She can, and will, destroy Lucifer, and the lower plane. But if she does, you will have to destroy her. One cannot live on without the other."

Tyler stood still and contemplated this. "How is it that Lucifer exists, while Hope does not?"

"Just because she is trapped inside a jar does not mean she does not exist," Pandora told him. "If you open the jar she will manifest into her human form. It is her duty to take care of Lucifer, or, as he is known, the manifestation of evil in the world. Her only job is to destroy him, completely. He cannot be bottled back up in the jar alongside her. The gods are cruel that way. I opened the jar and unleashed evil into the world. There is no bottling it back up. It has to be managed. That's what you were created for." Pandora reached into the pouch and carefully removed the ornate jar.

Tyler stared at the painted jar. Every fiber of his being told him to reach and take hold of it. But he knew, in his soul, that it wasn't meant for him. "I don't want it," Tyler told her. "It isn't right for me to have a weapon like that in my possession. I am meant to be the weapon."

Pandora slid the jar back in her pouch and tightened the strings. She turned

toward the door.

“That’s it? You came all the way here to offer me a jar you knew I wouldn’t take and you’re leaving?” Tyler said with a laugh.

“I had hoped you were too angry to see reason and would take the offer,” Pandora told him. “I admire your strength. I have been contemplating using the weapon myself. But I’ve done enough damage. And that’s what Lucifer is counting on.”

“Why would Lucifer think you’d unleash Hope now, after all these years?” Jonathan asked her.

“He has my daughter,” Pandora answered him.

Tyler looked at her. “Yeah, the gods gifted her to him.”

“She betrayed him and came home to me,” Pandora said. “Her refusal to fight on his behalf and her failure to bring his own daughter to him made him angry. When I refused to help him he threatened me, taunted me, and took my daughter prisoner. He practically begged me to come after her, and bring the jar with me.”

Tyler knew all too well what Lucifer did to the people he kept prisoner. He’d been there himself. He almost felt sorry for Pandora, and Gemma, but he’d never tell them that. “I was created to be the weapon who keeps Lucifer from destroying the world. I appreciate your offer to hand over a weapon that can aid me in that battle, but I’d like to try to do that on my own. I will do what I was created to do. And if that means helping your daughter escape Lucifer’s prison, while protecting his own from whatever it is he created her for, then so be it. But I can’t be everyone’s savior alone.”

Pandora nodded. "I understand. I just wanted you to know there was someone down there who, like you, fought against the fate she'd been given," she said with a smile.

Tyler knitted his eyebrows together and tilted his head to the side. He had no idea what that meant. He was clearly not rebelling against the fate he'd been given. He was training to be the Omphalos as he was told to do. He was preparing to do battle with the ruler of the lower plane, as he'd been created to do.

"You're throwing off the balance just by having her here," Pandora pointed at Chloe. "And the fact that you would protect Lucifer's spawn, despite everything you've been through," she continued. "It's against your nature. It's against what the gods set in motion. It isn't what you were created for."

"On the contrary," Tyler argued. "I was created exactly for this. The gods wanted me to fight against Lucifer and that's what I'm doing. If that means making peace with my enemy, that's what I'll do. If it means keeping Lucifer away from his own daughter. I'll do that too," he said. "The gods don't deal in specifics. I've been taught this over and over again, my whole life. They set things in motion and hope we make the right choices. This is the right choice."

Pandora nodded at him. "You have learned a lot," she said as if she had anything to do with it. "My choices have been haunting me for a long time. I'm not saying it was right to let curiosity sway me into opening this jar, and I'm not saying letting boredom drive me into setting Lucifer loose on the middle plane. But I'll tell you this much, I thought they were the right choices at the time," she said and walked out the door.

"What just happened?" Tyler asked Chloe and Jonathan. They both shook

their heads at him.

“Do you think she’ll go after her daughter on her own?” Jonathan asked.

“I would,” Chloe answered. “I think she wanted you to do it for her, so that her conscience was clear, for once, but now that you’ve refused, she’ll likely figure out a way to save her daughter on her own. Which is what he’s counting on.”

Tyler knew Chloe was right. Pandora was in the worst kind of trouble. The one where you make rash decisions without thinking of the consequences. But why had she come to him? Did she want him to stop her? “I don’t think she came here looking for help. She knew I’d refuse the weapon. She came here to tell us what she is going to do.”

“Why would she do that?” Jonathan asked.

“She wants someone to stop her,” Tyler suggested. “She’s in a bad spot. Her daughter is being held hostage by the king of the lower plane, and believe me, that’s not a place you want to be, she knows the consequences of her actions but she’s got no other choice. She truly just walked in here and told us to help her or she’d do it herself and whatever happened in the wake of that was not her concern.”

“What are you going to do?” Chloe asked him.

“I’m going to get her daughter back before Pandora does anything stupid,” Tyler answered with a sigh.

## LUCIFER

“How does it feel to know your own mother isn’t in a hurry to come rescue

you?” Lucifer taunted Gemma.

“You may find it surprising, but I haven’t seen the woman in a thousand years, she’s learned to live without me,” Gemma snapped back at him. “Also, did it occur to you that maybe she’s smarter than you give her credit for?”

Lucifer’s laugh bounced off the broken walls. “That’s rich,” he said. “I guess you have been away a long time. See, your mother, in her infinite wisdom, came to me several months ago and offered me a chance to walk right onto the middle plane. She knew what I wanted to do once I got there. And she helped me anyway. Then, when it all went sideways, she ran away.”

“How’d that go for you though? Seems to me, being stuck back on the lower plane and all, things didn’t really go all that well,” Gemma kept up with his taunts.

“Don’t you worry your pretty little head,” Lucifer retorted. “My daughter will be in my arms soon enough and together we’ll carry out my plan to take over the middle plane.”

“What if that’s not what she wants?” Gemma asked him without any of the sarcasm and fire she’d been previously throwing.

Lucifer didn’t answer her right away. Then, “She’s my daughter, of course that’s what she wants.”

“Let me give you some unsolicited advice, Lucy.” The snark was back. “I know a lot about being expected to do something because it’s what your parents want. That never works out well. My husband died fighting beside his father to save his creation, the human race. Because that’s what his father wanted. Then, instead of marrying someone else like my parents wanted me to do, I fled my life,

changed my name and had all my memories wiped. The fastest way to get your daughter to resent you is to assume that because you want something she'll want it too."

"Noted," Lucifer said with absolutely no emotion. "By the way, how's that running away plan working for you? Seems to me being locked in a cell on the lower plane didn't work out well."

Gemma's laugh was as loud and wholehearted as Lucifers had been. "Nice try, but I was able to disappear for thousands of years. It took you less than a month to be stuck back here. I win this round."

Lucifer stormed off. He didn't know where he was going. He'd destroyed everywhere he'd usually escape to.

#### TYLER

Tyler's living room was even more overcrowded now. An impromptu meeting had been called bringing Prometheus, Azazel, Phenex and Abby into the small apartment he and Jonathan along with Chloe who was entertaining Adina with a stuffed bunny she was making "talk" in a voice Tyler found creepy but Adina seemed to be delighted about.

"In summary, because I don't have time to go into every detail," Tyler addressed his friends. "Lucifer took Gemma prisoner because she didn't bring Adina to him. Pandora came to me in the hopes I would do something dumb like take ownership of her jar and use the weapon to destroy Lucifer, thus freeing Gemma. I didn't touch it," he felt the need to clarify that last part. "I'm going to go get Gemma back, and all of you," he pointed around the room "are going to keep Adina safe here."

"Is there a plan? Or were you just going to walk into the lower plane and ask

Lucifer if you can have her back?" Azazel asked.

"Yes, that's the plan. To ask nicely. You and I both know where she's being held Azazel," Tyler snarked at him. "And we both know I can find my way in and out of the area undetected. Of course I don't believe it will be as simple as going down there and bringing her back, but as I said a minute ago, I don't have time to go into details. And seeing as I'm going in alone, there's no need to explain any sort of plan to anyone."

"I think you should reconsider that," Phenex suggested. "Surely Lucifer is waiting for someone to come get her? You should have back up."

"Would you like to come along?" Tyler asked her.

"No, I was thinking it should be Azazel," she answered said with a modicum of guilt in her voice. Azazel shot her a dirty look.

"I knew it was only a matter of time before I'd have to go back there," Azazel said. "Now seems like as good a time as any."

"Great. So, the plan is, walk into the lower plane and ask Lucifer to give us Gemma," Tyler said with a wry smile. "I'm serious," he said on Azazel's eye roll. "We go in, tell Lucifer he's got two choices, give us Gemma and we'll leave him be or don't, and we'll allow Pandora to destroy him, which she's clearly planning to do. Either way he doesn't get to hold onto Gemma."

"And if he chooses option B? Or if Pandora doesn't plan on destroying him?" Azazel asked.

"He's been attempting to take over the middle plane for hundreds of lifetimes. You really think he's going to take a chance that Pandora won't use the weapon

on him? He's got a one track mind. Get what he wants, at all costs, except his own destruction," Tyler said.

"I see your point. I don't think the plan will work, but I see where you're going with it," Azazel said.

"Do me a favor, don't die before I get back, okay?" Tyler whispered to Chloe as they both stood over Adina's crib watching her bite at the ears of the plush bunny. "She clearly didn't like that voice you were doing," he giggled.

"I'll do my best," Chloe whispered back before hitting him lightly on the back of the head. "Come back in one piece. She's counting on you."

## PANDORA

Pandora knew all the pathways to the lower plane had been closed up after Lucifer's previous visit to the middle plane had gone terribly awry. Her fault, her inner voice reminded her. She shushed it. But she also knew there had to be some other way in. One of the worst parts about being immortal but not being one of the gods was that she didn't have any of the powers they were blessed with. They'd given her eternal life and a lust for curiosity but nothing more. She silently cursed at the sky for giving her such shortcomings.

"Damn," Pandora cursed out loud. She knew there was one way in. And she didn't like it at all.

The walk from the garden behind her room to the small guest house seemed longer than usual as she went over the conversation in her head. But when the old woman opened the door she lost all ability to speak.

"What do you want?" the woman spit out at her.

“I need your help,” Pandora stammered. “Again.”

The witch cackled. “What could possibly have gone wrong in your world that you’re coming to me for help, after what I did to you?”

“You have no idea,” Pandora said to no one in general.

“Why don’t you tell me about it, and maybe if I hear something good, I’ll consider it,” the woman said, stepping aside to let Pandora in.

Pandora followed Deanna into the small living room and sat on the edge of a chair across from the couch. Deanna sat comfortably in the middle of it. Despite her attempts to look non-plussed, Pandora knew the witch was intrigued by the events unfolding around her.

She didn’t really have time to explain to Deanna all the reasons why she needed to find a way onto the lower plane. But Pandora knew simply wanting to rescue her daughter wouldn’t be enough for the woman. She wasn’t a parent and never met Pyrrha. Gemma. So she appealed to something else. “Lucifer has my daughter. I need to go get her from him. If I make it back here alive, with my daughter, I will give you the jar and you can do what you want with it.”

Deanna blinked at her a few times. “I find you a way into the lower plane and you give me the jar?”

“Yes, that’s what I’m offering you,” Pandora said.

“And what makes you think I’m dumb enough to believe you won’t use the jar on Lucifer and render it useless to me?” Deanna asked her.

“I am certain I will not have to use the weapon,” Pandora assured her.

“Desperation does crazy things to good people,” Deanna said shaking her head.

“Who said I’m a good person?” Pandora responded to the statement despite it not warranting one.

“We’re all just doing what we need to survive,” Deanna answered. “There is someone in Interplanum that can get you into the lower plane. But he requires a great deal of sacrifice you may not be willing to give him.”

Pandora stood up from the chair. “Take me to him.”

“Very well,” Deanna said with a sigh.

Pandora watched as Deanna conjured the spell that opened the door to the world between things. Interplanum. She had tried to memorize the words, but Deanna said them so quickly and so softly Pandora couldn’t catch them all. When the air shimmered she knew the spell was in place. Deanna stepped through the shimmering air and Pandora followed.

They stepped right into the Interplanum Street Market. Everyone around them went about their business as if nothing had happened. They were used to people showing up out of thin air. Pandora had started to get used to that too.

Deanna led her to a small table where a short, stubby, balding man sold bits and bobbles that Pandora had looked at a number of times but was never impressed by. “The guy who sells junk jewelry in a magical market knows how to get into the lower plane?” she whispered to Deanna.

“Not very nice to judge people by the worth of their wares, Pandora,”

Deanna retorted. "Hello Frank," she said loudly. "He's going deaf," she whispered to Pandora.

Desperation indeed. She was about to trust her life, and her daughter's fate, to a half deaf junk dealer and a witch who tried to steal her jar. Where had things gone so wrong in her life? Don't answer that, she shushed the inner voice, again.

### TYLER

Tyler took one last look at Adina and turned away from the crib, coming face to face with Jonathan who had been quietly standing behind him.

"C'mon," Tyler said taking Jonathan's hand and leading him into their bedroom. He closed the door behind them. "As much as I'd like to rip your clothes off and throw you on this bed, I'm in a bit of a hurry," he said with a smile.

Jonathan returned the smile. "I'll wait for you, till the end of time." He kissed Tyler gently on the lips. "But don't make me wait that long, okay?"

"You know I don't like to make promises I can't keep, so believe me when I tell you, I'll be back before you can miss me." Tyler wrapped his arms around Jonathan and held onto him tight.

"Be safe," Jonathan whispered.

"Always," Tyler whispered back. He didn't want to let go. In fact he wanted to stay right where he was forever. But he knew he couldn't. It wasn't his fate. So he stepped back and let his arms fall to his sides anyway. "Take good care of them," Tyler said as he opened the door.

“Ready?” Azazel asked Tyler as soon as he stepped back into the living room.

“Nope, but we’re going anyway,” Tyler said with a shrug. “I can get us into the hallway where the cells are, what are the chances Lucifer is keeping watch over them?”

“I’d say they’re high, extremely high,” Azazel said.

Tyler nodded at him and turned to face the others. “It’s harder to communicate down there so I won’t be checking in unless there’s a reason to,” he said. “See you soon.”

He turned back to Azazel and put his hand on the demon’s shoulder. There was nothing discerning to traveling through teleportation. You concentrate on your destination, close your eyes, and hope that when you open them you’re exactly where you wanted to go. When Tyler opened his eyes he was relieved that he’d done it right. He smiled.

“You almost zapped us into a holding cell, didn’t you?” Azazel whispered next to him.

“No,” Tyler said with a snort.

Tyler had brought them to where he’d remembered the door to the holding area had been. It was gone now. He looked around and noticed most of the walls were in rubble around them. And suddenly the violent shaking they had felt on the middle plane made more sense. He also noted the lack of Lucifer’s presence in the area at the moment.

“No Lucifer?” Tyler asked the question though he knew the answer.

“There’s no way he’s not lurking around the area,” Azazel said.

Tyler and Azazel made their way down the hallway, which was now more of an obstacle course than anything else, stepping over rocks and iron bars from holding cells that had been destroyed. There was only one cell still standing. Tyler knew it well.

“That one was built to hold in the worst of the worst,” Azazel whispered to him.

He nodded to acknowledge he’d heard the demon, but his mind went back to his days of imprisonment here. So that’s what Lucifer and Azazel thought of him back then. So dangerous they had to keep him in the strongest cell. At that time nobody knew who, or what, he was. Tyler tried to shake the memories and stay on target.

When they reached the last cell in the hallway Gemma greeted them with with one word. “Trap.”

## PANDORA

The man looked up from his table and scoffed when he saw Deanna standing in front of him. “What do you want?” He spit out in a low gravelly voice.

“Is that any way to greet an old friend?” Deanna smiled sweetly at him. That only made him madder.

“Ha!” He shouted.

Pandora watched the exchange impatiently. She wanted to interrupt them and explain how important it was that they get on with what they came for, but she could tell it wasn’t a good idea. So she stood back and listened.

“C’mon old man, you can’t still be mad about Italy,” Deanna was saying. “It was so long ago.”

“I’ll never forget, old woman,” Frank retorted. “Why don’t you just tell me why you are bothering me, or go away.”

“This is Pandora,” Deanna said pushing her forward. “She needs your help.”

“You have truly lost your mind if you think I’m going to help anyone who keeps company with the likes of you.” Frank didn’t even look at Pandora.

“Please, it’s important. I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t, believe me. I have no love for Deanna. She betrayed me. If I had any other choice I’d have gone somewhere else,” Pandora pleaded with the man.

He finally looked at her. Pandora stepped forward and said into his ear, as loudly as she dared but hoping loud enough he’d hear it, “I need to get into the lower plane. At any cost.”

“A good man would warn you not to offer such things,” Frank said with a wry smile. “Follow me,” he said to Pandora. “You, stay here,” he pointed a fat finger at Deanna who stopped moving forward.

“Unfortunately, I am not a good man,” Frank said to Pandora as they walked into a tent he had set up behind his table of wares.

There were dead animals hanging from ropes on the metal rods holding the tent in place, it smelled like death. Herbs and flowers Pandora couldn’t identify hung around the things that weren’t dead. “Clearly,” she said under her breath.

“The cost is your life,” the man continued.

“You don’t even know what it is I’m asking for,” Pandora said with a slight hitch in her throat.

“Doesn’t matter, when you deal with me, the cost is always your life. Did the old woman not warn you of this?” Frank seemed pleased at Pandora’s shock.

“She said it would be a high cost, she didn’t specify what it was. And I didn’t ask,” Pandora answered him.

“The cost is your life,” Frank said again. “However, if I am unable to help you, you will not be expected to pay such a price,” he said. “What is it you need me to do for you?”

“I need to get into the lower plane,” Pandora told him.

“Whatever do you want to do that for?” Frank looked at her with wide eyes.

“Lucifer has my daughter. I need to get her back,” Pandora remained honest with him. Might as well be. “What do you mean by the cost being my life?”

“Smart. Most people don’t ask that question. Some figure it means their death and refuse, others, well, they agree without thought and get very angry when they discover what it is they’ve agreed to,” Frank started. “Some wish the price had been death...”

Pandora was growing impatient. She didn’t have time to stand there and wax poetic with a man she wasn’t even sure could help her. “Before I agree to anything I need to know if you can help me,” she cut him off mid sentence.

“Deanna is many things, but she is not a liar, she knew exactly where to bring you,” Frank started. “Yes, I can get you into the lower plane,” he said when Pandora folded her arms over her chest and sighed.

“I accept.”

#### TYLER

“I was expecting Pandora but this is nice too,” Lucifer’s voice came from behind them. “Brother. I’m surprised you would set foot back on this plane.”

“Lucifer,” Azazel said his name with fire and anger Tyler could feel in his soul. “You didn’t really leave me a choice.”

“Bold move taunting an immortal who has the only weapon that can destroy you,” Tyler tried to break up the tense reunion before it could become a battle of wills.

Lucifer laughed. “Is that why you’re here? You trying to protect me from Pandora?”

Tyler matched Lucifer’s laugh. “No, Lucy. I’m here to protect you from yourself. I’m going to take Gemma back to the middle plane. And you’re going to let me. Because this is not her fight. The battle is between you and me. No one else needs to be involved with it.”

“Believe me, Omphaplos, I have not forgotten,” Lucifer retorted. “The only way you take Gemma back to the middle plane is if you’re exchanging her for my daughter.”

“That’s not going to happen,” Tyler told him.

“GEMMA!”

A loud voice caught everyone’s attention. It sounded close.

“Mom?” Gemma said under her breath.

“Gemma!” Pandora called out again. Lucifer sprinted in the direction of the sound. Tyler and Azazel followed him.

“Where’s my daughter?” Pandora was screaming at Lucifer when Tyler and caught up with him. “I told you I’d do whatever it took to get my daughter back,” she directed at Tyler.

“I told you I’d bring her back you,” Tyler answered.

“You were taking too long,” Pandora retorted.

“You came to me this morning,” he pointed out. “That offer still good?”

“Tyler,” Azazel said his name as a warning.

Tyler shook his head at him. He held out his hand to Pandora who handed over the pouch she’d offered that morning. He could hear Azazel sighed behind him. “Just trust me,” he said telepathically. He held the pouch up to Lucifer. “In this pouch is the jar everyone is so afraid of. I’m going to walk into that holding cell and bring Pandora her daughter. You’re going to let me.”

“What makes you think I’m just going to let you take her out of here without getting what I want in return?” Lucifer stood in front of Tyler defiantly.

“Because the jar is in my possession now, which means I get to use it however

I see fit,” Tyler answered him calmly. “And you and I both know I’m not exactly trustworthy in following rules,” he continued, moving forward.

Lucifer stared him down, unmoving. Tyler kept walking forward. “I will go through you,” he said through gritted teeth. Lucifer moved to the side and let Tyler walk through.

“This is not a victory,” Lucifer said as Tyler passed by him.

“I know,” Tyler said quietly as he continued toward the holding cells. “We need to move fast,” Tyler whispered to Gemma as he unlocked the cell.

“How?” Gemma asked when she stepped out of the cell. Then, “Where’s my mother?”

“Long story,” Tyler answered her first question. “She’s okay, Azazel’s with her,” Tyler said. “He’s on our side,” he assured her.

Tyler led Gemma to her mother, past Lucifer who was clearly having a stare down with Azazel.

“Azazel,” Tyler called to him. He moved forward. “Hold on to each other,” he instructed. He closed his eyes and concentrated on home.

“What was that?” Azazel asked when they appeared at the door of Tyler’s apartment.

“A victory,” he said opening the door.

TYLER

Tyler stepped into his living room and found it quieter than when he'd left it. Time moved differently on the lower plane. What took him just a short time to accomplish down there was more like six hours here at home. He turned around and put his finger to his mouth "Wait here," he whispered.

Chloe was asleep on the couch, Jonathan dozed in a chair next to Adina's crib. Tyler crouched next to him, putting a hand on his arm gently. Jonathan stirred awake. Tyler put his finger to his mouth again, this time to shush a stunned Jonathan. He nodded toward the door and stood up.

"That was fast," Jonathan said when they were outside the door. "I mean, not that I'm complaining, but how did you get her back so easily?"

"I think Lucifer has a way to get to the middle plane. If I'm right, his first priority will be to come looking for his daughter," Tyler said all the words quickly. Everyone stared at him, wide-eyed. "I need to speak with Prometheus. Azazel, stay here with Jonathan and Chloe, be alert and contact me immediately if Lucifer does find his way here." They continued to stare at him.

"Wait," Azazel finally spoke. "You're taking the weapon with you, leaving us here to defend against Lucifer, unarmed?"

"You and I both know you're not unarmed," Tyler said. "Are you saying you're not willing to fight against your brother if it comes down to it?"

Azazel shook his head. "I'm on your side," he looked to Tyler and then to Jonathan.

"I promise I'll explain everything," Tyler addressed Jonathan. "Keep them safe, keep yourself safe." He kissed him on the forehead and turned his attention to Pandora. "Ready?"

Pandora nodded. She took Gemma by the hand and reached out for Tyler's. He took it and closed his eyes, concentrating on Prometheus's mountain. When he opened them they were standing at the door. Tyler did not let go of Pandora's hand. He tightened his grip on it, in case she decided to try and flee. He knocked with his free hand.

Prometheus answered the door immediately.

"Saw us coming, did you?" Tyler greeted him. Prometheus nodded and moved aside to let them in. Tyler pulled on Pandora's hand and practically pushed her inside the Titan's living room. Gemma trailed behind them.

"Lucifer has a way onto the middle plane," Prometheus said it before Tyler could.

Tyler tilted his head to the side. "He definitely does, or are you asking me?"

"I got a message just before you three appeared at my doorstep. The gods noted an anomaly, right around the time you left on your rescue mission. They can't be certain but they believe it was created when Pandora entered the lower plane with the weapon," Prometheus explained.

"That explains a lot," Tyler and Gemma both said. They looked at each other. Tyler motioned for Gemma to go ahead.

"He was too proud, too eager to have my mother come after me," Gemma said.

"And he let you go, let us all leave, without putting up much of a fight," Tyler added.

“If you thought he was able to leave the lower plane, why are you here talking to me and not at home guarding Chloe and the child?” Prometheus asked.

“Azazel is there with them,” Tyler tried to sound confident about that. “When we were down there, I took possession of the jar. I was hoping you could find a way to reverse that agreement and give it back to Pandora.”

“No,” Pandora protested. “You can’t. I mean. I need you to hold onto it. It’s yours now. I,” she turned to Gemma. “To get into the lower plane I had to make a deal. My life is no longer my own. The contract is binding. If I don’t return to him within the next 24 hours he starts taking people I care about,” she said.

“There are always ways around those kinds of deals,” Prometheus suggested.

“To what end, Prometheus? I keep creating chaos and you keep fixing my mistakes. It’s time I take ownership over my choices. Being the servant of a powerful black magic dealer is better than living for an eternity in this endless loop,” Pandora argued.

No one could argue with her. Especially not Tyler, who was facing that same fate. Although he had many things to look forward to now. Jonathan. Adina.

“It’s not safe to have such a weapon in the hands of the Omphalos. It’s not a fair thing, to ask someone created to fight against Lucifer, to not use a weapon that could end that fight forever,” Prometheus said. “I will not ask the gods to reverse the contract you made, but I will have to ask them to find someone else to gift the jar to.”

“I’ll take it,” Gemma offered.

Prometheus looked up at his ceiling. "I think that's a fair deal," he said to it.

"We do too," a booming voice echoed through the room. "Hand the jar the Pyrrha, Tyler."

Tyler did as he was told, handing the pouch that contained Pandora's Jar in it to Gemma. She took it tentatively before holding it against her chest. "I'll protect it with my life," she promised.

"Thank you," Tyler said loudly, addressing her and the voice coming from the ceiling, then, "I have to go."

Tyler disappeared from Prometheus's living room and appeared in his own as fast as he could get the thought into his mind. When he got there the room was in chaos. Chloe was on her knees, crying, screaming, rocking. Azazel had burn marks and blood covering his face and hands. Jonathan was laying on the floor and Adina was nowhere to be found. Tyler ran to Jonathan, checking his pulse.

"He's alive," Azazel said hoarsely.

Tyler could feel a thumping in Jonathan's neck and noticed he was breathing, his chest moving up and down slowly.

"What happened?" Tyler demanded.

"I was guarding the door, he appeared out of nowhere, and came right at me, I tried to fight back, I didn't see the hellhounds he'd brought with him until they were on top of me. Chloe and Jonathan tried to fight him," Azazel explained.

"He took her," Chloe sobbed.

Tyler's heart fell. He moved closer to Chloe and put a hand on her shoulder. "I'm going to get her back, I promise."

### PANDORA

Pandora wanted nothing more than to spend her remaining hours with her daughter. But she knew that if she did, she'd change her mind about going back to Interplanum, and that was bad for everyone. "No matter what urge you have to open that jar, don't," she said to Gemma. "Take care of yourself, and do your best to get along with your father."

Gemma nodded at her. Pandora knew too much time had passed, and too many memories had not returned for Gemma to be overly emotional about their goodbye. She tried to hold herself together. "I'm sorry," she said before kissing Gemma on the forehead. She didn't wait for a response. She pressed her finger against a charm on the necklace she was wearing and watched as the air around her shimmered. She stepped through it and was transported to the tent behind Frank's shop at the Interplanum market. It still stunk. Pandora wondered if she'd get used to it.

"Ah, you've returned." Frank's voice startled her. "I wish I could say I wasn't surprised by that. I wasn't sure you'd make it back from there."

Pandora looked at him. "Why would you make this deal if you thought that?"

"It's not every day you get to make a deal with an immortal," Frank told her. "It was a chance worth taking."

Pandora couldn't find anything to say to that so she just nodded.

### LUCIFER

“You and I are going to do great things,” Lucifer said with a smile. “Adina, I actually like that name, I suppose we can keep it.” Adina looked up at him with bright blue eyes. Lucifer’s smile widened. He had taken over Azazel’s quarters, seeing as his brother wouldn’t be using it ever again. He had never understood why a demon who never slept would need a room such as this. With all the comforts of what Lucifer imagined mortals had on the middle plane. He had gently placed Adina in the middle of a soft bed. She was laying on her back kicking her feet and giggling. It was unsettling how happy she was. Lucifer watched her, fascinated, until she finally fell asleep.

A knock on the door startled him. And when he opened it he was even more surprised by who was on the other side. The dragon stepped inside, pushing past Lucifer, nearly knocking the demon over. “Hey!” Lucifer ran after the creature who was headed straight for Adina.

“She shouldn’t be here,” the dragon puffed. “It isn’t her fate.”

Lucifer stopped in his tracks. “I’m her father, of course she’s supposed to be here.”

“You may very well have created her, but she is not meant to be in this place. It will kill her,” the dragon told him.

“All the more reason why I need to get back to the middle plane and take it over,” Lucifer retorted.

The dragon turned to him. His yellow eyes bored into the space where Lucifer’s soul would be, if he had one. “I’m sorry, Lucifer. But that’s not your fate. I’ve been trying to tell you that for thousands of years. You will fail up there. Every time. It is not in my nature to take sides, but you have brought a half mortal child to a place where she is not meant to survive. If you do not

return her to her mother she will be dead soon. And I will have no choice to take her back there myself. Do not take my words lightly this time, demon.”

The creature stormed out of the room, leaving a puff of smoke in his wake.

### TYLER

Tyler knew he didn't have time to waste but he wasn't going anywhere until he was certain Jonathan was okay. He'd been holding cold compresses to Jonathan's head off and on for several hours. It didn't appear to be working. He hadn't moved since Tyler got there, and his skin was burning up. He was still breathing, though. It gave Tyler comfort that Jonathan's chest moved up and down in a steady motion. As long as that continued, Jonathan was still alive. When he wasn't keeping a close eye on Jonathan's breathing Tyler was glancing over at the couch where Chloe had cried herself to sleep after hours of sobbing and insisting everything was her fault. Tyler did as much as he could to comfort her. He made sure she knew nobody thought that, he didn't think that. This was all Lucifer, Tyler kept telling her.

“I can keep an eye on them, if you want to go.” Azazel had been teleporting back and forth between the Esesa Jane and the apartment, keeping everyone in the loop. Tyler had felt it was better for both Chloe and Jonathan if the apartment wasn't filled with bodies, taking up space, breathing all the air, and making Tyler feel guilty for not rushing to the lower plane to rescue Adina from her father.

Tyler looked up at him. He wanted to point out that this is what happened when he trusted Azazel, but he stopped himself. Deep down he knew Azazel was no match for Lucifer or his three hellhounds. Tyler should have never left. “I'll wait,” he told him. “Just a little longer,” he said on Azazel's concerned look.

“Anything new?”

Azazel shook his head. “Not a thing,” he said, disappearing again.

He couldn't explain why, but it continued to make Tyler mad that none of the gods felt the need to step in and help them. The upper plane, the Greek Titans, any of them could stop all this madness once and for all. But they weren't able to, or so they said. It was important the Tyler and his friends take care of this matter with as little interference from them as possible. It didn't seem right. He closed his eyes and imagined a world where thoughts and prayers made a difference. Just for the hell of it he said a little prayer for Jonathan. He laughed at himself. No one is listening, he said silently. Jonathan stirred awake next to him. Tyler looked up at the ceiling “You're kidding,” he said to it.

“Ouch.” Jonathan put his hand to his head.

“Careful.” Tyler helped him sit up. “Hi,” he added when they came face to face.

Jonathan looked around the room, moving gingerly. “I'm sorry.”

“Don't, this isn't on you.” Tyler kissed Jonathan's forehead and gently wrapped his arms around him. The relief he felt was overwhelming. Hot tears fell down his cheeks. He held onto Jonathan, he couldn't tell how long. When he was sure his emotions were back in place and Jonathan wasn't going to fall back into whatever state he'd been in when Tyler found him he sighed “I have to go.”

“Bring Adina back, and kick Lucifer's ass,” Jonathan said. “You gave the weapon back?”

“I had to, it's more dangerous in my hands, they know I'll use it, and they

can't control that," Tyler said standing up. "Gemma has it now. I'll explain it all when I get back. With Adina."

Jonathan stood up, his legs wobbly. Tyler steadied him. He felt bad, leaving Jonathan in this condition. "Take care of yourself, and Chloe," he whispered in Jonathan's ear.

"Be safe," Jonathan whispered back.

"Always," Tyler nodded. He closed his eyes and pictured the lower plane. It was easier to find the will to get there this time. He had a stronger purpose than ever before. He pictured Lucifer's library, despite knowing it had been destroyed. When he opened his eyes he was in front of the dragon's lair. That wasn't even on the list of places he thought of when he pictured the lower plane. But here he was.

The door opened and Alexis peeked his head out. "Come in," the dragon suggested kindly.

"You knew I was coming?" Tyler asked as he stepped inside.

"I waited for you to teleport and helped you find your way here," Alexis told him.

Tyler didn't know the dragon could do that. But then again, he didn't know a lot about what the dragon could do. They hadn't had a lot of time to train, or get to know each other. Tyler was certain Alexis preferred it that way. "Why did you bring me here?"

The dragon curled up on his pile of treasures and brought his face to Tyler's eye level. "Remember I explained how time works differently here."

Tyler nodded “Yes.”

“It wasn’t a question. It was a statement. Remember, time works differently down here. I’m sorry I can’t explain further, you will understand when you see it. It was important to remind you. That’s all.”

The dragon was always to the point and Tyler knew by the way he said “that’s all” that the dragon was done giving him the information he needed to know. What it meant was a mystery to him. “Thanks?” Tyler said as a sort of question and left the dragon’s lair shaking his head.

#### LUCIFER

“Did you feel that?” Lucifer asked out loud. No one answered. “The Omphalos is here,” he said with a wry smile. He wasn’t sure why it gave him so much joy to know the weapon was on his plane. It usually meant a lot of grief for the demon. But this was different. The Omphalos was here to fight. He was angry, and determined, and that made Lucifer happy. “Wait here,” he said before stepping out of the room.

Lucifer walked toward where his library would have been, if he hadn’t destroyed it. He figured that’s where the Omphalos would be looking for him. And as he stepped through the rubble he saw that he had been right. The weapon stood in front of the mettle grating that used to be the library’s fireplace.

“Lucy,” the Omphalos said in a sing song voice.

Lucifer hated that name. Usually because the people who said it meant it with disrespect. “Omphalos,” Lucifer said, doing his best to not show any emotion in his voice.

“You can call me Tyler,” Tyler said.

Lucifer knew the weapon’s name. He just refused to use it now that he knew what he was. His enemy. Not just because he annoyed the demon to no end. But because that’s what he was created for. “You here to bored me to death, again?” Lucifer taunted.

“You know exactly why I’m here,” the Omphalos spit back at him.

He did know. And it made him increasingly more happy. “Yes, shall we go see her?” The Omphalos didn’t answer, and didn’t move to follow Lucifer.

“What’s the catch?” he asked.

“No catch. You came here looking for Adina. I’ll bring you to her. Of course, that doesn’t mean I’ll let you take her away from me again, but there’s no harm in allowing you to see her,” Lucifer tried to keep his voice steady. He didn’t want his emotions to spoil the surprise.

“You know I have to bring her back to her mother, Lucifer.” The weapon stayed rooted in place.

“Is she not dead yet?” Lucifer retorted.

“She’s going to hold on just long enough to see you defeated, and to see her daughter again,” he said with a great deal of assurance.

That confidence was what annoyed Lucifer most about these exchanges. The Omphalos couldn’t just give Lucifer the win. It didn’t matter. The demon knew he had won this round. Despite his need to get on with the show, Lucifer continued the conversation. “How’s my brother doing? I hope my hellhounds

didn't do him too much harm," he said with a smile.

"He's doing fine," the Omphalos told him. "As is my boyfriend, in case you were wondering."

"I told them all I wanted was my daughter back. I wouldn't have hurt anyone if they'd just handed her to me. But they insisted on fighting back. Strong boy, for a mortal. He put up a good fight."

The Omphalos shifted his weight from side to side. Lucifer could tell his patience was wearing thin. Good. "Now, do you want to see Adina before you go back to the middle plane and report on your failed attempt to rescue her or would you rather scurry back with your tail between your legs and tell them you didn't even have the guts to say goodbye to her?"

He shook his head. "You truly believe you've won," he moved forward. "I'm not leaving here without her. Please, Lucy, lead the way. I'd love to spend some time with Adina before I kick your ass and bring her home. To her family. The one she belongs with."

Lucifer held back the fire he felt at those words. He knew he had to get the Omphalos to follow him now or they would stand here exchanging jabs forever. He walked toward Azazel's living quarters with the weapon following slowly behind him. Lucifer's happiness, and pride in his creation continued to swell as they reached the door to the room. He opened it slowly and let the Omphalos enter before him. He stopped dead in his tracks. Lucifer almost bumped into him. Curled on the bed was Adina. Fast asleep holding a book Lucifer had found on one of Azazel's shelves.

The Omphalos turned to face Lucifer. "What. Did. You. Do. To. Her!"

“She’s beautiful, isn’t she?” Lucifer said with a proud smile.

The Omphalos turned back toward the bed and slowly made his way toward it. As he reached the side of the bed Adina’s eyes opened and she smiled brightly. “Hi, dad.”

The words cut into Lucifer like a dagger.

### TYLER

Tyler’s heart skipped about a hundred beats as he processed the scene in front of him. Adina had grown into a toddler in just a few short hours. He tried to remember how long he’d been on the middle plane tending to Jonathan’s wounds. Had he lost time? The dragon’s voice echoed through his mind. “Time works differently down here.” That turned out to be a huge understatement. Adina’s eyes were green today. And they were staring at him.

“Hi,” he said back to her with a tentative smile.

“Can we go home now?” Adina asked him calmly. “I don’t really like it here.”

“Yes, we can go home,” Tyler told her. She jumped off the bed and reached up for him to pick her up. His heart swelled with pride, love, happiness. He reached down and put her up on his hip. She wrapped her arms around his neck.

He turned toward Lucifer. The demon stood silently at the door of the room. He looked stunned, and hurt. Tyler wasn’t sure Lucifer had that emotion in his toolbox, but his face showed, grief. Tyler approached him carefully. “I’m going to take Adina to her mother now. I trust you’ll stay out of the way and give her what she wants?” Now was not the time to taunt the demon. There was no

telling what he'd do to retaliate if Tyler had pointed out the irony of the situation.

Lucifer nodded at him mechanically. Tyler knew this fight was far from over. But for the moment he was able to teleport out of the room without so much as a retort or any sort of response from the demon.

They arrived just outside Tyler's apartment door. He smiled at Adina. "Don't be afraid if your mom and Jonathan are upset by how much you've grown, okay?"

Adina nodded at him. "Okay dad."

Tyler opened the door and stepped inside. Adina held onto him tightly. The room was much like it had been when he left it, which hadn't been that long ago. As soon as the door closed behind him Jonathan was at his side.

"Oh my gosh," he whispered. "Hi," he said to Adina. She smiled brightly and reached out to him. Tyler let go and let Jonathan take her in his arms. "Wow. You got big!" It wasn't a judgement. It was a simple statement of fact. Tyler couldn't believe he'd gotten so lucky and he wasn't sure he deserved someone like Jonathan. But he was glad to have him in his life.

Chloe was still sleeping on the couch when Tyler approached her. He kneeled down and checked her pulse to make sure she hadn't suddenly passed away. She was still alive. He was glad. It would have been terribly unfair for her to die before seeing her daughter again. "Chloe," Tyler said her name softly. Chloe's eyes opened slowly. "Hey," Tyler smiled at her. "Someone's here to see you."

To his surprise, Chloe reacted much the same way Jonathan had, except for the tears flowing down her face. "Look at how beautiful you are," she said

hoarsely.

“You want to go say hi?” Jonathan asked Adina who nodded. “Can you walk?” She nodded again. He carefully set her on her feet and let her go. Sure enough Adina walked over to Chloe as if she’d been doing it her whole life. It saddened Tyler for a brief moment. He tried not to think of the things he and Jonathan had already missed about raising a child. And he reminded himself they would have the opportunity to raise more.

Adina climbed onto the couch and sat next to her mother. “Hi,” she said brightly.

“Hi.” Chloe smiled at her. “Do we know how old she is?” She asked Tyler.

“I’m nine,” Adina answered proudly.

“She’s nine,” Tyler said with a giggle. He nodded at them and walked toward Jonathan.

“Is it over now? Are we done fighting Lucifer?” Jonathan asked him.

“I doubt it,” Tyler said. “When I got there he was confident he’d won. But Adina called me dad and asked if I had come to take her home. He was so stunned he just let us leave. When he gets over the shock of it. I can’t imagine what he’ll do.”

“Will she keep growing that rapidly or was it a lower plane thing?”

“She’ll grow faster than a typical mortal child, but not this dramatically,” Tyler said.

Jonathan nodded.

“I should go to the Esesa Jane and let everyone know what’s happening here,” Tyler said looking over at Chloe and Adina. Chloe was explaining that Tyler and Jonathan were going to take good care of her and that she was sorry she couldn’t stay around to watch her grow up. Adina smiled at her mother. “I grow very fast,” she said matter-of-factly.

### LUCIFER

There wasn’t anything else on the lower plane to destroy. Lucifer had stopped himself from laying waste to Azazel’s bedroom. Adina’s bedroom now, he corrected himself. The events played out in his mind, over and over again. Adina, his own daughter, chose the Omphalos over him. The weapon would pay dearly for that. He’d get her back and she’d learn to love it here. He hadn’t had enough time with her yet.

Lucifer paced the room. Thinking. Plotting. He’d tried to follow the Omphalos onto the middle plane but the anomaly had been closed. His anger grew as the odds kept stacking up against him. He’d find a way to get back there. He’d get to Adina and bring her home. As he made that promise to himself the words the dragon had spoken to him came flooding back to his mind. It wasn’t safe for her on the lower plane. He knew the dragon was never wrong. He didn’t care. Adina belonged to him and he’d bring her back there until she was ready to battle alongside him on the middle plane. Then she could stay there.

### TYLER

The Esesa Jane was crowded, as usual. It was a harsh reminder that despite Tyler’s world being turned upside down, none of these people were aware of what was going on in it. Tyler heard Phenex’s laugh ring out toward the back of the restaurant. He headed in that direction, looking from table to table until he

caught sight of her. He nodded at her and she returned the gesture. The door to the training room appeared in front of him. He looked around before stepping through it. If anyone had been looking in his direction they'd be surprised. Where he saw a door they would see a solid wall, and he just walked right through it.

The room was empty. Wood Lucifer standees stood in their usual spot. The table where he'd moved the tea cup still had a teapot on it. He closed his eyes and called out to Abby and Prometheus. "Meet me in the training room," he said it out loud despite not having to.

Phenex stepped inside just as Tyler was opening his eyes. "What's up?"

Tyler wanted to laugh, cry, pass out, sleep. But there was no time for any of it. He could feel it all around him. Things were shifting back into place, which meant his time as the Omphalos was about to come, for real. He knew deep down the battles he'd fought over the past several months were nothing compared to what he was about to face. He wasn't sure he was even ready for it. "Abby and Prometheus are on their way," he said.

Phenex had taken her spot at the meeting table and poured herself a cup of tea. Tyler sat across from her fighting the urge to fall apart or nap, whichever came first. Abby and Prometheus appeared at the same time saving him from having to do anything drastic to keep himself from either action.

"I'm sure the two of you know most of this already, but to keep the entire room up to date," Tyler started. "I was able to bring Adina back to the middle plane, again. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on how you look at it, she aged nine years in the time she was down there with Lucifer. The good news is, she didn't much care for being down there. After referring to me as 'dad' she asked to go 'home,'" he said with a smile. "Lucifer was so stunned he just let me

take her back here.”

“Ouch,” Phenex said with a cringe.

“We all know this isn’t over,” Tyler continued. “Not by a long shot. If anything Lucifer is more determined than ever to get to the middle plane and get his daughter back. He doesn’t seem to care about what she wants. But we’ll let him learn the lesson of that on his own.”

Abby sat forward and cleared her throat. Tyler knew this meant he wasn’t going to like what the angel was about to say. “The Archangels have decided to reopen the portal between planes. It restores the balance, they said.”

Tyler shook his head. “So we’re back to where we were in the beginning? Where are they and who’s guarding them?”

“The Abbey and Salvation,” Abby answered, and before Tyler could protest she added “I’m back at Salvation, and you’re gonna get a kick out of this one. Gabriel is guarding The Abbey.”

Tyler laughed. “They’ve got an Archangel guarding a portal at a gay bar?”

Abby nodded her head.

“In that case,” Phenex interrupted their moment. “Lucifer will try to enter through the Salvation portal. No offense my love, but he’s not about to try to get past an Archangel when there’s one still training at the other door.”

“No offense taken,” Abby said with a smile. “I agree,” she added.

“Regardless, let’s make sure both locations are guarded well,” Prometheus

suggested. “We’ve underestimated Lucifer before and he nearly burned down the whole city. Let’s not do that again.”

“No, definitely not,” Tyler agreed.

## LUCIFER

Lucifer could no longer feel the pull of the anomaly that had been opened when Pandora came looking for her daughter. It had been a good plan, luring her here. He should have known better than to expect the effect to last long. He was pacing the space that used to be his library, planning, plotting, growing angrier by the minute. His books were gone. He couldn’t even go see the dragon. Or, more accurately, he refused to. The last time they had been in contact the creature was so angry Lucifer thought he was going to breathe fire. Lucifer pushed that thought out of his mind. That and the next one, which was that the dragon had been right. He had prepared to let the Omphalos leave with Adina. She had been growing more rapidly than Lucifer had expected and he knew it wasn’t good for her to continue to mature that fast. Especially sine he couldn’t teach her everything he wanted her to know as fast as he wanted to. So he’d let her go with the Omphalos. And when she asked him to come along, he’d be able to walk right onto the plane. Because even the king of the higher plane couldn’t deny a father from his child. Not only had she not asked for him to join them, she’d called the weapon dad. He could still feel it like a dagger in his heart.

“Master,” a voice called him out of his misery.

Lucifer turned to see who had disrupted his moment. Not that he wanted to remain in it. One of his soldier demons stood in front of him. “Yes?” He said it with so much attitude the demon flinched.

“You wanted to know when there was any important news to report, and I think, this is really important,” the demon stammered.

Lucifer folded his arms across his chest and grumbled with impatience.

“The portals to the middle plane have been reopened,” the demon said brightly.

“Well, that is important news,” Lucifer said surprised that the demon had actually done something right. He dismissed the demon with a wave of his hand and went back to pacing the empty space.

Lucifer sighed. He was going to have to do it. The dragon’s lair was the only place he hadn’t destroyed, which meant it was the only place he could find information. He slowly made his way down the rock stairs practicing what he’d say to get the dragon to help him. He was certain he had good reason. This was about getting his daughter back.

“Lucifer,” the dragon breathed out.

The demon could feel the anger, and impatience, emanating from the creature’s scaly skin. “I need to know if there’s a way back onto the middle plane, now that the portals have been reopened.”

The dragon huffed. “You know that you are still forbidden from entering the plane. The fact that you’ve been able to go there, twice now, has been very troubling for the balance of the universe.”

Lucifer laughed. “The balance of the universe? If the gods are so intent on keeping things fair and balanced, why have they allowed the Omphalos to take my own daughter from me?”

“She is with Tyler by choice,” the dragon said. “She is not being held against

her will.”

“Unlike she was here?” Lucifer finished the sentence he assumed was coming.

“Those are your words, Lucifer. I cannot help you find a way back onto the middle plane, those answers are not here. It is not in your fate. I have no doubt you will not take no for an answer, however, and I am sure you will find a way.” The dragon climbed high up on his mountain of treasures and was out of Lucifer’s sight.

## TYLER

The Salvation Bar & Grill looked exactly the same as it had the last time Tyler had been there. To be fair, it had only been a few months. But it felt like a lifetime had passed since the last time he had been inside.

“The gods just can’t stand change, can they?” Tyler said as Abby led him to the back, where the kitchen was located. Tyler had been in that kitchen hundreds of times, but it was only recently that he had discovered the refrigerator held a special gift to those who knew about it. A portal to purgatory, which led to the depths of the lower plane, eventually.

“What else has that big of a door?” Abby pointed out.

Tyler put his hand against the cold steel of the industrial sized fridge. He could feel the energy of the lower plane pulsing through it. “As long as Adina is here on this plane, Lucifer will find a way in.”

“We’ll be ready for him,” Abby assured him.

“I still think we should have Gemma here, with the jar, in case things go south,” Tyler said.

“We can’t keep relying on her every time Lucifer tries to get onto the middle plane,” Abby said. “We have to do this ourselves.”

“So we’re supposed to pretend a weapon that can easily deter Lucifer from doing anything rash isn’t readily available?” Tyler insisted. “Isn’t that what it was created for?”

“It’s more like an emergencies only thing,” Abby answered.

Tyler threw his arms up in frustration. “And Lucifer returning to the middle plane to kidnap his own daughter, again, isn’t an emergency situation?”

Abby shook her head. “I’m sorry, but it isn’t. Not my words,” she said walking out of the kitchen.

Tyler followed her quickly. “What, in the eyes of the people in charge up there,” he pointed toward the ceiling “is an emergency situation?”

“We can handle this, Ty,” Abby said.

“I know we can, but wouldn’t it be able to handle it easier if Lucifer knew the weapon was in reach?”

“You’re the weapon Tyler!” Abby screamed at him.

It took Tyler by surprise to see her get angry. It wasn’t in her nature. No matter how many times he’d annoyed her in the past. He stood there, staring at her, unable to respond.

“I’m sorry, but it’s the truth. You’re the weapon created for this purpose. Forget the jar even exists. I can wipe it from your memory if you want me to,” she said holding her hand up toward his head.

“Don’t you dare,” Tyler said calmly. “I wasn’t suggesting that we use the jar instead of me. I was suggesting it more as an including me. I’m not trying to get out of the fight, Abby. I’m trying to even it. We know what Lucifer is capable of.”

“It’s time we show him what you’re capable of, Tyler,” Abby said.

“I wish I had as much faith in me as you do,” Tyler said with a sigh.

#### TYLER

Abby was walking faster than Tyler imagined her short legs could manage. He tried to keep up with her, but she was determined to keep a distance. When they got to the door of Esesa Jane’s Abby had to stop to open it which allowed Tyler to catch up.

“All I’m saying is, Lucifer is more likely to enter through Salvation’s portal,” Tyler said as he and Abby stepped inside.

“In other words, Lucifer won’t try to enter through the portal guarded by an Archangel,” Abby responded. “He’ll go through the one with an easier target.”

Tyler shook his head at her. “Tell me I’m wrong.” Abby just kept walking toward the back of the restaurant. “Thought so.”

Phenex greeted them just as they got to the training room door. “How’d it go?”

“The portals are definitely open and the lower plane is aware of it,” Tyler whispered to her. “The Salvation clientele was decidedly more demonic today.”

“There’s a full house back there today.” Phenex pointed at the wall behind them.

Tyler stepped through the invisible door and into the training room. As Phenex had warned, it was more crowded than usual. He wasn’t so much surprised by that as he was the faces he saw amongst the crowds of people. Even Gabriel and Michael had deemed it necessary to come together for this meeting. Tyler was about to head toward them when he caught a glimpse of Jonathan holding a wide-eyed Adina in his arms. He turned to head in their direction, ready to lecture Jonathan about having brought the toddler with him, when he saw that Chloe was standing with them. Now he was even angrier. A toddler and a dying woman. Tyler had too much to worry about already.

“Hi dad.” Adina’s bright voice snapped him out of his anger. She reached out to him and he took her in his arms.

“Hi,” he said and hugged her tightly.

“She’s a part of this even if we don’t want her to be.” Jonathan knew Tyler wasn’t thrilled, he didn’t seem all that thrilled either, to be honest.

Tyler nodded to him. “I guess it’s all hands on deck,” he said motioning toward Gabriel and Michael who seemed to be in a heated discussion with Abby and another angel Tyler had seen when the battle for LA had started a few months ago. “Wonder what’s going on there.”

“Nothing good,” Azazel said from behind Tyler.

“Feeling a little out of place?” Tyler teased the demon.

“In a room full of misfits and miscreants?” Azazel said with a smile. “I’m good.”

Tyler took another look around the room. Angels, gods, demons, mortals. They were all unusual in some way. What wasn’t unusual was the way they were grouped together. It was just like he remembered his junior high dances. Except instead of nerds, jocks and misfits they were grouped by their own kinds. And just like junior high there was one strong link keeping them all in the same room: survival. He was caught up in the memories of his school days when he heard his voice.

“Tyler, it’s your show,” Prometheus was saying.

Tyler set Adina on her feet. “You got this,” she said with a smile.

That was all he needed to know he was doing the right thing. He’d fight for her. There was no question about it. She had his heart wrapped around her finger.

## LUCIFER

Lucifer was growing extremely tired of being told what his fate was. He didn’t like the idea that he wasn’t in control of it. He was determined to prove free will was much more important than letting the universe decide what you could and couldn’t do with your own life. That had been his goal all along. And he was more convinced than ever that it was his duty to show the world that taking control of your own destiny was more important than putting your life in the hands of a being who only cared about keeping things balanced.

The only question now was how he'd do that. He was still stuck on the lower plane. Unable to pass through either of the newly re-opened portals. They were afraid of him though. The powers keeping him from getting to the middle plane. Why else would they have an Archangel guarding the most powerful of the two gateways?

Lucifer made his way to Azazel's living quarters, to remind himself why he was doing all this, and to see if his brother had left any good books on his shelves. So far he'd only found inane stories written by mortals who thought they knew what being an angel and a demon were all about. Stories made up about his descent from good to evil. It was easy to see how they'd prefer to tell the story of an angel who went bad, to teach mortal children the lesson of doing the right thing. He wondered what they would think if the real story came out. He should write that book, he thought.

He was in the middle of throwing books off Azazel's shelves when the walls of the room began to shake. Lucifer looked around, wondering if the Omphalos had decided to take the fight to him. No one was there. He stepped over the pile of books and headed toward the door. He peeked his head around and saw nothing out of the ordinary. But the lower plane continued to shake. Was it possible they were having an earthquake he didn't cause? Doubtful, he thought.

The shaking stopped. Lucifer surveyed his surroundings, checking on any damage. There wasn't anything more than the destruction he'd already created. When he stepped back inside Azazel's room a figure was crouched down sifting through the pile of books Lucifer had thrown from the shelves. Lucifer assumed one of his demon soldiers had come in and was being nosy about what Lucifer had been up to. "What are you doing? Hey," Lucifer called out.

The figure stood up slowly. It was cloaked in a grey robe with the hood pulled over its head. The sleeves were pulled over the figure's hands. It was

doing everything in its power to keep its identity hidden from Lucifer. This made the demon even more angry.

“Show yourself,” Lucifer demanded. The figure made no move to do so. Lucifer stepped forward, ready to take matters into his own hands. But he ran into a forcefield before he could get closer to the figure. “What do you want?” Lucifer continued to question the stranger standing in front of him. He couldn’t understand why this, being, was bothering him. “Either show yourself, tell me what you want, or get out of my way,” Lucifer said, trying to move toward the figure again. He was unable to move any further. The figure crouched down again and continued to sift through the books in silence. Lucifer grew more and more impatient. But he was stuck in place now. Unable to do anything except watch the being pick up one book at a time, only to put it back down again.

That process continued for so long Lucifer lost count of the minutes that had passed by. When the figure had reached the bottom of the pile it stood up. Lucifer’s patience was long past its breaking point. The figure held out the book to the demon. Lucifer hesitated before reaching out to take it. When it was in his hands the figure disappeared and Lucifer felt the hold on him release. He looked at the cover of the book in his hands. It was blank. He opened it. The pages were blank. Every one of them. Except the last page.

“You will not find anything new if you keep looking in the same direction,” Lucifer read it out loud. “What does that even mean?” He yelled.

To be continued....