



Th Witch
Demon
Chronicles



J H Mitchell



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Part 1: The Price

The morning was dusky. The faint smell of freshly-turned earth wafted in wisps on the misty air. All was quiet, the sounds of dawn muffled by the silence of the rising sun.

She appeared, as she expected, at a crossroads. The air shimmered as she stepped through at the convergence of the rough dirt roads. They stretched into the distance away from her, disappearing into the north, south, east and west. The ground at her feet was undisturbed except at the very centre of the intersection, where a small mound indicated a disturbance in the soil where something had been recently buried.

The boy completed the picture. He stood on the other side of the mound, feet bare and toes curling in the dirt as he stared at her. His moss-coloured eyes shone, but burning deeper within their depths was a faint glow. A glow that only those with the power to see souls could perceive.

A power she possessed.

It was the same scene she had seen a thousand times before. Except it was also different.

She took a moment to glance around. The fresh morning light—the glow of the sun peaking over the horizon—was foreign to her. It had been so long since she had witnessed a sunrise. Hers was the time of darkness and starless nights.

These morning hours, the soft spray of sunlight lighting on the morning dew, were the hours of angels. Just breathing sent short

bursts of numbness through her, reminding her that she was a creature not meant for daylight hours.

She returned her attention to the boy.

He wilted away from her, chestnut hair falling around his face, green eyes wide and almost startled. Too innocent, yet far too knowing to have summoned her.

'You're eyes are red,' he said, whispered, breathed.

His gaze was transfixed on her face. They stood for a moment. The human and the demon; each waiting for the other to move first. Each curious. Each, just a little bit afraid.

She blinked and he shook himself, as if she had been holding him in place—though she knew she had yet to possess that power.

'That means you're her, ain't you?' he asked.

'Yes.'

He shifted his weight, dropping his gaze back down to the ground, at the mound in the middle of the road. The one he had buried a part of himself in—likely a lock of hair or some precious keepsake.

When he looked up at her again, his eyes were a darker. Mosslike and shadowed, yet still shining with the brightness of an innocent.

She suppressed a shiver. She had never dealt with a child before. Even teenagers were touched by the violence of the world. Tainted.

This one, however, was not. He was pure. It shone from him. From his eyes and his hair and his very pores. It sent a crawling feeling along her spine and the question of how he had come to summon her emblazoned on her mind.

She took another look around the crossroads, searching for another source of the summoning, searching for some other party, some protector or controller of this boy.

There was no one. Only the child, pure and innocent and still staring at her. It sent another chill through her.

She folded her arms and said, 'What can I do for you?'

He swallowed and gave a little cough, as if clearing his throat, 'Can you fix people?'

'Fix people?'

He nodded. 'My sister, she's... she's sick. Can you fix her?' His eyes were hopeful, bright, and he added in a rush, 'I can pay!'

'Really?' she asked, raising an eyebrow.

He nodded again, 'Yes. You need a kiss, right? I can do that.'

She couldn't help the smirk that twitched at the corners of her mouth.

'Something like that,' she said.

He hesitated, regaining that wide-eyed expression that was like nails on a chalkboard to her soul. She flexed her fingers, attempting to rid them of the numbness that was beginning to seep into their tips.

'It's not a kiss?' he asked, worry pitching his voice higher. 'She said all I hadta give you was a kiss. I don't got nothing else.'

Uncrossing her arms, she crouched down in front of him, eyebrows drawn. Here was her answer.

'She?'

'My sister,' he explained, feet kicking at the soft dirt at his feet, eyes cast away from her face at her sudden nearness, 'she's sick. She said you can help her get better and all I gotta do is give you a kiss.'

She rested her elbows on her knees, feet sinking into the dirt. 'She sent you?'

The boy nodded, eyes flicking up to hers and away again.

'She told you how to find me?'

He nodded again.

She stood up, 'What's your name, kid?'

'Morgan,' he said, 'What's your name?'

She hesitated, her voice catching in her throat. 'Didn't your sister tell you?' she asked.

He shook his head emphatically. 'She just said I'd know you 'cause of your red eyes,' he paused and tilted his head to the side.

She hesitated before answering with a wry smile, 'My name is Morgana.'

He blinked. 'That's like my name!' he said, voice hitching high.

'You don't say?'

At her tone, he paused to look at her, leaning a little closer than she would have liked. She shifted backwards, having trouble focusing on his eyes and the subsequent shine of his soul.

She stood up and took another look around. With a little more focus than she had used before, she searched for the path the boy had used. Behind him to the west she saw a flicker of blue, the dim light of an adult soul. She had not seen it in the glow of innocence that shone from the boy, but now it was obvious to her. The sickly outline of the blue soul, the flickering darkness of whatever illness was slowly consuming it.

Yes, that soul was one that would have no qualms coming out to the crossroads to bargain for life.

Morgana frowned at the house in the distance. 'How old are you?'

'I'm nine,' said Morgan. 'How old are you?'

She glanced at him, smirking again. 'I'm very old.'

The boy tilted his head to the side, frowning as he looked her over. 'You don't look very old.'

She laughed and turned to him fully. She tried to spot some sort of darkness in the shine. Some sign that he was already tainted. He stared back at her, swaying slightly, hands moving unconsciously with the motion of the wind.

Morgana took a deep breath in. It had been so long since she had even seen a child so pure as this boy. This child with her namesake.

He would make a great addition to the King's ranks. The brightest souls often turned the darkest, and she would be greatly rewarded for stealing such a prize from *above*. Yet the thought of carrying him...

She sighed. 'I can fix your sister,' she said.

His face turned brilliant and the shine from him brightened so much that she had to look away, 'Really?' he asked.

'Quite easily.'

'Like magic?'

The question gave her pause. Her past reared its distorted face in her mind, reminding her of all the reasons she stood there before the boy, rather than in another place. A place where the presence of a

soul like his would not burn her.

Morgana tilted her head. 'In another life, perhaps,' she said softly. 'What I do is more of an exchange.'

'Exchange?'

'I can grant you this... wish—,' she said.

'Like a genie!' he exclaimed, interrupting her.

She raised her eyebrows, 'Something like that,' she said again, 'But my wishes aren't free.'

Morgan flushed and looked back down at the ground, 'Oh, the kiss?'

'No,' she said, 'The kiss is how I give you the wish.'

The boy frowned, 'So... how do I pay you?'

She crouched down in front of him again. 'You give me your soul.'

He froze, eyes wide, sunlight gleaming off his hair and silence filling the fields around them. It was still, quiet, all animals having hidden from her presence, from her darkness.

The boy stood in that silence, caught in it, as her words slowly registered with him.

'My-My soul?'

The brightness of him, and her closeness to it, made it hard for her to focus on him. His purity was raw and bold. Dangerous to her own darkness. Her hands tingled from it, alternating between numbness and a slow, creeping burn. It was her punishment, for daring to be so close to a creature such as Morgan.

'Yes,' she said, 'If you accept my deal, then your sister will be healed and you will have just ten years of life. And then I get your soul.'

His breath hitched. He swayed closer to her, and though his light itched through her, she stayed where she was.

'T-Ten years?' he said, eyes large and breath short.

Morgana nodded. It was the set price she gave all her customers. Non-negotiable.

He was silent. His feet shifted in the dirt. His hands clenched at

the hem of his shirt. His head tilted, eyes drifting back the way he had come, back toward the house in the distance, and the soul that lived within it.

'But you'll fix her?'

'Yes.'

'Will...will I die? Without it?'

'Yes.'

'Will it hurt?' His voice cracked on the last word, hitching in that way that precluded tears.

Morgana whispered, 'Yes.'

He swallowed again. Hard. His gaze became unfocused as he turned back to her. Green bore into red. The child and the demon.

'Ten years,' he whispered. 'I'll be...'

She filled in the end of his sentence, 'Nineteen.'

He looked up her, eyes glistening, and in that moment, she caught a greater glimpse of him.

His sister had known more than she had told him when she sent him on this errand. She had known the cost, and had not told him—had in fact, lied to him. He knew that now.

And yet...and yet she was all he had in the world. No parents or other living relatives to rely on. No one else to protect him.

Morgana saw this, saw it in the stark white of his soul. It scoured her, burned into her mind, and she knew his choice.

'Okay,' he whispered.

She didn't ask if he was sure, didn't check that he understood what he was asking for, what it would cost him. Nor did Morgana tell him what future awaited his sister's soul for sending him to make her deal.

'Have you ever been kissed before, Morgan?'

He crunched his nose. 'No,' he said, 'That's gross stuff grown ups do.'

She laughed.

'You might want to try it before you're too grown up, or you won't get a chance,' she answered.

He frowned at her, but she ignored it, leaning forward to kiss his forehead.

The contact stung and she pulled away quickly, glad she had not touched his lips.

He looked up at her, eyes once again wide, impossibly so. She was so close she could see the flecks of yellow and lighter green in his eyes.

'Did it hurt?' he whispered, his breath ghosting over her face.

Morgana swallowed, 'Ten years,' she said. 'Ten years and I'll be back.'

He started to nod, but before he had even swung his head back up she was gone, leaving the boy standing alone at the crossroads while her own soul burned.

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She *was* back for him, ten years to the day; despite the scars his touch had left on her own shackled soul. They still burned, from time to time, and though her King had rewarded her greatly, even offered her a higher position among his ranks, she did not feel the usual thrill upon collecting a soul.

He was waiting for her when she arrived.

Her hounds strained at her heels as she walked, salivating and snarling at each other, confused as to why they were being held back and taking it out on each other. She flashed them a look and they quelled.

As she entered the room the boy looked up at her. Though he was no longer a boy.

His eyes alighted on her, still so bright, and she felt that shiver from so long ago creep back through her. Back through the tips of her fingers and her lips, where she sometimes still felt the burn of his soul. It had left stains on her. Pure stains that streaked through the darkness.

'You're here,' he said.

His voice was soft and calm. As before it was all the same. Except, as before, it was also different. He was not like the others. He did not run or plead or beg for another deal, for another ten years,

another five, another one. *Just one.*

Instead he sat and greeted her.

'Hello Morgana.'

She stilled her hounds with a wave and said, 'Hello Morgan.'

He smiled at her and stood from the bed where he had been sitting cross-legged.

'How is your sister?' she asked, having not seen any sign of the soul she had healed.

He smiled, 'She's well,' he said, 'No more cancer, thanks to you. I said goodbye to her this morning.'

Her eyebrows shot up, 'Goodbye?'

Morgan nodded, 'Of course. I had to explain what was going to happen to me,' he said. 'But she already knew.'

It did not appear to bother him, his sister's abuse of his soul, and she once again wondered if he truly comprehended the deal he had made.

'You know, you never explained how it works,' he said, 'How you could just... take the cancer away. I've always wondered.'

She raised an eyebrow and smirked, 'Like magic.'

He grinned at her, not the grin of those Morgana typically conversed with, but the good natured grin of a delighted child.

'Perhaps you'll find out,' she added.

The reminder of his imminent death did little to diminish his smile and he leaned back against the bed frame to say, 'Well. Let's get this done then.'

He looked toward her hounds expectantly, and she knew that he had done his homework, that he knew how this was supposed to end. Instead, she closed the distance between them, so that she could once again see the flecks of gold in his eyes.

She kissed him.

His lips were hot against her own, searing at her own charred soul, tearing at the white streaks that already marred her.

He had taken her advice in regards to kisses.

She breathed in, sucking out his soul until the brightness left his

eyes and instead filled her.

Her pain was her penance. His lack of pain, for the moment at least, her futile gift.

He was meant to suffer for his deal. That was the rule of the exchange. That was what the hounds were for. It was their job. Her job. To let them rip through the physical of this world and tear into the fragile soul beneath.

This time though, this time the soul was too bright.

The price too high.

## *Part 2: Everything*

The first girl Morgan had ever kissed had been two years older than him. He was nine and a half and small for his age, but that hadn't stopped him from grasping her shoulders, reaching up on his tip toes, and planting a big, clumsy kiss straight on her lips.

They were full lips. Big and quick to smile. But that hadn't been why he kissed them. In truth, he hadn't even really liked the girl they belonged to. She had shrieked at him so fiercely he hadn't ever dared kiss her again.

Yet, she had been his first. Not because he liked her, not even because he'd really wanted to, but because a demon had once told him to try.

Ten years. Ten years before that very same demon would come to claim his soul. She had told him to practice kissing. To *'try it before you're too grown up.'* It was a warning. He wasn't going to grow up. He would never reach adulthood. He knew that. Had accepted it, even.

So, he took her advice. He tried. He practiced. He became renowned for it. The little boy who kissed girls. Just once. Once per girl. That was enough. He found that every kiss was unique. Some felt nice. Some felt sloppy. Some just plain awkward. Most were just okay.

Even as he grew, the more kisses he gave, the more kisses he took—the more experience gained—the results rarely varied. They were

okay. Not bad. Not great. Just okay.

The older he got, however, the closer he came to the end of those ten short years, the more he wondered what it would be like to kiss *her*. Her lips which had been a soft pink, quirking up in a curious smile as she stared at him out of impossibly red eyes. Eyes that had bored through him, had seen right to his very soul.

When he wasn't thinking about kissing, he was thinking about *her*.

He knew he shouldn't have. Knew that wasting his precious, limited time was ungrateful—stupid, even. There were others who would have given anything just to have the time he'd had. Others who would have given their souls—like he had.

A soul for a kiss.

Well, in truth it was more than a kiss. She—the demon (*Morgana*, his brain whispered)—had given life back to his sister. To the only person in the world he had to love him. Without her, he would have been alone and homeless, scavenging in the scraps of others who barely even knew he existed.

Instead, he led a full—if somewhat short—life.

His focus was fractured. In his lessons, he bounced around between poor skills and endless talent, depending on what captured his interests. He studied animals, built intricate machines, kissed girls—and boys. It wasn't for him. But then, none of them had been for him.

He wondered if she ever thought of him?

He certainly thought of her. Of those red eyes that followed his dreams. The girl who was a demon, with hair that glowed like fire in the morning sun. She stood waiting for him when his eyes closed, standing barefoot in the dirt of the crossroad with the spring fields glowing golden behind her.

He counted the days until he would see her again. Until she would come to claim his soul with a kiss. A kiss that he hoped wouldn't be clumsy.

He found that clumsy kisses weren't so much because one had never kissed before, but more because of a lack of compatibility.

Sometimes there was just no way for two people to mesh. That was okay. For every person that didn't mesh, there was one that would.

He wondered, for ten years, if he would mesh with her? Until one day the ten years was up and there was no more time left to wonder. There was only time to say goodbye. Goodbye to his sister, goodbye to his possessions—all of which had been neatly packed up and given away or donated to those in need (those he would have become had *she* not saved his sister); goodbye to the world he was about to leave behind.

She stepped through the door of his room as if stepping straight out of his memories. She was unchanged, untarnished by the years, as vibrant and beautiful as he remembered her.

'You're here,' he said. 'Hello Morgana.'

'Hello Morgan.'

Her voice was both soft and smooth, yet with a faint husky undertone. As if she didn't speak often. As if she'd waited these ten years to speak only to him.

She closed the distance between them, her presence engulfing him, making his breathing quicken and his pulse race. She stared at him, red into green, and then, before he had a chance to brace himself, pressed those pale pink lips against his.

It wasn't what he had imagined. It wasn't awkward. It wasn't clumsy. It wasn't even okay.

This kiss...this kiss was fire. It was heat. It was light. It was *everything*.

Her lips were dry and surprisingly cracked, chaffing against his with a fierceness that was at once rough and gentle. She was a contradiction. Her hair of fire, her eyes of blood, her hounds of hell—her touch, so soft and gentle.

She pulled back the faintest bit, so that their lips just barely touched. He opened his eyes, staring at her in wide wonder.

A kiss to end all kisses. A kiss to end his life.

Without a thought he pressed into her, closing his eyes even as he felt the beginning of something *wrong* pulling at the core of him. His soul. Crying out a warning. A warning he ignored. He knew the

price he had to pay for dealing with a demon. He knew there was no fighting it. No taking it back.

So instead he succumbed. Gave in. Relinquished control.

Instead he focused on this last kiss. So much better than his first.

His kiss with a demon.

No...his kiss with a demon...who was once a girl. A girl like him. Full of curiosity and wonder. Full of fire. Full of light.

In this last kiss, he saw her for what she really was. Beneath the darkness. Beneath the demon. She was a girl.

A girl that was, for this one moment, his.

### *Part 3: Without You*

Three hundred games of chess. Three hundred bargains. Three hundred deals with the devil. Or rather, with Angels. Yet of all those games, Morgana's side had only ever truly won three times.

Oh sure, there had been numerous draws. Numerous truces formed over small, inconsequential matters. A soul returned here, an Earthquake allowed there. But *true* victories? The kind of victory that would please a king? Only three. And after each victory, a new Angel to take the loser's place. A new angel for Morgana to watch. To study. To defeat in the endless battle for control.

Morgana held back a scoff. Control won through a chess game? It was absurd. If not for the burning nature of each kiss surrendered to her, she might have laughed.

How had she gotten here?

Oh she'd thought this title lofty. The highest honour. A sign of *trust* from the King. Making deals with angels for him? Stealing away small victories, one insignificant game of chess at a time? Locking herself in this empty void. The room between worlds. Sequestering herself to *Limbo* just to make *Him* notice her.

After all, what was a King without a Queen? Without *her*?

More to the point, what would happen to her should she lose his favour? Things had been simpler before she had risen through the ranks, before she'd come to learn what true power was, before she'd garnered *His* notice; before her dealmaking had left the sanctuary of the crossroads.

She sighed and brushed away thoughts of the crossroads, instead eyeing the chess board before her with weary boredom and wary anticipation, counting down the number of moves and attempting to focus on the matter at hand. Not nights spent on lonely crossroads, trading deals for souls. Thoughts like those only ever ended the same way her time there did. With pain, and light, and souls too pure for the depths of hell.

She clenched her jaw and toyed with her knight, not really seeing it, thinking instead of moss green eyes and crooked smiles and scars of light traced across the remnants of her soul.

Opposite her, the Angel (she'd already forgotten his name) drummed his fingers impatiently along the countertop. The shadow of his wings fell across the wall behind, and though she couldn't see them—shrouded from her sight as they were—she could almost make out the ruffled nature of them as he shifted in his seat. Something about his expression irked her. Though she'd not had many occasions to meet Angel's there was something *off* about this one, something almost...

The Angel blew out a breath of air, eyes widening as he stared at the board.

She quirked an eyebrow, tilting her head. 'Why so impatient?' she asked, her tone flippant as she decided on her move.

An entirely too human expression flashed across his face. Exasperation. Irritation. Helplessness. And something else. Something familiar and taunting and terrifying.

His eyes darted upwards to stare at the ceiling above. 'Just... waiting for you to notice,' he muttered, in a voice almost too low for her to hear, to the sky.

'What am I supposed to be noticing?'

Surprised, his gaze dropped back down to her. He was young.

That was the first thing that had surprised her when he'd stepped into the room. Far younger than any of the others.

Oh they all looked the same. Ageless and perfect. Yet he was different. There was something in his face. Something pure and graceless and eager in those eyes that were too green and too much

like someone she had once known that showed how young he really was.

Curiosity had twanged deep in her gut and yet, despite it all, despite the rumours of a new baby angel, she hadn't been able to really focus on him. Those eyes, those damn green eyes that were at once so similar and so different had kept her from focusing too hard on him.

She should be relishing this chance to pull one over on the angels. To take this little, inexperienced creature they had foolishly pitted against her and show him what true power really looked like.

Except...there was something entirely *off* about him. He didn't act how angels were supposed to act, didn't *react* the way angels were supposed to react.

Like now, with his stupid surprise. The unguarded bemusement clouding his features. 'God, you're dense.'

She stared at him, fingers frozen on the little marble statue in her hand.

Never, in over 700 years since her creation, had she heard an angel curse—let alone take the Lord's name in vain.

With a sigh of his own, puffed out in pent up frustration, he pushed up out of his seat—the seat he was never supposed to leave—and turned away to pace.

Pacing. He was *pacing*. Back and forth along the (limited) length of the room, throwing her nervous, exasperated little glances before turning and starting all over again.

What the hell?

She left her piece where it was and let her palms rest on the sides of the table, watching him, reaching for the power that pooled at the base of her spine. Mistrust seeped through her, making her skin prickle. What was he up to?

His gaze flicked to her again, so green (like grass in the cool morning dew) and she had to shake away the sudden feeling of *Deja Vu*. Who was he? *What* was he? More to the point, what was he up to?

She let tendrils of power seep out of the tight ball of control she

had been keeping it in, and shadows crept through the small, annoyingly bright room. A reminder of her presence. Of their purpose. Of her status.

She was called Queen for a reason. And she would not be ignored.

He paused, regarding her with those blasted green eyes—so bright and open and blazing with emotion—and a sharp volt of unease sparked up her spine.

She forced herself to relax, lounging back in her seat and regarding him with a cool, unperturbed expression, as if his actions were completely beneath her notice.

How long had she been making these deals? How many games of pointless chess, each side trying to out manoeuvre the other as the endless negotiations between Heaven and Hell raged on. Games instead of battles. Deals instead of bloodshed. She was the key. The only demon who could withstand the toll, to pay the price of making deals with angels. No one else could last as she did. Not demon, and not angel. She alone was capable of withstanding pure light of angels.

Until this one.

Unlike the others—who disdained to even look at her unless absolutely necessary—he had kept up an almost constant chatter. Always asking questions. Enquiring after her.

‘Hello Morgana,’ he had said that first day, an easy smile slipping onto that almost-familiar face. ‘How are you today?’

Distrust had surged through her. ‘Ready to devour angels,’ she had said, determined to put him off guard, to overthrow whatever manipulation they had planned.

But nothing had come of it. Nothing except more questions.

*‘Did you train your hell hounds? What do they look like?’*

*‘What’s your favourite time of year on Earth? What’s it like there?’*

*‘You were a crossroads demon before this, weren’t you? What was the most interesting deal you made?’*

*‘I heard a rumour that they call you a witch. Does that mean you were human, once?’*

*'Does it hurt, making deals? It's just, sometimes, you look like it hurts.'*

She couldn't understand him, not during his tirade of pointless small talk, and not now, with him staring across the room at her as if she were the answer to all that was wrong with the world.

'You don't see it do you?'

She hid a shiver and clenched her hands around the edge of the table. 'What exactly am I supposed to be seeing?'

He laughed, though not unkindly.

'For someone so adept at knowing what people want,' he said, his lips quirked up in wry exasperation. 'you have a terrible grasp of emotion.'

'I have a perfect grasp of emotion, certainly more so than any angel.'

'And yet,' he sighed. 'you remain completely clueless as to *my* feelings.'

'Angels don't have feelings,' she said reflexively, eyeing him shrewdly and wondering again what new game they were trying to play.

'And yet here we are,' he muttered, dropping those bright eyes down and away, a faint flush of red creeping up his neck.

She blinked, frowning at him in confusion. He was *embarrassed*?

His gaze flicked back to her. Green into red. Light into dark. Her fingers tingled, numb where the scars of light marked her soul. She clenched her hands and released them and still he watched her.

'How can you not see?' he whispered, almost imploringly. He laughed. '*They* do. They keep telling me I'm too emotional. Keep training me and *guiding* me and drilling me in what I'm supposed to do in here, how I'm supposed to win, how I'm supposed to... but it doesn't matter. It *doesn't matter*. Because every time I'm step in here and see you, it's like... like I'm on *fire*, and it all comes rushing back. Do you really not see it? Do really not know how far in love with you I've fallen?'

For a moment the words were lost amongst the tirade. Overwhelmed by the irritation surging through her at his childish

rant. Then the world turned on its axis.

Everything froze. All responses, all words, lodged in her throat. Her thoughts screeched to a halt, jamming into a ten car pile up in her mind. Love? *Love?*

She straightened, jostling the table, but still could say nothing. *Do* nothing. Except gape at him.

Two of the chess pieces toppled over, clattering onto the smooth wooden tabletop. The sound reverberated through her and an instant later anger erupted.

Rising to her feet she snapped, 'You...angels don't feel love!' Yet, despite her tone—despite the suspicion that made her words sharp and her expression distrustful—something stirred in her chest.

A faint *thump...thump...* as her ancient, unbeating heart responded to the sincere, fond exasperation in those frustratingly bright and terrifyingly green (moss green) angel eyes.

'I know,' he said, soft and accepting and despairing. 'I know.'

He stepped back up to the table. Hesitant and nervous and oh so young. So *innocent*. Memories beckoned to her, surging unbidden to the forefront of her mind, but she brushed them away. Tingles crept up her fingertips, tickling up the old wounds there. Wounds of light she had tried to cover up with darkness, never quite succeeding.

Those scars had made her both weak and strong. Weak enough to change the way she made her deals. To change how she bargained. Strong enough to make deals with angels. To bear their burning presence. To kiss them. To inflict a pain of her own upon them. Her own darkness—mottled though it was—carved a path through each angel she touched, causing them as much pain as they did her. More.

After all, wasn't that the point of her being there? She could withstand what even the Dark Angel himself could not. Though, as her fingers turned numb, she wondered if she'd overestimated her strength.

He stepped closer, edging around the table, those damned green eyes beseeching, his breath wafting over her face. Sweet and smelling faintly of coffee.

Angels didn't drink coffee.

'Angels don't feel love,' she repeated, trying to hang onto her anger, to the suspicion that came so naturally when in the presence of all other angels. 'They can't. It's impossible.'

'They've tried to take it away,' he muttered, all his attention riveted on her, catching her in place, disallowing her to move, to even breathe. 'They took away everything else. My life, my memories, my humanity. Everything. Everything except you. I remember you. Standing at a crossroads, in the middle of a field, to make a deal with a boy.'

*Thump, thump...thump, THUMP.* She sucked in a sharp breath, her throat tight and dry and her mind exploding into thought. Into memories. Memories that had been locked away. That *she* had locked away. Memories that knocked constantly on her consciousness. Memories of how she'd gained the scars of light riddling her soul. No...no it *couldn't* be...could it?

Thos eyes. Those damn, moss green eyes.

'I remember waiting. Ten years. Ten years for a kiss. I practiced. Just like you told me to. But it was nothing like waiting for you. It was nothing like kissing you. You...you are *everything*. Everything I ever waited for.'

She wanted to speak. Her hands clenched at the table behind her, her fingers digging into the soft underside of wood. She *wanted* to say something. To call him a liar. To call him a trickster. To tell him to take his games back to those filthy angels and tell them that she was a Queen—the Queen—and she would not be fooled by their schemes. She *invented* these games.

Instead, when she opened her mouth to speak, all that came out was a name. 'Morgan,' she whispered.

A faint smile lifted his lips. 'So you finally noticed,' he murmured, leaning forward, his lips brushing against hers as he spoke. 'Hello Morgana.'

'You can't be...,' she kept her gaze fixed on his, disbelieving and a little afraid. 'You can't...'

*Thump, thump. Thump, thump.*

How? How was he here? Why wasn't he in *hell*? She had put him there herself. She had presented his soul, bright and searing, to Him. It was the whole reason she was here. Apparently, it was the reason *he* was, as well.

She stared at him, at the impossibility of him, and yet she couldn't deny it. Now that she was focused, now that she was really *looking* at him, she could see it. See it in the crooked smile and the calmness of his soul. His soul. So familiar, so aching.

No wonder he had set her skin on fire.

'What are you doing here?'

'I'm here to see you. To be with you. I want to... can I kiss you?'

She wanted to laugh. He was standing so close to her she could feel his lips ghost past her own, not quite touching, but near enough to burn. To sear. To blaze across her soul.

Since the moment he'd stepped through that door into this room between worlds she had been growing accustomed to his burn. Each angel was different. Each fire that filled them unique, burning away the darkness no matter how hard she fought against them.

His particular fire burned hotter than any other she had encountered. Yet...yet she had been able to endure it. It hadn't *burned* so much as it had smouldered. Filling her with a heat that... wasn't quite unpleasant. As if it was a familiar burn. As if she had spent her entire existence preparing her soul for his touch.

She had thought it was because he was new. A fresh baby angel with no concept of the gravity his presence put on others. In a way she had been right; but she had also been so unaccountably wrong. It was because he was *Morgan* that he burned so bright. Because he was Morgan that she—and she alone—could bear the weight of his nearness. Because of the scars his touch had already left upon her. Changing her.

'Morgana,' he whispered, and a shiver crept along her spine at the sound of her name, at the hoarse, almost desperate, way he spoke it. 'Can I...?'

Why? Why? *Why?* 'Yes.'

Each deal she had made had brought her closer to this. Each kiss she had been foolish enough to think she had stolen—smug even, at what she had thought was a victory—had led her to this moment. Each one working at the old, bright wounds in her soul. Stretching them longer, carving them deeper, building on the brightness within her.

Heaven and earth, did he even realise what he was doing to her?

His lips were fire. His soul burning alongside the scattered darkness of her own. Yet she didn't pull away. Couldn't. He had entrapped her. Snared her in her own trap.

He *loved* her? She wanted to laugh at the absurdity. Scream at it. Curse everyone and everything involved in subjecting her to this torment. To a kiss that burned hotter than the depths of hell—a kiss she could no more shy away from than deny her own existence.

It *was* him. Morgan.

She melted under his kiss. Giving in to him. Giving way to the smouldering burn that was emblazoning into an inferno.

He was all light. Bright, engulfing, all consuming, pure light and she threw herself into the kiss, returning it with every ounce of darkness she could muster up from her bruised and aching soul.

He staggered back, his hands rising to catch at her. For a moment she thought he would push her away. To realise who and *what* he was kissing. Even if he *could* feel love. Even if he alone, of all the angels, was capable of such intensity, he had to realise that she—engulfed in centuries of sin—was the wrong choice.

A strange mewling sound seeped out of him. A sound of pain, of pleasure, of *longing*. Such a longing that it sent a sharp pang of fear straight through her.

She pulled away, gasping, her hand flying up to her mouth to touch her swollen lips, staring at him with eyes that felt too large.

Morgan took two steps back. His legs hit the chair he wasn't meant to leave and he collapsed into it, looking lost. His chest rose and fell in sharp movements, his green eyes stunned and dazed.

'That was...' he paused, catching his breath. 'It hurt.'

His voice was filled with surprise, and he stared down at his

hands as if only seeing them for the first time.

Aftershocks. Pain ricocheted up her spine, echoing along the scars of her soul. She took a deep breath, refusing to let him see how much she burned just for that one, forbidden kiss. She swallowed hard against the pain.

'This... we can't. We can't do this,' she said, when she thought her voice would remain steady enough. 'It's impossible. You...me... we're incompatible.'

A strange laugh welled up inside him, bursting out and petering off before it even really started. 'You call *that* incompatible?'

'You said it hurt,' she said, crossing her arms.

'Sure,' he said, lips quirking up into that infuriating smile of his (how had she not recognised that smile?). 'But so does not kissing you.'

She rolled her eyes. He reached out a hand to catch her wrist and tugged at her. She wanted to resist him. To remain where she was. To stay firm. Be the Queen.

Instead, her arms went loose, and she stood before him. Unprotected and exposed. He looked up at her and meeting his gaze was like staring into the sun. A sun that broiled and burned. A sun that gave life.

'It's forbidden,' she said. 'They'll have our heads for this.'

His gaze fell away from her. 'I know,' he said, his brows creasing into an unusually severe frown.

'If they kill me, I'll be reborn. They'll just remake me into what I am. But you...you're an angel. It'll be worse for you.'

'I'm not afraid,' he said, and pulled his gaze up from the floor, a little frown of defiance etched across his angel perfect face.

'You should be. You won't die. You can't. But you can be destroyed. They'll take away everything that makes you *you*.'

'They already tried that,' he said, stubborn as any demon. 'It didn't work.' She opened her mouth to argue, but he cut her off. 'And even if they did, even if it worked, it's worth it. To be with you.'

She shook her head, helpless. 'You're insane. This...' she gestured between them. 'This can never work. You're an angel. I'm a demon. You're not even meant to *be* here. I mean, we haven't even gotten to you escaping, the fact that you're now an *angel*? You'll be hunted for all eternity. *We* will be hunted. There will never be peace.'

A crooked smile softened the intensity of his expression. Green eyes resettled on her, pure and unafraid. Content even.

'I can live with that,' he said, 'if means you'll come with me.'

She stared at him in disbelief. He really *was* insane. That he could be so calm at the notion of being chased for all eternity by Heaven and Hell, just to be with *her* of all people, could be nothing other than complete insanity.

'I can live with running,' he continued, his voice soft, filled with a faint delight that gnawed at the steadily increasing beat of her heart, 'If I'm with you, I can live with anything. I love you, Morgana. No matter how much they take from me, they can't take that. I love you. Until the stars are dust. Until every sun burns out into oblivion. I love you.' He took her hand, sliding his thumb across her knuckles, his touch soft, and warm, and kind. 'They've tried to teach me so much, but the one thing I know for certain, is that I can't live without you.'

She swallowed, her throat dry, unable to find any words to respond to him. After all, what does one say to a declaration like that?

#### *Part 4: Hell and Heaven; Two Sides of the Same Coin*

Of all the tortures he'd had to endure in hell, time was the worst.

Not the pain or the torments or the endless screams. Those he had expected. Those he had prepared himself for.

Instead it was time.

Time that dragged into eternity, the minutes seeming like hours while simultaneously passing hours in mere seconds. The days and nights swirled around each other in a mix of time and space that didn't make sense to his human mind.

Not that there was much human left about him.

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You are no longer what you were.

They say this with a smile, sunlight warm and bright behind them as they gaze down at him with the fondness of a love parent. Except he had never had parents.

~~~

They strip his humanity away during the long eternity of seconds that made up his days. Leaving him in pieces, to regather himself however he could in that dank, cold, lonely place. Sometimes he didn't bother.

He didn't feel quite so alone when he was rendered into so many parts.

~~~

You are no longer alone.

Yet the loneliness creeps in. Unbidden and unwanted. An ache deep within him that tells him something isn't right. Something... something is *missing*. Someone is missing.

He feels it in everything. In the crisp morning air, in the vibrant oranges and reds of sunrise and sunset, in the shocking crimson flowers that bloom by his bedroom window. Someone out there is calling to him, and he wants to find her.

~~~

They tried to break him. Tried to fill him with a darkness that soaked him through, weighed him down, made him feel like he was drowning in a thick, gagging rottenness that filled his noise and clogged his senses. They were destroying him. Bit by bit, they were tearing away the pieces that made him all that he had been and all he would have become. The things that made him... Morgan.

~~~

Your name is Ezenhym.

He frowns up at the soft clouds above, pure and white against a summer blue background.

Ezenhym?

Yes.

He follows the path behind them, trailing slow in the morning light, brushing his hands against soft budding petals and feeling... at odds.

It is always bright here, bright and brilliant, no matter the time of day or night; the skys are clear and rays of moonlight and sunlight glittered off the iridescent wings in a perpetual rainbow of *colour*. A splash of red catches his eye and he pauses, a memory--whose memory? His? How does he have memories?--of red eyes staring into his soul, a soft kiss pressed against his forehead and he blinks.

Enzenhym, are you well?

He doesn't know. But the ache within him--the loneliness--intensifies. He is not well. He is incomplete.

~~~

He pieces himself back together just in time for night to fall. If the days are loud and endless, the nights are silent and cold. Empty. Void of anything. He longs for sleep, but it rarely comes. He is exhausted and spent and ready to collapse, but the nights drag out, cold and shivering and alone.

Until, just as the sun is set to rise, his breath evens out, his heartbeat slows, and his mind succumbs to rest. Just a few minutes. Just a few moments to recoup his breath. But it is enough.

Enough to feed his soul. To remove the taint of darkness that threatens his existence. To remind him of why he is here. Of who brought him here.

Morgana.

~~~~

You are special Enzenhym. We have such high hopes of you. You must listen to us. You must obey.

They train him. Teach him. Show him how to behave. What to say. What to do. They tell him what to want and he listens

At first.

But time is a fickle beast, and soon, it catches up to him and he begins to realise the truth.

He is not free here. He was never free. He had merely traded one prison for another.

~~~~

Time is the enemy. He loses sense of it. Of the days and nights. Of the past and the present. Of reality and dreams.

She is there, in his dreams.

He knows she isn't real. Just a figment of his mind. Still he clings to her. Of all that he experiences in this hellscape, she is the thing that keeps him sane. Even as the darkness claws at him, even as the light sears him. Burns him through. Remakes him again and again and again.

Time is an endless loop, and his new life begins before he realises the old one has ended.

Still, she remains the only thing he is sure of.

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She is a demon. She is a witch. She is very dangerous. Do you understand? You must be very careful. Do not underestimate her. You alone can become her undoing.

Her name is Morgana.

~~~

They remade him. Erased him. Erased everything he had ever been. Made him new. Made him whole. Made him *more*.

He knew better, though. Something was missing. He had felt it, deep within, even before he had seen her. She had only made him realise just how much he had wanted to find her. Just how much he had needed to.

They hadn't realised then, when they'd sent him into Limbo to try his hand at unravelling the Witch Queen. They hadn't made the connections.

But he had.

The minute he stepped into that room and saw her, all those carefully laid plans, all the preparation and the information—who she was, what she was, how dangerous she was—it all slipped away.

Something ignited within him and the emptiness, the aching loneliness that they had tried to fill with light and lies and promises of glory and power, it all vanished.

Here, here was something that he wanted.

~~~

'I love you,' he says. 'Until the stars are dust. Until every star burns into oblivion. I love you.'

'I...,' she stared at him with impossibly red eyes, and the moment between her words seemed to stretch into an eternity. Hope filled him. Hope that he had found the one thing he had longed for his

entire life. All three of them, in Heaven and Hell and Earth. All of them so different, yet exactly the same. He had longed for her, and there she was, finally before him again.

Yet time remained the enemy.

'I'm sorry,' she says, and her voice is soft and despairing, her eyes bright with tears as she shattered every hope his heart held. 'I'm sorry I... I can't.'

And just like that, his world tumbled into pieces once more.

Part 5: Lost

Morgana's head pounded with the constant noise of battle. Swords and axes and arrows clattered against shield or tore through flesh and still the worst of it all was the sheer volume of noise. She missed the quiet. The midnights spent in solitude and the dusky silence of a morning just risen, days spent on crossroads, with nary a soul in sight. Sometimes, she even missed chess.

She grit her teeth, forcing away the memories, steeling her resolve and pushing her way through the throng of bodies, some demonic, and some angelic. Chess. Ha! Years wasted to keep the peace, and here they were, right back where they started, each side trying to destroy the other on the eternal battlefield.

Nothing ever changed.

And yet...

An arrow grazed a flock of angels in the grey sky above her. She heard the whistle, felt the call of the weapon she had helped create and glanced up just in time to see the flock part, dodging out of the way. Projectiles were nothing to angels after all, who moved with agile grace in the sky. Like winged, nightmarish warriors from above.

As they scattered, though, one wayward angel dipped below the rest. His formation was sloppy, his wings not quite fast enough to escape.

A momentary silence fell around her as all the demons below froze, drawn by the spray of something golden splattering out from

where the arrow struck. Wings collapsed, and the angel went down in a flurry of feathers and golden blood.

The silence, the shock, the surprise, reigned for but a second before the jeers and shouts of victory erupted around her.

Morgana couldn't breathe. She stared at the fallen angel struggling back to his feet. An angel that was too new. Too familiar.

No. *No*. Why would he be there? Why would they bring him there? There was only one reason that arrows aim had struck true. One reason the angel didn't move in sync with the others. His movements and style as unrefined as a fresh new warrior.

He'd never been in battle before.

How could he? When he was a fresh baby angel. The only new angel created in over a thousand years.

In a flash, demons surged forward, each as eager to be the first to capture the fallen angel as the next and Morgana, almost overwhelmed by the sudden clamour, lashed out.

Oh she might have been demoted, but there was more than reason she had been queen. Black tendrils of magic seeped through the crowd, lashing out at those that dared to step into her bath as she made her way forward.

Slowly, they noticed her and though contempt warred with eagerness across most their faces, they quelled in her presence, shrinking away from her as she allowed her magic to pour forth, unrestrained.

The air thickened and even the angels paused in their approach, wary of her. She was the demon who could withstand the light of angels, the Queen of the Crossroads, the Witch Demon.

It gave her a moment to breath. To take stock and compose her thoughts and make a plan. She wanted to laugh. Felt it bubble up within her, mirthless and somewhat hysterical.

How had it all gone so wrong?

'Morgana,' said a cruel, almost lilting voice as she stepped past the edge of the crowd. 'I caught you a little beast. Care to do the honours?'

She flicked her gaze sideways, keeping her expression cool and

disinterested.

Azareth, tall and inhuman—like most demons borne of Lilith—tilted his horned head toward her, black eyes gleaming with the pleasure of battle. He held out the long scythe they'd spent centuries forging for this precise moment.

The moment they would kill an angel.

Thump, thump... Thump, thump.

She took the blade, ignoring the flicker of disappointment and burning hatred in Azareth's gaze. For the briefest moment he held fast to the handle, not quite willing to relinquish his hold on it. She didn't blame him. A task such as this was a task to be envied. To kill an angel? What greater achievement could there be?

For that achievement to be fulfilled by a demon that had once been a human?

Thump thump, thump thump.

Well... no wonder they hated her.

She gave the blade a brief twirl. In part to test the weight of it in her hands, but also to turn back the crowd. The scythe was long and dangerous, sending the demons scattering back.

Her magic still seeped across the ground, a reminder of her power, of the *reason* she had been chosen to become a demon. The reason she had risen through the ranks. The reason she had been favoured by *Him*.

But that was before things had changed. Before *she* had changed. And now, she wasn't sure her reputation would be enough to hold them back.

Thump thump thump thump.

The blade dipped down toward the ground. She turned her head, staring at the fallen angel, still clumsily trying to get to his feet. In a moment, the other angels would join him. They would try their luck against her dark magic to try and rescue him. To save him. How could they not? He—like her—was unique. They couldn't risk loosing him.

But then, neither could she.

The blade hit the ground. It scraped through the mixture of mud

and blood (blood black and golden, demon and angelic) and the sound echoed across the mud-strewn battlefield, sending shivers of discomfort up her spine as she stalked toward the fresh spattering of blood on this broken battlefield between worlds. The theatrics of it almost made her smile.

Until she stopped before the fallen angel.

'Morgana,' he gasped, green eyes flickering up to her.

'Don't speak,' she said.

She wanted to reach out to him. To touch him. To tell him he would heal, that his wounds would recover. He still had time. Angels weren't so fragile as to let a simple arrow bring them down. Yet she held herself still. Her touch would be of little comfort to him now.

The crowd behind her grew impatient.

'Morgana?' asked Azareth in a deceptively mild voice. 'Enjoying the view, are you?'

She flexed her magic and turned, raising the blade from the ground to point at the scurrying creatures creeping after her. Magic and blood, multicoloured and poisonous, dripped from the blade.

She raised her chin. 'Back off.'

Stunned silence.

'Morgana,' Azareth's tone was curious, his gaze narrowed. 'What're you doing?'

Thumpthumthump.

She lifted her chin, hardening her traitorous heart into silence as she glowered back at the crowd of demons with all the powers she commanded.

How had she let it go so wrong?

'Morgana?' the voice at her back was pained and yet hopeful, and her jaw clenched.

Why hadn't she gone with him before?

She ignored him and glowered back at the demons around her. They were beneath her. Weak and snivelling, not content with their lowly positions but too cowed to do anything about it. Not like her. No, she had kicked and clawed her way up the ranks. She had

earned her place. Earned the right to take what she wanted.

Well. Now she knew what it was that she wanted to take.

She mustered her resolve and made her voice firm and commanding. Queenlike, some might say.

‘Not this one.’

‘*Excuse me?*’

‘This one is the human,’ she said, as if talking to someone too stupid to understand. ‘The one they *chose*. The one they *changed*. The one they *stole* from us. If we kill him, we’ll never know why. We’ll never *how*. He’s valuable alive.’

Azareth’s black eyes shifted between her and Morgan, studying them. Studying her. Her skin crawled. She felt the old wounds of light itch as he looked her over and she wondered if he could sense her weaknesses. She raised an eyebrow, looking down her nose at him as if disgusted by his lack of comprehension and foresight. Which, she was actually.

‘She...has a point. The King may want...’

‘Shut up,’ Azareth said, his tone lazy and yet brooking no disobedience.

Behind her, one of the angels from above finally grew a spine and dropped to the ground. She heard the thud as the slight and yet heavy angel hit the mud. Heard the squelch as they knelt. She made sure to keep her magic at bay. Present, but waiting. Showing them that she was aware that they were there, but giving them leave to take Morgan.

‘I’m fine,’ Morgan gasped. ‘I...Morgana?’

Azareth’s expression shifted, and Morgana squashed down on the reflex to wince. What in Heaven was taking them so long? Couldn’t he just shut up and go?

Azareth’s shoved both his hands into his pockets. Unlike the lower level demons, he had no need for armour, his power shielded him like a cloak. ‘I’m at a loss,’ he said, shrugging his shoulders and staring at her with an incomprehensible expression. ‘In 700 years I don’t think I’ve ever seen an expression quite like the one on your

face right now. Are you *afraid*, Morgana?’

‘Come,’ whispered the angel-rescuer at her back. ‘Gabriel has called a retreat.’

‘Wait,’ Morgan coughed, and Morgana heard the ache in his voice. Heard the spittle of golden blood that welled up from some deeper wound. ‘What...what’re you doing? Morgana?’

‘Get out of here,’ she hissed, half turning her head but not taking her eyes off Azareth.

‘But...’

‘Now!’

‘It’s a pity,’ said Azareth. ‘We had such high hopes of you.’

She prepared for him to fling himself into the fray. To summon another weapon and attack. She was ready. She was strong. She *knew* she could take him.

Unfortunately for her, so did he.

‘Sabriel!’ he called.

In the split second it took for Morgana to realise what was happening, for the whistle of a dagger flying through the air to reach her ears, terror engulfed her. Terror unlike anything else she had experienced. Not since becoming a demon. Not since 700 hundred years ago, when she had been nothing but a mere mortal human. A little witch. A lonely girl.

For a split second she froze. The darkness warred with the scars of light. If she stayed where she was, if she let Sabriel’s dagger pass, then she’d be saved. After all, so far she hadn’t done anything that couldn’t be explained by a will to serve *Him*. This angel was valuable, of that she had no doubt. She could let the dagger pass, let it strike him, go back to making crossroad deals and be free. Free of angels and their burning presence. Free to do whatever she wanted, to *be* whoever she wanted to be. Free, and alone.

She spun, dropping the scythe and diving for the two angels behind her. For her angel. For the boy whose soul she had taken. Morgan’s gaze met Morgana’s. Moss green eyes widened in realisation and horror.

'No.'

The impact hit her harder than the pain. She staggered, her feet slipping in the mud.

'No! No! Let me go! Morgana! Let—Morgana!'

'Morgan! Stop, we have to go!'

Cold seeped into Morgana. It touched her lips first. Where her soul was brightest. *Cleanest*. Pure. Pure from kissing angels. From kissing *him*.

It seeped along the old scars along her soul. Wounds of light that still ached in the presence of angels. In the presence of Morgan. First cold. Then numb. She was surprised by how much of her senses were dissipating into nothingness and she knew, as it crept first along every patch of purity that had worked its way through her soul, that they'd really done it. They had made a weapon that could kill angels.

She gasped, her knees buckling, the scythe slipping from her hands.

Arms wrapped around her, capturing her before she fell. She felt his own injury, felt the warm blood seeping into his clothes and onto her. He slipped and the two of them crashed into the ground, their fall broken only by the wrecked ruin of Morgan's wings.

'Morgana, Morgana. Please, no, God. No, you're okay. You're okay. Help her! Stop standing there and help her!'

'That's not possible.'

Morgana recognised the voice, but it took her mind a moment too long to place it. Azareth. Standing over them with that infuriatingly curious expression.

'What do you mean? You're demons. That's what you do isn't it? You bring people back! You fix them!'

'For a price.'

The numbness receded just enough for her to feel the panic return. 'Don't...' she gasped.

'Fine!' Morgan said his voice harsh and choked and desperate, his arms, lean and strong and warm, tightening around her. 'I'll pay

your stupid price. Just fix her. *Please.*'

Objections rose from the other angels. There were more of them now and Morgana could feel the hatred in the air thickening, like lightning before a storm. The battle wasn't over yet.

'Morgan,' her voice was faint. 'You have to go... before... before they start fighting again.'

He didn't listen. He was staring up. At Azareth.

Her vision blurred. 'Morgan.' She couldn't see his face, but she knew the expression that would be there. Could hear the anguish in his voice as he spoke.

'I'll give you my soul,' he said, sobs underlying the careless tone of the words he choked out. 'That's what you want, right? Take it, just...just take it...just...save her...please...'

'He means it,' said someone in the distance, surprised by the sudden realisation.

'Of course he does,' said Azareth. 'Look at him. He's in love with her.'

'Morgan,' she shifted, blinking hard and trying to refocus on his face. To see those eyes, green and passionate and *warm*. 'Please....don't. You...'

He looked back down at her, blinking furiously, tears splashing down into the bloody mud. Red and gold swirling together in splattering patterns. 'I'll find you. I promise. I'll find you. I'll always find you.'

'I'll be waiting...'

'I'm afraid that won't be possible either,' said Azareth, and Morgana cursed him, hating him for not letting Morgan have this final gift of hers. 'That dagger was meant for one of you. It is a weapon we've been working on for centuries. A weapon to kill angels. She will perish here. Her body will turn to vapour and her soul will be trapped in the ether. Trapped in a void. A world apart from worlds.'

Devastation. Terror. 'Wh...what?' A tightening of hands around her arms. Clawing, clinging.

'She will no longer exist in this world. Ever. There will be no resurrection. No reincarnation. She is bound for another place. A lonely existence in a barren place not fit for life. As much I as would delirious in taking your soul, this is deal I cannot grant.'

Water dripped onto Morgana's face, and for a moment—one delirious moment—she thought it was raining.

His head was bowed, leaned over her, staring at her with incomprehensible denial. Tears splashed down onto her face.

He was crying for her. She wanted to laugh. Who'd have thought an angel would cry for her? A girl who became a witch who became a demon. She'd been making mistakes her entire life, but finally it seemed that she'd done something right.

For how else would someone as pure and beautiful as Morgan shed tears for her?

'Morgan...' she whispered. 'Morgan, I...I love you.'

His shoulders shook. 'I love you.'

'Until every sun burns out into oblivion...Right?'

'Yes,' he sobbed. 'Until oblivion.'

The numbness closed in and the aches, the slow burn that rattled through every sliver and crack in the darkness of her soul, burned out. She sighed. Something that might have resembled contentedness eased into her in place of the pain.

Here, dying in the arms of an angel, she finally felt...happy.

Part 6: Found

The morning was dusky. The faint smell of freshly turned earth wafted in wisps on the morning mist. All was quiet. The sounds of morning muffled by the silence of the rising sun.

Except... the sounds of morning were not muffled, but *missing*.

Where was the bird song? Where was the whisper of wind through the tress? *Where were the trees?*

There was nothing. Nothing around him except the desolate, rocky landscape stretching endlessly into the grey horizon. In every direction there was nothing. No clouds, no trees, no mountains.

He turned in a circle, despair trying to bring down, making his knees weak as tears welled in his gaze. Was it for nothing? Had he been wrong? Had he risked everything to end up alone after all. in a world apart from all other worlds. A desolate lonely prison for the only angel to ever have died. The only angel to have been killed. A prison meant for him and him alone.

He stared up at the grey sky and wanted to scream.

Except, he had never been one to accept defeat.

There was nothing for it. He would search this planet. He would know every inch of it's surface before he ever succumbed to miserable defeat.

He scrubbed his hands over his face, slapped his cheeks and straightened his shoulders. He cast his gaze, bright and green in a landscape of grey, and searched the horizon, trying to find anything to make one direction more appealing than the other.

He paused, frowning into the distance. It was dark smudge on the horizon, no more than his fingernail. He took a steady breath, his heart fluttering in his chest. Okay. A smudge was better than nothing.

With hope wedge in his throat, he took a deep breath of determination and—with nothing else to call his attention—he set his gaze upon the distant mountain and began to walk.

~~~

The climb was steeper than it looked from the bottom. He had walked for hours with no change. No shifting sun, no darkening or lightening of the sky. The higher he climbed, the more he expected to see a peak of orange leaking over the horizon and yet none came. No bright orange glow to light up the greyness of the world. Just the continual grey half-light of dawn without the rising sun to follow.

He panted, pausing every now and again to fill his lungs with surprisingly crisp air before continuing up the endless slope.

Rocks slipped and tumbled around him. It was a treacherous climb and he fell twice. His palms stung, the stones tearing through his skin, leaving his hands splotchy and red.

Still, he didn't stop. The higher he went, the closer he got, the more he felt the need to accomplish his goal. To do *something* other than just exist in the grey world.

Near the top something changed. He paused, his face dusted in grit and sweat, and tried to even out his laboured breathing, trying to figure out what was different in his cold, empty world.

Wind. For the first time since he'd died he could feel the wind.

A cool, soft breeze ghosted across his face and his green eyes closed in relief. He tilted his face toward the sky, relishing in the sweetness the wind carried across his skin.

He breathed in, tasting all the scents the wind brought with it to tantalise him. The smell of freshly turned earth.

His eyes flew open, wide and green, like moss covered stones. A sense of urgency rushed through him and he was running.

Scrambling up the rocky hillside. Stones tumbled. A small avalanche begun below him. He slipped and fell and crawled. Staggered to his feet again.

The crest of the hilltop vanished before him and he stumbled over the sudden ditch, tumbling to his knees.

Panting, he tried to catch his breath.

Movement caught his eye, and he lifted his head.

Colour. Greens and blues and the clearest of water trickling through a rocky riverbed and on its edge, kneeling by the water and staring at him with startled amber eyes, was a girl.

She stood, surging to her feet and then freezing in place, still staring at him with those wide, impossibly fire-like eyes.

Something uncurled within him. He'd almost given in. Almost allowed the doubt and despair to catch hold of his heart. Yet here he was, in a lonely world constructed just for him, and him alone, and still she stood before him. Just like he knew she would.

'Morgan,' his name was a ghost of a whisper across her lips.

Pushing himself to his feet, he stood straight, a faint smile curling at the corners of his lips. A dimple formed in one cheek as the purest of joy chased away all the pain and aches in his body.

'I told you I'd find you,' he said.

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Fin

Interested in more?

Jade Mitchell is a professional multitasker, who is never happier than when discussing the world of storytelling, whether it be her own published novel (*Extinguish*), one of the many ideas bouncing around her mind, or her favourite story of the week.

Always with her mind on faraway worlds, Jade began writing between studies of *The Taming of the Shrew* and Trigonometry, and—encouraged by her teachers (amidst plaintiff cries to put away her stories and focus on classwork)—went on to complete a Bachelor of Creative Industries at the University of the Sunshine Coast.

Jade is fascinated by people, especially ordinary people in extraordinary situations; so much so that she has not only created fantastical characters but, with the help of her partner, two tiny humans of her own. Now she juggles raising two rambunctious toddlers, working the “day” job in a busy office, building a publishing business, and of course, working on her first love: writing. Sometimes she writes novels, sometimes poetry and sometimes even wedding vows. Mostly though she writes about people.

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