Sky's Edge
By Kristen Ashley

Teaser Chapters

Prologue
Curse

Tanyn

Three Days after the Midnight Masque in Night's Fall…

King Tanyn alighted from the craft.

He heard the hiss of the door closing behind him, but he paid no mind to it.

His mind was on the ice steps in front of him.

He allowed those steps to lead his gaze and his attention up to the castle that rose high above him, a riot of snowy turrets with golden warmth flooding from lit windows.

The whole thing was a fancy, a folly, a magician's trick.

And a not-so-inside joke.

But underneath, it was a witch's curse.

Berg Castle, the royal residence of the monarchs of Sky's Edge for the last six hundred years, was coated in snow.

This, while the inhabitants of that realm, if lore could be believed (and Tanyn knew it could), were delivered direct from the pits of the fiery levels of the hells.

It had not been built to resemble the fairytale castle it appeared to be now.

It had been built to convey power. To intimidate.

Pain, betrayal and loss were what caused it to be packed with snow.

Tanyn ascended steps he had not ever taken in his life, for he'd been born to sit on the throne but was banished from that castle when he was barely able to walk.

He stood at the top landing in front of golden doors that shone so brightly, not only from their color, but also from the eternal gilded fire blazing from the large lantern that hung above him.

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He turned and stared at the lights spread before him, demarcating the capital city of Sky's Edge, Abyssinia.

His city.

His realm.

His.

He turned back to the doors.

For this, his first visit since he was a year old, he had dismissed all the staff who worked there.

It was his first visit as king.

Therefore, he had to push through the doors himself.

He did not wander the chambers.

He did not marvel at the centuries-old magic that had created the snow walls and ice marble floors, ice crystal chandeliers and frost-edged windows.

He did what he promised his mother he would do when this day arrived.

He descended three levels under the castle.

He went to the dungeons.

Once there, he took the skeleton key he'd demanded, and received, and used it on the antique lock to an area of the castle he'd been told hadn't been used in four hundred years.

He threw open the old wooden door fortified by iron and instantly recoiled.

Centuries of torment, misery, torture and lost hope had a feel that endured time.

It also, he just discovered, had a smell.

He allowed himself to adjust to it, and after he entered, instead of voicing his command, he turned to the bank of switches at his side which had been installed when electricity had been harnessed for a variety of uses.

Tanyn hit the switches.

The space illuminated.

He'd been told, due to the fact it had not been in use for a very long time, this area had not been updated at all since the early 1900s, and the meagre light fixtures proved it.

He moved through the shadowy first room, which could be considered a form of reception area, though not a welcoming one, if the chains affixed to walls, walls not made of glinting snow but of glittering black stone, told the tale.

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Next up was a sort of lounge, with rickety tables and chairs left to disintegrate, plus an old iron stove that had provided warmth back in the day for the guards.

It wasn't providing warmth now, and this area was certainly not included in the temperate seventy-three degrees that the rest of the castle rested at, regardless of its wintry walls.

More magic.

But no magic down there. It was as cold as the Borea Sea.

He moved through the guards' lounge, down the long hall made of stone punctuated by wood doors, also fortified by iron, that had small, barred windows to look through to see the prisoners and slit doors at the bottom to shove food inside the cells.

At the end of the hall, there was nothing but a stone wall.

Or, to anyone else, it was nothing.

To him, only to him, it was something.

No.

Not something.

Everything.

He could see immediately his half-brother, Arnaud, had been told this tale.

He could also see further proof Arnaud had never been the rightful king of Sky's Edge.

There were vicious scrapes and black blast marks marring that wall. A great number of them.

He'd tried to get in.

And he'd failed.

Tanyn simply stood there for perhaps two seconds before all the lights in the room illuminated red.

When they did, he wasn't practiced at it and the muscles of his mouth found it odd, but even so, they moved to form a smile.

It was then the stones started ticking.

The one at eye level moved out, then up. Then another. Another. A fourth. A fifth. Then the sixth, seventh, eighth.

More.

Until those stones formed an arch around a doorway that led into a crimson-lit stairwell that went in one direction.

Down.

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Tanyn took a deep breath.

He thought of his mother.

He did not think of his father.

He moved through the arch.

And descended.

Chapter One

Pride

Catla

Three Weeks after the Midnight Masque in Night's Fall…

The Sky's Edge king's UtiliSport hovered over Mom and Dad's landing bay at the back of their house on the toney Horn Island, off the coast of the city of Nocturn in Night's Fall.

I sat in the back among a three-male security detail I did not (yet) need, waiting for the bay doors to open.

They did.

We descended.

I heard the *whoosh* of landing, the craft powered down and my door whistled open.

Not looking at any of the males in the craft, I put one sleek black patent leather spike-heeled pump to the steel floor of the bay, tucked my slim black patent leather envelope clutch against my ribs and alighted.

I immediately saw Johnson, my parents' human butler, standing just inside the door to the bay.

He was frowning disapprovingly at me.

This was an expression I was used to from Johnson due to the fact he'd been running my mother and father's household since I had memories, and I had been doing as I pleased since I emerged squalling from my mother's womb, two weeks late.

Yes, late was a thing for me. Doing things on my time was a thing for me. And doing things that annoyed the hell out of my father (not always intentionally, but full honesty, sometimes it was intentionally) was further a thing for me.

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What could I say?

I was half demon.

This expression on Johnson's face was because I was late for the upcoming family meeting.

Twenty minutes late.

This time intentionally.

And it wasn't to be a bitch or anything.

It was to make a point.

Johnson (and no doubt my parents) knew it.

I wanted to have this meeting like I wanted to have someone dress me in pink.

Demons didn't do pink, as a matter of course.

I didn't do pink, as a matter of principle.

We could just say, I had baby pics where Mom had put me in pink and frills, and even when I was incapable of speech, ambulation or feeding myself, I had a sour look on my face due to my distaste of my clothing.

And this had nothing to do with the fact that pink seriously clashed with my coppery hair (well, not nothing, but that was only a minor factor).

"Your parents are in your father's study," Johnson intoned.

Of course they were.

Dad couldn't pull his whole Master of the House thing if we weren't in his study.

The door to the elevator that led up to the house slid open at my approach, and I headed through it.

Johnson entered with me.

Luckily, King Tanyn's males stayed behind.

And the doors slid closed.

"Will you be joining us for dinner?" Johnson asked.

Absolutely not, I answered in my head.

Oh yes.

I was nursing a serious grudge against my father and would continue to do so if this situation didn't correct itself the way I needed it to, maybe forever.

"I have plans," I said.

"Of course," Johnson murmured.

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Did I detect a hint of understanding in the butler's tone?

He revered my dad. He adored my mom. And even though I tried him on a variety of occasions through the years, I knew he felt the same for me (when I wasn't vexing him…or Dad).

And he was human, so he didn't understand the situation I was in.

Even so, I did detect that hint.

The doors slid open.

Johnson hung back and I strode into the house I'd grown up in.

Mom had done a full décor overhaul two years ago. Gone was the modern, streamlined design she'd crafted just over a decade ago when I left home and went to uni, and she'd needed something to turn her mind to because "my baby is all grown up and heading out into the world on her own."

She'd struggled with that, Mom did. It hurt to watch.

I'd always been super okay being an only child. Until then.

But by that time, I was raring to get out there and make my mark.

Now, in its place was an even more modern, streamlined design made up entirely of whites and creams, this included the floors and walls.

As such, the cavernous first floor that was all open plan held a variety of seating areas with armless couches and chairs and hovering tables and drone lamps.

Dad teased Mom incessantly about how he couldn't relax and watch a screen with somewhere to rest his head.

Mom then teased Dad back about how he always had a headrest, and she had close proximity to play with his hair.

Yes, this meant his headrest was her lap.

Yes, this was cute.

Yes, since they were my parents, it was also gross.

And yes, in that moment, it served to further infuriate me because Dad got to fall in love.

Dad got to pick the being he wanted to spend the rest of his life with.

I did not.

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Hence my very recently arranged marriage to King Tanyn of Sky's Edge, which segued into me carrying a grudge that might last forever, and obviously further led to me being late to this meeting, which was to discuss my arranged marriage to King Tanyn.

I was seeing someone.

Did that matter to Dad?

No.

Of course, things with Bash were very new. We were only seven weeks into it. I didn't know if he was the one.

But I knew I liked him. He was interesting. He was handsome. We shared the same interests. I liked watching when I made him laugh. He was good in bed. He had a decent pedigree (a prerequisite for Dad, not me). He made good money (also a prerequisite for Dad, and not me—I could make my own money…and did, not to mention, I was the sole heir of the Truelock fortune).

That said, Bash was no king.

Ugh.

I ascended the gleaming cream steps to the second floor, walked down the hall and heard the murmuring of voices coming from Dad's study before I hit the open door.

When I did, I saw Dad sitting behind his desk, Mom sitting in one of the chairs in front of it…

And King Tanyn standing at the window behind Dad, but off to the side.

Ambush, gods damn it.

All of their attention shifted to me when I appeared in the doorframe.

Mostly (all right, totally), my attention was on Tanyn.

Honestly, why did the male have to be so farging gorgeous?

That healthy, thick dark hair. That lean, tall body. His strong jaw, straight nose, heavy brow.

Those electric blue eyes.

I didn't want to, but all I could think of was the kiss he'd laid on me after the troll attack at the Midnight Masque. This he did after I'd only just met him. This he did before he told me to get rid of Bash and he'd be in touch. His "in touch" meaning he was going to contact my father, not me, to negotiate for my hand, and he would do that without my knowledge, until Dad told me the arrangement had been made.

Thankful for that last thought, which meant I glowered at him before I looked at Dad.

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“I thought this was a family meeting,” I noted.

“As the king will be wed into this family, it is,” he replied, and I saw the warning sign of the streak of red lightning flash first through one of my father’s dark eyes, then the other, before he said, “You’re inexcusably late.”

I strolled in. “I have a job, Dad.”

“And I requested this meeting three days ago, specifically after working hours so this very thing wouldn’t occur, and thus you couldn’t use that excuse. You have an assistant. She put it on your calendar. So you should have arranged your day so you could arrive at this meeting promptly,” Dad returned as I sat down in the chair next to Mom’s.

“Heya, honey,” Mom whispered.

I glanced at her. “Hey, Mom.”

Dad regained my attention when he kept lecturing me. “When you’re queen of an entire realm, you cannot ask important dignitaries to wait while you make certain your lip stain is just right.”

At these words, I heard Mom’s sharp intake of breath, and my back shot straight.

“And you didn’t curtsy to His Majesty when you entered this room,” Dad stated. “That’s an indefensible breach of protocol.”

“I’m in my childhood home,” I retorted.

“He’s king of a realm, Catla,” Dad clipped. “And don’t think with a lifetime of us putting up with your antics we don’t know you purposefully made all three of us wait twenty minutes for your arrival.”

“Well, first, I didn’t know Tanyn would be here,” I defended. “And second, you and Mom are at home. You work from this office frequently. You both have things you can do. It isn’t like—”

“Your inattentiveness to anyone’s needs but your own *has got to stop*,” Dad ground out, unfairly might I add.

Sure, I was late.

But he knew why I was, because I didn’t want this meeting at all because the oh-so-not insignificant fact I did not want to give up everything I knew and loved and marry King Tanyn.

I just met him three weeks ago, for one.

Therefore, I didn’t know him much at all, for another.

What I did know, I wasn’t fond of, for yet another.

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He was unbearably arrogant, for starters (a reminder: him kissing me then telling me to scrape off my…situationship, like he had every right to do so, *after we'd just met*).

Onward from that, it seemed Tanyn Firefierce had zero emotions, which did not enamor me to spending a lifetime with him, since, in my arsenal, I had too many.

And I'd repeat, *I was seeing someone*.

But mostly, I was a fully functioning adult female. I had a very good job I excelled at. I had good friends who I adored who returned that. I lived a life I enjoyed. That life was a full life. I knew my own mind.

And I could pick my own damned husband.

Regrettably, Dad wasn't done.

"This realm does not revolve around you, Catla Truelock."

"Mammon," Mom murmured warningly.

"No, Freya," Dad bit. "I've had this conversation with my daughter too many times. This is the last."

He delivered that to Mom.

To me, he said, "Tanyn's Public Relations Director has been holding for us to holo with her for the last ten minutes. She has things to do too. I don't have to remind you, the recently deposed king of Sky's Edge is facing a bevy of trials for calamitous international incidents along with murder. She does not have time to await your fancy. I also shouldn't have to remind you that Tanyn certainly does not have time to waste. I've said it before, I'll say it one last time, it's insufferably rude, and it cannot, and I will have your promise right here, right now, it *will not* happen again."

In return, I did not remind him I had no idea Tanyn was going to be there, and as such, further had no idea some PR Director was waiting to have a chat.

Instead, I sat completely still and stared at my father.

I sensed Tanyn shift uncomfortably and heard my mother's soft, sweet, "Catty."

But it took very long moments before Dad cottoned on to the situation.

He was a demon.

I was half demon, half human, but in things like this, the demon always won out.

And the "thing like this" was, you didn't cross the pride of a demon.

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I could, and had, taken my father's dressing-downs for reasons, admittedly, I deserved (what could I say? again, I was half demon, this always won out, so naughtiness, rebellion and willfulness was ingrained—Dad had even conceded he often got in trouble for these same things when he was younger). And for others I would vociferously contend I did not.

However, these were always studiously private family affairs.

Speaking to me like this in front of Tanyn was unconscionable.

And I noticed, belatedly, Dad realized it.

"Catla," he murmured.

"Carry on with it," I said in a dead voice.

"Sweetheart, I—" Dad tried.

"Please, *carry on with it*," I hissed.

"Perhaps I should—" Tanyn started.

My gaze shot to him. "No. Stay. Let's get this done."

There was a long, awkward silence after that, and this long, awkward silence had a lot to do with the fact, not only that you didn't cross a demon's pride, but also, demons had grave difficulty apologizing, like my father should be doing right now.

But he would not.

"You were keen to do this, Mammon," Mom said in an irate tone (oh yeah, even human, she knew you didn't mess with the pride of a demon, maybe even better than Dad and I did—also, she was a mom, and you didn't mess with that either). "Do it," she finished.

Dad took a breath in through his nose and stated, "Mira, Tanyn's PR director, will explain the ins and outs of things before you two officially come out at Aleksei and Laura's engagement party. However, none of that can happen until you move beyond the compatibility trial. This has been arranged for the weekend after next."

Even though this was going to require me changing plans, since it was right then Thursday, so I only had just over a week to prepare, I said nothing.

"Tanyn wants to host you on Sigil Isle. In the home where he grew up," Mom said. "Won't that be nice?"

I looked to her and replied without inflection, "Lovely."

She pressed her lips together before she sent a cross look to Dad.

Tanyn finally spoke.

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"Does this work with your schedule?"

I turned my expressionless face to his equally expressionless (but still handsome) one.

"Does it matter?" I asked.

"It does to me," he answered.

I arched a brow. "Indeed?"

It was an excellent question.

As noted, he knew I was with Bash too, when he went into negotiations with my father…

No, when he *approached* my father to negotiate, then signed the betrothal agreement that would, if we got through the compatibility trial, tie me to him for the rest of my life.

(And just to say, it was the male who determined if the trial was a success or a failure, so I was screwed on that score too, unless I could convince him during that weekend I was not the queen for him, something I fully intended to do.)

Of course, there was no actual law that said I, who had not signed a betrothal agreement, had to adhere to said agreement.

At least there wasn't a law in Night's Fall, where I lived.

However, if I didn't, I could kiss my mother and father goodbye indefinitely, even eternally.

Although Dad and I could cross horns, I loved him. I loved both of them. I did this with all my heart. I did not want to lose them, even if this whole business was crazy archaic.

Just the concept of being disowned by them terrified me.

Mom, as a human, could, and probably would, defy this demonic edict.

Dad never would.

Never.

If we made it through the trial and I didn't marry Tanyn, I'd lose Dad forever, and I couldn't even think about that without feeling sick to my stomach.

Tanyn conceded my point by inclining his annoyingly attractive head, a movement that was annoyingly attractive.

"Sweetheart," Dad called me, all loving and kind now, of course.

I turned to him, and I knew my face was not loving or kind but carefully bland.

Dad sallied forth anyway.

"Tanyn wishes for you both to be coronated together," he announced.

Bully for Tanyn.

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"As such, and with Aleksei and Laura's engagement party coming closer, we really don't have time to delay," he went on.

I said nothing.

"Sweetheart," Dad whispered, the word this time dripping with remorse.

Farg his remorse.

Sure, he was a male. He didn't have to put up with this nonsense. In real terms, he could not get how this felt.

But he was living with me and Mom and the rest of the world in these modern times. He had to know how much he was asking of me, how totally antiquated this expectation was of female demons being married so damned young. He had to have *some* understanding of what this was going to cost me.

And he'd had a hand in making me. He *knew me*. He knew how I'd react to him doing something like this.

Even so, he laid me out right in front of Tanyn like I was not behaving like a female who'd had her options and free will torn from her, but instead, like I was a disobedient child.

So…oh yeah.

Farg his remorse.

"Will your beings arrange transport, or shall I?" I asked Tanyn.

"I'd prefer you have a detail," Tanyn replied.

"I know. They escorted me here," I reminded him, leaving off *and everywhere else for the last week*. "Unnecessarily, since no one knows anything about us."

"And it was thought no one knew Laura was Aleksei's mate, and she was attacked months before she even met him, because she was Aleksei's mate," Tanyn rejoined.

He had me there.

"We're not mates," I rejoined.

"Yes, we are," he returned. "Or we will be, shortly, when I put a ring on your finger and a crown on your head."

Bah!

"Right," I conceded. "Will your beings tell my beings when I need to be ready? I can assure you,"—my eyes slid to my father before they went back to the king—"I won't be late."

Did Tanyn's mouth tighten ever so slightly because Dad botched this? Or was I seeing things?

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“My beings will be in touch with your beings,” Tanyn agreed.

“Excellent. Shall we cease wasting Mira’s time now?” I suggested.

Dad sighed.

Mom made a displeased pip.

“Of course,” Tanyn said.

“Engage holo with Mira Loreling,” Dad ordered his desk comm.

There were some beeps indicating this Mira female was being hailed before the demon herself, sitting behind a desk, blinked into the room.

She stood and curtsied to Tanyn.

I fought rolling my eyes.

“Your Majesty,” she greeted.

“Mira. Allow me to introduce my fiancée, Catla Truelock,” Tanyn said.

Now did I detect a minor sneer on her lips?

“Miss Truelock, a pleasure,” she said to me, sounding like she meant it, while totally not meaning it.

“And Mammon and Freya Truelock, my future in-laws,” Tanyn continued.

“Sir. Madam,” Mira addressed them.

“The compatibility trial is set,” Tanyn told her. “So please go over your preliminary plan.”

“Of course, sire,” she replied.

Sire?

Yuck.

“Naturally, it all depends on the results of the compatibility trial,” she was sure to add (oh yeah, evidence was suggesting with this one interaction, the demons of Sky’s Edge were not going to open their arms to their future queen being of a First Family of demons to bend a knee to the shifter monarch of Night’s Fall a handful of centuries ago). “But obviously, momentous news like this, especially considering all Sky’s Edge endured under the reign of Arnaud, the terrifying way that ended, and the resulting but sudden shift in leadership, this needs to be handled with care. In other words, we can’t spring it on the citizens of Sky’s Edge.”

I just loved sitting around listening to someone pointing out the obvious.

With a glance at Tanyn, I noted he felt the same way.

Mira was noting Tanyn’s response, I could tell, because she hurried on.

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“Therefore, we’ll arrange a few pics to be leaked. Secreting out of a restaurant, obviously unsuccessfully. Being together in a craft. Things like that. These will be arranged with photographers and media outlets I trust. Of course, in turn, this will shift focus to Miss Truelock, the detail she’s been provided will be noted, tongues will wag, and the stage will be set for you, Your Majesty, to escort Miss Truelock to Prince Aleksei and Mistress Laura’s engagement party, which will officially declare your courtship.”

I hated this idea because Laura was one of my best friends. Everyone already knew she was engaged to Aleksei, that had been spectacularly communicated through several dramatic events.

That said, she’d never been a fan of attention being on her, so if I asked, she’d probably be all for Tanyn and me doing our thing at that party.

But still.

It was her night.

However, if things went according to my plans, none of this would happen anyway, so I wasn’t going to waste energy discussing it.

Surprisingly, Mom spoke up.

“And how is my daughter meant to be seen with the king? She has a life and an occupation here in Nocturn, and even on a priority route, it’s a four-hour craft ride to Abyssinia.”

“Once the trial is over, we’ll be working out the specifics,” Mira replied. “Though, I’ll warn you now, I believe the king should be seen with Miss Truelock no less than four times. The goal should be six.”

Considering one could say Tanyn’s job being the new king and cleaning up after his criminally insane (in a variety of ways) half-brother was more important than mine as the director of an art gallery, I sensed I’d be spending a lot of time on a craft in the coming weeks.

“Perhaps Miss Truelock can work from Abyssinia?” Mira suggested. But before I could answer (not that I was going to, I either wouldn’t have a choice, although it was practically impossible to manage an art gallery not being *in* the gallery, or during the trial I’d make it so this would be moot (pray Lilith)), she said, “Just a warning. Again, we’ll work out the details after the trial.”

When no one said anything, Tanyn asked, “Is this acceptable to you, Catla?”

It was not.

“Of course,” I replied dully.

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Tanyn studied me.

I let him.

Mira broke into this. “Well then, we have our course set, and we’ll be hard at work at it after the trial. Though, I’ll put everything in place so I simply have to hit go when I have the order.”

Tanyn broke our staring contest to turn to the holo. “Thank you, Mira.”

“At your service, sire.”

That *sire* business again.

Yuck.

“Lovely to meet you,” Mom said.

“You as well,” Mira replied, sounding like she meant it, when she totally didn’t.

Dad pressed a button on his desk console and Mira blinked out.

I pulled my Palm out of my clutch and started to order a Fly.

“Catla?” Dad called.

After I hit go on the Fly, I looked up at him. “Is that all?”

“I was hoping you’d have dinner with us.” He threw out a hand to indicate Tanyn. “All of us.”

I stood. “I’m afraid I have plans. And I just ordered a Fly. I’ll wait for my pilot outside.”

“You have a detail, dearest,” Mom noted.

“And I’ll be living with that the rest of my life. For now, I want to take a Fly home.”

“Is that wise?” Mom asked Tanyn.

Before he could answer, I began moving to the door, saying, “Enjoy your evening.”

“Catla!” Dad called sharply.

I turned to him, looked right into his eyes, and he flinched.

“Enjoy your evening,” I whispered.

With that, I resumed my trek, trying, and failing, not to allow all the things that had been crashing through my brain for the last week since I found out what Dad had done to crash into my brain.

For starters, I had to break up with Bash.

As a repeat, I liked him, and I had hopes I could put Tanyn off, but I couldn’t string Bash along while I went on a compatibility trial with another male. He was a demon too. He knew all about this. No way he’d wait for me to do that. It’d be mean and even cruel to ask him to.

So there was that.

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And if I did not put Tanyn off, I'd have to quit my job.

I loved my job.

And I'd have to leave Nocturn.

I also loved this city. I was born here. I grew up here. My life was here, and it was more than just my job; it was the museums, the parks, the theaters, the shopping, the hustle and bustle, the fact there was always something to do, somewhere to go, something to see. It was my flat, which I had made perfectly my own.

And my friends.

Laura, Gayliliel and Monique.

Laura and I had been besties since we were eight. Gayle came a year later. Monique was a newer addition, but treasured.

It was hard to recall times in my life when Laura and Gayle hadn't been a part of it.

How was I going to live without them being a ten-minute craft ride away?

Of course, we would all eventually find mates. Have babies. Life would change. It wouldn't be drinks and shopping and brunches and clubbing forever. I was aware of that.

But I never thought life for me would change in the way I'd only see them occasionally, not only because I lived in a whole other realm, but also because I'd be covered in queenly duties, which included providing my husband with an heir.

I didn't want to be so far away from my females.

And even if I was very, *very* angry at my father, I didn't want to be so far away from Mom and Dad, either.

I didn't want to be a queen.

I wanted to be who I was.

Then, of course, there was my own father humiliating me in front of a *king*. Speaking to me like I was five years old. Speaking to me like he did not know, because I told him, loudly, I had no interest in any of this, and therefore I wouldn't rush, panting with excitement, to a meeting with him and Mom to talk about it.

All of this was a lot.

But none of it was my choice, and that made that "a lot" far too much.

So much, as I walked down the steps, I felt myself fighting tears.

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Me, Catla Truelock, half demon and tough bitch (though, also half human, so that explained it) *fighting tears*.

I'd almost made it to the front door when I felt fingers curl around my upper arm so firmly, the grip and the resultant halting of my forward momentum had me whirling toward whoever grabbed me.

Wretchedly, it was Tanyn.

Making it more wretched, it was in that moment the first tear fell.

Demon tears were red. They weren't blood, just crimson-streaked water.

Therefore, he could not miss it as it traveled in what felt like slow motion down my cheek.

And he watched it glide along my skin.

All the way.

Once it dropped off my jaw to soak into my slim-fitting, sleeveless, black, to-the-knee dress (with its slender, black patent leather belt—black was one of my colors (or non-colors, as it were), but I'd purposefully selected it for its funereal properties for this meeting), his gaze lifted to mine.

"That wasn't how I wanted that to go," he said quietly, his deep silky voice feeling silky against my skin.

I ignored it.

"Well, that's how it went," I replied. "Now, if you'll release me, my pilot will be here shortly."

"Allow my detail to take you home."

"At this juncture, I'll have to pay if I cancel the Fly."

"I'll reimburse you."

"I'd rather be alone."

"You'll have a pilot in a Fly."

"I think you understand what I'm saying."

"Catla—"

I twisted my arm and gained my freedom. "I have to go."

"I don't leave for Sky's Edge until tomorrow. Have breakfast with me?" he requested.

I shook my head. "Thanks, no. It seems I'll be away from the office quite a bit in the coming weeks, and out of town soon, so I have things to do."

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“Catla—”

The front door opened for me as I approached it, but I turned to him.

There was no remorse in his face, no empathy. He was watching me, intently, but another thing I knew in the very little I knew about him, he kept his cards close to his chest…always.

I was to be his wife, and he wasn’t giving me anything, even now, not having missed I was feeling too much.

Why do you even want me? I’m all wrong for you.

I wanted the answers to this question, but I didn’t ask. Not now. I was still fighting emotion. I couldn’t take more.

“I’ll comm you,” he said.

“Of course,” I replied.

Then I turned and walked out of my parents’ cube of a multi-million-mark house to the Fly, which, thank Hecate, had perfect timing and was coming in for a landing as I marched down the steps.

The king of Sky’s Edge stood in the open door to my parents’ house, arms crossed on his wide chest, watching me fold in.

“Yeesh, is that—?” the pilot began, staring out the side screen toward Tanyn.

“Just…can you please just go?” I begged.

He looked back at me, and I noticed he was human.

He noticed the red tracks on my face.

And thank the gods, when he did, after I was secured, he spoke no more.

And we took flight.

Sky’s Edge **will be released August 18!**

Click here for preorders.

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