Chapter 1

Graduation day.

This was my ecstatic face.

It was the same as my who-gives-a-crap face. I had so many bigger things going on in my life that high school fell to the very bottom of the totem pole. When you had hellhounds nipping at your heels, demons trying to end your existence, and a neighbor that was some kind of key to the underworld, who also happened to be the girl you were in love with, it kind of put things into perspective.

My hummingbird, flighty cousin, Lexi, lived her life by the rules of Gucci, Kors, and Dior. I watched her zip up the stairs for the thousandth time. “Lexi,” I growled after her.

She flashed back down and stopped in front of me, smiling sweetly. “You summoned, almighty one?”

I shot her a dry look, although I had to admit, it did have a nice ring to it. “You are driving me insane.”

Blowing an oversized grape bubble in my face, she grinned. “Like I care.”

“Lexi, so help me—”

The sound of her brother, Travis, laughing saved her from the end of my sharp tongue. I glared at him lounging on the couch with an Xbox remote clutched in his hand. He spent so much damn time with that stupid gaming system that I never got the chance to demolish it. Then there was also the probability that Angel would never talk to me again if I actually laid a hand on the black box. She was nearly as bad as Travis with video games.

I never imagined being so jealous of an object.

“Give it up, Chase,” Travis said, smirking. “You know that once Lexi gets going, there is no stopping the whirlwind from tearing through the house.”

He was right, but still…she was making me dizzy. I glanced back to face the little hellion, only to see the spot where she had stood was empty. Huffing, I dropped down onto the couch beside Travis.

“Are you going to get ready for your big day?” Travis asked.

I cracked my neck. “I was thinking about skipping.”

Travis snorted. “No way is my dad going to let that happen. I assumed you’d want to be there, standing next to your little angel.”

The play on her name brought a smile to my lips. There wasn’t anything angelic about Angel. Begrudgingly, he did have a point. Devin would probably make me go just so he could make the moves on Angel’s mom. And Angel, well, I could handle her…possibly.

We had this completely insane connection, and trust me, I was used to some pretty messed up stuff. Hell, I was part demon for God’s sake, but what I had with Angel, trumped anything the universe could throw at me.

Bring it.

“I guess. It just seems like a waste of my time,” I said, stretching my legs.

“Oh, your time is so valuable.”

“Damn straight.”

Travis shook his messy blond hair. “Uh-huh. If I have to be there, so do you.”

“You’re going to watch Emma get her piece of paper?” The hunter’s name made my demon itchy. I didn’t trust her, but I also kept that to myself. Travis couldn’t handle losing Emma again. That much I was sure.

Pride shone in his eyes. “I wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

I groaned. “When did you become such a d-bag? What? Are you going for the best-boyfriend-of-the-year medal?”

He shrugged. “Remind me again what a smart girl like Angel is doing with a jerkwad like you?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know? I can’t give away all my secrets,” I said.

“Please. Just remember who is older…and has more game.”

I socffed. “Sorry to crush your spirits, but you don’t have shit on me.”

His sea-green eyes got that challenging glint. “Oh, really?”

A butt-kicking vibe hit the air. It had been awhile since I had been able to flex my ass-whooping skills. I couldn’t let them getting rusty. Just as I was about to go all gung-ho on my cocky cousin, I felt the familiar tingles.

Angel was near.

I raced to the door like a kid in a candy store, ripping it open before she had the chance to knock. Her hand stopped midair. She looked up at me, shifting her feet on the porch. “I don’t know why I bother,” she mumbled under her breath.

My heart tripped. I loved that she mumbled. It was just one of her many endearing qualities. She looked absolutely adorable in her black and red gown and cap. Her dark hair was blowing lightly in the wind, long and loose, just the way I liked it. I couldn’t resist the urge to kiss her. Lightly, I pressed a kiss to her berry-flavored lips. “Hey, hot stuff,” I murmured.

Her lips twitched even as she playfully whacked me on the chest. “You seriously have sketchy taste in hotness.”

“Maybe I like the brainy look. I know I like what is under that—”

Her hand shot out, covering my mouth. “You are insufferable,” she said, her blue eyes twinkling.

I was just getting started. My tongue darted out, grazing the inside of her palm. I watched her eyes darken and start to glow. Did I mention that there was nothing average about my girlfriend? Seeing the supernatural effect was a reminder that I was the one responsible for the change, which was both thrilling and depressing.

All I’d ever wanted to do was save this girl, protect her with my life. How I ended up binding myself to her heart, body, soul was still surreal to me. I wasn’t sure I would ever get used to the idea that Angel was mine—only mine—forever and beyond.

That was a hell of a commitment.

I grabbed her wrist, feeling her pulse jump under my fingers. Score one for me.

“You are going to make us late,” she whispered, swatting at my hands.

“And you both are making me sick.” Travis made obscene gagging noises from behind me.

“Excuse me, while I teach my cousin a lesson in manners.”

Before I zapped across the room, Angel laid a hand on my arm, and that was all it took to keep me from thrashing Travis.

I sighed. “Fine. Let’s go, but I’ll drive.” I stepped out onto the porch and dug in my pocket for my keys.

“Wait. What about Lexi?” Angel asked.

“She can get her own damn ride,” I grumbled.

Angel grinned, and I swear I felt it all the way to my gut, as well as other unmentionable parts. I angled my head, and for one split second, I contemplated sweeping her off her feet and making a beeline for my bedroom. I figured I could make it to the top of the stairs before she made a stink.

“Wow. Someone is feeling prickly,” she said.

That wasn’t all I was feeling.

She crossed her arms. “Who pissed in your cheerios?”

Opening her door, I waited until she was settled before zipping around the car. Hey, I might be a jerk most of the time, but at least I still knew how to be a gentleman when it counted. The car roared to life much like the demon inside me. Then, because I’m a guy, I revved it a few times, feeling the power of the engine tremble under my hands.

Angel slid me a sideways glare. “Was that necessary?”

I put the car in reverse. “Does Howdy Doody have wooden balls?”

She tried to cover the grin that was threatening to make an appearance. “I don’t know why I bother.”

“Yes, you do. You are infatuated with me, and who could blame you?” I said matter-of-factly.

“I am going to pretend I didn’t hear that.”

“Think we have time to pull over and do a little making out?” I ran my hand up her leg.

She smacked it away. “Definitely not, octo-arms. Keep both hands on the wheel.”

The teeniest bit of unease stirred inside me, but it wasn’t mine. It was coming from Angel. I knew her well enough to know that my driving still made her nervous, and I couldn’t blame her. I did flip a car with her in it. In my defense, she barely sustained a scratch. I hadn’t been so lucky, but when you have demon blood in your veins, you heal at an ungodly rate.

I didn’t like that she was feeling even a splinter of anxiety. Deliberately, I slowed my speed, watching the tall pines that lined both sides of the road pass by. The ride into town was short and uneventful, thank God. Country roads could be pretty mundane.

I made the turn into Spring Valley High, and a sense nostalgia fluttered in my stomach. This would be the last time we pulled up together in this school parking lot. In a way, I was sad. It was here, in this school, that Angel and I had spent a bulk of our time together. Chemistry class had never been so combustible, and it hadn’t been the experiments going up in flames. Nope—it had been us.

Stepping out into the bright sun, I let the rays warm me. June in Illinois could go either way. It could be eighty degrees and beautiful, or it could be forty degrees and crappy. The weather here was as unpredictable as my temper and Angel’s tongue—almost. What a match we were.

I weaved our fingers together. “Are you ready for this?”

She stood tall for a petite frame. “As ready as I’ll ever be.”

Her hand felt so small in mine it was ridiculous, but there was nothing fragile about her. She was one of the strongest girls I knew, besides Lexi.

“Did you get anything yet?” she asked with a trace of expectancy.

I knew what she was asking. The same question over and over again since we filled out those college applications. We were late to the game, and the suspense was driving her crazy. More than once, I thought about breaking my promise and taking a quick trip to the admission’s department, but damn it, I valued her trust.

When had I become a guy of morals?

What had she done to me?

“No. Not yet. We still have time,” I said, trying to be optimistic for Angel.

Disappointment sprang into her eyes.

I might be taking a road trip after all. A little persuasion to move the process along couldn’t hurt. She would never have to know.

“Chase!” she said sternly.

The way she said my name had my pulse jumping, and I smirked. She knew how my mind worked.

We had crossed the parking lot and just reached the entrance to the football field. Her hand tightened in mine. Momentarily, she forgot about my devious mind. I felt her shudder beside me.

Ah, yes.

The football field wasn’t Angel’s favorite spot. She darn right avoided it. A demon had lured her here under false pretenses, using her to trap me. It wasn’t likely she would ever forget, and she wouldn’t let me whiteout that night, as much as I would like to.

Her blue eyes went wide. I could see the flash of memories coming back to haunt her, but worse yet, I could feel her panic.

*Damn Alastair*. The list of shit my douchebag father was responsible for was quite extensive…and growing. Even from the underworld, he could cause problems.

I pulled Angel to the side as a group of kids passed. “Hey, you have nothing to worry about,” I said, framing her face with my hands. “Today is going to be perfect. Nothing is going to go wrong. I swear.”

Now, I just hoped I could keep that promise. No dead bodies. No demons. No funny business. Those were all tall orders to fill when you were a Divisa and trouble followed you around like flies on shit.

Slowly, as she kept her gaze locked on mine, the pressure that was clamping down on my chest eased up, her fear subsiding. She took a deep breath of the country air she was so fond of. “You’re right,” she said, leaning against me. “Thank you for doing this.”

As if I could ever deny that face anything. I wrapped my arm around her shoulder. “Let’s go graduate.”

Her smile brightened.

Together we walked hand-in-hand to take our places among the small class of 2014 graduates. We were assigned seats based off our last names. I would like to see someone try to pry me away from Angel’s side.

Not happening.

I also might have given the ladies in the office a little demon-eye action the last week of school.