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The Darkest Lie

Written by Gena Showalter

Published by MIRA Books

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Gena Showalter

THE
DARKEST
LIE



PROLOGUE

GIDEON STARED down at the woman sleeping atop the bed of cloud-soft cerulean cotton.

His wife.

Maybe.

Inky hair tangled around an innately sensual face, long lashes casting shadows over graceful cheeks. One of her hands rested at her temple, her fingers curling inward, her azure-painted nails gleaming in the golden glow of the lamp. Her nose was perfect in shape and size, her chin stubborn, and her lips the plumpest—and reddest—he'd ever seen.

And her body...gods. Perhaps those made-for-sin curves were the reason she bore the name Scarlet. Her wickedly rounded breasts...the slender dip of her waist...the feminine flare of her hips...the lean length of her legs...every part of her was meant to lure, to ensnare.

Without a doubt, she was the most hauntingly lovely female he'd ever beheld. A genuine sleeping beauty. Only, this beauty would come up swinging if he tried to kiss her awake.

The thought had him grinning in pure male satisfaction.

One look, and a man knew she was passion and fire underneath that snow-white skin. What most men didn't

know, however, was that, like Gideon, she was possessed by a demon.

Difference is, I earned mine. She didn't.

For-freaking-ever ago, he'd helped his friends steal and open Pandora's box, unleashing the evil inside. Yeah, yeah. A mistake. Hardly worth a second's thought, if you asked him, but the gods hadn't, so, as punishment, each warrior responsible was cursed to host a demon inside his own body. Baddies like Death, Disaster, Violence, Disease, yada yada.

There'd been more demons than warriors, though, so the remaining fiends had been placed inside the immortal prisoners of Tartarus. Where Scarlet had resided her entire life.

Gideon was paired with Lies, Scarlet with Nightmares.

Clearly, he'd gotten the short end of that demon-stick. She merely slept like the dead and invaded people's dreams. He couldn't utter a single truth without suffering. To tell a pretty woman that she was pretty was to fall to his knees, agony unlike any other exploding through him, cutting at his organs, acid spilling through his blood, draining his strength, even eroding his desire to live.

"You're ugly," he'd have to say instead. Most females would burst into tears and run the hell away. So, yeah, he was immune to tears.

But what would Scarlet do? he found himself wondering. And would her tears bother him?

He reached out and traced a fingertip along the curve of her jaw. Such silky, warm skin. Would she laugh at him, unconcerned? Would she try and slice his throat? Believe him? Call him a liar?

Or would she haul ass like the others?

The thought of hurting her, angering her and ultimately losing her didn't sit well with him.

His arm fell to his side, hand fisting. *Maybe I'll tell her the truth. Maybe I'll praise her.* But he knew he wouldn't. Make that mistake once, fine. You were stupid. Make it twice, and you were proving Darwin's theory.

He'd already made it once.

Gideon's greatest enemy, the Hunters, had captured him and told him that they'd killed Sabin, keeper of the demon of Doubt. Now, Gideon loved that man like a brother—boy could bitch-slap like no one else—so he'd erupted, screaming how much he hated them, how he was going to kill them all, and it had been the gods' honest truth, every word of it. Though it might take him years, centuries, to see the promise through, that didn't matter. He'd meant it and had been penalized for it, the anguish instantaneous.

After that, curled on the floor and writhing, he'd been an easy target for torture. And torture him the Hunters had. Repeatedly.

After beating him so severely his eyes had swollen shut and several teeth had flown the coop, after shoving sharp pins under his nails, electrocuting him and carving the mark of infinity—their mark—into his back, they'd removed his hands. He'd seriously thought he'd reached the end. Until a very much alive Sabin had found him, rescued him and carried him home (after doing some of that aforementioned bitch-slapping).

Thankfully, both of his hands had finally regenerated. Something he'd been waiting for. Very...*patiently*. So he could seek revenge, yes. Or rather, that had been the case at first. But then his friends had jailed this woman,

this Scarlet, and she had claimed they were husband and wife.

His priorities had kinda switched at that point.

He didn't remember her, much less wedding her. But he *had* seen flashes of her face all these thousands of years. Mostly every time he collapsed atop a woman, sweaty but not truly replete because he was too filled with longing for something, or someone, he hadn't been able to name. Therefore, he couldn't outright deny her claim. And he needed to deny her. To prove her wrong.

Otherwise, he would have to live with the knowledge that he'd abandoned a woman he'd promised to protect. He'd have to live with the knowledge that he'd slept with other women while his wife suffered.

He'd have to live with the knowledge that someone had fucked with his memory.

Yeah, he'd demanded an explanation from Scarlet, but she was stubborn to her core and had refused to tell him anything more. Like how they'd met, when they'd met, if they'd been in love, happy. How they'd split.

To be honest, he couldn't blame her for keeping the details a secret. How could he? She had been as much a prisoner to the Lords as he'd recently been to the Hunters, and he hadn't talked to his captors, either. Even during that oh, so pleasant hand extraction.

So, he'd come up with a plan. For Scarlet to open up to him, he would have to take her somewhere else. Just for a little while. Just until he had answers. Then, this morning, he'd done it. While his supposed wife slept, oblivious to the world around her, he'd kidnapped her from his home and carted her fireman-style to this hotel in central Budapest.

Finally, he would have everything he wanted.

All she had to do was wake up...

CHAPTER ONE

A few hours earlier...

LET'S GET THE PARTY STARTED, Gideon thought with unparalleled determination as he stomped through the renovated hallways of his Budapest fortress.

The demon of Lies hummed inside his head, heartily in agreement. Both of them liked Scarlet, their alleged wife, but for different reasons. Gideon liked the look of her and the saucy, forked-tongued comments she made. Lies liked... Gideon wasn't sure. He only knew that the beast purred in approval every time she opened her beautiful, I-can-do-things-you've-only-dreamed-about mouth.

It was a reaction usually reserved for pathological liars. Except, the demon couldn't actually tell if she fibbed or not. Which meant beneath all that affection for Scarlet, Lies was frustrated, sensitive to every word that left Gideon's mouth. And that made *Gideon's* life frustrating as hell. He couldn't even call his friends by their own names anymore.

Was she or wasn't she a filthy freaking liar? And yeah, he was well aware of the irony. He, a man who couldn't utter a single truth, was complaining about someone who might be feeding him a big, heaping bowl of shit. But were they or weren't they? Had they or hadn't

they? He had to know before he drove himself insane, puzzling over everything she'd ever said and everything he'd ever done and thought.

His request that she just lay out the facts, black and white, boom, done, *over* had been ignored for the last time.

He was finally taking action.

Hopefully, pretending to rescue her from his own dungeon would cause her to trust him. Hopefully, trusting him would cause her to open the hell up and answer his godsdamn questions.

Oops. His frustration was showing again.

"You can't do this, Gid," Strider, keeper of the demon of Defeat, said, suddenly keeping pace beside him.

Fuck. Anyone but him.

Strider couldn't lose a challenge, *any* challenge, without suffering as Gideon suffered when he spoke true. Including Xbox, and that was seriously screwing with Gideon's "Assassin's Creed" mojo, because yeah, Gideon had challenged him, trying to distract himself and work out the stiffness in his new fingers.

Anyway. Always, without question, he and Strider guarded each other's backs (video games aside). So, he shouldn't have been surprised that his friend was here, resolved to save him from himself. Didn't mean he'd roll over and play dead.

"She's dangerous," Strider added. "A walking blade through the heart, dude."

Yes, she was. She invaded dreams, presented sleepers with their worst fears and fed off the ensuing terror. Hell, a few weeks ago, she'd done it to him. With spiders. He shuddered, momentarily sick to his stomach

as he pictured the hairy little bastards crawling all over him.

Pussy. Suck it up. He'd faced countless swinging swords without flinching—as well as the monsters wielding them. What were a few spiders? Another shudder. Revolting, that's what. He knew what they were thinking every time their beady eyes landed on him: *tasty*.

But why hadn't Scarlet invaded anyone else's dreams? He'd wondered about that almost as much as he'd wondered about their “marriage.” The other warriors, their female companions, she'd left alone. Despite the fact that she'd threatened to slaughter every single one of them. Something she truly could do.

“Damn it. Stop ignoring me,” Strider growled, punching a hole in the silver-stone wall seconds after they passed a closed bedroom door. “You know my demon doesn't like it.”

Dust and debris plumed the air, a loud crack echoing. Great. Soon, other warriors would be up and running to find out what had just happened. Or maybe not. As temperamental as members of this household were (*cough* too much testosterone *cough*), they had to be used to unexpected, violent noises.

“Look. I'm not sorry.” Gideon flicked his friend a glance, taking in the blond hair, the blue eyes and the deceptively innocent features that were somehow perfect for his he-man build. More than one woman had called him “beautifully all-American,” whatever that meant. Those same women usually avoided looking at Gideon, as if even roving their gazes over his tattoos and piercings would blacken their souls. For all he knew, they were right. “But you're correct. I can't do this.”

Which meant that Strider was wrong and, yes, Gideon damn well could do this. *So suck it!*

Everyone who lived in this fortress—and godsdamn, there were a lot of people, the number seemingly growing by the day as his friends each hooked up with their “one and only” (gag)—was fluent in Gideon Speak and knew to believe the opposite of whatever he said.

“Fine,” Strider said tightly. “You can. But you won’t. Because you know that if you take the woman out of this home, I’ll go gray from worry. And you like my hair the way it is.”

“Stridey-man. Are you hitting on me? Trying to get me to run my fingers through those mangy locks?”

“Shithead,” Strider muttered, but his anger was clearly defused.

Gideon chuckled. “Sweetie pie.”

Strider’s lips even twitched into a grin. “You know I hate when you get mushy like that.”

Boy loved it. No question.

They snaked a corner, bypassing one of the many sitting rooms the fortress possessed. This one was empty. As early in the morning as it was, most of the warriors were still in bed with their women. If they weren’t weaponing-up at that exact moment, of course.

Out of habit, he scanned the area. In this particular room, portraits of naked men littered the walls, courtesy of the goddess of Anarchy whose warped sense of humor rivaled Gideon’s own. There were red leather chairs (Reyes, the keeper of Pain, sometimes had to cut himself to quiet his demon, so red came in handy), gleaming bookshelves (Paris, keeper of Promiscuity, enjoyed romance novels), and weird silver lamps that twisted and curved over the chairs; he had no idea who

those were for. Fresh flowers bloomed from vases, sweetly scenting the air. Again, he had no idea. Fine. He'd requested those. That shit smelled *good*.

Gideon breathed deeply of that fresh, delicious air. Except he ended up inhaling a nose full of guilt. Sadly, that happened all the time lately. While he luxuriated in *this*, his would-be wife rotted below in the dungeons. Before this, she'd spent thousands of years in Tartarus, so that made him doubly cruel for leaving her down there.

Really, what kind of man allowed such a thing? An asshole, that's who, and he was certainly king of them. After all, he was going to return Scarlet to the dungeon once his questions were answered. For, like, ever. Even if she was—or rather, *had been*—his wife.

Yes. He was a bad, bad man.

She was simply too dangerous to be permanently freed, her ability to invade dreams too destructive. Because when you died in one of Scarlet's nightmares, you died for real. That was it. The end. And if she ever decided to aid the Hunters, which could happen, scorned women and all that, the Lords would never be able to sleep soundly again. And they needed their beauty rest or they became snarling beasts.

Case in point: Gideon. He hadn't slept in weeks.

Slow down, his demon suddenly instructed. *Moving too fast*.

Usually Lies was merely a presence in the back of his mind. There, but silent. Only when the demon's need was great did he speak up. But even then, he had to say the opposite of what he wanted. And now he wanted Gideon to hurry up and reach Scarlet.

Give me wings and it's done, Gideon replied dryly,

but damn if he didn't quicken his step. He could and did think what he meant. Always. He never lied to himself or the demon during these private moments. Maybe because he'd had to fight savagely and without mercy for such moments.

Upon possession, he'd been lost to darkness and chaos, a slave to his soul-companion and his evil cravings. He'd tormented humans just to hear them scream. He'd burned homes to the ground, as well as the families inside them. He'd killed indiscriminately, and taunted while doing so.

It had taken a few hundred years, but Gideon had finally clawed his way to the light. *He* was in control now, and had even managed to tame the beast. For the most part.

Strider heaved a sigh, regaining his attention. "Gideon, man, listen to me. I said it once, but I'll say it again. You can't take the female outside these walls. She'll run from you, you know she will. Hunters are in the city, we know that, too, and they could catch her. Recruit her. Use her. Or, if she refuses them, even hurt her like they hurt you."

One, Strider was speaking as if Gideon couldn't hold on to the wily temptress for a few days. And he could. He knew how to kick ass and take names with the best. Two, Strider was speaking as if Gideon would be unable to find her if he did indeed lose her. And three, Strider was probably speaking correctly, but that didn't soothe Gideon's sudden burst of anger. He may not be the smooth operator that Strider was, but he had *some* skills with the ladies, damn it.

More than that, Scarlet herself was a warrior. An immortal. She could surround herself with darkness. A

darkness so thick no human light, and no immortal eyes, could penetrate it. Losing her wouldn't be as disgraceful as losing, say, an untrained human.

Not that he'd lose her, he told himself again, and not that she would *want* to run. He was going to seduce her. Was going to pleasure the energy right out of her and make her desperate to stay with him. Which shouldn't be too difficult. She'd liked him enough to marry him, right? Maybe.

Damn it!

"I know what you're thinking," Strider said after another sigh. "If she escapes you, so what? You'll find her."

"Wrong." He had thought that, yeah, but he'd soon discarded the idea. So there. *What are you? A girl?*

"Well, what happens to her while you're looking for her? During the day she needs protection, and if you're not with her, who's going to protect her?"

Fuck. Good point. Scarlet couldn't function during daylight hours. Because of her demon, she slept too deeply. So deeply that nothing and no one could wake her until sunset, a fact he'd discovered after nearly giving her a brain aneurysm while trying and failing to shake her into consciousness.

He had been shocked when, a few hours later, her eyes had popped open and she'd sat up as if she'd just taken a ten-minute power nap.

Which had raised other questions. Why did her demon sleep during the day, when the people around her were awake? Didn't that defeat the purpose of creating nightmares? And what happened when she traveled and the time zone changed?

"We're lucky we found her when we did," Strider

continued. “If we hadn’t had Aeron’s angel on our side, we would’ve died trying to secure her. Setting her free, no matter the reason, is stupid and danger—”

“You haven’t said that before.” Over and over again. “Besides, Olive’s no longer on our team.” Meaning, she was. “She can’t help us again if needed.” Meaning she could. “Now, I hate you, man, but please keep talking.” *I love you, but shut the hell up!* Seriously.

Strider growled his renewed frustration as they pounded down the steps that led into the dungeon, stained-glass windows giving way to crumbling, blood-stained walls. The air became musty, tainted with sweat, urine and blood. None of it was Scarlet’s, thank the gods. His guilt couldn’t have handled that. Fortunately—or unfortunately, depending on whom you asked—she wasn’t the only being locked away. They had several Hunters awaiting payback, aka interrogation, aka torture.

“What if she was lying to you?” his friend asked. The man didn’t know when to quit, and yeah, Gideon knew Strider *couldn’t* quit. Which was why he didn’t simply punch his friend in the face and beat feet. “What if she’s not really your wife?”

Gideon snorted. “Forgot to tell you. Sifting through truth and lies is difficult for me.” Except with her, but he wasn’t going to issue that reminder just then.

“Yeah, but you also told me you don’t know with her.”

One of them had a perfect memory. Excellent. “There’s no way she can be my wife.” The chances were slim, but yeah, they were there. “I don’t have to do this.”

When Scarlet had first invaded his dreams and demanded he visit her in this dungeon, he’d been helpless

to do otherwise, filled with a need to see her, some part of him recognizing her on a level he still didn't understand. When she'd alleged they'd kissed, had sex, even wed each other, that same part of him had hummed in agreement.

Even though he didn't fucking remember her.

Why couldn't he remember her? he wondered for the thousandth time.

He'd been playing with several theories. The first: the gods had erased his memory. But that raised the question of why. Why would they not want him to recall his own wife? Why had they not erased Scarlet's memory, as well?

The second theory: he'd suppressed the memory himself. But again, why would he have done so? *How* would he have done so? There were a million other things he'd actually *like* to forget.

The third: his demon had somehow erased the memory when they were paired. But if that were true, why did he recall his life in the heavens, when he'd been a servant to Zeus, tasked with guarding the former god king at every moment of every day?

He and Strider stopped at the first cell, where Scarlet had resided the past few weeks. She was asleep on her cot, as he'd known she would be. And as he'd done each time he'd seen her, he sucked in a breath. *Lovely*. But...

Mine? Did he want her to be?

No, of course not. That would complicate the hell out of everything. Not that he'd let it matter. He couldn't. His friends came first. That's the way things were, and the way they would always be.

At least she was clean; he'd made sure she had enough

water to drink and to bathe. And she was well fed; he'd made sure food was delivered three times a night. He would do the same when he ultimately returned her. That would have to be enough.

Don't hurry, Lies cried, practically jumping from one corner of his skull to the other. *Don't hurry!*

Cram it, buddy. I'll handle this. But he couldn't force himself to move just yet. He'd been waiting for this moment forever, it seemed, and wanted to bask in it.

Bask? He really was becoming a woman.

Look away before you get an erection, he told himself. All right, now that was more manly. He purposefully shifted his gaze. The walls around her were composed of thick, impenetrable stone. Therefore, she could never see the Hunters imprisoned beside her. Actually, Gideon didn't care about that. He didn't want the Hunters seeing *her*.

Yeah. He wanted *mine*. At least for now.

Speaking of the Hunters, they spotted the warriors through their own bars and shrank into the shadows, their murmurs tapering to quiet. They might have stopped breathing as well, so afraid were they of being singled out. Good. He liked that his enemy feared him.

They had every reason to do so.

These men had imprisoned and raped innocent, immortal women in hopes of creating half-breed children they could raise to hate and fight Gideon and his friends. Children who would've been able to help the Hunters find Pandora's box before the Lords could, all in hopes of using the artifact to separate each demon from its host. An act the warriors wouldn't survive, as man was now bound irrevocably to beast.

That, too, was part of their punishment for opening that stupid box.

Gideon withdrew the key to Scarlet's cell, his new fingers stiff and shaky from disuse, and reached out.

"Wait." Strider placed a hard hand on his shoulder, trying to hold him in place. Gideon could have shaken free, but he allowed his friend the illusion of winning this small battle of wills. "You can talk to her *here*. Get your answers *here*."

But they had an audience, which meant she couldn't relax. And if she couldn't relax, she wouldn't allow him to touch her. Degenerate that he was, he wanted to touch her. Besides, how else was he going to seduce information from her? By telling her how ugly she was? By telling her what he *didn't* want to do to her?

"Don't ease off, man. Like I haven't told you countless times, I have no plans to bring her back when I find out what I don't want to know. Okay?"

"If you can bring her back. We discussed that little problem already, too. Remember?"

Kinda hard to forget. Unfortunately. "I won't be careful. You don't have my word. But I don't need to do this. It's not important to me."

That hard hand never left him. "Now isn't the time to leave us. We have three artifacts, and Galen's pissed as hell. He's gonna want revenge for the one we took from him."

Galen was leader of the Hunters, as well as a demon-possessed warrior. Only, he looked angelic and was paired with the demon of Hope, so all of his human followers thought he was, indeed, an angel. Because of him, they blamed each of the Lords for the world's evil.

Because of him, they expected a future free of that evil, and fought to the death to achieve it.

Aeron's new woman, Olivia, who actually *was* an honest-to-her-God angel, had stolen that third artifact from the bastard. The Cloak of Invisibility. As there were four artifacts needed to lead the way to Pandora's box—the All-Seeing Eye (check), the Cage of Compulsion (check), the Cloak of Invisibility (as stated, check) and the Paring Rod (check coming soon)—Galen was desperate to win back the Cloak, as well as confiscate all the others.

Which meant their war was really heating up.

Didn't matter, though. Nothing was going to deter Gideon from his present course of action. Mainly because part of him felt like his very life depended on this.

"Gid. Dude."

He flicked his friend a narrowed glance, lips pulling back in a snarl. "You're begging to be kissed." Beaten to hell.

A moment passed in heavy silence.

"Fine," Strider finally muttered, raising his arms, palms out. "Take her."

Jeez. "Wasn't planning on it, but many thanks for the approval." But why wasn't Strider collapsed on the ground, out for the count? He'd just lost a challenge, hadn't he?

"When will you return?"

Gideon shrugged. "I wasn't thinking...a week?" Surely seven days was plenty of time to soften Scarlet toward him and get her to open up about their past. Right now, she seemed to hate his guts. He didn't know why, but he would. It was a vow. But still. She clearly

preferred dangerous men. Why else would she have supposedly married him? So he fit the bill.

“Three days,” Strider said.

Ah. Negotiation time. That was why Strider hadn’t fallen to his demon. He wasn’t defeated, merely trying another strategy. Gideon could dig. He felt just as guilty about leaving his boys behind as he did about leaving Scarlet in this cell. They needed him, and if they were hurt while he was gone, he would completely flip his lid.

“I’m not thinking five now,” he compromised.

“Four.”

“No deal.”

Grinning, Strider nodded. “Good.”

So. He had four days to soften Scarlet. He’d fought more difficult battles in less time, he was sure. Funny that he couldn’t recall them at the moment, though.

Hell, maybe he just suffered from selective memory loss. Maybe fights and Scarlet—whom he’d probably fought with a lot, since she was opinionated, bossy and mouthy as shit—were the biggest casualties of that loss.

He would’ve liked to remember the sex, though. *Mind-blowing*. He just knew it.

“I’ll inform the others,” Strider said. “But in the meantime, I’ll drive you to wherever you want to take her.”

“Sure thing.” Gideon finally inserted the key and unlocked Scarlet’s cell, the door swinging open with a whine. “I’m not gonna drive her myself. I want everyone to know where we’re going.”

Strider gave another growl, this one just as frustrated but now laced with anger. “Stubborn jackass. I have to know

you made it safely to wherever you're going or I won't be able to concentrate enough to kill anyone. And you know I'm on a strict, at-least-one-Hunter-a-day diet."

"That's why you won't be getting a phone call from me." Gideon approached Scarlet's still-sleeping form. She no longer surrounded herself in that impermeable darkness while she slept. As if she wanted Gideon to always be able to see her. As if she trusted him not to hurt her.

At least, that's what he told himself.

"Gods. I can't believe you talked me into this. Did I tell you already that you're a shithead?"

"Nope." Gently he scooped Scarlet into his arms.

Sighing, she rubbed her cheek against his heart. A heart that was now beating against his ribs like a sledgehammer. She must have liked the erratic rhythm, because she cuddled closer. *Nice*.

She was five-nine to his six-three, slender, but leanly muscled. She had refused the clothes he'd offered her, so she wore the T-shirt and jeans Aeron had found her in.

Gideon inhaled deeply again, but this time there was no guilt. She smelled of floral-scented soap, and it consumed him. What had she smelled like all those years ago, when they'd supposedly been married? Flowers, like now? Or something else? Something more exotic? Something as dark and sensual as she was? Something he would have enjoyed sucking into his mouth as he tongued her from head to toe?

Head out of gutter. Now wasn't the time to indulge such thoughts.

He turned with her clutched tightly to his chest, a treasure he *would* protect while they were outside the fortress walls. Even from his friends. He knew he was

contradicting himself, thinking of her in such romantic terms and so ferociously, when his intentions were neither pure nor honorable, but he couldn't help himself. Stupid lust.

Strider's expression was wary, but accepting, silently telling him no defensive moves would be necessary. "Go. And be careful."

Gods, he loved his friends. They supported him no matter what. They always had.

"By the way. You look like you're a cat, and you just found a bowl of cream," Strider said with a shake of his head. "That's not comforting. You have no idea what you're getting yourself into, do you?"

Maybe not. Because he hadn't looked forward to something this intensely in a long time, and he probably should've been wary. Having his idiocy pointed out, though... "I'm not showing you a finger in my mind. Do you know that?"

"Yeah, I know. It's your index finger and you're telling me I'm number one."

He laughed. Something like that.

"Four days," his friend reminded him. "Or I come find you."

Gideon blew him a kiss.

Strider rolled his eyes. "You wish. But listen. I'll be praying for you to return to us alive. And with the girl. And that she's alive, too. Oh, and that you're satisfied with what you learn. And that she satisfied you in other ways, so you'll forget about her like you've done all the other women in your life."

Okay. That was a lot of prayers. "Thanks. A lot. I really mean that. So when didn't you become a priest? And when did the gods decide they liked answering us?"

Strider had never wasted his time on prayers before, and the gods actually adored ignoring their requests.

No, not true, he corrected himself. Cronus, the newly crowned Titan king, now liked to visit the fortress without an invite and make all kinds of shitty demands Gideon and the others were forced to obey.

Like killing innocent humans. Like choosing to save either your woman or your friend. Like begging to be told where your friend's spirit had been sent when the friend in question had had his head cleaved from his body. Yeah, that had happened. Aeron had lost his head to a warrior angel and at Cronus's behest, Gideon had begged (in his way) to know where the man's spirit resided, tears streaming down his face. Actually, all of them had begged and sobbed like babies.

But in the end, Cronus had still refused to tell them. Because they'd needed a lesson in humility, the bastard had said.

Then, of course, Aeron had returned on his own. Or rather, with his sweet Olivia's help. He'd been restored to his body, minus his demon, and once again lived here in the fortress. But Gideon had yet to forgive Cronus for his disregard, so prayers weren't something he would be offering anytime soon.

"Priest." Strider's head slanted thoughtfully. Of course, he ignored Gideon's questions. Him, though, Gideon easily forgave. "I like it. I mean, it's practically true. I *have* sent many women through the gates of heaven."

Hadn't they all?

And Scarlet would be no different, he assured himself.

Grinning now, Gideon carried his woman away.

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Published in Great Britain 2010.

MIRA Books, Eton House, 18-24 Paradise Road,
Richmond, Surrey, TW9 1SR

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ISBN 978 0 7783 0382 4

55-0710

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Printed and bound in Spain
by Litografia Rosés S.A., Barcelona