



Scent of Cin

By

Ella Drake

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Dedication

To my own hero, always.
And to Venus. You really are a goddess. Thank you for giving me faith in this story.

Chapter One

She didn't recognize her own body, rigid in death. The fire red teddy, crumpled on the floor, had been ripped from her cold alabaster skin exposed for the scalpel to cut. On the sterile metal table, her blood dried in a trail down the legs to the drain on the floor.

The last remnants of her life.

Cinnamon watched from the upper corner of the room, feeling raped and defiled by the men spreading her lifeless body before the angel of death himself.

Confusion, loneliness, and fear were not emotions Cinnamon Murphy was accustomed to feeling. And yet, there she was, dead on a slab in the mortuary, awaiting the scalpel with emotions she'd never experienced in life, and wondered why she was hanging around instead of going after that big bright tunnel in the sky. Moments ago, if asked, she'd have said being a hotshot detective should have been a first class, express train to Paradise. Let alone getting the Hellions off the street before they could cause damage, protecting the innocent, righting the wrongs, putting the depraved behind bars.

But if the men in tacky Hawaiian shirts—sans lab coats—with the roaming hands gave any indication, she had more work to do, and unfortunately, she was dead. Unable to grill the bad guys and stuck in hellhole limbo, she watched somebody's grunts touch her body. Tugs and pulls, pinches and rough fondling gradually muted as if she were numb,

under anesthesia, but with an edge of awareness seeping in. The air changed, shifted, when another man stepped into the room.

“Enough.”

The deep baritone pulsed through her, inciting momentary desire in her body lying on the table. Although she’d been afraid before, the demon’s voice made her aware of two things. First, she was dead, even if she was self aware, and unfortunately not dreaming. Definitely dead, otherwise she’d be off that table and slicing clean through the demon’s head in a heartbeat. Second, her apprehensions were verified by the looks of horror etched on the two men backing away from her body. One of the demon’s lackeys crashed into a gurney. Surgical instruments scattered across the floor.

If his own terrified men fled, what did he have planned for her? And why did desire course through her body for a creature she’d pledged her life to eradicate?

They dashed for the door. Her prostrate body, unable to tremble, was left alone with the dark man standing at the end of her table. Tall enough that he would’ve towered over her, his waist brushed across her bare feet.

Despite the anxiety clawing at her throat, she put her observational skills to work, trying to understand how she had gotten here and the identity of the men, starting with the demon at her feet. Surely he was a demon, dark as shadow. The light bounced off his bronzed skin and jet black shiny hair. Encased in a black leather jacket, his shoulders stretched wide and long legs strained against matching leather pants, tight enough to see the musculature and fine shape beneath.

Wait a minute, Murphy.

At least seven feet, maybe more, he was too tall to be a demon. A Nephilim, a pre-flood product of a demon and a human woman, a man among men, a fallen angel. Or something like that. She hadn’t paid much attention to the history sessions she’d sat through when she’d first joined the volunteer Hellion Squad—which she’d done every solstice since getting her detective license. To her, a product of a demon and a human was, quite frankly, demon. No “half” about it.

This complicated matters. She always knew where she stood with a demon, but a Nephilim could be tricky.

Good or evil? Or, as it really played out, evil or only partially depraved?

To her, it was easy. Black and white. If it wasn't fully human, Cin lopped off the head, asked questions later. She'd learned that lesson the hard way after losing one partner too many.

The Nephilim removed his jacket in one fluid shrug Cin might have admired if she weren't dead and he weren't half-demon.

"Tanner?" The force of his low tenor reverberated, and a scrambling outside the room answered. Within seconds, the door slid open, and a short burly man in a dark butler-type suit barreled in, bringing the heat and humidity of South Florida with him, sweat glistening on his pale bald head.

"Give it to me and get out. I don't have much time. Take those two back to their kennel, and prepare a room for our guest."

"Yes, sire."

The short man's hairy hands clutched an oak-paneled box, laden with scrollwork, the carvings deep, blood red. Shoving the box into his master's hands, he bowed low, kept his eyes on the floor, and backed out of the room. His shoes echoed on the shiny, hard surface of the floor, bringing Cinnamon's eyes back to the drain under her gurney where her life's blood had trickled down.

Tunnel vision narrowed to the grate, while her ears tuned to the *plunk, plunk, plunk* of drops hitting the pipes underneath.

The snick of air released from the box brought her attention to the strong hands holding it on the steel surgical table next to her body. Not recognizing the implements, she tried to panic, have a sense of concern, anything. In the absence of those emotions, she knew her essence was fading. She was becoming a Shade. Too quickly, she no longer saw the stark red of her wounds, but rather, her slashed body faded, awash in muted browns.

Nephilim or no, the man moved with grace as he took a metal instrument from the box. Like a strange airbrush or pen, its design

puzzled her. Motions quick and decisive lent his hands surgical precision. After using a scalpel to slice his wrist, he held the cut to the strange pen, now open. His blood pooled in the well. When the instrument filled, he brought his wrist to his mouth, his lips lush and full, and licked the laceration. The flow of red abated with steam sizzling from the closing wound.

Crouching at her feet, he used the pen on the soft instep of each foot, the buzzing sound cluing Cinnamon in on the purpose of the implement. He tattooed her feet with his own blood. *What the hell?*

Appropriate choice of words since he was surely sending her there.

In a logical world, she should be horrified, but she was empty except for a slight numbness where he inked her. No longer bereft over her lost life or afraid for her pale body, she viewed her splayed limbs on the slab with dispassion.

Unable to decipher the signs he drew, she placed it as demon scroll. She slipped further, sure that moments ago she would have been able to read the script. She couldn't move. Couldn't speak. Of course not. She was apparently dead with some sort of ritual being committed upon her corpse before her spirit faded.

Putting the tat gun back into the box, he pulled out another metal instrument, one that looked like a tuning fork, and a gossamer skein of thread. The burnished steel fork, around six inches long, dwarfed in his grip. With no idea what kind of arcane ritual he performed, a last spark of her old self gave in to an intense curiosity to see where this led.

The man walked to the head of her gurney and turned. She should have been able to see his face, but his head bent down as he studied her lifeless form. Her spirit, up in the corner of the harsh, sterile room, couldn't see his features, his expression. He cradled her head and brushed back her hair, gently, as a father with a child. After tracing her face with his large hands, he parted her lips which had been clenched in pain from the angry, violent, jagged slit across her throat. She hadn't seen her attacker who'd crept up from behind, silent as the death he carried.

Putting the post in her mouth, the twin tines slanting out of her pale lips, the dark man unraveled the thread loosely in his hands, fingers

deft and capable. With a movement so swift she almost missed it, he struck the tuning fork. The reverberations slammed through her body, or rather, her spirit body which no longer floated near the ceiling but sank toward the floor.

His head snapped up, and a dark-as-night stare locked onto her spirit form. He could see her. He whipped out the strand in his hand and hit her directly in the chest. The strand snapped and gripped tight around a faintly pulsing spot in her soul where her heart should be. He pulled the thread, and her spirit drew toward the Nephilim who smiled in satisfaction, white teeth gleaming. She tried to struggle against the inevitable, but she was weak and useless against the tide crashing along the shore of her fate.

Closer, closer. His black eyes, never wavering, watched her.

Awareness trickled back into her. The red markings on her feet grew vivid, glowing in their rich color. Near the end of the table, she stopped. Before she could be relieved, a suction began, even more irrepressible than the thread. The scrolls on her feet drew her in.

Cin jolted into her body, alive again.

Sensation flooded her with the vibrations of the divining rod permeating her real, no longer spirit, body.

Cold slammed into her, and an impatient flick of hand ripped the fork from between her teeth. A hot, sizzling mouth crashed onto hers. He forced his breath into her. His fiery touch made the bottoms of her feet singe and simmer.

No longer cold, but burning with fever and greed, she sucked from the billows pumping air into her lungs. Her throat seared. With pricks of pain, her flesh mended and cells repaired. The closing flesh at her neck burned hot white as it seemed to stitch together.

Hyper sensitive, her cock stirred to life as the lush lips beneath warmed with life. Her cinnamon scent called to him.

Wait! What the hell?

With abrupt clarity, she sensed the man's arousal as her own. An aching pulse started in her clit and flowed through her body to fall heavy and wanting in her breasts. Before she could act on it, the lips vanished,

and she became cold, bereft.

She was also scared shitless. Trying to scramble from the table, her body not yet functioning on all cylinders, she crashed to the floor. In a heap, unable to move, Cinnamon Murphy was relieved she had fallen on the opposite side of the table. Still, the Nephilim stood between her and the door. The door that led to escape.

Could she run, or should she stay and kill the bastard?

As the son of a demon, he'd seen all types. No one compared to Cinnamon Murphy, even disheveled, on the floor, and newly brought back to life. He admired her spirit, but her body wouldn't be able to support any escape plans as of yet. She wouldn't have made it past his lapdogs, much less him, even in her top form.

He admired that form, her quirky charm, and the lush spice of her body. He moved around the table and reached down to her. When she ignored his hand, he straightened away from her.

"Who are you?"

Her voice was rusty and gravelly from the healing cut to her neck, and his erection swelled even more from the husky sound of pure sex. But his anger returned, anger at the audacity of his Queen. His rage at his inability to save the woman detective had crippled him until he remembered the wooden box hidden in his library. Seething regret crushed him, making him desperate. Desperate enough to perform the risky, long forgotten ritual of life sharing. Desperate enough to risk both their corporeal selves if the ritual imploded, reversing itself. Who knew the price to their souls?

"What did you do to me?" she rasped.

Averting his eyes, he had to look away before he pounced on her. He didn't have the time for his attraction. He couldn't hunger for her vulnerable nakedness as she began to turn pink with life. In sharp counterpoints to her full head of auburn hair and deep brown eyes, her dusky areolas beckoned. Riveted, he couldn't keep his gaze away. As he watched, her nipples pebbled despite the oppressive heat made sweltering by the use of his own power during the ritual.

For years he'd missed the intensity of desire. Now was not the time

to enjoy the carnal delights of flesh. He wanted to lick every last freckle on her skin, and she had quite a number of them. Everywhere. But, enough of this. Time slid away while every second compounded his desperation. "I'm afraid this is my fault."

"Bastard!" She tried to move again, no doubt to kick him in the balls. After watching her for weeks, he knew she'd put up a fight if she could. He well understood her usual bag of tricks. To save a life, she'd pull any dirty maneuver. He admired that.

"Settle down, Cin. I would never harm you, but my enemy's lackeys followed me to our meeting. They killed you simply for being near me."

"Only friends call me Cin."

Her eyes flickered with wariness, but he could see she believed him. Otherwise, she would have pounced when he'd reminded her she had been killed. He was sure of it.

"I am your friend," he said.

"Okay, friend. What's your name?" she asked, her lip curled in a dubious expression as if she didn't believe he'd tell her.

He meant to give his name. He wanted to offer her that power over him, but he found it more difficult than he'd thought. Possession of a true name compelled a demon to obey, but he trusted Cin not to use his unwisely.

At his hesitation, she smiled without warmth. "You may call me Murphy, like all my clients. I take it you need help with Hellions?"

She didn't ask again about her death, or her rescue from becoming Shade.

"Yes. I need your help to find my son."

Her eyebrows shot up, and he chuckled, struck with black humor. Demons didn't safeguard their spawn, but he was no demon. He'd managed to shock the notoriously worldly, calculating, ruthless gumshoe, Cinnamon Murphy. He didn't wait for her response. "In exchange for bringing you back from the dead."

He paused, and she went pale as death. His heart stuttered with panic that he'd made a mistake in the scrollwork—never his strongest

ability—maybe gotten the ritual wrong, and she would slip through his fingers. But she recovered, dispelling her visible shock as if it were vapor.

He continued. "I'd like you to find where the Demon Queen has hidden my son."

Chapter Two

Cinnamon reeled. She found herself wishing she was still dead. And what kind of thought was that? One more day of life afforded. One more day to send the Hellions back to their pit of horrors. One more Hellion off the street helped avenge the many good guys who'd died protecting the innocent. Good guys like her brother, Shane. He'd have taken the opportunity in both hands and thank the heavens for it.

Past the split second of fear and indecision, she gulped and ignored the stinging response from her throat. She also ignored her still pulsing center and eager breasts begging attention from the last being on earth she should want. Unable to think straight, to understand her situation, she forced her mind to work, to hide behind her profession. Getting him to talk would give her the answers to what in hell was going on. She'd learned long ago that the guilty couldn't help but talk. All she had to do was listen.

"Seeing as I had already agreed to meet you tonight to discuss the possibility of taking your case, we can get down to business. And, I suppose I can give you a discount since you saved my life and all. Call it the 'Save Cinnamon Murphy's Ass Special'. I'll have you know it's the first time the Special has been offered, and it's only available for a limited time."

Voice croaking, she stopped talking, deciding her flippancy not only wasted time, but stung her damaged vocal chords. Motioning for him

to speak up, she lifted her eyebrows in question and waited.

He paused to compose himself, straightening his clothes and brushing his capable hands through his hair. It gave her time to take in his features, memorize the details of the silky strands he pushed from his face.

With his blue black hair flowing straight to his shoulders, his black eyes, and grim mouth, she couldn't be sure of his intent, but she was sure of his raw appeal, perfected to be a woman's wet dream. His chiseled features were statuesque, beautiful in their harsh lines, but cut through with painful emotions. The pain did not detract from his beauty, but added to his rather dangerous appeal. He towered over her, his tight, thin white T-shirt pulled taut over his muscles and lean waist.

Again, her attention came back to his hands with blunt fingernails clean and buffed, and fingers long, elegant, and strong. She pictured his hands in her hair, not gentle as moments ago, but fisted and tangled in her auburn strands as he pistoned, slamming into her over and over.

Shaking her head to dispel her sexual daze, she was abruptly aware she was still nude, on the cold floor, and the dried blood was hers. In sharp contrast, she'd never felt so alive. She'd never been so abuzz with desire, her skin tingling, itching to be touched. Was this a side effect of being brought back to life, lust crawling up her body and clouding her mind? Could he tell she wanted him? Her, a human. Him, at least part demon. She'd lost her mind when she'd died, and it didn't look like it'd come back.

The blood he'd used must inspire these wanton images, more vivid and desperate than any she'd ever had. She'd never fisted her hands at her side to keep them from grabbing a man to her and begging for hot, wild, monkey sex. At least, she didn't think so.

Her pant suit had been cut from her body. The tan jacket had covered a red teddy. No blouse. She may have been on the job, but she liked to be sexy, if only to remind herself of her humanity with that sinful bit of lace. She hadn't intended for the bit of fluff to be viewed by the EMTs, the ER clinician, nor the worker in the morgue who had stripped her for the examiner. Instead of the examiner, this dark man had come for

her. How had he managed it?

Now she lived once again in her skin, evading death, and no longer covered by her favorite outfit. A suit now on the floor. But, why did she hover at a man's feet, salivating like crazy? She swallowed as he reached down to lift her off the floor. His large but gentle hands hooked her under the arms, pulling her up his long hard body. Her five-foot, six-inch frame brushed against the leather he wore, skin sliding on its smoothness from the sheen of perspiration covering her.

"Is it hot in here, or is it just me?" She shivered despite the sweltering atmosphere in the room.

"You're making *me* hot." A look of apology appeared and vanished, confusion following, but he quickly recovered. "We are short on time, but I fear I will burn out of control."

He grinned a charming smile and added with sultry humor, "Flammable objects will start combusting around us if I don't slake the sexual heat." Face serious, play turned to seduction, his voice lowered to a hypnotic rumble. "I need you. Now. For hours. All night long. Days on end."

Her emotions still out of whack, she see-sawed between terror and satisfaction that she could stir the flames of a Nephilim. Flames that had already raised the temperature in the room to steam bath levels. As if on cue, the emergency sprinkler above their heads began to rain. The smell of musky water teased her senses. The drops never reached her. They turned to steam, fogging the room and covering her in a fine mist.

If Shane still lived, he'd disown her, but she couldn't think of her brother when she wanted carnal relations with a Nephilim. Not wanted, but needed, as if joining with him would make her whole again and slake the simmering that flooded and swelled at the apex of her thighs.

His luscious mouth came back to her lips, this time not to bring life, but to spike her hunger. She wanted to crawl under his skin, bask in his warmth, his fires. Careening out of control, unused to its loss, she gave herself to him, melded against him. His clothing melted away in the blink of an eye. Flesh to flesh.

Aching in her core, hollow, she needed him to fill the emptiness.

She whimpered and clawed at his shoulders. Heat engulfed her, and his skin radiated, but he did not scorch her. His flames of desire covered her with ecstasy, not pain, not death.

Lifting her higher into his arms until her feet left the floor, he hesitated to put her back on the gurney, on the table smeared with her blood. He tightened his hold on her, slid his mouth from her lips, and spread hot kisses from her jaw to her ear. Whispers buzzed through her dazed mind as she wrapped her legs around his waist.

"I would wait and make love to you slowly, torture you with pleasure, in silk sheets covered in rose petals, sipping wine from your body. But for now, we have no time." His sexy crooning, better than foreplay, elicited hot cream to gather between her thighs.

Though she positively knew that she wouldn't have succumbed to him yesterday, today she couldn't bear one more moment without him inside her. The call to give him her body shivered and echoed from deep within, and an instinctive drive to alleviate the building furnace blossomed in her core. She had to have him. Now.

That should bother her, but she'd figure it out tomorrow. Right now, sex and orgasm mattered more than her next breath.

Strained words, pushed past a thick throat, made his voice husky and ratcheted her need as he whispered sexy promises. Arms around her, he thrust his scalding hand between her legs from behind. A long finger slid along her folds, wet and slick, and feathered over her pleasure point. When she twitched in response, he removed his hand, chuckling in sinister lust at the evidence of her readiness.

"No, don't stop."

"Don't worry, my lady Cin, I won't stop until you scream my name."

He positioned her hips and slammed his cock inside to the hilt. No tender coaxing, no sweetness, but hot, fast, and hard. Instant relief brought her back from the edge she hadn't known she'd teetered upon. With him buried inside, a tension and panic eased even while her primal urges built. He slipped one arm around her mid back and tilted his hips to angle his groin against hers. Looking down between their bodies, he

moved his other hand to span her leg at the hip. His thumb pressed her mound, and the friction of his thrust stimulated her clit. Oh, yes. Just the right spot. Nobody had brought her so close, so fast before.

"If you want me to scream your name..." She panted, unable to complete the thought before moans took her in mindless abandon. Digging her heels into his firm backside, she pressed against him for more. More friction. More pounding. More of his thick, large shaft impaling her.

"My name is Stephano Cruisie Leopold Nickolai Gregorio Lucian Montevedo."

Grinding his pelvis against her, he punctuated each of his names with a hard thrust. He took her to the edge while his body glowed with heat. The singed air thickened while crackling water dissipated from the atmosphere into steam, but he did not scorch her to embers, other than the heated passion they shared.

The moist slide of their bodies against each other nearly overwhelmed her with passion and incoherency, but he added to her pleasure when he took her mouth in a demanding kiss.

Their tongues twined, their bodies tensed, and moans and whimpers filled the room along with the strong aroma of sex. His rhythm became harder, more frantic. His thumb pressed and circled her clit.

Climax rocked through her body, and her legs quaked while white sparks flashed behind her eyes.

"Vedo!"

Swelling impossibly harder, he stiffened before he softly grunted and filled her with hot semen. He held her tightly and continued pumping against her in aftershock.

"Vedo?" he asked, voice weak, sated.

She laughed, the release making her mellow and content to tuck her face in the crook of the shoulder of a stranger. A man, part demon, who still held her. Deep inside her, Vedo's cock trembled. He moaned and nuzzled her hair.

"Who can say a name so long? Vedo works for me," Cin replied, almost ashamed to banter with a man she should consider the scourge of

the Earth. Almost.

"My family name, Montevedo," he answered with a level tone, but his contempt over the name peeked through along with his anger toward what had to be a demon father.

"Vedo." Lifting her head to rub her lips across his skin, she licked him. He tasted like hickory. Forget shame. She had dedicated her life to ridding the world of evil, but this man could not be so. She could not believe him to be evil, not with the way her body had responded to him, but could she have done otherwise, with his blood coursing through her veins?

She cleared her throat of the tightness lodged there. He tasted too good to be a demon.

"Good enough to eat," she whispered in his ear, and he shuddered. She couldn't believe he still spilled inside her. His hips rocked into her while his legs shook. The sheer volume of his seed was too much for her to contain, and it flowed down their legs. She floated in a daze of contentment for long moments before he lowered them to the floor. His body shook while his cock still pulsed, buried to the hilt.

His lips were no longer grim but quirked in a smile, a strand of his tousled locks stuck in the corner. His eyes shut while pure bliss trapped his features despite the shock waves running up and down his entire body. When he finally stilled, his scorching temperature lowered, and he opened his glistening midnight eyes.

"Thank you."

The relief in his voice confused her, and she didn't think it polite to ask what in the hell kind of mutant had so much cum that their lower bodies were soaked, slippery. Not that politeness ever kept her mouth shut.

But, damn, he smelled good. Like summer fields and sunshine layered over the smell of a campfire. Like life, something she had lost, and he had gifted.

It hit her. She had been brought back from the dead and now had demon seed in a pool around her. Now coated with its earthy scent, she had been willing. Did she beg for it? Something she had sworn never to

do, fall to the sexual allure of a Demon—Nephilim—Hellion, whatever the hell he was. Hellions, the bane of her existence, had already stolen her life, taken her entire family, and killed every last partner she'd ever had. Everyone she'd ever dared to love. And now she'd had sex with a demon—those beings that directed and controlled the Hellions. Okay, so he was half-demon. And she'd enjoyed every last minute of it.

Regret and mortification were not emotions Cinnamon Murphy was accustomed to feeling. And then he spoke.

"Are you fertile?"

The question jolted her, and she lurched away. Even in her appalled state, she wanted the thick shaft she had dislodged. She wanted him back inside her, filling her, warming her core.

She fisted her emotions into control and told herself to act like a Murphy, calm, logical. Shane may have hated her for the rest of her life for fucking a demon, but he'd expect her to keep her head. Was she fertile? Where was she in her cycle?

"I might be. I don't know. But, I've never died before, so who knows."

He ignored the sarcastic shot.

"As you can see, I have a heightened fertility trait inherited from my father." His eyebrows lowered at the mention of his demon sire.

Or over the inherited ability to create a fountain of semen?

"This virility is the reason the Queen picked me to impregnate her. Most unwillingly."

Now his expression turned bereft, and he seemed unable to subdue the contempt over his body as he grabbed his pants and pulled them over his hips. Too bad. She might have regrets, but she had enjoyed the view. What the hell had gotten into her? Oh, yeah, demon blood. Hell and damn!

In a flash, she wondered how he'd removed his clothes and was more than a little chagrined that she still had none. Her ruined suit on the floor wouldn't do. Where could she find clothes? His silky voice brought her back to the conversation.

"Most unwillingly." He couldn't seem to help the repetition.

"When our son appeared to have more of my human mother's traits, the Demoness abandoned him, as I had hoped, and I rescued him. I love him."

His face closed, no longer readable, and Murphy was adept at doing so.

"He's twelve, the oldest. She has spawned others off me, every year at the summer solstice, when she is in heat. But despite my hopes, the other children are hers and please her in some way. She uses them as the lure, threatening them harm if I refuse to perform. I cannot refuse, even if she has modeled them after herself. That's why I need you. She'd never expect a human, much less a woman, to come for him."

Her face hardened at the insult to her gender, but he had a faraway look and couldn't see her displeasure.

He shook himself. "A dozen. Eleven demons and one beautiful angel, who grew into his power when he hit puberty. This solstice eve, his power escalated. She took him."

"Why did she take him?" At a loss, Murphy fell back on her training. She kept her voice low, concerned, a technique she had mastered in dealing with shaken witnesses.

But he didn't answer. He looked around the stark room with its white surfaces, glinting instruments, and open shelves of supplies. She wondered what he saw. She'd seen the morgue plenty of times in her line of work, but never as a victim. Before, she'd viewed the sterility as necessary in a medical environment. She now saw it as devoid of life, as bleak as the expressions of the victims carted through here daily.

The wall held lines of corpse cabinets, all of them with clipboards of paperwork in the slots. The hotel was full, including the overflow of the gurneys pushed to the side, sheets covering the bodies of two others.

Guilt rode her as she realized she'd had mind shattering sex while in the presence of Hellion victims. With a Nephilim at that. That's all they housed here, the men and women torn apart by the minions of the same Demoness that had bound this beautiful man. She realized she had delicious bait in front of her to catch the evilness she'd hunted for the past decade.

As if reading her thoughts, he stared at her. A sad smile tugged at the corner of his lush mouth, red with the aftermath of their play.

"Do you know how she got me to perform? Got me hard as a rock? I am usually infertile. The rivers of my seed only come when I am triggered to mate. I couldn't mate with her, even if I wanted to do so, without the trigger."

Ice cold despite the heat pouring from Vedo once again, she remained mute. She could not ask because the look on his face assured her it was connected to her. His vitality and fertility with her was a key to the answer. But the detective in her had to know, the curiosity would not be appeased. "What's your trigger?"

"Cin, pure Cin."

Crossing her arms around her waist, she hugged herself to stay on her feet. She didn't quite understand his meaning until his next words punched the air out of her lungs.

"The scent of cinnamon."

Chapter Three

Vedo's temperature spiked high and filled the small cabin of his car. Hands tight on the wheel to keep them there, he wanted Cin to distraction, but he had to find his son. His call of heat to mate had risen to urgent levels moments ago. He held it under tight control, for now.

He'd found a pair of medical scrubs, a poor substitute for Cin's usual smart clothing. He'd noticed. It was difficult not to notice everything about her. The cut of Cin's suits accented her long lean frame, not lush, but almost boyish. Yet, her sexuality exuded all woman and called to him in new ways, beyond the biological urges of his past encounters. She attracted him on an intellectual level, a rational wanting he could grasp. Primal urges to stake his claim and never let her go were all new, all irrational. Alive for centuries and not only was Vedo in heat, but for the first time, he wanted to own a woman, body and soul. No time to understand it all.

Cin shivered. She sat beside him in his black Jaguar—the bucket seats separating them—making him wish he'd called for his limo so he could press against her, share his warmth. The trembling ratcheted up, a side-effect of reclaiming her body. On the mark as ever, he could see her methodical brain click to the logical question.

"Are the shakes because I died?"

"Yes. I'm sorry, but I am not adept at the ritual. I know of no way to help with the trembling. The knowledge was hidden by the Montevedo

elders, and I am the last of the family, besides my son. My mother killed herself, taking away the chance to increase my father's line beyond me."

He hadn't meant to add the last comment. Why would she care?

"I'm sorry." She sounded sincere.

"Don't be. I'm sure she was glad to escape."

She was silent. The thick tension forced a sound from him. It wasn't a laugh, but it released the tightness in his throat. He stopped the desperate sound. "I'm the one who is sorry."

Waiting for him to continue, she remained quiet, and he understood how she was such a good investigator.

"We don't have time for your nerves to settle. I'd prepared a room at my estate for you to rest, but we need to change plans. We must go to the thinnest point of the veil and find Tiago, my son."

Speaking through chattering teeth, she managed to sound both strong and vulnerable, "I chase the veil every June and never find it. How will you?"

"I'm sure you'd like to know how to stem the tide of new Hellions coming through, but it's not an exact science."

"No shit." Cin mentally rolled her eyes at the man. Did he think she had spent the past decade twiddling her thumbs during the Solstice?

He slanted a glance at her. She wondered at his reaction to her upfront language. The man had said he owned an estate, and he was half demon. She deduced he must have been raised in privilege, if not happiness. Demons had more money than God. She snickered at her internal joke. He cut his gaze toward her again.

"Keep your eyes on the road. I don't want to die twice tonight." She left him a space, a moment in time to follow up on her verbal jab, but he remained silent. "Don't think I won't grill you more, later. Right now, you've got my attention and my enthusiastic help to rid the world of that bitch. Her Hellions wreck havoc. Raping and pillaging ain't the half of it."

Somewhere deep inside, a tiny voice added, *and she hurt Vedo*. But she ignored the voice. Must be Stockholm Syndrome. She'd find a shrink first thing after she took care of this latest influx of Hellions. Wait, what was she thinking? Shrink? Being dead must have killed more than a few

brain cells.

"I sensed the veil rip after we made love. Unfortunate, but we cannot wait to see if your body will reject my mark."

Her mind hung up on the phrase "made love," which she knew without a doubt she had never done. She opened her mouth to tell him it was just sex. She snapped it shut so hard she bit her lip. The taste of blood filled her mouth.

"My body could reject what mark?" she asked with forced calm.

"As I said, I'm the only one left with knowledge of how to bring life back to the newly dead, but I've never done it before. I had to mark you as mine and give you a part of myself. We're tied together, bound by blood."

"So I can't kill you for doing this to me?"

"No."

"I'm going to let this go for now because you're going to help me with my life's ambition. And yours, I think. To kill the bitch demoness who opens the gates every year. But, when this is all over, I expect a full run down. And don't think for one minute I'm not going to kick your ass for getting me killed in the first place."

Vedo didn't doubt her. When this was over, if they were alive, he was sure he'd get a tongue lashing. Why did that thought cause his cock to jump?

Her shaking worsened.

Stopped at a traffic light, Vedo reached across the console to rub her leg. He bemoaned the scrubs she wore keeping their skin apart. Her manner changed when he touched her. A softness peeked through.

"I'm so cold."

She looked at him, beseeching, and his heart stuttered. In the month he had watched her from the shadows, she'd never shown weakness. He knew how to warm her, but they didn't have time for what he wanted to do to her. His usual aloof civility fell victim to her allure, but if he didn't keep his randiness in check, the heat would build and he'd have no choice but to take her. All reason aside, he wanted to hear her scream his name again.

Vedo, the name which she had given him. The first such gift he'd

known in his life. She was a true treasure he meant to guard with his own life, as he guarded Tiago.

Tiago.

Moving his car through the grid of streets, he ignored the scent of Cinnamon clouding his senses, and focused on the pulsing of the veil. The veil grew thin, weakest in the heat of summer. The ozone had kept the Hellions out through all of time, but pollution and thoughtlessness of man had created a breach.

Once the depletion in the ozone had reached South Florida, all hell had broken loose. The Demoness, asleep for eons, had awakened. She called forth her minions when the solstice made her most powerful. The veil rendered open. The Hellions had come bringing rioting in their wake, depravity and cruelty their sole pleasures. They forced their queen upon all of the demon spawn in the area—such as himself.

For the past decade, humans had been made aware that demons were quite real. Task forces, such as the one Cin had joined, tried to keep the gangs at bay, but made slow progress before the next batch came through each year.

Demons had always walked among them content to blend in and keep their perversions behind closed doors, for the most part. They could be killed. Cut off their head, and they couldn't self repair. The trick was to get close enough to do so.

The pulsing of his blood grew stronger, causing his body to simmer in a delicious way. The humidity of summer cast a sheen of sweat and moisture over them. He needed, even craved the heat, the reason he stayed in Florida. Summer was heaven.

"Now I'm not cold. I'm burning up and my feet are throbbing." Cin halted his musings.

"It's my blood." His lips turned up at the twist of fate. "You've always wanted a way to find the rip in the veil, haven't you? My blood responds to it. You'll have hot feet every solstice to lead the way."

"Great." She deadpanned, but she didn't contain the smile erupting on her face. "Now I don't have to use you as bait."

The air left his lungs in a rush, surprising him, making him wary

over the ability this woman had to hurt him. After a dozen years of subjugation by the Demoness, desire burned in him again. For Cin. She had the power to name him. She had the power to hurt him. "I'm not bait."

The clothing he'd found in the men's locker room hung loosely, too large for her, and he couldn't keep himself from staring at the V-neck. It plunged down far between her pert breasts. The glistening sweat on her chest pooled into droplets, and he watched one bead slide down between the soft mounds sized for his hands.

The car honk startled him. He jumped in an undignified manner, but he didn't care when he heard her husky laugh.

"Not much to stare at there. It's a wonder you spared more than a glance." She chuckled, comfortable with her slim body.

Her good mood vanished, the twinkling in her eyes growing hard. He understood the cause as the cadence rushed through his body in sweltering waves. The veil.

Several nude men walked down the street, bodies emaciated, chins elongated. Their bodies half crouched and hair jutted in disarray as if continually tugged, pulled, and yanked. He counted eight. Not great odds, but they were new, not used to the atmosphere. He had an advantage. The lightness of being topside would confuse them, unlike whatever Hell they had left behind.

Pulling the car over to the side of the road, Vedo ignored the swerving and honking cars.

Cin's tension straightened her shoulders. Her intense observation narrowed to the group now a block away from the car. They slowed with their noses in the air, scenting.

"Damn. I don't have my taser or my sword," Cin said, her voice calm despite the threat.

Taser to immobilize them temporarily. Sword to decapitate them permanently. He'd seen her skill with the sword, and it was a chilling sight. Chilling not being a comfortable feeling for him, he wasn't disappointed she didn't have her sword. Of course, she shouldn't be defenseless, and he'd had them retrieved after she'd been ambushed.

"I have your weapons in the trunk."

She leaned into him and gave him a scorching kiss. Hot and greedy, her tongue entered his mouth. After too short a moment, she pulled back.

"You do have your uses," she said and gripped her knees as if to keep her hands from him.

Maybe he should keep her sword around if it got him this kind of reaction. The scalding waves that radiated from his chest outweighed any amount of chill.

The Hellions smelled Cin, blatant erections undeniable proof. They surrounded the Jag, snuffling. The woman in question remained calm, used to this behavior, but it made his skin crawl. His temper flared, and he thought he heard a growl. Impossible. He'd learned long ago to keep his feral nature in check. Cin flicked an amused glance his way, and the spiking heat in the small space proved he'd lost control. He'd sunk to the level of the beasts outside the car.

He'd growled.

Damn.

"I'm thinking it's probably good that you've changed me in some way, or I'd be toast with the sparks you're putting off over there."

"Sorry."

"More to talk about later," she mumbled, but he heard.

He reached behind him in the small cab of the car. Customized for his tall frame, his seat sat all the way back to the useless back bench. He flipped the back cushion down, reached into the trunk, and pulled out the sword and taser. Pushing them into her capable hands, he trusted she'd put them to good use. He shoved open his door, leaving her his parting comment.

"These mutts can't be far from the bitch. Let's take them down." He grinned, momentarily amused that he'd sounded more like Cin than himself.

"Fine by me," she answered.

Vedo slammed the door and shoved the nearest wretch away. As he knew they would, they ignored him and tried to find a way into the car

to get at the woman. Hellions were the hounds of Hell brought forth by the Demoness to wreak havoc, the emotions she fed upon. Nothing was as dangerous as a demon who fed on havoc. Their turmoil laid waste to as much of humanity as possible. That's why they'd been hunted down centuries ago, put to rest deep in the earth. To date, she had been the only one to awaken. This particular demoness enjoyed using the Hellions as they preyed upon women. They mowed over anyone in their path.

He growled again and vowed that this female would not be harmed. His female.

Grabbing the nearest man-hound, who scrabbled at the seams in the door, he put one hand on the mutt's neck, the other on its shoulder, and twisted. The resulting pop gave him satisfaction. The bloodlust he held in check awakened and fed his demon with the scent of death. He'd have to be careful not to lose control, or he'd make the Hellions seem like child's play. With that thought, he twisted the head off the body he held. Dropping it, he suppressed the call of blood.

"Leave some for me," called Cin as she crouched in the door he'd come through.

Most of the sex-crazed lunatics still lurked on her side of the car. Inhaling deeply, her cinnamon scent slammed through him. The awakening demon clawed to get at her, to take her, possess her. He blinked and looked away, lunging at the nearest enemy.

Chapter Four

Cin was stunned by the change in Vedo. The white of his eyes blazed red, evil banked for now. Once she'd stepped from the car, her nerves prickled as he scented her. His nostrils flared, and his eyes grew wild for a heart stopping second. He rumbled deep in his chest, loud and fierce. The sound was strangely comforting.

A cur lunged at Cin from the top of the car. Vedo's growl grew louder. He threw the Hellion onto the sidewalk.

Cin swung her sword. She turned away from Vedo to her right. In a swift move, she decapitated the first slime bucket to round the backside of the car. That was number three. With a flip of his wrist, Vedo yanked the head off of number two.

Vedo pushed away from the car. Vedo's slight tap to her elbow directed her to the middle of the sidewalk. They stood, back to back. The remaining five still ignored Vedo, to their peril, and focused on her, pushing each other aside to get to her first.

Three lunged at once.

She brought up her arm and fired at the one on the far left with the taser. The wires shot the electrodes dead center into his chest. He fell to the ground bucking. Cin rotated her sword. The sharp metal slid straight through the neck of another cur. Four down. The sword continued its arc. She watched with satisfaction as she sliced into the shoulder of the next Hellion.

The growling behind her intensified, and she heard a sickening crunch. Five down.

Yanking her sword out of the Hellion in front of her, she held it aloft, kicked his midsection, and thrust him away from her. Cin turned. Swinging her sword down, she sliced off the thrashing hellion's head. She yanked back her taser. Six.

Harsh hands clutched her waist from behind. A strong grip ripped down her pants to entangle her legs. The cement raced up to meet her, but she kept her attention on the Hellion she could see. The taser flew out of her grasp when her hands hit the ground, but she held tight to her sword as her knuckles scraped the sidewalk. Levering into a pushup, she knifed her legs in a circle and kicked the Hellion in the jaw. He dropped like a stone.

The putrid stench of sulfur made her eyes water. The beast behind her tried to climb on top of her, but he fell away when she rolled and whisked her sword around. She sliced off his arm instead of his neck. His howling ended with another abrupt crunch. Seven.

The last one, bleeding from his shoulder, shook his head dazedly. He'd had the full brunt of her kicks twice. He crawled toward her, drool running from his mouth.

Sitting up, she struggled with her pants for a millisecond before abandoning the idea. With a forward stab, she caught the mongrel in the throat. His whimpers escalated to strangled howls. His hands clawed the sidewalk, his saliva tinged pink. Putting him out of his misery, she withdrew and cut across his neck with a deft horizontal strike. Eight.

The air rushed in and out of her lungs.

After the grunts, growling, and grappling, Cin's ears rang from the stillness. With a quick glance, she determined the Hellions were all gone. The sickening tang of blood clung to the back of her throat, as always. The iron scent mingled with the city, the gas fumes of passing cars that hadn't stopped, but had sped by to avoid trouble.

The hint of smoldering wood flooded her an instant before strong arms engulfed her. Vedo—who panted from the exertions of fighting off the Hellions he'd dispatched—lifted her from the ground and turned her

to fit against him. His arms of steel wrapped her in a bone crushing hug. The illusion of safety, for the first time since the first Hellions stepped through the veil a decade ago, eased her tension despite the large bulge pressing into her stomach. Her brother, Shane, would have liked Vedo, if he'd given the Nephilim half a chance. Would he have resented her for falling to this unavoidable pull, this desire that burned her from the inside out?

Then the trembling started.

Cin shook so hard the sword fell to the ground with a clank. Vedo clutched her harder against him. His scorching body supported her, strengthened her. His face brushed against her hair, rubbing back and forth. She could hear his deep breaths.

"Cinnamon." His pained voice shook, and he ground his erection against her. Impossibly hard. Impossibly large. "I'm going to lose control in about three seconds."

His large strides ate the distance to the Jag.

Opening the door, he swooped into the seat. He pulled her down onto his lap. Legs flung across the center console, she wiggled her ass on the rigid cock underneath her. Adrenaline heightened her arousal. The door slammed shut, and his mouth crushed hers. His hot tongue forced between her lips. Intoxicating.

She wanted him. She needed him to keep the trembling at bay. Anticipation crested through her, and she reveled in his heat and his animalistic power. She forgot everything except this intoxicating thrill clutching at her, begging for release. Clenching her legs together, she relished the moist heat building to a conflagration between her thighs.

Sucking Vedo's tongue into her mouth, she yanked at the buttons of his pants. He lifted her, extricated the tangled scrubs from around her legs, and in one fluid motion pulled them off. She had no undergarments. Her bottom slid over his leather pants. He grabbed her right thigh and guided her leg around so that she straddled him.

Both hungry, tugging at his clothes, they managed to free his cock to stand between them. Eager to feed the hunger and impulse to ride, Cin grabbed him at the base and pulled up his length.

"Yes." Vedo groaned.

He leaned his head back and shut his eyes for a moment, and she gave in to the urge to lay her head against his chest. She stroked him, and he grew larger. Harder. Silk over steel. When he stared back at her, his eyes filled with red. She had a flicker of unease, but she looked away, down to the erection she'd wrapped in her hand.

His magnetism made her forget. She didn't dwell on his being part demon. Her mouth salivated at the sight of his burnished head. Pre-come sizzled at his tip, and she licked her lips. When his body jolted in reaction, he growled low, a feral sound that kick started her already overtaxed libido.

"Now, Cin. Your scent is making me crazy. I'll be a rutting lunatic in about five seconds."

"I thought you said three." She couldn't resist the byplay, even with her mind fogged with lust.

She almost wanted to see him rutting like an animal, but not quite. The delay tightened her chest against the need to have him inside, the need to join with him, blood to blood. She lifted up, brought the head of his shaft to her soaked entrance, and lowered herself. When she paused to heighten the tension, he gripped her hips and pushed her down as he surged up and hilted.

"So much for slow," she said and gritted her teeth against the relief and pleasure. He stretched beneath her to fill her fully and retreated, only to impale her again.

"No slow. Later."

The pounding bliss brought her teeth on edge. The exquisite tingling in her blood raced to her extremities. No one had ever made her feel this way. So alive.

She changed her mind. Slow wouldn't do it. "Fast, better. Harder, baby."

No longer capable of speech, she stared into his glazed eyes that hinted of red. The reminder that he was Nephilim did not dim her need for him to fill her completely. A few short breaths and the car filled with steam and the windows turned opaque.

Heartbeats later, Vedo shook, and his skin blushed along his upper chest and throat. With his hands under her arms, he reached the top of her shoulders from behind and pushed her down onto him, hard. He groaned, and his eyes wavered in and out of focus. A feast for her senses, the smell of him filled her mind as much as his cock filled her body so completely. He ran his hands over her skin eliciting shivers up and down her entirety.

In retaliation, she leaned forward to lick him, the sweet taste of his sweaty skin, exquisite. In the smallest corner of her mind, she couldn't believe she could respond with such uninhibited abandon to a Nephilim who'd brought her back from the dead. Was she still human? Then he moved his hips, and she didn't care anymore.

Vedo struck a rhythm, stroking into her and pressuring her mound in circular motions. At her whimper, he growled again while his mouth suckled her now heavy breasts. Cheeks indenting at the force of the pull, he tortured her nipple and sucked, hard. Her hands clenched his head, holding him to her with a firm grip. She couldn't let him go. Her fingers tightened even more in the strands of his hair.

"Yes, right there." She moaned her approval when he tugged and nipped her sensitive flesh. In response, she increased her efforts sliding up and down his shaft and plunged headlong toward that needed release. Hot. The heat shimmered on her skin, and she loved it. She wanted more, and more, and more.

After short pounding seconds, he gave the other breast the same mind blowing treatment.

Too charged to last, they both exploded in climax as one. Vedo expelled the air in his lungs with a heavy sound that ended in a guttural roar. Cin's entire body trembled with release. Balls of fire bounced through the car, extinguishing moments after they appeared.

Slumped against him, she sought more of his warmth. Cutting his moans short with her mouth, she plunged her tongue inside to tangle with his. His essence flowed. The sun burst inside her, and his heat coated her, filled her. As before, he continued to pump, his release lasting long moments. Rather than being disturbed by it, this time Cin sank into their closeness as he held her. Perhaps Nephilim's weren't so bad after all. She

liked this one.

A knock on the window shattered the peaceful moment, and before she could process the shocking idea that she'd had sex in the front seat of a car, the world shook.

The door ripped wide. The hinges squealed in protest.

A voice slithered into the car, insinuating itself, all the more frightening because of the whisper. "Did you enjoy riding my bull?"

Torrid air knocked her from the car and onto the pavement, blessedly cool until the stinging scrapes across her left arm and leg began to burn. Cin moved into a defensive position and managed to get her knees under her, her arms straight, hands flat on the ground.

"He's mine," proclaimed the screech inside her head as it lanced through her.

Her arms collapsed. Sharp daggers of pain sliced behind her eyes. She wrapped her arms around her knees. Her naked backside thumped to the ground. Bruised and abraded by the gravel, Cin pulled the overlarge shirt from beneath her armpits where it'd been pushed, down to cover her knees. She rocked back and forth on the pads of her feet as the darts across her mind crippled her.

"I am not yours. I am not your toy." Vedo responded to the voice, hate dripping from every word.

His large form stood behind her. Vedo touched her back in a quick gesture, silencing the debilitating screams echoing inside her.

The eerie disemboweled voice belonged to a demoness Cin had still not seen. She knew the voice, though she'd never heard it before. It pouted. It simpered.

"My little slave, you're still my favorite. Come with me now and perhaps I'll let the boy go. I thought he might perform as well as you, but his body doesn't please me as yours does."

"Did you touch him?" The growling fury erupted from Vedo.

Volcanic waves rippled across the ground. Vents of hot air pushed Cin's hair around her body in a vortex. Steam in the air crackled, and noxious fumes of burning leather surrounded her. The answering anguish swept through the scrolls Vedo had left on her body. Fire hotter than any

she could've imagined engulfed her feet.

Not good.

"No, pet. I didn't touch the boy. I didn't want you to feel replaced or pout too much and spoil our fun. Now, I haven't forsaken my needs for anyone else in centuries. Come reward me with your willing submission. Come to me."

"Bitch." Cin couldn't help the explosion as jealousy warred with protective instincts. The monster wouldn't touch him again. He was hers. He belonged to no other. She stomped on the small thought that this was a ridiculous notion for a Murphy. To protect a half-demon was not a logical thought.

Cin rose to her feet in deliberate movements. Her body sung with vitality, unstoppable in the heady aftermath of the fight followed by the shared passion with Vedo. With practiced ease, she looked for her sword and scanned for the bitch now growling. Cin's arm hair lifted. The voice circled her, babbling incoherencies.

Vedo slipped a hand into Cin's and spoke with a steady voice. "Where are you? Tell me before I use your name to draw you forth."

The Queen's chiding laugh frustrated Cin, who wanted to cut the demon's vocal cords. Who was she kidding? She wanted to slice through the entire neck, remove the head from the body. This was the Demoness who sent Hellions into the streets. Gangs of them roamed and sought mayhem. They'd killed Cin's partners and her beloved brother, cut dead in the street when he tried to protect a woman from being mauled. Nothing would satisfy her more than ridding the Earth of the Demoness, but Cin calmed a fraction when Vedo hooked his other hand through her elbow to cradle her arm.

"You do not know my name, child. Come and find me. I do so love to torment you."

The overwhelming scents of spice assaulted Cin's olfactory glands.

Vedo whimpered.

She tried to turn to him, still behind her, but he did not let go of her arm—such was his frozen state. She jerked out of his grasp and swung around to face him.

Eyes wild, her Nephilim blinked once and leered at her.

Vedo was surrounded by cinnamon. The scent drove him crazy with lust, and all the more so since he had tasted the beauty in front of him. He pulled Cin roughly against him and bent his head to take her lips. He bruised her delicate mouth, still swollen and wet from their exuberant play in the car. Before she could respond, her body tense with shock, blistering wind ripped her from his grasp.

Cin landed several feet away with limbs splayed on the sidewalk. She rolled onto her side and into a ball and tucked her head.

Vedo took a step toward her, his need overwhelming the small voice inside his head that worried if she were hurt. Before he could lift his other foot, Cin's prone body whipped through the air and into a dark alley near his parked car. Trash cans and empty boxes in the entryway blew over with the force. He could not see her in the dark tunnel between buildings.

The sidewalk was empty. He scanned the humid street, toward the silent alley. The clank of steel reverberated over the unusual quiet. At his feet, steam rose from the heat of his soles on the concrete. Cin's sword lay underneath his left heel. He bent to pick it up, catching her scent as he rolled it in his hand, testing its weight. He stalked toward the deserted lane, intent on the trail of Cinnamon.

The fear in his gut was new. He'd never felt its like, the terror for his son and his lover. The lover he would claim forever—as soon as he got them home. And he would get them all home. He would rid the world of the Demoness once and for all. She'd always taken him during a moment of weakness. The first few times he had been unprepared, not realizing her intent to have him every solstice.

Later, he'd armed himself with all manner of daggers, swords, garrotes, anything that could slice through a fleshy neck, but her hounds picked him up while his weapons were out of reach, or threatened his son until he disarmed. Resisting had been useless, but when he'd first seen Cinnamon in action during the last solstice, he'd regained his hope.

His son was a hostage, but now Vedo had a blade, a way to protect Tiago.

The cobblestone alley was unique, not a usual surface, but then, perhaps the Demoness chose this location for that reason. The stone would not melt as easily as asphalt or even concrete. The veil's static raced across his skin. The opening occurred near the solstice, but the Demoness controlled the exact timing and location. He walked farther into the alley. The darkness surrounded him. No bother. The Queen knew he was here.

His aura scorched in waves around him, and his aching loins hindered his movements. His gait, less than graceful. Trailing the sword behind gave cold comfort. The scraping sound added to the illusion he would end this once and for all.

To his mortification and utter horror, before when his heat rose, he'd been utterly open to sexual conquest. The joint sensations of lust and crumpled resolve had made him vulnerable, a weakness readily used by the Queen.

Now his heat gave him power. His predator's instincts heightened, and he could see the odd tableau at the end of the alley. His woman. On her knees in front of the Demoness surrounded by curs.

This would not do.

He had sacrificed. Lived and breathed acquiescence as a child. For a dozen years, he'd pacified the monster now threatening his Cin.

His Cinnamon.

This would end now. Nothing would keep him from saving his son and his mate.

He tightened his grip on the sword.

Chapter Five

Where was Vedo? Cin yearned for his steadying presence. It was a new feeling to need someone.

On her knees surrounded by death, Cin did not tremble. In her quest to rid the world of Hellion filth, she had faced annihilation before. She did not bow to pressure now. The only decision to be made was how to go out in a blaze of glory. What poison should she pick to end the existence of the perversion laughing gleefully above her? A razor wire wrapped around each boot heel? The whisper thin blade sewn into the wide piping of her slacks?

Even a nice throwing star would be welcome.

The hot steam on her arms reminded her. She didn't have her usual clothing with the built-in arsenal. No matter.

Inside, a knot the size of a fist lodged somewhere in the vicinity of her heart. She didn't have a weapon, and her demise would bring death to the man tied to her. Vedo hadn't told her so, but the knowledge ran bone deep.

As much as she did not fear her own death she couldn't hurt Vedo. She couldn't sacrifice him, even for the greater good. Shocking.

"Well, well, well. What do we have here? A little whore?" Spittle hit the back of Cin's neck. She shuddered.

A foot, hard as rock, sliced into Cinnamon's chin. She splayed flat on her back. With a whoosh, the breath left her body.

That was going to leave a bruise.

The momentary thought that her lover had carnal knowledge of this clove-footed, pimple-riddled, slovenly creature in front of her, hollowed her stomach. But pity for Vedo had no place here.

Her words labored, Cin sat up and spoke past swollen lips, "Come on. This is just us. Woman to woman." If you could call this hideous gnome a woman, with ugly red skin oozing gook. She couldn't be four feet tall. Her hair waved in static, a tangled mess, chopped off at varying lengths around her shoulders. Who could tell what she looked like under there? This was a queen?

Cin continued, "We've got more important matters to discuss than a mere man."

"True." The Demoness reached up with a flaming hand and singed the hair obscuring her face. Revulsion rocked Cin, and she held her breath against the smell of demon hair. Cin's surprise seemed to please the Queen, who smirked. The smile revealed a black mouth crowded with razor sharp teeth. Her pupils swirled bright speckles around a black, empty hole. Cin cringed.

"However, I find I do not want to converse with you, who defiled my stud. I had wanted to use his services tonight."

Cin gagged at the images railing against her mind. Saliva filled her mouth. She swallowed and fought to keep her gorge down. The she-dog's wicked laughter helped Cin control herself. She wouldn't play into the bitch's plans.

"I can assure you, I am not prepared to speak of your stud's services, either." Cin walked a fine line. The Queen could end Cin's existence with a snap and a bit of spontaneous combustion.

"Nor do I want to talk to the woman who has killed so many of the little pretties I bring here to please me." The queen sniffed.

"The mutts please you?"

"Oh, yes. They please me greatly." The queen eyed her with obvious lascivious pleasure. A cold rock of dread settled in Cin's stomach. Did the look imply she sported sexually with the Hellions? A horrendous thought. Or, was she thinking of Cin? Even more horrendous.

"I'll take you instead." Damn, the look was for her.

"Over my dead body," Cin muttered.

"We've already done that. You will tell me why you are not dead."

The she-devil thought Cin would tell her. Ludicrous. The bitch had just admitted to having her killed, too. Cin didn't play dead.

"She's not dead because your mutts failed to kill her." Vedo's steady voice echoed down the alley, venom dripping from his tone. The dozen Hellions surrounding the two women shuffled and swayed their noses in the air.

"I know Tiago is here. Give him to me," Vedo growled.

The Queen's stare flickered to the shadows of the alley. A hungry expression gave her a thin shadow of vulnerability, dispelled when she started fondling her own breasts.

"Eww!" She clamped a hand over her mouth. While all attention had been on Vedo, Cin had scrambled back to her knees from being prone on the ground. One part of her mind rebelled at the display of the deranged, ugly Demoness in front of her. The other part planned to use the distraction Vedo provided.

"Hello, pet." Perhaps the Demoness intended the tone of voice to be alluring, but the atmosphere buzzed with feral intent. Erect and ready, the mutts responded, howling in the confined space between the tall buildings.

The menace in the air was thick enough to clog Cin's lungs.

The Queen stood there, on a silver platter, but Cin retreated. She couldn't risk Vedo and Tiago. After they were safe and the solstice had passed, she and Vedo could discuss options. They'd find a way to defeat the enemy without endangering her lover and his son. Her own life she'd been willing to give for the cause, but found she couldn't risk those two. Mystifying considering she'd never even met Tiago. Vedo's love for his son spread into her like rays of sunshine.

The pack before Cin watched their mistress, pleading in their eyes. Whines echoed in the alley, walls shimmering with hot steam. But the curs stood immobile. Watching. Not the usual behavior of Hellions, who by now would be either rutting on a victim or using their own hand.

Sometimes using each other.

All rational thought fled when the luring scent rolled over her. The fragrant volley directed at Vedo with such force, she saw his legs wobble in the shadows. He leaned against a side wall to collect himself before he walked with a stiff gait toward the end of the alley lit by the fires of the veil.

"Come to me, my pretty," the Queen crooned before her voice turned harsh and hissed at Cin. "I am bored with you, but I think I'll make you watch when I play with my toy."

"Cin." Vedo's rich voice soothed her despite the evil hovering around them. Her naughty bits responded to him like flame to tinder. The untimely surge of lust had to be because of the blood ritual he'd performed. His passion mingled in her veins. But, her body didn't care for the reasons. It knew what it wanted.

She melted at the sight of him, and his physical presence set her breasts to clamoring for his undivided attention. Her breath strangled in her lungs. Her nipples beaded. Her core flared and moisture pooled. The longing in his face reached into her, chipped at her heart. And the impressive erection outlined in his leather pants made her mouth water.

The crooning and panting behind her should have been a douse of cold water, but she couldn't care about the Demoness, despite a decade of hunting her. Cin was unable to do anything but stare and pant for the man who'd given her life. A man who shared his life force with her.

Vedo stalked to Cin and bent to give her a searing kiss and the world slowed, slipped away. The sauna atmosphere around him ensnared her body in a puddle of desire. Every pore of her skin opened to his touch.

She longed to jump up and wrap her legs around his waist. She ached to unsheathe his magnificence and ride him. Now. In front of all. Her boiling blood thrilled at his feral beauty, his dark hair and sharp features, and all seven feet of brawn. The peril surrounding them receded, and she grasped the fledgling peace and love as their spirits touched through their blood bond. The bond snapped tight, the connection to him as irrepressible as the scrolls that itched the pads of her feet.

The scent of cinnamon tinged with brimstone nearly gagged her.

She broke away from Vedo's lush lips to fill her lungs, choking on the pestilent air. The she-devil had pulled out all the stops. Shrieking filled Cin's head at a fevered pitch, and she leaned away from Vedo's kiss, but no pain in the world, no mental torture could have made Cin release her grip on his arms.

"Come to me, pet. I want you now, even if I need to cleanse the whore from your skin." The words were distorted, and Cin strained to make sense of them.

Vedo pressed the hilt of her sword into her fingers. He'd held it against his left leg, out of sight. He hugged her with desperation, his erection blatant. His breath in her ear blew like a furnace, whispering inside to light the corners of her soul, and his meaning, barely spoken with word, flowed into her.

"I trust you. Save my son and end this. I can never fight my trigger for long." He ground his hardened shaft against her with fierceness, strength, and her skin abraded in response. "You have five minutes before I'm a mindless rutting animal."

"Is that like the five seconds in the car?"

He quirked a corner of his mouth. "I will be sure of it. Five minutes."

He walked past her. Cin cringed at the triumphant trilling from the devil woman. The pride of the Hellion Squad held the sword with determination and refused to look behind her when she heard leather rip. The Hellions howled in a cacophony.

Five minutes.

Vedo would hold his own until his internal demon forced him into frenzied need. She had to find Tiago. Fast.

"Yes, pet. You're beautiful. Beautiful. Perhaps since you came to me without delay, I won't hurt you tonight."

Cin couldn't listen to the Demoness, who warbled in pleasure. She walked straight through the lines of Hellions who watched the events behind her. Cin didn't want to contemplate what they saw. Back firmly to Vedo, she checked the internal clock she had developed through instinct. Four and a half more minutes.

The dead-end lane between the two abandoned edifices had one outlet besides the alley she'd been thrown down. Seconds ticked by. There, an industrial building with a damaged padlock. The lock had been melted away with parts of the metal door. Not subtle.

With the sword in her left, she stooped to grab a chain on the ground with her right. The chain was an obvious victim of the Hellion's break-in. Any manner of weapon worked if she were desperate enough. She swung the chain in an arc to memorize its weight.

Four minutes.

She pushed the door open with the sword, walking in with its lead. A large room spread before her. It was an old textile shop. Rows and rows of workstations with overturned chairs and tables with antiquated sewing machines crowded the middle of the room while the sides were lined with piles of moldering fabric stacked on shelves.

A burst of howling behind her made the soles of her feet burn. Vedo was in pain. Only the force of her determination cooled her, allowed her to continue her search for the boy.

Tiago wasn't in the main room. She stood still, taking precious time to deduce the best place for a hostage. No time to be wrong. She needed to find him now because she had three minutes left.

A movement to her left had her crouching, chain whipping out. She raised the sword above her head parallel to the floor, tip pointing behind her, poised.

The sight greeting her repulsed and amused. The arrogance of the Demoness was her downfall. The woman had not made adequate arrangements to guard her hostage. Tiago sat bound to a chair, pillowcase over his head, but she knew it was him. Her blood sang with the satisfaction of finding him, and her protective instincts flared. Her singing blood was the only proof she needed to identify him.

Four Hellions scrambled at the window watching the proceedings outside. She did not want to ponder what they saw with their visual proof of sexual excitement.

She took a precious tick of the clock to move to Tiago. Quiet. She could take the Hellions, but it would cost them more valuable seconds.

"Shh, Tiago. Your father sent me," she whispered in the tense boy's ear as she sliced through his bonds.

The boy took a long deep breath and relaxed. "You smell like my father. Who are you?"

"A friend." She guessed he'd go with anyone who released him from the Hellions, but he sensed his father. That would help move things along.

She pulled Tiago from the chair. He was lanky and tall for a pre-teen, probably six feet. At his movement, she stopped him from removing the pillowcase. "There are things you shouldn't see. Just hold onto my hand, and I'll lead you."

At the door, Cin risked a glance at the Hellions. They still watched the spectacle outside. With limited space at the small window, they pushed each other away to make room for themselves. The jostling carried their pungent scent to her. Her nose crinkled in disgust. The escalating growls heralded that their animal nature would soon dominate. Cin was glad she wouldn't be here then. The men would either fall on each other to rip out throats, or to slake their sexual hunger. Either case involved violence.

She opened the door with caution. Checking outside, she determined the coast was clear. Guiding Tiago to the door, she hoped beyond hope to slip away without notice. Screams from the direction of the window proved those wishes false.

Plunging them both outside the building, she slammed the door, leaned against it, and dug in her heels. She had to count on none of the bad guys inside having a gun. Not likely. They had nowhere to keep weapons.

Tiago shook. His head tilted up proudly, and he stood as if fear was unknown to him. The door started shuddering under the weight of the bodies hurling against it. Thud. Thud. She wasn't sure if the pounding was from the Hellions trying to get to her, or her heart beating as if to burst from her chest.

"Tiago, turn and put your back to me."

Daring to reach forward, careful to keep her weight against the

door, she slipped off his head covering and revealed raven hair that fell to his shoulders. Like his father. He began to turn to her; his profile showed grim determination and sharp features.

"No, don't move." He obeyed without qualm. He understood the danger. Cin didn't want him to see his father, or her own partial nudity.

"What should I do?" His voice was calm, low. Poor thing probably lived this every solstice.

"Look there. Do you see your dad's car?" At his nod, she continued. "Run to it and get down out of sight. Don't look at anything. Don't turn around. Lock the door and wait for your dad. I'll watch your back. Don't worry." By the end of her speech, she panted and hoped like hell the keys were still in the ignition.

"Okay." He sounded weary, if not afraid.

"Good boy."

He snorted.

She levered against the metal door, even though some of the pounding had let up. Not a good sign, that. Tiago took off down the deserted alley.

She watched the boy. He ran head down and disappeared in the darkness for heart wrenching moments. Relief almost crippled her when he reappeared under the lights of the street. He jumped into the Jag.

She checked her internal timer.

Two minutes.

She adjusted her sword grip and sprinted back toward Vedo's last position. She didn't care about the Hellions behind her. That boy huddled in the car needed a father. And Cin wanted to explore all of Vedo's body. Head to toe. At leisure. She wouldn't leave him to the Demoness. And, oh yeah, she wanted to pay that bitch back for hurting Vedo and for the death of her brother.

"Vedo!"

She screamed when she saw him go down.

Chapter Six

Vedo focused on the off-flavor of the Queen's scent. It wasn't the musky richness of Cin. Tainted by an undertone of burning sulfur and imbued by the evil woven through its strands, the thick perfume clung to the cloying air. Cin had no evil.

He grasped that rationale even though his dick was hard enough to drive nails. For the first time, his mind maintained thin tendrils of control over his heat. But not for long. Even now, control unraveled, though he'd lasted longer than he thought. He could last even longer for the sake of his son and sweet Cin.

He needed time.

One last effort to delay had him falling to his knees at the Queen's feet. The movement pulled a deep groan from him. His pants tugged against him, the sudden pressure against his swollen cock caused his body to tighten, jarring the welts across his naked bleeding chest. The bitch had barbs. Through the groan and the peels of delight from the Queen, he heard his name called.

Cin, her nearness a mixed blessing, tumbled over him. It was a blessing. She wouldn't have returned until finding his son. It was a curse. Her presence had him panting, the heat blurred his eyes, and flashes of hunger devastated the last vestiges of his hard-won calm.

Cinnamon's scent rushed toward him, heightened by her sweat and pumping blood. Vedo needed her. A simple plan entered the white hot of

his brain. *Help her. Kill Queen. Then can have her. Plunge into her. Make her mine.*

He growled and lunged at the Demoness. The Queen, surprised at his action, stepped back. But not far enough. He pounced on her. He controlled the animalistic urge to drive into her. Because she was not Cin. He wanted Cin.

The bitch's leer managed to dampen the effects of his driving lust and allowed hatred a share of the primal urges ruling him. She thought he was going to fuck her.

He returned her look with an answering grin. He knew his eyes swirled the same as hers.

The Hellions went wild, focused on the couple on the ground. The mongrels enjoyed the show so much they didn't hamper Cin. He could sense her movements as she broke into a full run.

Vedo bent down, his nose close enough to touch the despised face of the Demoness. "I'm never going to defile myself with you again."

"I feel how much you want defiling." She bucked up against his erection. The movement hit hard and painful in his overly aroused state. He didn't flinch.

"This game is over. You will not touch me again. Nor my son. Understand?"

"How will you stop me? You slobber all over me every solstice. Our little tradition pleases me."

"I'll stop you." The soft reply came from over Vedo's shoulder, and a gentle hand shifted through his hair to draw his head back. Quick as a flash, the sword slid between the two exposed necks.

The Queen hissed and bared her pointed teeth at Cin. The Demoness struggled, but Vedo managed to keep her down. Her writhing and contorting brought her neck against the blade and cut her. The blood brought everything to a halt.

The surrounding minions watched with eager eyes, silent and still. They followed this mistress now and gladly groveled at her feet. But they reveled in death, even hers. They'd follow another just as easily. Vedo detested the idea, but they might leave this demon to go to one even

worse.

Cin's stare narrowed with hatred toward the Demoness. His mate's eyes hardened, and her deadly prowess tightened her arms, rock steady with the enemy in her grasp. Now that she was so close, her presence soothed him, and he subdued the beast within, despite Cin's enchanting spice.

"Do you want the honors, or shall I?" she asked, prepared to let him finish her hunt of a decade.

He didn't care who finally rid the world of this evil. He wanted it done. "Do it. End it, and let's get out of here."

The thrashing beneath him renewed, desperation fleeting across this hated face. She nearly bucked him off of her and managed to scratch his face with her wicked nails. His blood ran causing steam to cloud his vision. A red drop plopped onto the corner of her mouth and sizzled.

The Demoness licked it off and leered up at him.

She tried to slither away before he grappled her down again.

In the face of ending his servitude, he found the strength to hold her still and bare her neck. He didn't watch the sword cut, but he saw the pain in her expression. He watched her life fade, and her eyes dim. With no satisfaction, an immense weight lifted from his chest.

The Hellions dispersed while Cin, expression troubled by their escape, watched the creatures slink away. The light of the Veil winked out and plunged them in darkness. Cin shifted closer to him, her breathing ragged.

"They'll find other masters. But, most demons are content to keep to themselves and hide their perversions from the world. Those curs won't run in packs again," Vedo said.

Cin shook her head and put her finger to his lips to shush him. Before he could react, she removed her hand to thread her fingers through his. She led him toward the streetlights. "Your son's waiting in the car."

He lunged forward. Her fingers slid away, and he ran down the dark lane. Heart pounding, elated, he looked back once to see if she followed. His eyes, able to see in the night, found her, caught in the streetlight, half in shadow, her borrowed scrubs pants in her hand. He

Scent of Cin by Ella Drake

hesitated at the entrance of the alley. She waved him ahead. She wouldn't go with him tonight.

She grinned. "You won't get away so easily. I'll track you down. You still have to explain what you did to me."

He smiled.

"I made you mine."

The End

Author Bio

As a child, Ella read books under the covers with a flashlight. There she found a special love of elves, dragons, and knights. Now that she's found her own knight in shining armor and happily ever after, she loves to write tales of fantasy hot enough to scorch the sheets. No flashlight needed.

www.elladrake.com