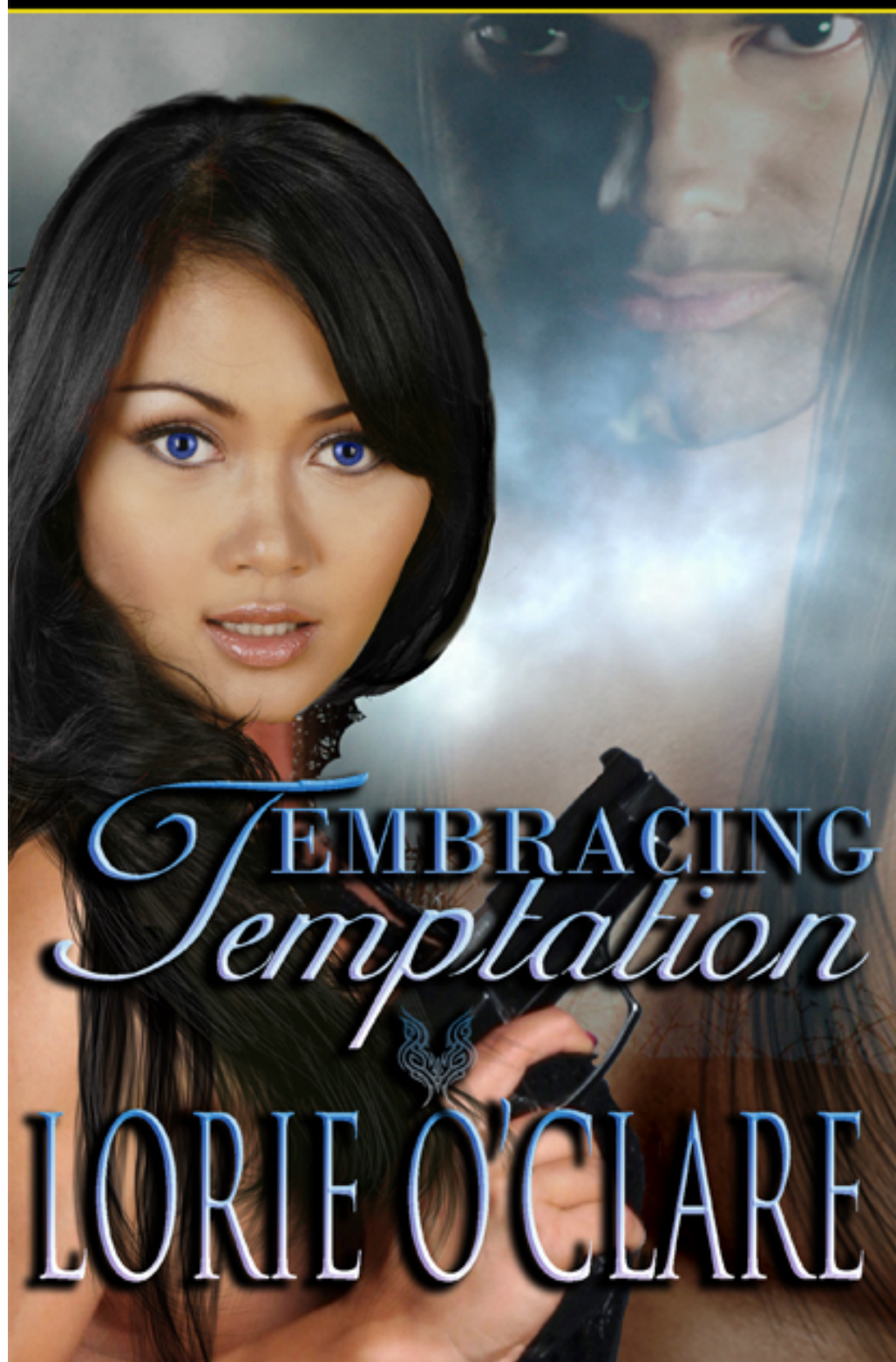


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Embracing Temptation

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*FALLEN GODS:*

*EMBRACING TEMPTATION*

Lorie O'Clare

## **Chapter One**

Nikita Povlechic leaned back in the overstuffed chair and stared at the suits surrounding the table. The long, narrow room, so far underground, often reminded her of a tomb.

An itch started at the back of her neck, but she didn't dare scratch it. The most powerful men in the world sat around the oval table, glancing over their laptops at each other.

"Are we in agreement?" Paul Tangari asked everyone.

"We are in agreement." Joseph Black, the only one who needed to answer, leaned forward, looking around the table.

Nikita let her pen slip from her hand, staring at the screen in front of her. The pen rolled from the table, making an echoing sound when it hit the floor.

Eight men turned and gave her their attention.

"Do you have a problem, Nikita?" Joseph asked her.

She looked up from the image of the United States, with the small box in the corner showing the picture of her contact.

"No problem." She smiled, keeping her fears in check.

They were sending her to her death. And not one of them gave a damn.

The others around the table rose silently. No one spoke. They would save conversation, speculations and concerns for when they were out of Centauri Tower.

Nikita's heels clicked on the marble floor as she walked alone down the hallway. This wasn't what she'd expected. The phone call that had woken her out of a deep sleep wasn't the first of its kind. But when Joseph Black had announced this new mission,

defining their target as an entity they couldn't see, Nikita had sworn she must have been dreaming.

She hadn't actually received the coded call in the middle of the night, left her cozy bed and grabbed a taxi outside her Manhattan apartment, arriving at Centauri Tower with no more than half a cup of coffee inside her to wake her up. Obviously she was still snuggled under her warm blankets, enjoying a dreamless sleep. Except she must really be dreaming. Because there was no way the leader of Centauri, Joseph Black, had just suggested they were to chase after...ghosts.

Her phone, clipped to her belt at her waist, beeped. Two of the other members of the agency, waiting on the elevator, turned and watched as she answered. They were grateful to be on the navigating end of the assignment, but dying of curiosity to know what her specific orders were.

Nikita grabbed her phone, leaning against the opposite wall to the elevator as she answered.

"Nikita. Would you meet me in my office?" Although Joseph Black asked, it was far from a question.

"On my way." She tried to sound casual.

*Let anyone around here see your fear and your days were numbered.*

"Come in. Have a seat." Joseph stood from behind his desk when she entered his large office.

Nikita sank into one of the black chairs facing Joseph's large desk and smiled at the balding, middle-aged man. To anyone in the outside world, Joseph would be hard to describe. Nothing about him stood out. He wasn't overly handsome, and he wasn't ugly. At around six-foot, he didn't work out, at least not that she could tell by looking at him, but he wasn't fat. His eyes were a pale green, hidden behind reading glasses that he seemed to wear all the time. In essence, Joseph was the perfect leader. Capable of fitting into any environment, and never standing out in a crowd, he made a perfect spy.

Nikita knew any advice he might have to offer would be worth listening to. At the same time, she didn't trust him. Something she'd learned early on with the Agency. Never trust anyone.

"Are you going to tell me more about these ghosts that you want me chasing?" she asked, knowing an aggressive approach to Joseph often worked best.

"Is that what you gathered from my debriefing?" Joseph took his time pouring coffee—didn't offer her any—and then sipped at it, staring at her over the rim. "Do you really think I would waste your skills? For that matter, the agency wouldn't consider a case unless it merited our skills."

She wouldn't put anything past the man, but bit her lower lip, keeping her comments to herself. Joseph Black took severe pride in Centauri Agency. He'd overseen her training and been a hard-ass doing it. Her skills as an agent were fine-tuned, but as to whether or not he abused, or wasted her training—well, no one ever asked her if she wanted the missions she was sent on.

Joseph moved to the chair behind his large desk, sitting slowly, all the while never taking his gaze off hers.

"You are going to assist in learning about demons. And if you feel this mission is a farce, you'll tell me now."

Nikita shook her head slightly, working her expression into a relaxed smile. "When do I start?"

Joseph wasn't fooled. "It doesn't surprise me that you don't believe such entities exist. If humans acknowledged them, then they wouldn't have the success rate they're having in taking over this planet."

He wasn't making any sense. Aching for a cup of coffee, she looked away from him and the hot cup of brew he nursed in front of her. Running her hands over her skirt, she stared at her slender legs, waiting.

"I'm sending you into the heart of them. There's a car waiting outside, and once you've arrived in Cedar Falls, Iowa, and taken possession of the house I've arranged for you, then you'll contact me. Your orders are pretty simple."

"I move into this home in the Midwest, and then what?" They sounded more confusing than simple to her.

"Then, my dear, we will use you as bait to trap the demons that are nesting there."

The small amount of coffee she'd managed to down before the debriefing quickly churned in her stomach.

"Bait?" she asked. This didn't sound good. "Bait to demons?"

"Yes. You'll pose as a recently separated woman, battling out a nasty custody battle. The demons will see your anger, resentment. You've lost your children. They will take the bait." Joseph sipped again at his coffee. "Besides, they love sexy women. Once you've trapped them, we can destroy the nest of them that are swarming through that area."

"And how will I know who these demons are?"

Joseph Black smiled. Chills rushed over her body. She'd never seen Joseph smile before. The room temperature seemed to drop a few degrees and a cold chill wrapped around her.

Standing, he let out a chuckle, a sinister sound that dampened her palms. She wiped them on her skirt, nibbling at the inside of her mouth as she stared at the man who controlled her life.

"Believe me, my dear. You will know a demon when you see one. They are the most hideous, disgusting creatures that have ever walked this planet. And it's time they learned they are no longer welcome here."

Already Nikita knew it was going to be a bad day. She left the office, escorted out of the private door that Joseph used only when he wanted an agent to leave on a mission

without being detected by the others, and opened the back door of the limousine idling in the chilly night.

They were taking her straight to the airport. Patting the gun at her hip, she knew she'd have to put it in her suitcase and show proper papers at check in. Luggage was already in the trunk. Her luggage, containing items she'd never seen before, packed carefully for her so she could take on her new identity. She wouldn't be allowed to tell anyone goodbye, make arrangements to be gone from her apartment for an indefinite period of time.

The agency took care of all that—and probably had before giving her the assignment. Someday she would know she was leaving town before her landlord did.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nikita climbed into the rental car, which was waiting for her when she got off the airplane in Iowa, and squinted against the rising morning sun. The warmth of it added to the relaxed mood of the people around her. By the time she'd reached the town of Cedar Falls, found the street where her new house was, she had almost convinced herself this might not be such a bad mission.

How could a town that was so cute, so laid-back in appearance, be overrun with demons? If she didn't know the agency well enough to know how serious they took every mission, she would say she'd been given a pud job, an assignment where she might actually be able to relax and enjoy the large oak trees, the clean yards and homey atmosphere of the neighborhood.

The second key on her key chain fit the front door, and Nikita pushed open the door, putting her suitcases down in the entryway.

Someone whispered her name. "Nikita Povlechic."

A warm breeze seemed to brush over her. Nikita turned around quickly, making sure the front door was shut.



She stared at the white semi-gloss paint on the solid front door. Turning around slowly, she stared at the furnished living room, a large couch, the dust-free coffee table in front of it. Matching end tables with lamps were on either side of the couch. A large television with an angelic sculpture on top was at the end of the room.

Nikita wondered what kind of income she was supposed to be making. This was a damn nice house. And she seemed very much alone.

"Hello?" she announced herself, just in case someone was here.

No one answered. And of course they wouldn't.

Reaching for her suitcases, she glanced toward the carpeted stairway. The bedroom must be upstairs. She'd check out the kitchen later.

Her heels were the first thing to go when she reached a master bedroom designed for orgies. It was huge and the bed had to be larger than a king size. Nikita swore she'd never seen a bed that size.

"Joseph, you sure picked an interesting layout for a supposedly recently separated woman." A computer sat on a desk to the side of the room. More than likely where she'd find further instructions.

Enough time later to learn what she'd be doing while she was here. Walking over to the double closet, she dropped her suitcases and then eyed the bed, feeling exhaustion wrap around her. The realization that she'd been on the go since before the crack of dawn hit her. Her eyes burned, her feet hurt, and the thought of scouring over files right now sounded very unappealing.

Crawling onto the large bed, she rolled onto her back.

Damn. Nice and firm, a perfect bed.

"Too bad you couldn't supply a boy toy too, Joseph," she mused, arching her back like a cat over the silk-like comforter that stretched endlessly over the bed.

Something tickled her arm and she slapped at herself. Just her luck she'd be given a cozy home to call her own for a while and it would be bug-infested. Glancing at her arm, she saw nothing.

Then the same sensation ran down her leg. Nikita sat up quickly, looking at her bare leg and then at the large bed she lay on. She didn't see any creepy-crawlies.

Sitting there with her legs stretched out, her short skirt ending at her thighs, the same sensation hit her again.

It was as if something ran down her leg, like a finger, stroking her skin, barely brushing over her. Warmth spread through her, like a breeze. None of the windows were open.

Joseph had sent her out here to battle demons with the only explanation offered that she'd recognize them when she saw them. Suddenly her heart skipped a beat in her chest. What if this house was haunted?

"Now you're being ridiculous." She fell back on the bed, adjusting herself so that the large pillows cradled her neck. "Joseph, you're an ass for putting thoughts of ghosts in my head."

The bed was comfortable, damned comfortable. Her mind faded, sleep taking over quickly. No creepy-crawlies or implications of ghosts would torment her right now. Exhaustion kicked in hard and fast. Just a few quick hours of sleep then she'd be clearheaded, ready to figure out what the hell she was supposed to be doing there.

Someone gripped Nikita's ankle. Firm fingers, warm and gentle, gave her ankle a slight shake. She jumped, sitting up quickly.

There was no one else in the bedroom with her.

"What the hell?" Nikita rubbed her ankle, which tingled from where she'd just been touched.

Fingers wrapped around her wrist while she touched her ankle. Nikita's heart almost exploded in her chest and then began thudding so hard she couldn't breathe.

"Who are you?" She stared at her wrist, feeling the heat from another's touch against her skin.

There was no one there. But as she stared at her wrist she could feel the hand, the curve of the palm, the long fingers that tucked underneath her wrist, fingers covering her pulse.

The warm breeze she'd experienced earlier wrapped around her. Her black hair that fell down her back swayed to the side as if she were outside.

"This isn't happening." Nikita had experienced a lot working for Centauri Agency.

She'd seen bodies blown up from bombs, had killed people, been shot, lost partners, witnessed evil course through people that was stronger than anything she'd ever imagined.

Nothing compared to this. Someone held her wrist, firmly yet gently, and they weren't letting go.

Barely able to swallow, her imagination conjuring up all kinds of reasons for what could be happening right now, she fought to stay alert.

"Are you a demon?" she asked, too scared to feel foolish for talking to her wrist.

Suddenly laughter surrounded her, not coming from any one direction. Male laughter, deep and confident. It wasn't insulting, yet humored. She had no idea how she knew this but somehow she did.

And now she did feel like a damned fool.

"Who the hell are you?" She yanked her wrist back, the hand she couldn't see letting go willingly.

Suddenly the warmth from the breeze no longer surrounded her. She looked frantically around the bedroom. Jumping off the bed, she stared at the skirt that wrapped around the bed, falling to the floor.

Damn it. She was an adult. There was no one in this room. And nothing to be scared of. She knelt down quickly, pulling the pleated material aside with a jerk and

looked underneath the bed. Her heart pounded so hard she couldn't breathe. There was no one and nothing under the bed.

She jumped back to her feet, turning around quickly, searching the room for any possible anomalies that could explain what was happening to her.

Pulling the closet door open just as quickly as she'd looked under the bed, she prepared herself for whatever might be in there. An empty dark closet greeted her.

A full-length mirror hung on the inside of the door and Nikita stared at her determined expression. Her long black hair swept over her breasts and she shoved it over her shoulders with both hands.

There was an explanation here. Maybe she was so damned tired and this assignment so weird that she hallucinated. Something had to explain what she'd just experienced.

Staring at herself in the mirror she took slow cleansing breaths. The only way she'd figure this out was if she had a clear head. Her palms were damp as she ran them down the blouse and skirt she'd worn since the middle of the night when she'd been called into Centauri Tower. She studied her expression.

Something moved behind her, the shadow picked up in the reflection in the mirror. Nikita didn't turn around. She heard nothing. But movement continued, the shadow growing.

And then a man stepped up behind her, tall, broad, tanned shoulders with dark hair, almost black, flowing past his shoulders. Muscles bulged in his arms, across his chest. As he moved closer, stepping out from behind her, she saw that he was completely naked.

## **Chapter Two**

"Who in the hell are you?" Nikita hid her fear well when she spun around, purposefully ignoring his nudity and looking pretty damned outraged.

"I'm Ares." She had a perfect mouth, beautiful and pouty. He didn't like the way it thinned into a narrow line when she scowled at him. "Would you prefer I stay invisible?"

"I'd prefer you put your clothes back on." Her response was quick.

Nikita looked around her, hoping he would think she was looking for his clothes. She wasn't thinking about his clothes though. She berated herself for packing her gun and not keeping it on her. She mentally judged the distance between them and her luggage. Dismay sank into her when she realized it would take too much time to get into her bags where her gun was. Her thoughts were too easy to read. Ares managed a straight face while listening to her argue mentally with herself.

Her thoughts moved to attacking him, a quick low punch so that she could manage her escape. But again, she was plagued with the fact that she wasn't armed.

"Seems to me you'd just prefer to attack me." He reached for a strand of her long black hair, itching to know if it felt as silky as it looked.

Nikita slapped his hand in midair. "Try anything and I will attack," she warned.

Ares grabbed her wrist, holding her hand still when she tried to pull back. "I've always admired warrior qualities in a lady," he whispered.

"Let go right now." Her eyes glowed like sapphires when she was angry.

The energy that soared through her excited him. She was going to attack. And she planned to move quickly.

Ares had the edge, her thoughts an open book to him. He moved quickly, pinning her against the wall, grabbing her other wrist when she tried to strike.

"You won't succeed in taking me down," he told her, knowing she would try anyway.

"What do you want?" Her breath came almost in pants, her breasts pressing against his chest as they rose and fell quickly.

"I'm here to offer some of my strength. You're going to need it." When he'd heard word that she was being sent as bait, a gift to appease the demons, there was no doubt in his mind that she wouldn't stand a fighting chance against them.

The excitement of the demons over the gift arriving had stirred enough uproar to catch the attention of more than one immortal. Ares just happened to get a glance at her when she'd arrived at the airport. He'd have no problem fucking her.

Usually humans didn't gain immortal insight after being fucked by one of them. But Nikita was more closed-minded than most humans. He'd secured the house, kicked all the demons out who had been waiting for her, and now would assist in opening her eyes.

"I don't need a damned thing from you." Nikita tried to raise her leg, to knee him in the groin.

Ares grinned at her, pushing one of his legs between hers and pressing his cock against her. It hardened painfully against her heat. Damn if she wasn't about the sexiest-looking human he'd seen in a long time.

Nikita realized she couldn't get away from him and her thoughts lingered toward another plan of attack. She had some experience in this area. Searching her thoughts, he saw that she'd dealt with attacks in many forms. That didn't surprise him, although he needed her to see she wasn't being attacked.

"You need me, Nikita. You've been sent here as a gift. And those damned demons don't deserve someone as perfect as you."

His words confused her, and she took a moment to digest what he'd said. Ares moved her wrists together above her head, holding them in one hand. His free hand cupped her chin, enjoying how soft her skin was.

"Tell me what else you know about why I'm here," she demanded quietly, relaxing underneath his touch.

"I know everything." There was no way she'd be able to grasp the truth in his statement so he didn't bother elaborating.

She pursed her lips, staring up at him with eyes that were a beautiful shade of blue. They set off her creamy complexion. Long black hair bordered her face, adding to her stunning good looks. He could resist no longer.

Lowering his head, he brushed his lips over those pouting lips, grabbing her lower lip between his teeth. The taste of her was better than anything he'd experienced in a long time. Nikita was so soft, yet with a body fine-tuned with the skills of a warrior. Her looks were distracting, a perfect weapon he was sure she'd used to her advantage in more than one situation. But the heat that rose from her, the sweet taste of her, blood surged through his human body with an energy that took him off guard.

He had to have more of her. Running his hand through her hair, tugging until her head fell back, he deepened the kiss. She hesitated. Everything inside her told her that she should fight him, that he was a stranger. It wouldn't take but a thought to make her want him, have her begging him to fuck her. But her aggressive nature, her craving to fight back, appealed to him.

And his cock throbbed so hard he knew that fucking her would be all the more pleasurable if she submitted willingly instead of with his aid.

Her hair glided over his fingers, so soft it contradicted the hardness of her thoughts.

In spite of her craving to find a way to gain the upper hand, she opened her mouth, allowing him in. Ares greeted her tongue with his own, exploring while they moved into a slow dance of lust and desire. Her breath quickened, her hands relaxing against

his grip as she moved against him, torturing him with the softness of her breasts, her slender hips, luscious curves that made him ache to explore every inch of her.

"Wait." She turned her head to the side and fought to catch her breath. "Let go of me...please."

Desire warred through her, and she fought to regain control of her thoughts. She wanted him and didn't want to. Ares let go of her hands, knowing she wouldn't try to strike him again, at least not for the moment.

"Once you trust me, you'll see that you need help," he told her.

He balled her shirt in his hand, and then with a wish he pulled it from her body. Before she could react he did the same to her bra. Her large nipples hardened instantly when the air hit them. All blood in his body rushed straight to his cock.

"What the hell?" Her jaw dropped, and she looked down at herself in shock and then up at him.

He dropped her clothes to the floor and then grabbed her skirt. Willing it off her body, it crumpled in his hands and he let it fall onto the pile with the rest of her clothes. She stood before him naked, more beautiful than he'd imagined.

"How did you do that?" She wished she'd had time to review the file on the computer in the bedroom, thinking that maybe some explanation about this man before her would be on it.

"There's nothing in your instructions about me," he told her.

And she stared at him, her deep blue eyes opened wide, her mouth agape in shock. She wondered why she wasn't terrified that this man had pulled her clothes from her as if they'd been taped to her. He sifted through her thoughts, enjoying that she realized it excited her to be naked too. She didn't like the idea, but she was turned on.

"How did you know what I was thinking?" She thought she was going crazy.

A typical reaction when a human witnessed the abilities of an immortal.



"The same way I took off your clothes," he told her, giving her the simplest answer although she didn't understand.

She placed her hands against his chest, instantly noting how solid and muscular he was and being more than affected by his coarse chest hair when it tickled her skin. She stared at her hands for a moment, her fingers stretching over his flesh. Then she pushed, gently at first but then with more force.

He gave her that space she wanted and took a step backwards. Nikita crossed her arms over her chest, causing her breasts to crush together. When she walked past him he adored her firm ass, so perfectly shaped. The fact that her pussy was shaved drove him wild. A body like hers was meant to be fucked, and often.

His cock stood erect, hard and aching. Blood pumped through it with more fierceness than he usually allowed himself to tolerate. She stood with her back to him, staring at the bedroom, fighting in her mind to make sense of what was happening to her.

He would answer her questions later. There was no way he could wait any longer. Gripping her shoulders, he pushed her toward the bed, coming down on top of her when she landed on the firm mattress.

"I need to be inside you," he whispered into her hair.

She pushed herself to her elbows, managing to raise the two of them with her own strength.

"You would rape me?" she asked, her breath coming in pants.

She wanted him as desperately as he needed her.

"Tell me no," he said, knowing that she wouldn't.

"You're a ghost, aren't you?" She didn't believe he was, but she was still trying to figure out what her brain didn't have the ability to comprehend.

"I'm Ares. I'm not a ghost." He spread her legs with his, then ran a hand down her ass to the source of her heat.

"Oh God," she cried out. Telling him no wasn't even on her mind. "Then what are you?"

"Humans called us gods." He dipped a finger into her moist cunt.

She was fucking soaked. The unknown excited her, turned her on, and she loved a good battle. He'd had no clue she would be such a perfect conquest. Her inner muscles clamped around his finger. Damn. She was fucking tight.

"Gods?" she asked, and then moaned when he thrust deep inside her.

"It's a human word, inaccurate but what you can grasp and accept." He didn't want to talk about this right now.

Later he would explain what she needed to know. His intention had been to appear before her, fuck her silly, and provide her with what her body could accept through their joining. If she had been a goddess, their powers would join, making both of them stronger. But since she was mortal, all he could offer was freeing her mind, giving her enough sense through fucking her that she would believe in what she would be battling.

No one had told him to help her. But a good battle excited him. He lived for the fight, his warrior blood sensing that she wouldn't survive if he didn't come to her aid. And fucking the shit out of her would be a damn nice way to start the fight.

"I think..." She could hardly talk, his fingers buried deep inside her cunt. "I think you just insulted me."

It hadn't been his intention. "Just stating the facts."

He moved to his knees, pulling his fingers out of her and licking the white cream that clung to them. She hadn't been fucked in a long time. Amazing that with her stunning beauty she lived just for the battle and took no time to enjoy getting laid.

Ares grabbed her hips, pulling her to her knees while she still basked in the sensations that rushed through her body.

She didn't fight him when he moved her so that she was on her hands and knees. "So all fight is out of you? Are you my willing lady now?"

Immediately she rolled over. Ares grabbed her, thrilled that she would put more aggression into their lovemaking.

Flipping her back over, he had her on her hands and knees before she could protest. His cock pressed against her soaked cunt, the smoothness of her skin sending the blood boiling through him. He could hardly see when he impaled her with his cock, filling her with a single stroke.

His human body hardened, every muscle tensing while her cum soaked his shaft.

"Holy shit!" Nikita tossed her head back, her long black hair fanning across her back as she arched into him.

Muscular yet trim, her body was a fine piece of art.

Ares drowned in her heat, the humidity from her body rushing through him, sending a fever to his brain. It had been a long time since he'd fucked a human. And even longer since he'd allowed her own free will to war with his while taking her. The excitement of not knowing what she would do next made the moment even more exhilarating.

"You are too damned tight. Unbelievable." He glided out of her, slowly, enjoying how her muscles contracted against his cock.

"More," she demanded, thrusting backwards.

He sank deep inside her once again. "Now you say how it is?"

Nikita's aggressive nature appealed to him as much as her beauty did.

"Shut up and fuck me." She pulled forward and then slid back again, instigating the friction between them.

She didn't understand what was going on, had no idea who he was. Nikita had decided to dwell on that later and enjoy this moment. Ares also noted that she kept her

sanity about her, believing she might learn more about who he really was if she fucked him and lowered his guard.

Amused, he obliged and grabbed her hips, filling her so quickly she let out a gasp and fell to the bed. Ares rode her hard before she could regain herself, her arms no longer holding her up.

A challenge was here, and Ares loved a challenge as much as he did a fight. Nikita believed she could better him, take him down if she submitted and fucked him. Her thoughts tangled through him, feeding him while he drowned in her moist heat.

"Is that taking care of you?" he grunted, feeling his muscles contract.

No way would he spill his cum in her hot little cunt before knowing that she was completely satisfied.

"Certainly someone as fit as you can do better." Her words burned through him, spoken without a thought.

"Have you had better?" He doubted that she had.

Ares would bet his immortality on the fact that she probably seldom fucked at all. The energy that swarmed around her was fresh, unleashed from a long abstinence.

Nikita slid away from under his damp palms. The grip he had on her hips didn't hold her in place. She moved forward, his cock sliding out from the heat of her cunt. The air in the room chilled him, and immediately he reached for her, wanting back inside.

She rolled to her back, staring up at him, her face flushed and her blue eyes glowing with passion. Energy soared through her. She was ready to battle.

Damn it.

The woman would drive him mad. She would take him on while fucking him, a mental battle of wits where neither would lose because both would be so well fucked.

Interesting.

And definitely a damn good way to spend an afternoon.

She ignored his question. "This was your idea. If you're going to pleasure me, then do it right."

She spread out on the bed, adjusting her head on the pillows. Running her hand down her body, she fingered her pussy, watching him with a small smile on her face.

"Show me what you can do," she whispered.

Ares raised an eyebrow. "You have no idea who you're messing with," he told her, although she didn't annoy him.

He was more than willing to show her what he could do.

"That, my dear, is a two-way street." She continued running her fingers over her moist flesh, fucking herself while her mouth formed a perfect circle. She let out a gasp and then smiled. "Now that we've established that we're both strangers, taste me. And be thorough about it."

Ares couldn't help but laugh. "Now I see why you seldom fuck. The lady needs a good education and some serious training."

She raised an eyebrow, her thoughts letting him know she strongly disapproved of anyone training her. Nikita had lived a life of training, following orders, blindly entering into missions without knowing any more than what she was to do next. It didn't surprise him that she believed she would prefer to be the one in charge. What Nikita didn't realize was that she'd never truly submitted. All orders she followed, she did under protest. Showing her a new life might be rather entertaining.

"Serious training?" She rolled her eyes. "Are you trying to turn me off?"

Ares grabbed her legs, spreading them while he lifted her ass off the bed. Instead of bowing down to her, he pulled her off the bed, bringing that soaked cunt to his mouth.

"You're aching to come for me," he whispered against her intoxicating heat.

Her body convulsed, bucking against his mouth when he buried his tongue inside her, lapping at her cum. Ares held on tight to her legs, knowing not a damn thought

went through her head when he sucked on her clit and then ran his tongue over her soaked flesh.

She tried to bring her legs together, gripped the bedspread with her fists, twisting it while she jerked against his strong grasp.

"Shit. Oh shit." She shook her head from side to side, her long black locks covering her face.

Ares watched her over her smooth mound, making a feast out of her while enjoying how her face twisted with emotion. She'd never been devoured before like this, and that pleased him.

But he would leave her wanting, craving more of him. Her inner thigh muscles quivered against his hands. Nikita tried to focus, staring at him through a hazy cloud of lust darkening her sapphire orbs.

"Do you want more?" he asked, gently kissing her sensitive pussy.

She nodded, and then ran her tongue over her lips. "Yes," she breathed.

Ares lowered her legs, allowing her ass to rest against the bed. Running his hands over her body, he lowered himself on top of her, burying his face for a moment in her full, ripe breasts.

Nikita ran her hands through his hair. She liked how dark and thick it was and the length.

Her nipples hardened against his touch, rubbing the nubs between his teeth—her sharp breath was enough to tell him he had her on the edge. Tugging on one and then the other, he stroked them with his tongue, soothing, and then nipped.

"Oh God." Nikita bucked into him.

"I want you so ready to come that when I enter you, you'll explode," he whispered into the soft flesh of her breasts.

"Okay..." She couldn't say any more.

He loved how she tugged at his hair, fighting to keep him at her breast, while he tortured her tender, puckered nipples. It amazed her that she liked longer hair, and ran her fingers through his thick locks. Ares realized that nothing about him was what she was usually accustomed to and that appealed to her.

"You're going to come," he repeated again, raising his head to meet the darkness of her blue eyes, filled with lust and a craving for more.

She sucked in a breath, not answering even when she opened her mouth to speak.

He had her beyond words, in a state of need that had overtaken her. She was right where he needed her to be. She would be more enlightened if she completely surrendered to him, came out of need and not because she desired it. And that enlightenment would save her life.

Ares straightened. "Do you believe in me?" he asked her, lifting her legs and then resting her heels on his shoulders.

He positioned his cock against her soaked cunt.

Nikita stared at him and then slowly frowned. Lust had overtaken her, his words reaching her slowly, and she didn't understand them.

"What?" She shook her head. "Please."

"Nikita. Tell me you believe in me," he repeated softly, pressing his cock gently against her smooth flesh that was soaked with her cream.

"Okay. Yes. Anything. Please." She sucked in another breath, moving her ass back and forth, desperate to have him inside her again.

Ares plunged inside her, diving into her heat and her thoughts at the same time. Surrounding himself with Nikita, he drove into her with so much force that she screamed.

Her fingernails raked down his shoulders, while she struggled not to completely pass out when she exploded. Her muscles contracted around him, while cream soaked

his shaft. Ares couldn't slow the momentum this time. He'd pushed himself too far and her tight little pussy felt too damned good.

He fisted his hands on either side of her head against the bed, bracing himself over her while he rode her through her orgasm. His own was close to follow, every muscle inside him hardening.

And as he came, filling her with his cum and some of his powers, he realized something that hadn't existed when he'd started seducing her.

"I'm going to protect you," he told her, leaning over to kiss her forehead as the last drips of his cum seeped from his cock.

"Okay," she said on a breath, relaxing underneath him.

Nikita was sated and tired. As he rose above her, looking down at her body glistening with sweat and cum, he knew his mark on her would help her.

But too much lay ahead of her for him to rely on her to accept the insight he'd given her. She would have a more open mind when she woke up, see her mission a bit clearer. But was that enough?

Ares decided it might be best to explore the neighborhood, see what danger lurked nearby.

"Sleep," he told her, and ran his hand gently over her face.

Nikita smiled and closed her eyes. "Don't be offended if I don't see you to the door," she murmured and then pulled part of the blanket over her body as she nestled onto her side.



## **Chapter Three**

Nikita sat at the desk in her new bedroom, her hair damp against her back from showering. The monitor in front of her displayed the different files already programmed on it. It hadn't surprised her that she would find instructions and the necessary programs she would need for this mission already loaded.

Opening the file called "itinerary", she studied the agenda laid out for her for the day. There were no instructions for her beyond what she was to do in the next few hours.

Possibly those would come resulting from how she managed today.

She had one hour to get ready for a lunch date with somebody named Julian Artos at a place called The Gardens with an address listed.

Nikita glanced at the time displayed in the corner of the screen.

"I can't believe there aren't more instructions." She scowled at the screen and then padded down the thick carpet toward the stairs and then into her kitchen.

At least the Agency had been kind enough to program the coffeemaker to have coffee start brewing for her in the morning. Unfortunately it had brewed almost four hours ago. Obviously no one had anticipated she would sleep this late.

"Or have such incredible dreams," she mused, and then pressed her hand to her lower back.

Her muscles ached, even after her hot shower. And when she reached to open cabinets, searching until she found a coffee cup, she felt the muscles pull down her sides.

All night long she'd dreamed of a tall and dark stranger, fucking her until she couldn't take it anymore. Even though she'd woken with her pussy drenched and pulsing, it had to have been a dream.

Nikita poured coffee that had been sitting in the pot on the warmer for the past three hours and blew on it while she turned and leaned against the counter.

She half expected her gorgeous god to saunter into the room, naked and rippling with muscles. Not to mention a cock that was better than any other man on this planet could possibly dream of bragging about.

"How could it not be a dream?" Part of her really believed that it wasn't, that she had been visited by a naked man who'd seduced her and then fucked her like she'd never been fucked before.

Her cell phone rang upstairs.

"Oh shit." She darted up the stairs, balancing her hot cup the best she could as she hurried to answer it.

"Nikita." Joseph Black's baritone sounded anything but friendly.

She sat down in the chair at her desk, quickly glancing at the still open file saying when she was to meet this person, and then at the clock in the corner of the screen. Since she wasn't late, there were no other instructions, she knew his tone didn't mean a reprimand.

"What's up?" She leaned back in the chair, lifting her feet and resting them against the edge of the desk.

Her inner thigh muscles cried out, tightening as if she'd just worked out in a gym for eight hours. She scowled and leaned into her legs, working to stretch out the kinks.

"You will meet Julian Artos in an hour." For some reason the way he spoke, his tone deeper, harsher than usual, sent chills over her skin.

"I've got the file open now. No problem. Who is he?" Nikita stared at her toes, wiggled them, and wondered why something seemed wrong.

"You will do whatever Julian wants you to do." Joseph didn't answer her question. "Is that clear?"

"Sounds pretty straight up." She swallowed her sigh of exasperation, knowing from experience that if she showed annoyance from being kept in the dark it only seemed to get her worse assignments. "Any other instructions?"

Anything. She didn't even know what this man looked like.

"Arrive at The Gardens. Julian will take you from there," Joseph told her. "Goodbye, Nikita."

And with that he hung up, his last words sounding so final, as if they'd never speak again.

"Goodbye to you too," she muttered and flipped the cell phone closed.

Tossing it next to her keyboard, she scowled at her screen. Her stomach twisted in knots when she realized the Internet wasn't connected to this computer.

Something wasn't right here. She straightened, dropping her feet to the floor and scooting the chair closer to the desk while taking a long sip of her coffee. Never had she been on a mission where the computer didn't have Internet access. How would files be downloaded to her? Other than this cell phone, which was only used when Joseph wanted to call her, she had no way of receiving information from the Agency.

Centauri Agency's intelligence didn't use cell phones to communicate. Secure computer lines were established between contacts. It had never been any different.

She frowned, finally looking away from the useless machine she sat in front of, and slowly took in the contents of her bedroom. The Agency wouldn't have gone to the trouble to provide her with a home, a cover as a recently separated woman, supposedly bitter and angry over losing her children, if she wasn't supposed to be here for a while.

It dawned on her that Joseph had told her when she had still been in his office yesterday, that she was supposed to contact him when she'd arrived. Yet he'd called her.

With anyone else, Nikita wouldn't have viewed that as out of the ordinary. But when Joseph led a mission, the details were followed meticulously.

She focused on the bed, not really looking at it as her mind went over all the details Joseph had covered yesterday about the mission.

"You will assist in learning about demons," he had told her. "And you'll be bait to trap them."

She shivered, still staring at the bed. Although she'd made it when she'd woken up, the blankets wrinkled in spots. The image reminded her of the awesome sex she'd experienced so recently.

Had it been a dream?

*I'm going to protect you.* Her mystery man, Ares, had whispered the words to her right after he'd come. Just thinking about him inside her made her pussy swell. Never had a cock felt so damned good. No man had brought her body to such an incredible orgasm. It was as if he'd known just how to touch her, to suck on her nipples, to eat her out, and then fuck her senseless.

It had to have been a dream.

Maybe in her mind she'd known that this mission would be more dangerous somehow. She'd conjured him up as a protector, someone who would watch over her. Letting out a sigh, she ran her fingers through her still damp hair. The silence of the house was reminder enough that she was very much alone on this assignment.

An assignment led by Joseph Black. The man who ran and had founded the Centauri Agency. Considered one of the best spies in the world, if not the best, Joseph had demanded no less from all of the agents who worked under him. She'd been with the Agency for three years, stumbling onto its existence during a drug bust when she'd still been a cop.

Once you learned about the Centauri Agency, you were either taken aboard, or you disappeared. Nikita had been one of the fortunate ones.

She stood, shoving the office chair out from under her. At the moment she didn't feel too damned fortunate.

"He's always demanded that we pay attention to every detail, follow his orders to the T." She walked over to her luggage, staring at the contents that had been packed for her.

He'd told her to contact him when she arrived in Cedar Falls. But he'd contacted her. Not that she'd had time to check in while Ares had distracted her, and then given her the best sex she'd ever had in her life.

On an impulse, she went to her cell phone, flipping it up and pushing the button for the address book. There were no numbers listed. She looked for the last number that had called her and then clicked "send" so that she could call Joseph.

The phone went dead.

Icy fingertips seemed to crawl up her spine. She had no way of communicating with the Agency.

If an agent was severed from Intelligence, unable to check in, the mission was put on red alert. Immediately backup agents were sent out to determine the status of the agent. All measures were taken not to jeopardize the mission.

Nikita had never been in such a situation. But she knew when other agents had lost communication, she'd never seen them again. Failing on a mission wasn't an option in the eyes of Joseph Black.

Well, Nikita Povlechic didn't like to fail.

Determination swept through her and she dressed quickly, donning the dress that fit her perfectly, which was packed on the top of her suitcase. She slipped into pale pink, low-heeled pumps that matched the dress and then hurried into the bathroom to apply some makeup and make sure she was ready for her lunch date.

First she would find out who this Julian Artos was, and then she would set up some kind of communication in her house. Before leaving, she did a quick walk-through in

each room, confirming there were no telephones. On an impulse she turned on the TV, somehow not surprised when it didn't come on. It was as if the house was a façade, appearing to be set up for someone who would make it their home for a while, although nothing was real.

"Maybe the demons aren't real either." Although something told her that whatever she was here to defeat, they were not only real, but very dangerous.

She put her coffee cup in the sink. The kitchen was simple enough, yet with all modern appliances. A clean white refrigerator, taller than her, stood next to her. Opening it, her heart constricted in her chest when she stared at the empty shelves inside. Quickly she moved to open all the cabinets, her breath coming too quickly. Although one cabinet had plates, some glasses and a few coffee cups, every other cabinet was completely empty.

"Why would you set me up in an unstocked house?" There was no phone, no Internet, no television, no means of communicating or learning about the outside world.

This made no sense.

Grabbing her purse, she fished out her keys, made sure her gun was loaded and nestled underneath her wallet, and on an impulse made sure she still had the cash that had been in there the day before.

A whole twenty-three dollars. Damn it. This Julian Artos person better be buying.

After pulling into a corner gas station and getting directions to The Gardens, Nikita began brainstorming. She didn't like surprises, and she damn sure didn't like not being in control. Without specific instructions, the best she could do was assume her cover as a separated woman, disgruntled with losing her kids, and meet her date.

*And do whatever he wants me to do.*

Something about those final instructions bothered her. Who was she kidding? Everything about this entire assignment bothered her.

The Gardens was a large brick building with long, narrow windows. The restaurant advertised Italian food and had a fair amount of cars in the parking lot. Although that was usually a sign of decent food and she loved Italian, Nikita had no appetite.

*Who knows when you'll get to eat again?* she told herself, thinking of her empty refrigerator and the small amount of cash she had on her.

Parking her car, she got out and ran her hands down her dress. Moistening her lips, she headed toward the large doors of the restaurant, deciding she'd do her best to get some answers from Julian.

As she entered the dimly lit restaurant, she was greeted by the sweet smell of sauces, cooking oils and the rich smell of coffee.

"I'm Nikita Povlechic. I'm supposed to meet someone. Possibly they told you." This much she was accustomed to doing.

Many years on the force, and then as an agent for the Centauri Agency, had her meeting strangers in restaurants on a regular basis. The hostess simply nodded and gestured that she follow her.

It didn't surprise her that she was led toward the back of the restaurant to a quiet booth almost in the corner. A man in a business suit, tall and well built, stood as they approached.

Nikita took in his short blond hair, his broad shoulders and trim figure. There wasn't a blemish on his nicely tanned face. And blue eyes bore through her as he watched her approach. If she could have imagined the perfect man, it would have been him.

Well, at least that was before last night.

She met his gaze, searching his eyes, knowing from experience how much could be judged on how a person met your gaze. He didn't look away but instead seemed to be doing the same to her, searching, probing, digging deep into her soul until she swore she felt him inside her.

An icy chill rushed through her. Something unpleasant crawled over her skin. A gut instinct. Maybe a premonition. But something told Nikita to get the hell out of there. And years in this line of work had her listening to her gut.

She tapped the hostess on the shoulder while they were still in the middle of the restaurant. "Let Mr. Artos know I'll join him in a minute. Have him order an iced tea for me. I left something in my car."

The hostess smiled, all professional, and turned to report the message. Nikita turned at the same time, heading out of the restaurant.

Something tugged at her, something aggressive and unfriendly. It was as if invisible hands wrapped around her, making it difficult to move toward the exit.

*You will be bait to trap the demons.*

The words sank through her like lead. Her gut twisted, and a taste of bile rose to her mouth. She could hardly breathe when she reached the door, pushing it open. Warm sunshine hit her and she barely felt it. In spite of the brightness, she suddenly couldn't get the cold chill out of her system. Her shoes seemed to weigh fifty pounds each as she worked to walk to her car. Even as she squinted against the sunlight, it didn't seem able to saturate through her, take the coldness that had wrapped around her away.

Her hands shook as she reached for her car and then pulled open the door. Glancing back at the restaurant she saw nothing out of the ordinary. No one was coming after her. She slid into the driver's seat, needing a moment to regroup before starting her car.

Something was terribly wrong. Julian Artos was a damned good-looking man, more perfect than anything she could have conjured up. Yet when he'd looked at her, when his cold stare had bored through her, it was as if he'd tried to reach out and grab her soul – take possession of her.

And isn't that what Ares had done to her last night?



Nikita started her car and then left the parking lot, barely focusing on whether other cars were around her or not. She would head back to her house, get her luggage, and then check into a motel.

One problem. She had no money. Struggling with her wallet while she drove, she pulled out her credit card—her personal credit card. Never on an assignment had she had to use her own money.

“Well, this merits that I do,” she told herself.

She had no means of communicating with Centauri Agency. Checking her cell phone again, she confirmed that it still was dead. Certainly Centauri Agency would want her to be in contact with them.

A few minutes later she parked in front of her house, unable to pull into the drive because of the unmarked white van parked there.

Relief flooded through her. She recognized the style of van, the exact type that Centauri Agency used.

Hurrying out of her car, she entered the house.

“It’s about time you got here,” she said in greeting to Todd Wilson, one of the agents she’d worked with in the past and who had been with Centauri Agency longer than she had.

Todd looked up at her, surprise apparent in his expression. “Nikita,” he said and then frowned. “Well, it’s damn good to see you too. We’re here on a code zero.”

Nikita’s smile faded. “A code zero?”

She stared at his light gray overalls and then at the other agent whose name she couldn’t remember who came down the stairs.

A code zero was when housekeeping was sent out to clean up an assignment after an agent had been killed. Their job was to ensure no evidence was ever left, that no one would know that Centauri Agency had ever been there. The other agent walked down the stairs carrying the computer that had been in her bedroom.

"When was the code zero assigned? That thing never had Internet access, and my cell phone wouldn't work." Nikita scowled, looking from one agent to the other.

Todd rubbed his unshaven face. He was an older man, possibly the oldest agent with Centauri.

"We got the orders this morning. The agency had a van ready for us right after we flew out here," Todd told her.

The other agent headed toward the door with the computer. "Glad to see you're still with us," he said and then headed toward the van with the computer.

Todd turned from her, continuing to rub down furniture, ensuring no prints of any kind were left in the house.

Nikita watched him, hesitating on what she should say. Joseph had called her this morning. He'd made sure she was heading out to meet Julian Artos. And he'd told her to do whatever the man wanted. If the orders for a code zero were issued earlier today, they had to have been sent out right after Joseph got off the phone with her. He'd known she wouldn't come back alive.

Her instincts about Julian had been right. But it had been more than sensing he wasn't a good man. She would swear he'd reached out, tried to rip her soul from her, did everything possible to keep her from leaving that restaurant. What she'd sensed hadn't been normal.

*A demon.*

But Joseph had described them as hideous-looking. Julian was anything but that.

"It'll be okay, sweetheart." Todd pulled her from her thoughts with a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

His soft gray eyes were warm and friendly, although years of this kind of life made them dense. When she met his gaze, knowing she had to look very worried, she couldn't read what feelings he might have on the subject. And Nikita knew that Todd didn't miss much. More than likely he already realized that she'd been sent out on a

mission that she wasn't supposed to live through. The fact that she had could get her into trouble with the Agency. One way or another, suddenly her life was on the line.

"You know that's not true," she whispered, not wanting the other agent to hear her and still hesitating on what she should say to Todd.

Although he'd always been friendly, Centauri Agency was a tough place. Agents did as they were told and reported everything they saw. If they didn't, they disappeared.

Todd gathered his stuff together, organizing equipment in a suitcase he had opened on the coffee table.

"You want to tell me what happened?" he asked, not looking at her.

Something rushed through the room, something angry and cold. The door flew open as it entered on a hard wind that sent Nikita toppling over the couch. Todd fell into the coffee table, crushing it, and then started making gurgling noises. His hands went to his throat as if he couldn't breathe.

Nikita didn't have a clue what was going on. The front door stood wide open, sunlight streaming in, yet it was freezing inside the house. She stumbled over the side of the couch, for some reason unable to regain her footing. Fear swept through her when she realized they were fighting an unseen force. And it seemed to have Todd by the neck.

How did you fight something you couldn't see?

For some reason her dream from last night came to mind. She had a hard time keeping her footing while stepping around the crushed coffee table and trying to reach Todd. She remembered Ares in her dream, his request that she believe in him and his telling her he would protect her.

"Protect me now," she cried out, feeling like she was forcing words past a heavy wind that wanted to slam the words back down her throat.

Nothing in all her years on the force or as an agent compared to what she was experiencing now. Curtains flew off the windows, wrapping around her, blinding her and knocking her over. She fought with them, her heart pounding a mile a minute as she struggled to get the heavy material off her. It was as if they held her captive, twisting around her the more she tried to free herself.

Able to pull them off her head, she sat up, fighting to untwist them from her legs.

Pictures soared off the walls, crashing into furniture. A damned tornado was taking place right here in this living room!

"Todd!" she screamed at the older agent.

He lay on the floor, his hands wrapped around his neck, while his face slowly turned an ashen color.

"God! No!" Finally she got the curtains untangled and crawled over to Todd. Her hair blew in her face, blinding her, and broken pieces of the coffee table scraped against her legs.

She easily pulled Todd's hands from his neck. She couldn't find a pulse. He was dead.

"Why the hell did you have to kill him?" Her teeth chattered from the cold in the room as she stared around her at the mayhem of what was left of the living room.

Something grotesque, more ugly than anything her worst nightmares could conjure, walked through the front door. Tall and distorted, standing on two feet, was the most disgusting creature she'd ever laid eyes on. Cold eyes that were opaque and too large for its gaunt head stared at her, sending an evil chill rushing through her already too cold body. It was grayish-green in color, its body gaunt and disfigured, and naked.

A nasty smell, like something that had been dead for centuries, filled the room, making Nikita gag.

"You will learn never to run from me again," it said to her.

## **Chapter Four**

*You'll know a demon when you see one.*

Nikita had no doubts that she was looking at one right now. The wind stilled in the living room, broken furniture, wall hangings, and curtains lay in disarray throughout the place.

She stood, avoiding broken furniture on the floor and moving to the couch where her purse was. Whatever this creature was, it wasn't human. It obviously had powers strong enough to kill a man without touching him. Not to mention destroy a house. All of her training kicked in, instinct taking over. She didn't think, didn't allow a single thought. In her dream last night, Ares had read her thoughts. Whoever he was, she didn't think he possessed the evil of this creature.

Nikita reached into her purse, wrapping her hand around the cold metal of her gun.

The creature's large watery, glassy eyes followed her action.

There was no way she could keep her heart from pounding in her chest. Cold sweat dampened her palms and traced icy paths down her spine. If the creature could read her body's reaction to him, it would know her terror. But it wouldn't read her mind. In her dream, if it had been a dream, Ares had reacted to her thoughts, knowing what she wanted even though she denied it with her words. This creature wouldn't have that advantage.

"You need to learn how to respect other people's homes," she hissed, clenching her teeth together so they wouldn't chatter.

She fired without removing the gun, aiming while it was still in her purse. Everything else was destroyed, why not destroy her purse too? Traveling light had its advantages.

Years of target practice and her line of work made her a damn good shot. She hit the creature right in its chest.

"Bitch!" it screamed, a bloodcurdling sound, and stumbled backwards.

Nikita wasn't sure how many bullets she had, but she fired again, this time hitting the creature in its butt-ugly face.

Its entire head spun around, while it screamed at a pitch that hurt her ears.

"Do you think you can destroy me?" it said, although she wasn't sure where its mouth had gone.

"She might not be able to, but I sure as hell can." Ares walked out of the kitchen, a sandwich in his hand.

He took a bite of the sandwich, thick with layers of meat and cheese, and waved his hand.

The creature disappeared, its outraged howl echoing in the room even after it was gone.

"Are you okay?" Ares asked.

"Do I fucking look okay?" She stared at the gorgeous man who'd been in her dream the night before.

Nikita collapsed on to the couch, suddenly shaking so hard she couldn't think. At least at the moment she didn't need to worry about her thoughts being held against her.

Ares took another bite out of his sandwich, his jaw muscles twitching in his face while he chewed. He looked exactly how he had in her dream, except now he was dressed.

Faded jeans hugged muscular legs. He was tall. Hell, he had to be over six-foot. Dark hair, almost black, fell in thick waves over his shoulders. And what broad shoulders. A dark T-shirt hugged the thick, roped muscles of his chest.

Nikita realized she still gripped her gun and forced herself to relax, looking down as she pulled her hand free from her purse. In all her experiences she'd never seen a room destroyed like the one she was in now.

And how was she supposed to explain all of this?

Todd lay on the floor, dead for no apparent reason. His grayish complexion and still body tore at her heart. He'd been a good man, and although she'd lost partners before and seen much bloodier deaths, it still bothered her that Todd had lost his life without even being able to fight.

This was a part of her job she'd never get accustomed to. It was hard to say which was worse—losing someone she cared about or having to announce their death.

The other agent who'd taken the computer to the van hadn't come back in. She feared the worst and wondered what the outside of the house looked like. The last thing she needed was local authorities being contacted.

Her legs shook when she stood, and she knew the instant that Ares turned his attention to her, swallowing the last of his sandwich and letting his gaze travel down her.

Where had he gotten that sandwich from anyway?

Like she should question such things after everything she'd just experienced.

"Maybe I can check in from the van," she said, more to herself than to Ares.

"And what will you tell them?" Ares walked through the room.

His foot touched a piece of the broken coffee table, and with the slightest gesture of his hand, the piece of furniture reassembled itself.

"You're not one of those monster things, are you?" she asked, somehow knowing that he wasn't, but still unable to make sense of all of this.

"Demon. And no. They aren't immortals, or we wouldn't be able to kill them." He spoke so quietly, so calmly, as if the information were common knowledge and he was simply reminding her.

"Of course." A surreal calm swept through her, and she headed toward the front door.

She couldn't cope with everything she'd just witnessed. Yet somehow she needed the strength to do just that.

The van sat parked in the driveway while sunshine that earlier had no heat now warmed her sweat-dampened body.

"What will you tell them?" Ares asked again, moving behind her in the doorway and running his hands up her bare arms.

His touch warmed her in a way the sunshine never could. In spite of the horror she'd just experienced, her pussy throbbed to life, anxious for more of what he'd given her the night before.

"They sent me here to find demons. I'll tell them the truth." She forced herself to walk away from his touch.

Immediately she missed his hands on her.

"If you contact them, they'll kill you." Ares still stood in the doorway.

Nikita glanced over her shoulder at him, but then opened the van door. The cargo area in the back was empty, other than the computer that had been brought down from upstairs. There was no sign of the other agent.

"Why do you say that?" She looked past the open van door at him.

The summer sun now made her feel hot. She'd forgotten how it could get in the Midwest. Even though she wore a comfortable dress, with no sleeves, and her legs bare, she could feel moisture bead between her breasts. A wetness formed between her legs too while studying the man in the doorway, but it was from a much different type of heat.

"You already know you were sent here to be given to the demons. Your people knew you wouldn't live through it. These men were sent to clean up and close down your assignment." He spoke so casually, as if all of this were common knowledge.



But he was right. And she'd figured out as much when she'd returned to the house. Todd and the other agent had arrived too soon after she'd talked to Joseph Black. It wouldn't surprise her to learn that he'd ordered code zero before calling her to ensure she was headed to lunch with Julian Artos.

"I won't run simply because they want me killed." Her nature wouldn't allow it.

There were questions she wanted answers to. The only thing that made her nuts was that getting answers out of Centauri would be harder to do than dying.

Ares pushed himself from the side of the doorway. He sauntered toward her, suddenly looking deadly, every muscle moving with unity like a well-polished army. Dark green eyes penetrated through her. No. More than that. They tore through her, demanding she present her most inner thoughts to him. She could feel him pulling her toward him.

And she'd be damned if she'd move an inch.

"Because you don't run, you are an honorable warrior. We'll fight together." He grabbed her hair, fisting it in his hand, and pulled her around the protection of the van door.

"Who is it that you plan on fighting?" Because at the moment he seemed to have it in his mind that he'd conquer her.

"Your agents will return to your leader. They will tell him that you're dead. Without your leader trying to kill you, you will stand a better chance of defeating what he can't defeat alone."

"My agents?" She gripped his wrists, willing him to let go of her hair.

Her hand barely reached around his thick wrist, and the way he tugged at her reached right through her body, drawing forth a need so strong it made her weak in the knees. Her pussy throbbed, the heat between her legs turning to moisture as his powerful hand held her head firmly by her hair.

Suddenly the agent she didn't know that well, the one who'd disappeared, hurried around from the other side of the van. He walked back into the house with purpose, not giving them a glance.

"They will return to your leader as planned," Ares said quietly.

Todd walked out of the house, carrying the suitcase that held the equipment he'd used to ensure no prints remained inside. His expression was serious, all business. He didn't notice them either, but walked to the driver's side.

The other agent walked out of the house again, carrying her two suitcases.

"I'll lock the place up," Todd told him. "Go ahead and check in."

"Todd?" Nikita struggled now, needing to get around Ares.

It made no sense that they were ignoring her.

"They don't see us, my dear. Nor do they remember anything that just happened." Ares let go of her hair, his hand brushing down her locks, stroking her back.

The gentle touch belied the power he displayed.

Nikita stepped away from Ares, mere feet from Todd as he made sure the front door was locked. He then turned, his look intent, as he headed toward the driver's side of the van. She turned, watching him, her heart thudding heavily in her chest. Ares focused on her, his warrior body tense and his watchful gaze alert.

She combed her fingers through her long black hair, pursing her lips together as she scowled at the van. It started up and slowly backed out onto the street. Neither agent saw her. They'd taken her luggage, hell, probably her purse, leaving her alone, stranded, without so much as a dime to her name.

Nikita had just been filed as a code zero.

"Am I the ghost?" She could barely speak over the lump that had swelled in her throat.

"No." Ares took her arm and headed toward the house, opening the front door and guiding her inside.

"I saw him lock that door." Nikita stopped in her tracks as she stared at the living room.

Everything was in place, undisturbed. Curtains hung on the windows. The coffee table sat in front of the couch with a large candle unlit sitting in the middle of it. Wall hangings hung where they belonged.

She was beyond losing her mind. This was absolutely insane.

"You will learn to believe what you can't see." Ares turned to face her, running his hands over her hair.

She looked up at that powerful face, the face of a fighter. In her low heels, she knew she stood over five and a half feet tall. Yet she leaned her head back, her hair stroking her lower back, and stared at him. His hair was longer than she would normally care for, brushing his shoulders, and dark, like a raven's.

"Okay. So you have powers of some sort." She needed something concrete, something more than this incredibly good-looking man, who could walk into her life, save her from a doomed mission, and fuck her like no other man could. She needed answers that she could sink her teeth into. "But why me? Why are you here?"

"There is a battle at hand. Julian Artos wants you. He's convinced humans he is so powerful that he can demand his own prize. And destroying him will send the demons once again into turmoil." Ares gripped either side of her head, holding her like he would lower his mouth to hers at any moment. "There is no battle that I can't win. But destroying the demons, wiping them from Earth, will be the greatest battle of all. Once again the immortals will have free rein."

All her years of training didn't make it any easier to pay attention to his words when his face was so close to hers. His mouth barely moved as he spoke, his tone hard.

But she had to focus, in spite of how her body cried out to him, how every inch of her throbbed with a need so great she could barely speak. "Who is Julian Artos?" she asked, her voice a bit more breathy than usual.

"No one you need to worry about." His hand slipped to the back of her neck, tangling in her hair, and he united their mouths.

Not just a kiss, but a conquest. His lips singed her mouth, demanding she open to him. Gripping her hair, pulling so that acute pain mixed with intense pleasure, he devoured her.

Their tongues met in a battle of lust. She wouldn't submit but instead leapt forward, the aggressor in the heat of the moment. Tasting him, experiencing strength like no man had ever dreamed of possessing, tingles rushed through her, his power surging through her.

Ares wasn't a man. His strength and abilities exceeded anything she'd ever experienced. That knowledge excited her as much as the intensity of the kiss.

And with that power that leapt through her, flooding through her veins, mixing with her mere human blood, she knew that she couldn't let him conquer her.

Turning her head, breaking the kiss, she gasped for breath, ignoring the pain as he tugged at her hair, anxious to have more of her.

"My life. My worries." She could barely talk. "You won't make decisions for me. No one will."

She pushed hard against his chest, feeling how hard his muscles were, how fine-tuned his body was. There was no way she could outmatch him, mentally or physically. But he would see her intelligence. And she would appeal to his. If that didn't work, she wanted nothing to do with him.

"This is something for me to worry about," she said when he let her go.

She could barely stand on her feet. And she knew she panted harder than a teenage girl ripe with lust for the first time.

Ares reached for her dress, his fingers brushing over her swollen breasts.

"No," she said, remembering how he'd pulled her clothes from her the day before in what she now accepted wasn't a dream. "You will hear me, or I will work alone."

Ares raised an eyebrow, straightening, suddenly looking so incredibly dangerous a nervous chill rushed through her. She held her ground, putting her hands on her hips, staring him down.

"I will lead this battle. You will learn that right now." He grabbed her arm, yanking her off her feet so that she fell against him.

His arms wrapped around her like a vise, forcing all air from her lungs. One hand stroked her ass, easily moving under her dress and undies until he caressed her bare flesh.

The hardness of his body pressed against hers. "The enemy is stronger than any human," he breathed against her face, scorching her not only with his heat but with his words.

The reminder that she fought something not human terrified her, but she was up for the challenge. Damn it. A battle where the odds were against her. Nothing excited her more.

This time she didn't fight to escape his embrace. "Then you will educate me. If you are indeed the warrior you claim to be, you will offer a debriefing so we can attack as equals."

A small smile appeared, the corner of his mouth narrowing as he grinned at her. "And you feel you can fight alongside the god Ares?"

His words hit her hard in the gut, taking her breath away. She shoved once again, struggling until he let her go. Walking away this time, needing space from this man, the creature, this *god*?

"The god Ares?" She didn't turn around but walked to the other side of the couch, combing her hair back with her hand.

"God isn't a very accurate word. It's how humans explain us," he explained.

She'd witnessed a man appearing out of nowhere, pulling her clothes from her body like they were paper. The most god-awful creature she'd ever seen in her life had

walked through the front door earlier, destroyed this house, killed an agent and made another disappear. Ares had reversed all of it, without even a wave of a hand.

And now he referred to himself as the god Ares.

Nikita's knowledge of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses wasn't great. But there was a god Ares. The name rang a bell. What she wouldn't do for the Internet right now.

"The computer is upstairs," he said from behind her, sounding almost bored. "I think you'll find you have Internet access now."

She spun around. "You just read my mind."

He shrugged. "I can think of much better things to do in the bedroom, or any other room of this house, for that matter," he told her. "But if you need to do your research... I guess that is how you can come to accept what you already know is true."

If he could put this living room back in order, it shouldn't surprise her that the computer would once again be upstairs where it had been earlier.

"I will know everything about this Julian Artos. I want to know why I was sent here. I want to know why Joseph Black sent me here." If he could do all of this, certainly giving her that knowledge was child's play.

"Is there anything else you require, my lady?" he mocked her. And to make it worse he offered a gallant bow.

Nikita didn't think. Anger surged through her. Nothing was worse than being mocked. She didn't like being kept in the dark. For years she'd dealt with that with her superiors as a cop and then with the Agency. Ares wasn't her boss, he wasn't anything to her, other than a man, entity—whatever—who'd saved her life. They would only team up to fight this demon if she was an equal in all matters.

She grabbed his shirt, twisting the fabric in her fist. The side of her hand pressed against his heart, the solid thudding beat a reassurance that he breathed and lived just

as she did. Beyond that she wouldn't dwell on at the moment. What he would see now was how to treat her.

"Don't you *my lady* me," she hissed.

His body was a brick wall, hard and solid. His expression didn't change. Dark eyes glowed with a fire that should have terrified her. But she wouldn't let size and power intimidate her. If he had the strength to kill her, well then hell, she was supposed to be dead already anyway.

"There is something more I require," she said, dropping her voice to a whisper, daring to stare into that dark, brooding gaze. Holding on to his shirt, knowing her strength didn't come close to his, she held her ground and took him on. "I require that you treat me as an equal. I'm not sure where you've come from. But where I come from, a lady isn't just someone used for a good fuck. Is that perfectly clear, *my boy*?"

Ares' eyes turned absolutely black. He grabbed her, lifting her in the air. With a cry of outrage, he threw her toward the couch.

"You should be bowing at my feet for what I offer you," he howled.

Ares had quite the temper when provoked.

Nikita landed on the couch, immediately jumping to her feet, ready for the battle.

"I didn't ask for shit from you," she countered, pointing her finger at him. "And I sure didn't invite you into my bedroom yesterday."

"Nor did you ever tell me to leave." He lunged at her, looking like he would send her flying again.

Nikita wouldn't run. She stood her ground, knowing no weapon would work against him. But she knew he was intelligent—a cocky pompous ass, maybe—but he had a brain too. And he would see that she matched him in that category.

"Then I'll tell you to leave now." She pointed to the door. "When you are ready to treat me like an equal, educate me on this mission so we can work as a team, you may come back."

Ares raised his fists, every muscle in his body flexing so that it looked for a minute like his shirt would rip from his body.

"You are just a human," he told her.

Nikita shook her head. "I'm not just a human. I'm Nikita Povlechic. And when you can respect me as such, then I'll consider working with you."



## **Chapter Five**

Ares vanished but then stalked around the house before walking through the wall and plopping down on the living room couch, resuming his human form. He'd be damned if he'd leave just because she told him to.

Who the hell did Nikita think she was, anyway? How dare she order him around, after all, he was the immortal.

"Damn it to Hedel," he mumbled when a car pulled into the driveway.

He wasn't in the mood for company and would have sent the visitor away but he knew that would only bring him grief if he did so. Sending watchers sprawling to the next galaxy was seriously frowned upon.

The front door opened, and a tall man, slim in build with eyes like a hawk, narrow and taking in everything at once, filled the doorway. Ares frowned at the man, who was assigned by the coven of Hedel before time began to keep an eye on Ares, report back on his activities to the coven.

"Are we slumming it?" Terrance clasped his hands behind his back, spreading his ankles slightly, like a soldier at ease.

"If you don't like it you can leave." Ares stood and paced over to the stairs, staring up them knowing Nikita scowled at the computer screen in the bedroom right now, researching everything she could about him from websites.

That would keep her busy the rest of the day, and she'd learn absolutely nothing about who he truly was.

"I'll leave after I learn what you're doing here." Terrance had never been affected by Ares' grouchiness.

"I learned who the demon is who is trying to become their new leader—Julian Artos." Ares turned away from the stairs, pacing to the other side of the living room. "He's already lined humans in his corner."

"Never a hard thing for the demons to do. Humans are always easily tempted." Terrance remained put, watching Ares as he paced.

Ares stopped pacing in front of Terrance, nodding toward the stairs. "Nikita was sent here by a spy agency she worked for. They were sending her as a gift for Julian."

"So did you wipe him out?" Terrance loved a good fight as much as Ares.

"Of course not." Ares gave Terrance his attention, although he'd much rather head up the stairs after Nikita. "The attack would be much more satisfying if I can catch Julian while he is with his collection of followers."

"Then wipe them out all at once." Terrance smacked his hand with his fist.

"You know me too well." Ares grinned, patting his watcher on the shoulder.

Terrance nodded toward the stairs. "And her?"

Ares imagined his anger had grabbed his watcher's attention. Although watchers didn't have the powers of immortals, the coven of Hedel, where all immortals originated, had given watchers certain abilities to sense when their immortal was up to something. In a way, watchers were spies for the coven, kept them updated on what the immortals were up to.

Terrance had never caused Ares any grief though. The watcher would actually fall under the category of one of Ares' true friends.

"And her," Ares repeated, mumbling. He shook his head, realizing he wasn't exactly sure what was going on with Nikita. "She needs my protection."

Terrance cocked his head, giving Ares a scrutinizing stare. "I see."

Sometimes watchers were a pain in the ass.

"There's nothing to report." Ares sliced his hand through the air and turned away from Terrance. "She's a human who was put into a situation that she shouldn't have been put into."

"And so you're back to protecting humans? Or is it just this particular human?"

Ares wanted to shout it was none of Terrance's business. But that was rather a hard thing to say to a watcher. Everything about Ares was Terrance's business.

Nonetheless. "It's none of your damned business," Ares said with a scowl.

Terrance cleared his throat, making it clear that he wouldn't leave until he knew the truth of the matter.

But Ares shot his attention toward the stairs, knowing the second that Nikita stood from the computer, straightened her dress, then sucked in a breath and headed out of the bedroom.

She appeared at the top of the stairs a moment later.

Barefoot, with her dress ending halfway to her knees and hugging her curves beyond distraction, she stared at the two of them before descending slowly. Her thoughts leapt out at him. She was nervous, a bit regretful for snapping at him, but not completely. What stood out the most for Ares was that she was glad he hadn't left.

"Hello," she said, giving Terrance a delightful smile that immediately had the watcher straightening and puffing out his chest.

Ares had the sudden urge to growl at him or, better yet, put him in one of the paintings on the wall. The man was part of his life to watch, not interact.

"You must be the Nikita Povlechic I've heard so much about," Terrance said with a gallant bow.

Nikita stopped on the bottom step, looking beyond flattered. Ares didn't miss that her guard was up. She wanted to know who he was.

"Terrance is my watcher, and he was just leaving." Ares figured having seen Nikita was sufficient enough. Terrance had all the information he needed for now.

"A watcher?" Nikita asked, her eyebrows narrowing, as she let her gaze pass from Terrance to Ares.

When she met Ares' hard stare, she looked down quickly. They had unfinished business, and he didn't mind at all sending her a mental note telling her as much. She looked up at him quickly, wide-eyed, and then down at her bare feet.

"A simple humble servant," Terrance cooed, missing the mental message that Ares had just sent Nikita. "A mere messenger to the coven of Hedel."

"Coven of Hedel?" Nikita cocked her head, her thoughts quickly leaning toward that of the investigator. "As in witches?"

"Witches are human, a mere shadow of the immortals." Terrance cleared his throat.

"You call him an immortal. But Ares is a god. His claim to fame being nothing more than getting caught in a net with his sister-in-law. Why don't you go by Mars?" Nikita gave Ares a challenging look. "He has a much better reputation."

Terrance let out a whoop and Ares fisted his hands, turning on his watcher. "You did mention that you were just leaving," he directed.

"Of course. Of course." Terrance waved a hand through the air. "I've seen enough for now. I'll check back in a day or so." And with that he headed out the front door, closing it quietly behind him.

"Do you have any other insults to throw my way?" Ares asked, turning on Nikita.

Her eyes grew wide as she braced herself on the bottom stair. She almost met him eye to eye.

"If I know what there is to know about you, then I can work alongside you better," she said quietly. "There is serious trouble at hand and I won't have you just waving a hand and making it all disappear before I understand it."

"So you are in charge here?" The best thing to do, it appeared, was to put Nikita in her place quickly.

Nikita let out a sigh. "Why is it such an issue with you that someone be in charge? Haven't you ever worked with a partner?"

"There is a leader. And there is a follower." Especially in this particular situation.

Nikita had no idea what she was up against. Even if he spent months enlightening her on the history of demons and what they were capable of, the havoc they'd brought upon this planet for centuries and centuries, she still wouldn't have a complete grasp of what they could do.

It turned him on more than he wanted to admit that she was such a true-blooded warrior. His dick got hard just watching the fire burn in her eyes when she thought about taking him on.

"Fine then. I'll be the leader." She tossed her long black hair over her shoulder, giving him an awesome view of her hardened nipples pressing against her dress.

"Is that so," he said, and gripped her arm, twisting it so that he forced her to turn around on the stairs.

She fell forward, and he let go of her arm, put his hands on her ass and slid her dress up.

"You had underwear on earlier," he said, loving the incredible view of her ass and cunt exposed to him.

"I had shoes on earlier too," she told him.

She was on her hands and knees on the stairs, moisture already clinging to her cunt.

Sparring with him turned her on. He wouldn't forget that about her. Their bantering had been mere foreplay for her.

"That you did. I much prefer you this way."

His cock hardened painfully in his jeans when he ran his finger from her ass to her cunt. Sinking his finger deep inside her hot pussy made the blood rush through his body, tearing through him with enough energy to make his human brain lightheaded.

Ares willed his clothes off him, but decided this time he much preferred Nikita with her dress shoved up to her hips. Bent over on the stairs, her legs spread enough to show her smoothly shaved pussy dripping with need.

He stroked the inside of her pussy and then took his soaked finger up to her tighter ass.

"I want you here, too," he told her, then slowly inserted his finger, moistening the tight hole while she bucked against him.

"Ares," she cried out, and he knew her mind was beyond words at the moment.

He could hear what she couldn't speak. Touching her like that turned her on more than she would ever willingly admit. His cock grew, engorged with blood, throbbing furiously while he forced himself to wait, to continue to torture her with his finger.

Stroking her flesh as he ran his finger back to her cunt, he probed a bit deeper this time, adding a second finger, spreading her open while her thick cream soaked him.

"God, that feels good," she panted and tossed her head.

Her long black hair fanned over her arched back, reaching her ass and brushing over her creamy white skin like a long cape.

Every inch of her was perfection. Her muscular yet trim legs braced and managing to hold her up while her arms rested on the higher stair. When she turned her head, he saw her long lashes flutter over her sapphire eyes. Her straight nose, perky and adding to the defiant expression she so often flattered him with, added to her perfect profile.

Twisting his fingers inside her, he enjoyed the fresh rush of cum that soaked his hand.

Nikita cried out, thrusting back toward him, aching for him to go deeper, hit that spot he had yet to touch.

Once again he pulled out, slowly removing his fingers from her, watching how they were covered with her thick, white cream.

"You are so fucking hot," he told her.

She turned her head, looking over her shoulder at him with a wicked grin. "Why don't you show me how hot you are?"

He loved her need to challenge him. Leaning over her, he thrust his soaked finger deep into her ass.

Nikita cried out, falling onto the stairs but then quickly pushing herself to her hands and knees again. She was so damned tight there he wondered if she'd ever been taken there before.

Deciding to let her know him a bit better, he brushed his lips over her back, and mentally talked to her.

*Will my cock be the first to have you there, my dear?*

"God. Oh shit." She tried to turn, but he grabbed her hip with his free hand, keeping her on all fours.

*Answer me,* he told her.

"Yes, yes." She let her head fall forward, her silky black hair encasing her.

It would have been just as easy to search her mind and gain his own answers. But she was so determined to be his equal, so willing to fight to obtain something she could never hope to match. He would give her this though. He would allow her to provide him with what he needed to know, talking to her in his own way, the way of an immortal.

*If I am your first, then I shall be your last.* He wasn't sure what possessed him to say that.

There was no way he could spend the rest of her life with her. Ares was a wanderer, a warrior, seeking out the battle and fighting for the just cause. Just because Nikita had the craving for the fight in her too didn't mean she would be able to keep up with him.

"Prove yourself worthy, and we'll see."

He'd been so focused on his own thoughts he hadn't anticipated her answer. Nikita hadn't jumped at the opportunity to be by his side. She'd given him an out, but for some reason it made him want her even more.

Damn the woman for being so damned enticing.

He pulled his finger from her moistened ass and gripped his cock, pressing it against her pussy. It throbbed in his hand, aching to feel her heat around it, needing to be buried so deep inside her that she would scream.

"Yes," she cried out when he thrust inside her.

Holding onto her hips, he rode her hard, gritting his teeth as he plummeted deep inside her again and again.

She arched into him, adjusting her body so he would go deeper. And he knew the moment he hit that special spot for her.

Nikita clawed the carpet on the stairs, her breath coming in pants as her orgasm swept through her. Cream soaked his cock, coating him while it dripped from her cunt.

He watched as his shaft disappeared inside her, slowing his movement, enjoying how hot a view he had. Her pussy lips gripped him, stroking him, making him swell with the urge to come.

But he had to hold out. He wanted more from her. Touching her ass with his finger, he willed it to moisten for him. Her tight little hole was a virgin, and he would allow her to experience the most pleasure he could offer her.

"What are you doing?" She jerked and lifted a hand to brush her hair from her face, twisting and trying to see over her shoulder.

"It's a lubricant. You are tight and I don't want to hurt you," he explained, and rubbed the cream he'd made appear on his finger over her ass while continuing to fuck her pussy.

"It's cold," she breathed and then once again let her head fall forward.

*Relax your body, Nikita. Give yourself to me.*



She didn't answer but he felt her exhale, relaxing, waiting with nervous excitement to experience what she'd never done before. Her willingness, her desire to give him what she'd never offered another man before, sent an emotion through him that he didn't readily recognize.

Something strong, a sensation to demand that she be his, brought him pause. Shoving the new emotion out of the way, he focused on the pleasure that she offered him.

Instantly he missed the heat of her cunt when he pulled out of her. His cock was coated with her white cum, moist and inflamed with need for more at the same time.

Nikita sucked in a breath, lifting her head when he pressed his cock against her ass. Slowly at first, he entered her tight hole, filling her easily with all the lubrication he'd given her.

"Ares!" she cried out, bucking against him.

*Oh sweet Nikita. You are so fucking perfect.*

He filled her ass, stretching her until she could take all of him. When she finally exhaled, he slowly pulled out and then drove into her suffocating heat with more energy.

Blood surged through him with an aggression he couldn't control—didn't want to control. So fucking tight. So damned perfect. He never wanted it to end. Gripping her hips, unleashing his urges on her, he continued to fuck her until he couldn't wait any longer.

Ares pulled out, exploding all over her ass. His cum dripped down her, white and creamy.

*Mine!* The emotions ran through him so heavily that not even Ares could control them.

## **Chapter Six**

Nikita was dead.

It took her a while to let this sink in.

Later the next day, she sat in front of the computer once again staring at her obituary. More than anything she wanted to reach out to her family, let them know she was alive. But she didn't need Ares to tell her that doing that could only put them in jeopardy.

"Ares," she said, not bothering to look over her shoulder at the reclining god lying on the bed.

He didn't answer and Nikita moved to the bed, grabbing his thick wrist. "Ares," she said again.

For the briefest of moments she would have sworn there was no life in him. Then he moved quickly, grabbing the hand that gripped his wrist. He sat up, pulling her into his lap.

"I think I prefer you in something more revealing," he said, his voice a mere growl.

The tank top and shorts Nikita had donned when she woke up disappeared. A long sheer gown tumbled down her legs, the material taut over her breasts and then flowing over the rest of her.

Ares ran his hand up her leg, under the material, until he fondled the most sensitive part of her body. Although a bit sore from the previous night, a fire still kindled quickly, rushing through her, when he caressed her damp pussy.

She gripped his shoulders, fighting to stay focused when he could so quickly make her body crave him.

"This gown isn't me at all," she said, balling the lightweight pale pink material in her hand. "I'm just not into all this frilly stuff."

"Ahh yes. My maiden warrior." Ares leaned into her, nipping at her earlobe with his teeth.

Tingles of need coursed through her and at the same time something a lot more snug suddenly hugged her body. Looking down she saw the tight-fitting leather corset she now wore. Tight enough that it kept her from sucking in a deep breath and pushing her breasts together so that cleavage spilled over the black leather, the sight almost turned her on.

"Oh my," she breathed and slid off him to better see herself in the mirror. "I like this. Goes nicely with my black hair."

"I agree," Ares said, coming off the bed like a deadly animal ready to stalk its prey.

A short black leather skirt finished the ensemble. She almost fell over though, when he suddenly made high-heeled black boots appear on her feet.

Grabbing his bare chest to balance herself, she knew they could spend the day playing like this and have way too much fun. There were matters to tend to though, questions to get answered. And as sexy as he made her feel with the outfit she suddenly wore, her body was still tender from the fucking she'd received on the stairs.

"I could take that tenderness away," he whispered into her hair, wrapping his arms around her and spreading his long fingers over her ass.

Nikita stared at her hands against his chest. Tiny black sprays of hair spread over muscles so fine-tuned they made her wet just staring at them.

"I want to find out how Joseph Black came to know Julian Artos." She let her hands brush over his chest, the soft hair against her palms tickling her skin.

"I was just looking into that."

She looked up into his powerful face, the face of a mighty warrior, displaced in time. Ares had a body made for shining armor, so tall and well built, so muscular. But

his powers made it so he wouldn't need such cumbersome protection. He could show off every inch of his masculinity, which he was doing a damn good job of at the moment, and still be a deadly weapon to deal with.

"Did you leave your body, or something?" That would explain why she could have sworn for a moment there that he had no life in him when he lay on the bed.

"Exactly." He smiled down at her, his green eyes swarming with mischief. "You learn quickly."

She ignored his praise. "So what did you find out?"

He let go of her, walking toward the middle of the room, and suddenly he wore comfortable faded blue jeans that did nothing to hide the corded muscles that twisted through his legs. A bright blue muscle T-shirt spread over his backside and when he turned to face her, she could still see enough of that glorious chest hair to drool.

"Joseph Black had a demon in him." Ares shrugged and the slight action brought Nikita to attention.

She'd been too busy admiring his incredible body and almost hadn't heard his answer.

"A demon in him?" The clothes she wore made her feel so sexy, and staring at him didn't help matters much. Her pussy throbbed with an aching desire, but this was the conversation she'd demanded.

It was just like Ares to give her what she wanted but under his terms. Sexual cravings tingled between them, she could feel the electricity in the air. It took more than a bit of effort to focus on what they were talking about.

"Yes." With two lazy steps he narrowed the distance between them. He had this way of moving like a cat, a slow, easy movement that at the same time looked very dangerous. He combed her hair back, lifting her face as he cupped it with his hands. "A demon can climb into your mind, take over your soul. They own you. And that human will appear to be the same person, but they aren't."

Heat from his hands singed her skin. A fever rushed through her. The deep tone of his voice, soft and rumbling, was like thunder that at any minute could burst into a dangerous storm. Excitement rushed through her.

She took in a slow breath. "How do you know if a human has a demon in them?"

Ares stroked her cheek, ran his fingers down her neck, and then brushed them over her swollen cleavage.

"The only way you could tell is by noting a change in their personality, their actions. Me... I can see the nasty creatures." He shrugged lazily, his hooded gaze focused on her breasts.

"And you took the demon out of Joseph Black?"

"Yup." He brushed his index finger between her breasts, sinking between the crease, touching the rapid throbbing of her heart. "And now I'm sure he's quite busy trying to explain his recent actions."

"Then I need to go to him."

"No." Ares moved his hand quickly, gripping her chin firmly.

His green eyes glowed with a protector's instinct she'd learned to identify. But no matter how stubborn he could be, she could be just as bad.

"Yes." She didn't try to pull her face from his grip but stared at him, not blinking. "Joseph is very powerful. Leaders of nations seek him out."

"He is human," Ares growled.

Nikita brought her hand up quickly, gripping his wrist the best she could and squeezing hard. Nothing she could ever do would harm Ares. But the extreme level of his abilities didn't intimidate her.

"And so am I," she hissed. "This is a human matter."

"Humans can't conquer demons." He gripped her hand, and a sly grin made his eyes darken.

Suddenly her hands stretched over her head. She looked up, her hair fanning down her back, and saw that furry black cuffs confined her hands together while a hook hung from the ceiling. He'd tied her, confined her, and stretched her out before him without so much as a blink of an eye.

"A demon could do this to you," he told her. And then pressed his body against hers.

"No. No demon could do this." She relaxed and smiled while her body tingled, turning into one oversensitive nerve ending.

"Oh?" He looked amused, running a finger down her center and then over her soaked cunt. "And why do you think that?"

"Because you won't let them," she whispered.

Ares thrust two fingers into her hot pussy, impaling her. Gripping her hair, he forced her face to his and then kissed her savagely.

He made love to her mouth with his tongue, while stroking her pussy with his fingers. Stretched out before him, unable to move, her body had never felt more alive.

Nikita raised her leg, wrapping it around his muscular legs. He growled into her mouth, pulling her hard against his body while stroking her tender pussy with his fingers. She cried out into his mouth, never knowing that being confined would encourage her orgasm so quickly.

Bound and unable to free herself, completely at Ares' mercy, she exploded, wave after wave rippling through her.

"Ares," she screamed, breaking the kiss, letting her head fall back.

At the same moment, her hands fell free, and she collapsed against him.

"I can show you ways to come that you've never imagined," he promised, letting his fingers slide out of her heat and then bringing them to her mouth. "Taste how incredible you are."

Nikita wrapped her lips around Ares' fingers, sucking the rich cream from them. She let her tongue stroll along his flesh, watching while his lashes fluttered over his eyes. Those green orbs grew hazy with lust.

She opened her mouth, allowing him to watch her tongue scrape over his skin. "Now it's my turn," she whispered.

"Your turn?" He still watched her tongue.

"Oh yes. You made the bondage appear for me, now make it appear for you."

His eyes shot to hers. "Appear for me?" He cocked an eyebrow.

"Yes, my dear. Make the cuffs and hook appear and bind your hands, stretched in front of me, so that I may do as I wish." Once again she sucked his fingers into her mouth and then rolled her tongue over them.

Ares groaned, closing his eyes.

"Do it now," she instructed, her insides on fire while lust pumped through her.

Ares pulled his fingers from her mouth. He took a step backwards, his dark hair bordering his muscular face.

"No one binds me," he told her, his tone almost deadly.

"Then I shall be your first," she said, more turned on by the idea with every moment that passed. She moved into him, running her hands up his chest, muscles twitching against her touch. "Tie your hands above your head. Allow me my pleasure, or we return to business."

"Nor do I take ultimatums." Now he spoke between his teeth, his arm muscles flexing when he fisted his hands at his side.

"Have it your way." Nikita shrugged, adjusted her skirt as she turned and headed out of the bedroom.

"Woman," Ares roared, and she jumped in spite of herself.

Her mouth went dry when she turned around to see Ares stretched before her, his wrists bound together above his head, secured to a hook that hung from the ceiling.

"Oh, holy shit," she murmured, heat rushing over her entire body as the pressure between her legs soared to a breaking point.

He stood before her, his feet bare, his faded jeans hugging corded muscle, and she let her gaze rest for a moment at his belly, where the jeans ended. Flat, hard abdomen sprinkled with dark hair peeked out from underneath his muscle T-shirt. Her gaze traveled further, taking in the broad span of his shoulders, the way his hair curled in dark midnight-colored waves, fanning over rippling flesh in his arms.

When she met his gaze, his green eyes darker than a summer storm-filled sky, his dangerous stare reminded her that he was anything but a prisoner. If anything, with his hands bound above his head, fisted, he looked more terrifying than she'd ever seen him.

Her heart pounded in her chest and her mouth was suddenly way too moist. She licked her lips, approaching him slowly.

"You look good enough to eat," she purred, her heartbeat plummeting to between her legs when his lips parted, his breath almost a pant.

She dared to touch him, feel the raw power surge from his body. He didn't speak, but watched her, like a hawk ready to pounce at any moment. No matter that his hands were bound, he looked as if he would attack on a moment's notice.

Nikita would enjoy the moment while she had it. Never had she had a man bound before her like this. It had always been a deep, dark fantasy, one she'd never shared with a soul. She would take this, relish what he offered, and damn it if he wasn't making her hot as hell.

Letting her fingers stroll down his chest, she went to her knees before him, undoing the top button of his jeans.

"Nikita," he growled, every muscle in his body hardening to steel.

"Yes, my dear," she mewled, undoing his pants and pulling out his swollen, throbbing cock.



She ran her tongue along his shaft, looking up at him. Ares' head fell back, his fists knotted so tightly they looked red. He was fighting to maintain the restraints he'd allowed himself to be captive in.

"Release yourself, and I'll stop," she whispered against his cock.

His head shot forward, and she watched a vein pop out in his neck. He glared at her, but then his eyes rolled in his head when she wrapped her mouth around his cock.

Ares let out a growl so fierce-sounding she feared he would rip the hook clear out of the ceiling. Her insides were molten lava, never had anything she'd experienced been so fucking hot.

Closing her eyes, she kept the mental image of him in her mind while sucking him deep into her mouth, taking as much of him as she could. She spread her knees, fingering herself, the ache within her almost beyond her own control.

Her tongue glided down his cock, then circled his swollen cock head, so soft and velvety. His salty pre-cum filled her mouth, as intoxicating as it was rich. Gliding her mouth over him, holding on to his cock while she took him in until she gagged, her body cried for relief as she soaked her fingers with her own cum.

"You push me too far," Ares growled, his voice echoing throughout the room.

He'd given her this, allowed her to do what no other had ever done to him. Ares the immortal, the god, submitted to her, surrendering his strength to her even if just for a few minutes.

Her heart beat so hard in her chest, the throbbing spreading throughout her so that every inch of her pounded with a need so strong it stole her breath.

Her lips tingled when she pulled him out of her. "Not yet. If you are so powerful certainly you can withstand the torture a bit longer."

"Don't think that I don't know how you torture yourself."

She looked up at him, saw the fiery lust burning in his eyes.

"Then suffer with me," she whispered and sucked him deep into her mouth once again.

A growl rumbled through him so hard she felt his legs shake. Her tongue danced around his cock, stroking and sucking. He thrust forward, doing his best to fuck her mouth while confined to the position where he stood.

More saltiness filled her mouth, richer, creamier, a warning that he would explode soon.

"Come for me," she demanded, talking while his cock head was still in her mouth.

His body shook, and she quit fingering herself so that she could feel the power in his legs. One hand on his thigh, the other holding his cock while she continued to suck, his strength seemed to seep through her, making her stronger, filling her with a confidence she'd never known before.

Her god! Her man!

Knowing that he would submit to her, give her what she wanted, and at the same time have the power and strength to control and protect her, proved to her that they truly were equals.

*I'm not going to let you get away.* She sent the mental message and at the same time took him in so deep that she gagged.

Ares roared, the entire room seeming to shake around her as he exploded in her mouth. So much cum there was no way she could swallow it all, spilled over her lips.

Her lips were numb when she sat back on her haunches, grinning up at him. And she was more than a bit weak when she stood, unable to stop from smiling. She waved her hand in the air at his bound hands.

"Be gone," she ordered, and then felt uncontrollable giggles when his black handcuffs disappeared and the hook in the ceiling vanished.

"Feeling pretty full of yourself," Ares said, wrapping his arms around her.

She leaned into him, feeling his heartbeat against her cheek.

“And for the record,” he added. “You’re right. You aren’t going to let me get away.”

## **Chapter Seven**

Nikita stiffened in his arms and immediately he sensed her fear and anger. Glancing down at her he saw her expression frozen, her eyes wide as she stared at the computer.

Julian Artos leered at them, his handsome face a mere mask that didn't cover the grotesque ugliness gleaming in his eyes.

"Don't think you can take what was meant for me." Julian let out a hideous laugh, his face filling the screen.

Nikita jumped out of his arms, hurrying over to the computer and quickly pushing buttons. Nothing she did made the image go away.

"You will never have me," she screamed at the computer.

Ares touched her shoulder, at the same time making the image go away and the computer screen go blank. Nikita trembled against his grasp.

"It's time for Julian Artos to die." Ares searched through the area, reaching his thoughts, his mind, past the neighborhood, searching for the bastard.

The image on the computer had been a scare tactic, a reminder to Ares of how much power the demon had gained. In the swoop of a second, the asshole had ruined their moment, taken his sensual lady and made her shake with fear.

"I thought you could destroy demons." Nikita backed out of his arms, crossing her arms over her nicely displayed breasts while frowning at him.

"I can." And taking down Julian would be a real pleasure. Ares looked down at his still damp cock and then adjusted his jeans, regretting that the moment had been lost. "The bastard has gained a following among the demons. They've been fighting for a

new leader, and if Julian is to be it, I want to take him down once he has them all gathered."

The fear in her expression faded as she listened. The fire that ignited in her sapphire eyes made them glow. Lowering her arms slowly, she had no clue how damned sexy she looked in her tight black leather skirt and corset. Her thoughts were no longer on sex though.

Nikita absently swiped her fingers over her lips, her mind churning with the excitement of the attack. "I still believe that a visit to Joseph Black is in order."

She was nuts. Ares shook his head adamantly. "We've discussed this already. There's no way you can defeat the demons."

Immediately she wanted to take on the challenge of battling them, simply because he'd just told her that she couldn't. How well he knew that reaction. A true warrior never turned down a challenge, no matter the odds. And he admired that trait in her. At the same time, he wouldn't let her go on a fool's mission.

Nikita gave him a sly grin, her hands gliding down her outfit, straightening it, encouraging him to follow the movement. "With your help, I can. You'll educate me on demons, and we'll learn what connections Joseph has."

"Remember, Joseph Black thinks you're dead." He watched her fingers fiddle with the end of her skirt, and fought to keep his cock from hardening.

Later, he would fuck her silly. But already he'd decided he would allow her to spend some of her energy in learning more about these nasty bastards that she craved so much to destroy. Battling with Nikita by his side might prove rather exciting.

"And thanks to you, I'm not dead. Don't think I don't know that and appreciate it." She began pacing, tapping her lips with her index finger while her mind attempted to plot out a method of attack. "You can take us to Centauri Agency, right?"

"I could..."

"Good." She walked over and stared at the empty closet. "I'm going to need some different clothes." Nikita turned, smiling at him. "I doubt I'd be taken very seriously dressed like this."

"You've got my attention." The more time he spent with her, he had a feeling she could grab anyone's attention no matter what she wore.

"Ares," she said quietly. "How about something simple? Jeans and a blouse?"

He'd much rather keep her dressed the way she was. For that matter, he had no desire to take her anywhere. Staying here and fucking her until she couldn't take it any more sounded much more appealing than chasing after nasty demons. But the matter wouldn't go away on its own. He did have every intention of learning when Julian would meet with his followers and had no doubt that it would be soon.

And when that moment arrived, he would be ready.

Giving her the once-over, he changed her short leather skirt into tight-fitting leather pants. Instead of a blouse, he decided a tight-fitting black sleeveless shirt would look better. He left the corset on underneath.

Nikita turned, surveying herself. "I need shoes."

He put her in simple black boots, with just a bit of a heel. When she turned around, he'd changed his own attire too, going for something darker. A simple shirt with black pants, a leather jacket to finish it off, and he was satisfied.

"How will we travel? Should we have luggage?" She'd glanced around the room, realizing that other than the bed and the computer, the room was bare.

"Come here." Ares pulled her into his arms, deciding he would give her taste of what she craved to know — more about him.

Nikita opened her mouth to answer him but he swept them out of the room. In the next instant, a windowless hallway surrounded them, the almost unnoticeable hum from a ventilation system the only sound detectable. They were quite a ways underground, in the secured section of Centauri Agency.

Ares slid his hands up Nikita's arms, which were tightly wrapped around him. Her heart beat rapidly against his chest, and her entire body was stiff against his. She hated being caught off guard. At the moment, disappearing from the house they'd just been in and reappearing here, although very familiar surroundings to her, had her frazzled.

"You must be ready for the unexpected if you're going to battle demons." He pried her arms from him, and then held on to them while meeting her gaze.

"I'm fine." She was fighting her fear.

Her thoughts were loud enough as she struggled to maintain composure in front of him, that it was as if she spoke out loud. More than anything she wanted Ares to see her as strong, as an equal, as worthy to battle by his side. Women in the past, especially the mortal ones, had always been content to let him fight and to simply enjoy his pleasures and gifts when he was with him. Nikita wanted so much more.

"I can see that." He glanced past her, down the hallway, knowing that two agents were approaching.

Nikita straightened, the black shirt he'd chosen for her, slightly see-through, giving him a glimpse of the cleavage that pressed against her corset. Her long black hair fell over her shoulder, covering one breast, while the rest streamed down her back behind her.

When the agents' footsteps sounded down the hall, Nikita turned, her mind quickly springing into action. Hearing her thoughts as she gestured for him to follow fascinated him. Although dying to question him as to how they'd arrived there, wanting to know so much more about what she'd just experienced, she put it to the side and took on the moment.

"Follow me. Look straight ahead. They won't say a word to us."

He'd give her credit. She was right. Apparently every agent here had an inherent fear of giving any indication of what they might know or not know. Each of them lived with knowledge that they might die that day. Knowing too much, or not knowing enough, could be a strike against them. As a result, they said as little as possible to each

other and simply carried out their orders. Even as he probed their thoughts, searching for any helpful information, he learned that they focused on their assignment, too worried about what might happen if they failed. He'd give Joseph Black credit for having them all incredibly well trained.

The two agents walked past them. Nikita looked down, passing them quickly, praying that they wouldn't be agents she'd worked with. Ares noticed she wondered if they might have demons in them. Neither of them did. But there were demons here. He could smell the nasty fucking creatures.

Searching in his mind through the maze of offices and hallways built underground, Ares found Joseph Black.

"Joseph is in a briefing. I think we'd do best to wait for him in his office." Ares noted that Nikita didn't have an established plan as to what she would say to him. He didn't care to enter into a situation unprepared. "We'll discuss what will be said once we are there."

Nikita nodded, and he sensed her relief that he was cooperating with her desire to seek out her former leader. And she did view Joseph as that. Ares had her complete trust. And although he realized she questioned herself that she trusted him, she'd accepted the fact that she did. He also noted that she studied her growing feelings toward him. She was human and he was an immortal. Nikita's thoughts focused briefly on whether that would make them compatible.

Ares wondered the same thing. In the past, he'd entered into relationships with humans. But it had always been simply because they amused him at that moment. Nikita somehow had managed to move past that point with him. Ares would explore that, figure out why she appealed to him so much.

But just as Nikita shoved thoughts of him out of her head, determined to give all of her energy to fighting the demons, Ares did the same thing.



They were preparing for battle. Focusing on her sweet ass swaying side to side in those tight leather pants he'd put her in would keep him from determining the best plan of attack.

A set of glass doors appeared at the end of the hallway. Beyond that lay a large room, busy with agents working at computers.

Nikita sucked in a breath. "Joseph's office is beyond the data room."

He already knew that, focusing on the closed doors visible at the other end of the large room. Putting his hand on her shoulder, more to reassure her that they moved as one, the two of them disappeared and reappeared in the Centauri Agency leader's office.

"Shit. You've got to let me know when you're going to do that." Nikita grabbed her gut, stumbling a step before quickly regaining her balance.

It wasn't the first time he'd heard a human's thoughts and knew they viewed traveling from one place to another the way an immortal did as similar to running really fast and then stopping just as quickly. It was an odd analogy and exactly how Nikita felt at that moment.

He ignored her complaint, instead taking in the large plush office. "Joseph will be joining us soon. You can introduce me, but you'll not share with him that I'm immortal."

"I'm not stupid." She looked cross at him and he knew she was nervous. "Let me do the talking. He thinks I'm dead and when he sees that I'm not, he'll insist I go through debriefing. He'll be blunt and demanding. It will take a few minutes at least for him to understand I'm not part of the agency anymore."

She doubted he'd see that at all, and he found it interesting that she seemed to have forgotten he could get into her thoughts.

*Maybe you should let me do that talking, and you can concentrate on how you're going to fuck me when we leave this place.*

Nikita's mouth fell open when she heard his words in her head. She shut it just as quickly and pointed a finger at him. Opening her mouth to speak, she then shut it, pursing her lips together while her blue eyes glowed with such passion that they accented her silky black hair beautifully. Even angry, she was about the most gorgeous creature he'd ever laid eyes on.

She yelled her thoughts at him. *Don't you dare be an asshole, Ares.*

Ares turned his attention to the closed set of doors, realizing that Joseph Black approached. He had another agent with him. Ares sent mental instructions so that Joseph suddenly decided to send the other agent away and entered alone.

*He's coming to us now,* he told Nikita in her thoughts.

She ran her fingers nervously through her hair and then sucked in a breath. Ares would give her credit. Nikita managed to hide her nervousness and fear very well.

"How the hell did you get in here?" Joseph also managed to keep his cool, closing the door as he stared from Nikita to Ares. In the next instant, he concealed his surprise, although in his mind he raced to try and answer the question on his own.

The agency leader came up with no answers.

"Joseph. Don't call security. You want to hear what I have to tell you." Nikita put her hands up, palms out. "I swear to you we haven't breached any security."

Joseph Black regained all composure, suddenly appearing the calm, in-control leader, as he moved slowly to his side of his desk.

"Nikita. We filed a code zero on you. I'm sure whatever you have to share with me will be mighty interesting." Joseph turned his attention to Ares for the first time, still trying in his mind to figure out before he was told what they were doing in his office. "You do realize the penalties for bringing someone who isn't part of Centauri into the agency."

"Joseph, this is Ares." Nikita fought to sound calm. "And as you just said, you filed a code zero on me. I'm no longer part of Centauri either."

"If you're alive, you're part of this agency," Joseph countered.

"No. I'm not. But I'm willing to work with you if you'll hear me out."

Joseph raised an eyebrow but remained silent, sitting behind his desk, clasping his hands together on his desk and giving her an expectant look.

*You've annoyed him, but he's intensely curious. Point out that you know he was possessed by a demon. It will give you the upper hand if you let him know that you're aware he's not strong enough to battle demons without our help.*

Nikita sucked in a breath. Joseph gave her a hard look. It didn't surprise Ares that the man realized he couldn't intimidate Ares. Joseph believed he could make Nikita do as he pleased and knew remaining silent would encourage her to tell him everything she knew. He had every intention of sending her into debriefing after that. Joseph Black would be in for a surprise. He wasn't going to get Nikita back.

"Do you remember everything while you were possessed by that demon?" Nikita asked.

"Possessed?" Joseph snorted.

"Joseph. You sent me to Julian Artos. Why did you do that?"

Ares crossed his arms over his chest. He stood back while Nikita approached Joseph's desk, determination rippling through her. The conversation wouldn't accomplish much, he was sure of it. But Nikita was a damned stubborn woman, and he'd let her figure it out for herself. In the meantime, Ares stretched his thoughts throughout the building, learning what he could about their operation and doing a mental count of how many agents had demons in them.

Joseph leaned back in his chair. "If the mission wasn't clear to you before you left, you should have told me."

Nikita shook her head. "You don't remember, do you?"

Joseph hit his fist against his desk. "I won't have you breaking into my office and then accusing me of not knowing my job."

"Joseph." Nikita stayed surprisingly calm. "Julian Artos is a demon. I've seen what he can do. There was a demon in you, but it's gone now. These demons are trying to take over. We can stop them, but only if we work together."

Joseph stood slowly. Ares watched him like a hawk, knowing his presence had Joseph a bit more cautious. The two men glanced at each other briefly. Ares straightened, silently letting Joseph know with his body language that he would protect Nikita.

"I think you better share with me everything you know, Nikita," Joseph said quietly.

"I saw a demon, a hideous-looking creature, enter a house and destroy it without moving a finger. Their powers are strong. I came here to see if we could work together. Tell me what you know, Joseph?"

"We need to schedule a complete debriefing." Joseph turned quickly, heading back behind his desk.

"I'm not part of Centauri anymore. I came here to see if we could work together." Nikita was growing frustrated.

"He doesn't know any more than you do," Ares said quietly.

Joseph gave him a piercing stare. "Agents in the past have tried to tell me they were no longer with Centauri, that they wanted to cut a deal, form an alliance. That isn't how it works, Nikita." All the while he continued to stare Ares down.

Joseph Black believed in his strength. And for a human he had a lot of power, more so than many leaders of their countries. Ares could see why Nikita wanted to come to him. She had a lot of respect for the man, although he could tell she didn't like Joseph very well. The man wasn't a warrior, yet he was the organizer of armies, the man behind the scenes, the plotter. His decisions killed humans and saved their lives.

"I'm dead, remember?" Nikita threw her hands up in the air and then let them fall to her side. She turned and looked at Ares, having a hard time accepting that Joseph

didn't know more than he did. "Maybe if we share more information with him, then he'll see we're a team to unite with," she almost whispered to him.

Apparently, in her excitement to make the meeting work, she'd forgotten she could share her thoughts with him.

Ares shook his head. "He doesn't know anything," he told her again.

"I won't have you withholding information from me," Joseph said sternly.

Ares looked past Nikita toward the Centauri leader. "We have no other information to offer you at this time."

Joseph Black's face hardened, anger consuming him. It was just too damned bad that he wasn't accustomed to being spoken to like this. Ares wouldn't have him scaring Nikita, which was exactly what he would have done if Ares weren't present.

*When we walk out of his office door, we'll return to the house.* Ares sent Nikita the thought, doing as she'd asked and warning her before they moved through space.

Frustration flowed through Nikita. She chewed her lip as she looked up at him, but then turned to Joseph.

"These demons are going to take over if we don't stop them," she said quietly. "It's a shame we can't work together to fight them."

"Let's go," Ares told her, putting his arm around her and guiding her to the door.

"You don't just saunter in here and then back out." Joseph Black was outraged.

What angered him more than their intrusion was that he didn't have more information to offer Nikita. Ares had a good hunch the man would seriously be researching it within the hour. Although he didn't remember being possessed, there were gaps in his memory. Ares searched deep through Joseph's thoughts, learning that he'd gone through files, tried to come up with answers for his actions during the period of time that he couldn't remember.

It pissed Joseph off that he had no answers and worried him that someone might discover his failures.

"You've just been offered your answers. When you accept them, possibly we can talk more."

"Now wait one minute," Joseph bellowed.

Ares didn't take orders from the man. Escorting Nikita out the door, he let it close behind them before making the two of them disappear. One or two curious eyes thought they saw someone, or a couple of people, leave Joseph Black's office. None of them would say for sure.

"That is the most bizarre sensation," Nikita said as soon as they reappeared in the living room of the house in Iowa. "And why did we come back here?"

She held her hands out in front of her, as if trying to regain her balance. Ares came up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and then sliding his hands up to her breasts. Her long hair tickled his flesh and the fullness of her breasts, spilling over the top of her corset, hardened his cock painfully.

"We have unfinished business," he told her, squeezing her tits.

The world wouldn't end in the next few minutes. Her excitement to continue to figure out these demons had its appeal. But Nikita would learn to trust him, to understand that he had matters in control.

Nikita stretched into him, twisting her head so that she could see his face. "You're right. We need to find Julian Artos."

"In good time. He won't be hard to find, when the time is right." His little human needed to learn patience. "Attacking before we have him where we want him won't accomplish what I want."

"And what do you want?" She twisted in his arms, her full lips moist and slightly parted.

Remembering how good they'd felt around his cock made his blood boil. Nothing mattered other than being inside her. Taking her, filling her, feeling her heat wrapped around him—he needed her now.

Nikita let out a cry when he grabbed her arm, pulling her around the couch sitting in the middle of the room. He pressed against her back, bending her over before she had time to react.

"This is what I want," he growled, making her clothes disappear.

That sweet ass and pussy glistened with moisture while her hair tumbled around her shoulders.

"Ares!" She brushed hair out of her face, turning to try and see him.

Bending her over the back of the couch, her body almost doubled over, those tight holes exposed to him, brought out a carnal side of him. Every muscle hardened inside him. They would battle together, triumph together. She would belong to him.

Every fiber he was made of demanded that it be so.

Ares willed his own clothes away and grabbed her ass, spreading her so that cream seeped from her cunt when he pulled her open for him.

"God, you're good," he said at the same time that he buried his cock deep inside her.

She'd sucked him dry earlier but the need to feel her heat wrapped around him had grown with every minute that had passed since he'd been in her mouth.

"Oh, hell yeah," she exhaled, her fingers digging into the couch, bracing herself, as he kept her bent over, impaling her.

With all the energy he had, he built momentum, pounding her cunt. "You made me wait for this."

"You got a blowjob." She tried to push herself up.

Ares thrust harder.

"Shit." She soaked his cock, unable to straighten as he pounded her harder than he ever had.

Long, black shiny hair fanned around her, blocking her vision. Muscles in her back flexed, his lady warrior, while she pushed back against him.

Always a fight in her. Nothing turned him on more. Even as he tore into her, gripping her ass hard enough that delightful red imprints of his hands appeared on her flesh, she didn't cower, didn't give in.

"Will you submit to me?" Already he knew everything in her nature defied her to do that.

Her pussy muscles contracted around him, the walls shifting against him as she arched her back. Holding herself up with one arm, she thrust her hair back with her other hand, the silky black strands streaming down her back.

"Never," she cried out, her mouth opening with a silent cry when he buried himself completely inside her.

Ares lifted one hand and allowed an ample amount of lubricant to appear on his fingers. The cool gel made her ass glisten invitingly.

"Oh God, that's cold," Nikita cried out.

Even though she twisted on the couch, struggling now to flip over, she was no match for his strength, even without powers.

"Submit to me, Nikita. Relax. Know that I'm in charge and you're safe."

"Ares," she sighed.

Her skin puckered against his touch, the muscles around her ass tightening and relaxing while he glided his finger inside her. With every twitch, every sensitive ass muscle awakened, her pussy contracted around him. There was no way he'd let her squeeze the life out of him before enjoying her ultimate pleasure.

Nikita offered complete surrender when she gave him her ass.

When he knew she was ready, her skin shiny with moisture from her ass to her cunt, he slowly pulled his cock from her heat. The white cream clinging to his shaft filled the room with the intoxicating aroma of sex.

Her legs trembled when he pressed into her ass, the lubricant making it easy to glide past the tight muscles, enter into her.



"Nikita," he growled, her muscles strangling him, bearing down with more force than he could fight against at the moment.

"Fuck me fast," she said, breathless. "I want it fast and hard."

Blood boiled through his veins. Fire devoured his senses, tearing through him. Her demands soared through him. The most submissive way a woman could allow herself to be fucked, and Nikita managed to take charge.

Her body trembled. Turning her head, her face flushed a delightful pink while black strands of hair fell over her it, the two colors contrasting. Her beauty matched her strength. Muscles trembled throughout her body while her thoughts defied her desire to give in to him.

Watching her ass cling to his cock, he glided into her, building the momentum. It would help Nikita learn that he was in charge, to move slowly, endure the pressure that pulled his cock in, enclosed around him with a heat that would kill him.

"You will learn that I'm in charge," he growled, unable to see straight from the heat that soared through his body, pulling him deeper into her pleasure.

"Fast. Hard." She thrust backwards, panting, demanding her will upon him.

"Woman," he roared and then sank deep inside her.

Quickly pulling back out, he braced her by her hips and let her have it.

Nikita screamed, throwing her head back. He pounded her ass, holding onto her firmly as she swallowed him whole, devoured all that he offered and still claimed more of him.

In the rush that surged through him, building to a climax that not even he could control, he heard her thoughts, her laughter in her mind. And as he exploded, the dam within him breaking with a multitude of light, her mind screamed in triumph.

She had tamed her god.

## **Chapter Eight**

Nikita stepped out of the bubbles, the steam in the bathroom seeping deep into her pores. Her skin tingled when she ran the soft towel over her, drying slowly while staring at her fogged image in the bathroom mirror.

"Ares." She wrapped the towel around her, padding into the adjoining bedroom where he'd been lying when she'd decided to bathe.

The bathwater had been delightfully hot, deep and so soothing to her muscles. And although the perfumed bubbles had relaxed her, soothed her aching muscles after being fucked so thoroughly, her mind had been a clutter of thoughts.

Ares kept telling her that they had to wait for the right moment to attack Julian Artos. He wanted the glory of defeat to be sweetened by the magnitude of demons he would take out.

While soaking in the heat of her bath, she'd imagined conquering those nasty creatures. They were affected by bullets, although she guessed a powerful gun would be needed to truly destroy them. But she had no idea where they would congregate.

"Ares?" she called again when he wasn't in the bedroom.

The house had a very still silence to it as she padded down the stairs. A quick search confirmed she was alone. Ares had left.

If that man had gone to take on the demons without her she would kick his ass. Wet hair slapped at her bare back as she raced back up the stairs, quickly searching for clothes to wear. The closet was empty. Turning slowly, gripping the damp towel to her breasts while droplets of water tickled paths down the back of her legs, the realization that she had no clothes at all sank through her.

"Ares!" She screamed his name loud enough to hurt her throat.

Stuck in a house in the middle of Iowa without a lick of clothing or a phone was not acceptable. Her gut twisted into an uncomfortable knot as she realized her situation.

The bastard. The fucking asshole. Demanding her submission, her trust, and then leaving her without a thing. No clothes. No money.

*What kind of jerk are you?*

Suddenly a T-shirt and shorts clung to her still damp body. She looked down at herself, scowling, and then wrapped the towel around her hair. The only clothes she had, best to keep them from getting wet. It wouldn't surprise her if there wasn't a dryer in this shell of a house.

He could hear her, obviously knew of her actions, but she had no idea where he was. Or what he was doing.

There wasn't even a damned brush in the bathroom.

*I'm not some fucking slut to do with as you please and then leave naked and stranded until you want me again.*

Nikita hit the wall with her open hand, the sting spreading through her palm and up to her wrist. Ignoring it, although she rubbed her hands together, she glared at her image in the still half-steamed mirror.

Maybe she'd allowed herself to enter into a bad situation here. Ares was a god, an immortal, an entity she would never completely be able to relate to. And there was no way she could imagine him understanding where she came from.

Pain rippled through her over the direction of her thoughts. Choking over a sigh, swaying toward not having Ares in her life, didn't sit well with her at all.

But damn it, she hated feeling helpless more than anything.

Doing her best to towel dry her hair, and then combing it out with her fingers, she hurried out of the humid bathroom. Thoughts raced through her head. None of them sat well with her. Simply sitting in a virtually empty house with nothing to do would make her crazy. Yet she had no shoes, no car, no idea where to go.

Helplessness wasn't a trait she enjoyed.

Marching down the stairs, she entered the living room, quickly pacing. Joseph Black still might have information that would help. There would be files, documentation, computer files that would help. Somehow she could figure out where more of these demons were, who they were possessing, and how to get rid of them. After all, initially that had been the mission she'd been sent out to do.

Thousands of miles from Centauri Agency made it a bit difficult to access any of this information.

But maybe...

She raced upstairs once again, hurrying to the computer in the bedroom.

Anticipation made her heart beat faster. Accomplishing something on her own, making sense out of all of this, without Ares' help, would show him that humans were capable of handling situations.

She didn't have his powers. But she had training, intelligence, and a keen mind for investigation. She wasn't helpless.

Thank God for the Internet.

Centauri Agency would quickly discover if she entered using her password, if it in fact still worked. The code zero had been in effect long enough that possibly she'd been wiped from the system.

This particular computer wasn't automatically configured to be able to find the Centauri website. It wasn't like they had a site to advertise. Continually retyping in variations of the website address, she began pounding the keys with her fingers, even the white walls and silence of the house growing on her nerves.

"I can do this," she yelled at herself, frustration having her ball her fists over the keyboard.

Trying one more variation into the search bar, she sat back smiling when the “enter” page to Centauri Agency appeared before her. Now to get her password to work.

“Well, I’ll be damned.” Nikita scooted forward, adjusting her chair while the familiar menu for Centauri opened on the screen.

She should be wondering how she’d been able to access such confidential information from a non-secure computer. With Ares in her life, she wouldn’t question much. And she wouldn’t question a godsend.

Her password worked without complication.

Nikita grinned, newfound power rushing through her when she realized she might actually get something accomplished on her own here.

“Just doing it the old-fashioned human way,” she said, crossing her legs on her chair and getting comfortable.

The best way to handle a situation was to go straight to the source. Nibbling her lower lip, she clicked on e-mail, and then typed in Joseph Black’s e-mail address. Her heart thudded against her ribs while she sucked in a breath. This had to be the right thing to do. Her gut told her that although harsh, Joseph could form an army against the demons better than any other human on this planet.

Regardless what Ares thought, if demons were invading humans’ minds, this was a human fight. And damn it if she wasn’t ready to take the bastards on.

Nikita sucked in a breath when her email was answered immediately.

Her smile faded as she clicked on the incoming mail, knowing this had to work. Nonetheless she wouldn’t deny being a bit nervous making demands from the man who’d shown no mercy with his orders over the past few years of her life.

Joseph’s response was simple. Three little words stood out against the white background.

*Where are you?*

She'd asked if he'd had time to think about their meeting. She'd wanted to know if he'd be willing to work together to conquer the demons.

And it was just like him not to answer her, but counter her questions with his own.

Nikita stared at the basically empty bedroom. No dressers, no nightstands, nothing but a bed. Bare walls, a shell of a home.

She typed her response quickly and clicked send before she could give it too much thought. Going with her gut had almost always worked for her in the past. Obviously Ares had decided to work solo, not thinking she'd make a decent partner. She had no idea where he was, what he was doing. And she wouldn't be a bit surprised if he knew exactly what she was doing.

Her mail was sent. She'd told Joseph where she was. Just like before, the response came instantly.

*A car will pick you up in thirty minutes.*

Damn. Nikita leaned back in her chair. It shouldn't have surprised her that Joseph would take action immediately. But that he could have someone here so quickly. Centauri had agents in every town. She'd swear to it.

Several hours later, Nikita wondered where in the hell Ares was. She paced the length of the small debriefing room, knowing all too well how making suspects wait forever put them on edge, made their emotions come to life, and therefore easier to interrogate.

Plain gray walls with no windows, and the hard cement floor, flooded her with memory after memory of times when she'd questioned criminals, terrified victims, and spies just like herself. No matter her expertise, trickles of sweat beaded between her breasts, her nerves on edge.

She'd done the right thing. Reassuring herself of that for the hundredth time, she sucked in a breath, willing herself to be calm. Nonetheless, her heart exploded when she jumped at the sound of the door unlocking.

Joseph Black entered the room, his usual calm and controlled self, shutting the door silently behind him. Wearing his usual business suit, his hair combed back around the side of his head, his forehead fading to his receding hairline, and his expression stern, for a moment she could believe the mission she'd been sent on had never happened, that nothing had changed. Crow's-feet cut in over his temples when he squinted, walking slowly around her, making no qualms that he was mentally noting her physical appearance from head to toe.

Chewing her lower lip, she turned slowly, keeping her eye on him, not breaking the silence, but reminding herself repeatedly that she was no longer his agent. Joseph Black was no longer her boss.

"Tell me about the man who was with you," he said finally, his calmness making the question almost sound conversational.

Nikita shook her head. "Joseph. I sought you out for a reason. There is a deadly attack taking place on humans. You have to know you were personally affected. We can take them on, defeat the demons. I need your word that we'll work together."

"There are no terms here, Nikita. I'll know every detail of your mission. Simply answer my questions."

"This isn't a debriefing of simply another mission. We're far from done here. I'm not returning to Centauri, simply asking for a meeting of minds."

"You have returned to Centauri. I don't have to tell you what happens when agents don't cooperate." Joseph quit moving, clasping his hands in front of him, appearing completely relaxed.

It was the way he narrowed his eyes, their nondescript faded color sending a cold chill rushing through her again. If he were possessed again, how would she know for sure?

One thing she had to do was keep her cool. Even though her heart beat way too fast, she managed to relax, giving him a reassuring smile.

"Of course I've returned to Centauri. There is no better leader among humans than you, Joseph. But I won't flatter you with simple facts." She paused, studying his expression, searching for any sign that he might not be who he appeared to be. Seeing nothing, but having no idea what to look for, she pressed forward. "Do you understand what it takes to destroy the demons?"

"You're concerned that the demon might be in me again." Joseph's response surprised Nikita.

She didn't answer, not sure what to say.

"I am wondering the same thing about you."

"You are?" Now that did take her back. "Joseph..." There would be no progress until they both were assured the other was safe.

"Come with me," he gestured, and then turned to open the door.

Following him down the narrow hallway, the debriefing rooms being much further underground than most of the offices, Nikita followed her ex-boss to the elevator that would take them to the holding cells. Even if he locked her up, Ares could find her. That much knowledge kept her from panicking when he took her toward where their prisoners were held.

Entering the larger hallway, several guards met them at the doorway, standing to the side when they recognized Joseph and Nikita.

"There is something that I want you to do." Joseph led the way past several metal doors where she knew prisoners were kept in small rooms, locked away where they had no hope of escaping.

Although the hallway was quite long, its end not even visible, they didn't walk too far. Monitors hung from the ceiling, moving slowly, following their movements. The one-eyed, non-blinking devices always gave Nikita the creeps. Sensitive to their body heat, the machines watched their every movement, recording their actions.



Joseph pulled a gun from one of the inside pockets of his suit. Nikita stared at the deadly weapon, her pulse beating rapidly. It wouldn't bother her a bit right now if Ares would give her some clue that he was watching her. Anything, a whisper into her thoughts, the warmth of his body against hers.

"Take the gun, Nikita." Joseph spoke quietly, holding the weapon out to her in his open palm.

She met his cold stare, her mouth suddenly dry. Slowly, she took the gun, his cold skin contrasting against her warm, damp palms.

Joseph pressed several buttons next to the door, which allowed it to slide open silently. "The agents inside are possessed by demons. Kill them."

"How do you know they're possessed?"

The door was already open and three agents that she didn't recognize blinked against the light from the hallway. Chills rushed over her body as they moved quickly toward the door.

"You think you can kill us, bitch?" One of them lunged at her, jumping through the doorway before she could think.

Nikita fired and the man let out an inhuman scream that echoed off the hallway walls. Guards ran from both directions. At the same time, the other two men in the holding cell backed further into the dark room. The man who'd lunged at her collapsed to the ground, dead.

She stared at the silhouettes of the men harboring in the darkness of the cell and then glanced at Joseph. His expression wasn't readable.

"I've just killed a man. How do I know the demon is dead?" She gripped the gun with all of her might, sweat tickling her spine as droplets beaded and fell over her flesh.

Bile rose in her gut as she gritted her teeth together and stared at the man crumpled on the ground. Her vision blurred, the man fading in and out.

"What?" she whispered, watching as a cloud seemed to drift above the man.

"You see it," Joseph also whispered.

Ugliness, pure evil. Something floated out of the dead man and slowly took the shape of a grotesque cloud, as if something was there but at the same time it wasn't. Awe consumed her and she forgot to be afraid. The creature seemed to have a mouth, but not really, more like a black hole surrounded by the crude outline of a face.

A horrendous shriek curdled her blood as the creature took form, arms and legs waving in the air. Although no more than a cloud, a vapor of sorts, it spread through the air over Nikita.

"Motherfucker, you're going to die!" She aimed her gun at the cloud, firing, and then falling backwards as wall and ceiling plaster shattered and flew everywhere.

She hit the ground hard, her ass stinging as she sat very unladylike with her legs spread, looking over her head for the cloudlike creature.

"I killed it," she said, suddenly feeling damned proud of herself.

Without moving she stared through the doorway at the two agents hovering in the dark cell. Both of them had demons in them and both would die even though they'd done nothing wrong. It wasn't right for two good men to lose their lives. One already had. She stared at the man on the floor.

"There's got to be a way to destroy them without killing your agents," she mused.

"We're working on that." Joseph offered her his hand and helped pull her to her feet.

Two guards stood on either side of them, weapons drawn.

Joseph tapped at the buttons alongside the metal door, closing the two agents still possessed into their prison. Their screams of annoyance ended once the door secured shut.

Nikita remained lost in thought while following Joseph up elevators and down hallways to his office. This time when pouring coffee, he offered her a cup—something

he'd never done before. It wasn't an act of kindness. His actions were distracted too. She guessed each mentally brainstormed, trying to conceive a method of attack.

And although she ached for a way to force the demons out of humans so that she wouldn't be forced to kill another agent, her mind kept lingering toward Ares.

Since she'd met him this was the longest they'd been apart. She had no idea where he was, or what he was doing. And it was starting to make her nuts—consume her thoughts.

*Ares, are you here?*

*The question should be, what the hell are you doing there?* It was as if he stood right next to her, his voice was so clear in her head.

*You already know what I'm doing here.* Nikita sat in one of the overly soft chairs that faced Joseph's desk, needing to maintain her composure.

Holding her coffee cup against her legs, she watched Joseph, who at the moment had his back to her, staring at a group of pictures on his wall.

Suddenly hands gripped her shoulders, solid and steady, their warmth seeping through her, warming her. Heat flooded through her while her heart suddenly raced. She almost spilled her coffee looking over her shoulder.

There was no one there.

Sucking in a breath, she tried to remain calm while Ares' hands slowly moved down her front until they cupped her breasts. Tingles zapped straight to her cunt, his touch igniting a need in her that made it hard to think about anything else.

Ares squeezed her breasts hard. It was all Nikita could do not to let out a yelp. Looking down at her shirt, she could see the imprint of his hands, the indentation of where his fingers were, while he tugged and caressed her breasts.

Joseph took that moment to turn around, giving her a shrewd look when she glanced up at him. Her face had to burn with a mixture of embarrassment and arousal.

Hiding behind her coffee cup, she sipped slowly, watching Joseph and covering her breasts with her arms.

Ares continued to caress, two of his fingers rolling her nipples against the fabric of her shirt.

"You've never killed a demon before today," Joseph stated, not making it a question.

There was no reason she could see to deny it. "No." Not that she could get her thoughts to focus at the moment anyway.

Ares moved his hands to the outside of her breasts, gently stroking the plump flesh there. Joseph didn't seem to notice the impressions on her shirt. Apparently Ares had given her the visual for her benefit only.

"Yet you lived through the mission I sent you on." Joseph gave her a hard look and Ares' hands stilled.

"I'm here." Nikita stood quickly, needing space from Ares and not enjoying the intent look Joseph gave her. "If you think one of those bastards entered me, you're wrong."

"I admit it crossed my mind. But no. That's not what I think."

Nikita had worked under Joseph for long enough to know he would share his thoughts when he was damned good and ready. Kind of like another man she knew – or god. Whether man or god, they weren't that different in some ways.

As she expected, Joseph continued, "I think you had help destroying the demons. The two agents sent out on your code zero detail have no memory of anything. Yet you come back to me, accompanied by a stranger you identify simply as Ares, and are prepared to destroy demons. Obviously something happened while you were there. You want to work as a team, then share what you know."

Power seemed to fill the room, a strength growing like testosterone from a man just challenged. But in this case it was a god. And his energy wrapped around her with so much intensity for a moment she couldn't breathe.

But damn it, he wouldn't control her. This was a human affair. If there was something between them, something meant to grow, it would survive this war against the demons and flourish afterwards.

Many instances could be cited from the past where agents worked so closely through intense assignments that they grew very close, sexual. But after the mission, after the danger passed, the romance fizzled.

Something told her that what she'd discovered with Ares might be stronger than that. He wasn't with her because he needed her to defeat demons. If anything, he didn't need her for any mission. And she wouldn't be with him simply because of his strength.

*You hear that, Ares? I won't use you to defeat this attack against humans. If you stand by my side, all will see you as my equal, not my secret weapon.*

Nikita put her coffee cup on the small counter against the wall of Joseph's office. She met her boss's hard stare. "Okay. I'll tell you what happened when you sent me to Iowa."

Joseph moved to his chair, sitting, an expectant look on his face.

*Be very careful.* Ares' whisper tickled her ear. Nikita ran her hand through her hair, brushing the ear he'd just tortured with his breath.

*He will not know you're immortal.* She sent the thought and felt his hand stroke her hair, an approving gesture, and one that let her know he was right there, by her side.

That fed her strength but she took a slow, calming breath. That was exactly what she didn't want. Ares had powers, a magic probably stronger than she'd ever be able to comprehend. But she wouldn't rely on it, use it as a buffer.

"You called me right before I was supposed to meet Julian Artos. And I went to meet him." She remembered feeling the evil emanate from Julian when she'd

approached him in the restaurant, how every fiber of her had told her to run. "I sensed something in him before approaching, something sinister, I can't put my finger on it."

She'd run, abandoned the mission. Admitting that would be grounds for termination or severe punishment under the code of Centauri.

"I left the restaurant without meeting him." Nikita held her head high, willing to take on any repercussion that statement might make. "But I didn't abandon the mission. When I returned to the house, Todd and another agent were there on a code zero."

Joseph raised an eyebrow. "They don't mention seeing you in their debriefings."

"That doesn't surprise me." Her heart raced while apprehension trickled through her. Quickly she told Joseph about the house being destroyed, the hideous creature appearing in the doorway.

"And how did you destroy this creature? Not to mention my agents who returned to me very much alive. What kind of power does it take to bring someone back to life?" Joseph leaned forward, his brow wrinkling as he frowned at her. "Certainly not any power that you possess."

The door to the office opened and Ares strolled in, his presence filling the room and sending her heart racing. So tall and powerful-looking, his dark hair falling to his shoulders while the simple T-shirt that he wore stretched over muscles that should be labeled lethal weapons.

"She doesn't possess those powers, but I do," he said quietly, closing the door quietly. "And now that she's shared what she knows, you'll tell us all you've learned about these demons."

## **Chapter Nine**

“Ah. Ares, the god of war, graces us with his presence once again.” Joseph relaxed in his chair, waving a hand to one of his chairs. “Sit. Both of you. This should prove an interesting conversation. I take it you’ve secured the office.”

Nikita looked beyond confused. She moved toward the chair offered, frowning as she looked from him to Joseph. Ares did some quick searching through Joseph’s thoughts, gathering what he already suspected to be the truth.

Joseph was bluffing, although he had suspicions, and was surprisingly open-minded for a human. He wondered if Ares didn’t possess some stronger ability to fight the demons. There were no confirmed facts though. Just a very good spy speculating.

It shouldn’t surprise Ares that Nikita would have the judgment to seek out the mortal. Joseph had a lot of power for a human, more than most leaders, and he’d seen enough during his career that Ares doubted anything he told the man would surprise him.

“Seriously, Joseph.” Nikita wanted to steer the attention away from Ares. She sat, leaning forward to give her old boss her attention. “Do you remember anything while that demon was in you? Anything to help in learning more about them.”

“I remember all of it,” Joseph said quietly.

That surprised Nikita. Joseph was bluffing. Ares hadn’t anticipated the man admitting that. Although he trusted them – Ares gathered that much – Joseph had the same wary streak running through him that Nikita had in her. Years in this line of work made both of them skeptical that any other human could completely be trusted.

For the most part, he would buy into that line of thinking. Humans looked out for their own. And when they didn’t have anyone else in their lives, they didn’t trust anyone. But without loyalty, they would falter. Gather that loyalty out of fear, or

compassion, and the latter would gain you better soldiers. Ares leaned back in the chair next to Nikita, allowing her to spar with Joseph. But his presence would ensure the conversation didn't turn into a bully session. Joseph saw that Nikita was with him, and as long as that was understood, Ares was willing to use him as an ally.

"Demons feed off hatred, fear, negative emotions. I'm conducting tests as we speak to see if ensuring the men they possess are nothing but happy, if the demons will leave them."

"You are?" Nikita stood quickly, her excitement making her glow when she looked down at Ares. "Joseph took me to see three agents who are possessed. I killed one of them and saw the demon come out of him. I destroyed it too."

She knew that he already knew that. In fact, Ares had been impressed that she'd seen the demon. Many humans didn't. They blinded themselves to the atrocities of life and lived behind their own tinted glasses. Nikita's intense desire to see them, her passion to have them destroyed, allowed her to see them. She was still susceptible to them though. Her frail human shell wouldn't withstand their wrath if they took her on with their full strength. Ares wouldn't see her exposed to them in multitude. They would destroy her just to piss him off.

"Even if the tests work, though, we can't drug the entire human race just to keep them from being possessed." Joseph's words brought pause to Nikita.

"There will always be demons," Ares said, needing both of them to see the truth.

The point of this discussion was, for the most part, pointless. He'd learned enough today, tracking Julian Artos, to know when he next planned to meet with his followers. Destroying the group of them would set the demons back, make them retreat for a while. Telling these two that as long as humans existed the demons would thrive would get him nowhere. It was the truth though. Humans were too emotional, too easily turned toward negative thinking.



"I'm sure there will be. Just as there will always be diseases, famine, death," Nikita argued, her determined expression giving her a sexy glow. "But that doesn't mean that we give in to them."

She wanted to know where he was today, what he'd been doing. And she ached to start the battle. Standing around discussing things wasn't her style either.

"You've come to me." Joseph forced her attention back to him. "I'm sure you've come to me with a plan, a method of attack."

"Why did you send me to Iowa?" Nikita asked.

"Julian Artos learned about you from the demon inside me. You're a damned attractive woman, Nikita. You know that. Julian wanted you. The demon ordered you to go to Julian. Shortly after you left, the demon left me. But I figured you'd be dead. Needless to say I'm happy that you aren't."

"Well, if he wanted me once, he probably still does."

"No." Ares wouldn't have her set herself up for bait for Julian. "Putting your life in danger like that isn't necessary. Not to mention, it's not an option."

"So I take it then that you know where he is?" Joseph asked, but he already suspected that Ares knew.

Ares looked at the older man, his plain appearance misleading. The man was shrewd, and although he knew nothing about Ares, he suspected and respected that Ares had many answers that he craved to learn.

"I tracked him down today." Ares offered the information more to satisfy Nikita's yearning to know what he'd been doing all day.

Her thoughts would be clearer if she relaxed, not focusing on what he was doing. If she wanted to dwell on him, she could concentrate on when she would next fuck him, not what he was doing when they weren't together.

"And where is he?" Joseph asked.

Nikita focused on him too. Ares took a moment to let his gaze travel down her. Let Joseph confirm his suspicions that the two of them were a couple. It would make working with the man a lot easier if they confirmed that one little fact. He couldn't hide a smirk, seeing that Nikita still wore the simple shirt and shorts he'd tossed to her earlier when she'd thrown a fit about being left naked in the house. Personally he would have liked to keep her that way, but she was a determined one. Her sense of adventure would make it hard to keep her chained to a bed always. And although that didn't seem like such a bad idea, Ares had to admit that her craving for the battle had its appeal too.

"At the moment, he's gathering his forces." Ares didn't take his gaze from Nikita.

"Then we should gather our forces too." Her face lit with excitement.

Killing the one demon had convinced her that she could take them on. A protector's instinct stronger than one he'd ever known before surged through him, hardening every muscle in his body. He'd see the demons all rot in the deepest of hells before any of those ugly bastards got their hands on her.

"I want a better understanding of them before I agree to any attack." It was the most sensible thing Joseph had said yet.

"And that's why I came to talk to you." Nikita didn't give it any thought when she put her hand on Ares' shoulder but turned her attention to Joseph. "Together we're going to figure out these bastards, learn what will take them out."

"We've interrogated the demons we have in holding cells, but their answers still aren't clear to us. What I want to learn is where they come from. Destroying the source is always the prime objective," Joseph said.

"You can't destroy hell," Ares told him.

"Hell? Are you saying the demons are like the devil?" Nikita asked.

"There is only one devil. He was destroyed recently. Now there is battle among the demons, all those condemned to hell, to find a new leader—a devil as you would have it." Ares didn't know how to put it into simpler words. "But yes. I mean hell like what

you imagine. The demons come from there, seeking out hatred and fear, any other ugly emotion they can find, to build their strength."

Nikita turned to Joseph. "Then Ares is right. There will always be demons. There's no way we can ensure that no human ever have a negative thought again."

"Not without taking away human free will." Ares let his gaze travel down Nikita, who stood next to him.

Her slim hips and the side view of her flat tummy were an enticing view. Her determination consumed her thoughts, her desire to learn, understand, and then conquer. Throughout all time he'd searched for a mate who possessed the craving for battle that sang through his blood. No god or goddess anywhere would have made him believe he'd find the perfect woman among the humans.

Nikita looked down at him, a quick glance that let him know she didn't take him seriously.

"How many of your other agents can see the demons?" Ares asked.

"A few can. We've secured Centauri. I doubt we'll have many other demons invading us. But if we do, we'll be ready for them." Joseph was convinced.

"Good enough." Ares stood, stroking Nikita's back. "We'll call you when we're ready for your help."

Nikita looked up at him curiously, wanting to know what he had in mind. At least she had the sense not to question him in front of her old boss.

Joseph stood. "We have accommodations for both of you here."

"That won't be necessary." Ares guided Nikita toward the office door.

"This time I insist." Joseph moved around his desk, meeting them at his office door. "Plotting an attack against the demons will be an intricate process. I insist on a way to contact you."

Ares reached into his shirt pocket, pulling out a cell phone he'd just created. "Push 'send' on this phone and you can reach me," he said and then opened the office door.

More people were in the main area outside the office this time. Ares walked with Nikita through the hallway toward the nearest elevator. The doors slid open as they approached and then closed just as quickly once they entered.

"Where is Julian Artos?" Nikita asked, grinning up at him.

She knew very well that every inch of Centauri was monitored not only with listening devices but cameras as well. Nikita relaxed into him, her hands creeping up his chest, believing that he'd disabled all ability for them to be overheard or seen.

"I have made plans." He hadn't disabled all devices, knowing that if he did, the Centauri agents would wonder why they couldn't see the two of them leave the building.

"Well, you're going to tell me what they are," she demanded, wrapping her arms around his neck and crushing her breasts against him.

He didn't touch her, but allowed her to feel the sensation of his hands stretching over her ass, squeezing the soft flesh there. In reality, he kept his hands by his side, letting the cameras see her devotion to him.

The elevator doors slid open, revealing another hallway looking like so many of the others in this underground maze of agents. Nikita sucked in a breath, not moving at first when the doors opened. He walked around her, turning so his back was to the hallway and looked down at her. Her cheeks had blushed a dark rose, highlighting the color of her eyes.

"Are you coming?" he asked, knowing from the look on her face he could probably fondle her with his mind and make her explode.

"You aren't playing fair," she whispered, her breaths long and deep.

"If I'm playing with you, it's fair," he told her, then took her arm and guided her out of the elevator.

Sliding his hand down to hers, he clasped her fingers in his and led her out of the underground agency. They exited into a parking garage and with a quick look around to

make sure he had all cameras covered, they disappeared, although this time he didn't take her back to the house in Iowa.

"Where are we?" Nikita asked, her grip on his hand pinching his flesh when she braced herself after moving through space.

He ran his hand down the side of her face, knowing this time that no one watched them. Stroking her flesh, tracing his knuckles down her neck, he ran his finger over her collarbone. Protecting her would be the primary goal of his evening. And he knew that would make the battle even more challenging.

"Where you want to be," he told her, his voice turning gruff as emotions surged through him.

"Where I want to be?" She looked around her, taking in the dark cavern with its damp air seeping through their skin. "What is this place?"

She wrapped her arms around her, her pupils dilating as they adjusted to the little light that managed to seep through the narrow paths that led to where they were.

Her long black hair fanned over her shoulders, parting over her breasts, which she pressed up with her arms. Her shorts ended over her upper thighs, and her long slender legs looked dark and muscular in the dark cave. But she was barefoot and not properly attired for the mission they were about to undertake.

Ares gripped her chin, wishing there was time to take her away somewhere else, somewhere peaceful and private. Every fiber of his existence ached to be alone with her, spend time enjoying every inch of her, claiming her a thousand times over.

She looked up at him, her eyes wide with curiosity.

"We are well under the Earth's surface right now," he told her, stroking the soft flesh just above her jawbone. "And I will have your word..."

"Of course, what?" She lowered her voice to a husky whisper.

Nikita smelled an adventure coming on. Ares easily read the excitement of her thoughts. She was so confident in his abilities to protect her that she wasn't scared,

didn't look around her nervously. Her face relaxed in his palm as she looked up at him, hungry for details.

"No matter what happens, what you see, you will stay by my side. If for one second I don't see you next to me I'll send you very far away from here until all is done." He tightened his grip on her jaw, the urge to cage her up until this messy duty was tended to overwhelming him. "Is that clear?"

"Yes," she whispered, her smile fading.

She didn't know what was about to happen but his words sobered her. At least she saw that what was about to happen was real, dangerous, and he was only allowing her to be by his side because she ached for it so desperately.

"Julian Artos will be here shortly, for a meeting with many of his followers." He'd spent quite a bit of the day confirming that information. Damned demons were devious characters, so hateful with their thoughts, gathering what he needed to know from them had been a tiring chore.

"We're going to take him down. Are we going to tell Joseph?" She tried pulling away from his grasp, suddenly eager to take a look around her.

Ares maintained his grip on her, refusing to let her face move. He would have all of her attention. Her body trembled, both from the temperature and her anticipation of what might happen. Ares looked down her body, deciding something more practical for their attack would be appropriate.

They needed better attire. Leather pants, close-fitting leather shirts and jackets appeared on both of them. He finished off the attire with comfortable black boots so they could climb over the rocky ground easily. Ares preferred Nikita dressed in something more revealing, but that would have to wait for later. He'd admit, nonetheless, that she looked damned sexy in the close-fitting outfit he'd created for her.

Not using his mind this time, needing to really feel her, Ares let his hand glide down her, wrapping his fingers around her slender neck.

"All those who need to know what we're about to do will learn in good time." Just holding her neck, feeling her pulse beat rapidly against his palm, fed him with an energy that soared through him.

He would conquer Julian Artos, not just because of his evil cravings to dominate the demons and take over Earth, but because the beast had wanted Nikita.

Nikita's head fell back, her long black hair drifting down her back, while her eyes fluttered shut. Such relaxed trust in him, not an ounce of fear darkening her thoughts.

"When do we start fighting?" she asked, her body completely relaxed, stretched out before him as she offered him her neck.

Feeling her life beat against his flesh, knowing he had her trust, her loyalty, her every thought open to him, gave him more power than she would ever realize she'd given him.

He let go of her neck, pressing against her front as he opened his hand, running it down her front so that his fingers spread over her breasts. Slowly she raised her head, looking at him with a lustful gaze.

"Julian is already here. The demons that follow him are arriving as we speak. They will smell that there is a human down here. That will start the battle." He knew his words would have the effect on her that they did.

Her pulse increased rapidly, her eyes widening as she realized that in fact she would be the bait that she'd suggested being. Ares ran his hands over her breasts, enjoying their fullness against the soft leather. Then stroking her side, his hand stretched around her narrow waist, pulling her closer to him with a harsh tug. His blood boiled with a craving more carnal than she needed to see.

"I'm ready," she whispered, exhaling when her body hit his. Her fingers ran trails up his chest, reaching around his neck and tangling in his hair. "With you by my side, I hardly feel like I need a weapon. But one would be nice."

Her breath tickled his chin as she looked up at him with a sultry grin crossing her face. Ares lowered his mouth to hers, capturing her upper lip between his teeth. Her soft cry fueled the fire already simmering inside him.

Nikita wrapped her fingers deeper into his hair and tugged at the roots, pulling his mouth closer to hers. She attacked his mouth, opening up to him, submitting and demanding at the same time. He wrapped his arms around her, crushing her to him. She molded against him, sighing into his mouth as their tongues danced.

Her thoughts reached out to him, distracted by the sensual kiss, but also distracted by the pending battle they faced. She had questions, wanted answers, yet ached to enjoy the taste of him, feel him touching her. Finally turning her head, remaining pressed against him, she gulped in a breath while he buried his face in her hair.

"You're already one hell of a weapon, my dear." Once again he warred with the thought of sending her away.

This whole matter could be easily resolved. Ares would have no problem simply destroying every demon down there, including Julian, wiping the bastards out of existence. There didn't have to be a battle or any show of strength. Cleaning house could take minutes, and then he could enjoy Nikita in ways she'd yet to experience.

"Did you hear something?" Her hands slid out of his hair and pressed against his chest.

"They have discovered that we're here." Ares had managed to distract her during the time they'd stood in the cavern so far underneath the surface.

Nothing as glamorous as Centauri Agency, the dark rocky cave-like clearing led to slimy hallways and dismal rooms that the demons used to gather in. Barely lit, dangerous, filled with a stench that turned his stomach, the meeting area for the demons matched the repulsiveness of their existence. Here they brought humans they'd converted over to their nasty existence. And here is where they would all die.

"Ares. I need a gun." Her heart beat nervously for the first time since they'd arrived.



He grabbed her chin again, demanding her attention. Her fear would be her downfall. If she hadn't realized that before, she would learn and understand it now.

"Not for this fight. I will give you a power. Point your finger, aim it like the most lethal weapon, and pull your trigger. Let the demons see that they mess with the woman of a god." His words hit her just as he'd expected, fueling the strength she would need to endure this battle.

"The woman of a god?" She liked how that sounded. Not only did she clearly think so, the glow on her face told him what he could easily read.

"Yes. You belong to me. My power is your power." He let go of her face, turning when he sensed the nearness of the demons.

"I don't belong to anyone."

If he didn't have the ability to read her thoughts, her words would have seriously pissed him off.

"Oh yes. You do."

Nikita turned when the echo of approaching demons filtered through one of the nearby tunnel-like hallways. She took a deep breath, reminding herself that she had nothing to fear.

"Darling Ares, if there must be possession between us, than let it be known that you belong to me." With that she turned from him, holding her finger up in the air as if it were a gun. "Now let's go kick some slimy ass."

"I doubt we're going to have to go anywhere." Ares searched through the underground caverns, knowing Julian wouldn't come forth.

He'd let his loyal followers be destroyed before he'd show his hideous face. Ares let his thoughts travel through the mazes of tunnels and narrow pathways.

*No demon can lead the hells if he doesn't have the balls to face one human, one god, and show he's got the strength that his followers don't possess.*

Julian heard his words, understood his threat. And the demon also realized that no matter where he ran, today he would die.

Suddenly demons appeared out of several different pathways, clinging to the walls, hanging from the ceiling, rushing toward them. Nikita backed into him, taken back by the multitude of them as they screeched, howled, and yelled obscenities.

"They will only grow stronger from your fear," he whispered to her.

"Right," she said, straightening, repeating his words in her head like a mantra.

With a wish, Ares could make all of them disappear, will them to be destroyed and make it so. He watched Nikita aim her finger, destroy several of them with her imaginary weapon when they lunged forward. The battle was for her, Ares' gift to her to appease her craving to wipe them out. Letting her enjoy the moment, feel she'd seriously accomplished something, would fuel Nikita with the confidence to feel equal by his side.

Her entire life she'd followed orders blindly, even when she'd disagreed with them. Giving her this moment, allowing her this victory, would give her the strength that she needed. Her confidence from defeating these demons would make her even stronger. And she was damned fucking sexy when she swelled with confidence and dared to take him on.

Several of them got too close, and Ares wiped them out with a wave of his hand.

"Why don't you do that to all of them?" Nikita cried out, continually pointing her finger at one demon and then another as she pulled her finger out and made them disappear, howling in outrage as they faded away.

"You wanted this to be your battle. It was you who said this was a human matter." The second he spoke he realized that she'd figured out his plot.

Nikita turned, glaring up at him. "This isn't a fucking game," she hissed.

At the same time one of the demons leapt on her, screaming in triumph. "Take me, Julian," it howled, and the two of them disappeared.

## **Chapter Ten**

Moving through space this time made Nikita absolutely sick to her stomach. She stumbled forward, slipping free from the slimy demon who held her.

"There's nothing I hate more than being stood up," Julian Artos said as he walked toward her.

Nikita got her bearings, looking around her quickly at the large dark cave she stood in. Julian moved closer, casually dressed in jeans and a pullover shirt. There wasn't a hair out of place on his head, his expression bordering on annoyance when he stopped in front of her.

Her heart thudded heavily against her rib cage. No matter where he'd taken her, Ares would know where she was. Julian would feed from her fear, grow stronger from her hatred. Knowing these things didn't make it any easier to remain calm.

Hell, she was who knew how many feet or miles underneath the surface of earth. A demon who ached to lead all the demons, become the devil himself, stood mere feet from her. The first time she'd laid eyes on him she'd thought him good-looking, a man designed right out of her fantasies. But the coldness in his eyes, the intense dislike that hardened the muscles on his face, made him uglier to her than any man she'd ever laid eyes on.

"Would you have preferred that I'd enjoyed your company?" Finding him repulsive qualified as a negative emotion.

Nikita let out a slow breath, ordering herself to relax, show no animosity. Clearing her mind wasn't as hard as keeping her body from shaking.

"Do you think only a member from the coven of Hedel can know your thoughts?" This time Julian didn't speak.

He stepped closer, reaching for a strand of her hair.

Nikita cocked her head, fighting the sensation that she was way out of her league. She had no idea what level of powers Julian possessed.

*Did you know that I can also read your thoughts?* It took every bit of strength she possessed to keep herself calm.

Julian laughed out loud, the sound flat against the walls surrounding them. "I doubt very much you would be standing there, fighting to remain calm, if you knew what thoughts were in my head," he told her.

"What makes you so sure?" She dealt with the devil here, with an entity evil enough to rule all who were evil.

But that didn't make him a god. That didn't mean that he had the powers that Ares had. She fisted her hand at her side, pointing her index finger straight down, doing her best not to think about the imaginary weapon Ares had given her.

"Because you are human, my dear." Julian looked down at her hair wrapped around his fingers. He stroked it with his thumb. "And, albeit a damned sexy one, your shell is weak, your soul easily obtained."

"So this is how you gather your followers? Kill them and then claim their souls? What if they were good people?"

Julian shrugged, looking at her with eyes so empty they were painful to stare into. Cold sweat beaded along her spine at the thought that she glared into the eyes of hell.

"And you believe the fairy tales about being good and receiving your reward throughout eternity?" He chuckled, a deep brooding sound. "Your reward will be much richer by my side."

He tugged on her hair, pulling her closer to him. Nikita didn't look away. No matter that her heart raced in spite of her instruction to stay calm. She stared into eyes so cold that her leather outfit couldn't keep her warm.

"What are you offering?" she dared to ask.

"You will be my queen, my lady, my property. You crave battle, thrive on killing and destroying. With the slightest bit of training, you will make a perfect whore."

Movement stirred around her. Nikita dared to look away from the evil entity who held her tight to him, noticing the cave they were in slowly filled with demons. Grotesque and moving slowly in their distorted bodies, their stench moved in on her even before they could.

Ares had to be here. There was no way she could accept that Julian could steal her away without Ares following. Why he didn't make his presence known she had no clue. But riding on the confidence that he kept a low profile for a reason, she brought her hand up to Julian's chest.

His body was cold, heartless. If there was a soul inside the shell of a body he harbored, it was beyond dead. No life, no spirit. She wondered what drove him to fight, when there was no life left to him.

"I think I'm pretty well trained already." She pointed the finger that Ares had made her weapon at Julian's chest and pulled the trigger.

Julian let out a horrific scream. Flying backwards, toppling into a handful of the demons behind him, his body contorted, spasmed into grotesque movements.

No longer could Nikita control her fear. Suddenly it seemed that the cave was clogged with demons, screaming, crying out, outraged with the destruction of their leader.

She couldn't move, couldn't breathe. The sensation of the walls closing in around her, anger and terror clogging the air so that she couldn't breathe, made it impossible to focus her thoughts.

"Ares!" she screamed with all of her might, making her throat hurt, while turning frantically, searching for an exit.

"Bitch!"

"You'll beg for death!"

"Let me torture her first!"

The demons' ranting terrified her. She should be able to control her emotions, take charge of the situation, but there were too many of them.

Slimy hands groped at her, pulling her along the uneven rock floor. Tears burned her eyes, their nauseating smell made her sick to her stomach.

When she was sure she'd be suffocated by them, trampled before any of them could torture her in any way, a deafening boom shook the cave.

Fucking shit! The cave would collapse and she'd be buried alive with these monsters.

It took her a minute to register what was going on around her. She must be losing her mind.

Agents. Centauri agents moved around her, firing at will at the many demons in the cave. Screams penetrated the air, sending chills rushing through her.

Falling to the ground, the rough uneven rocky surface of the cave scraped at her hands. A demon fell in front of her, its naked deformed body covered with slimy sweat and blood.

She was going to puke. Right here. Right now. All of this was simply too much.

"You'll be just fine," Ares said from behind her, pulling her to her feet. "A good warrior can handle it."

More demons rushed through the surrounding tunnel-like hallways. Nikita shoved her hair behind her back, the urge to demand of Ares why he hadn't stayed by her side.

"Next time, remind me to make you promise that you won't leave my side," she growled at him.

Ares looked down at her, but there wasn't time to answer. A calm wave of his hand sent dozens of demons sprawling backwards, screaming in pain before tumbling to the ground, and then disappearing.

The group of Centauri agents continued firing on the demons. Screams and gunfire reverberated off the cave walls. Rocks tumbled to her feet, while the pungent smell of blood clogged her senses.

"You weren't out of my sight for a moment." Ares yanked her back by her shoulder, clearing her from the path of a large wash of rocks that tumbled from the cave walls.

"We're going to be buried alive." One of the Centauri agents voiced her thoughts.

"Is the place secure?" Another agent, obviously the one in charge, backed away from a pile of dead demons, while still holding his gun in front of him.

An eerie silence with dust filling the air had Nikita looking around her nervously. She wouldn't die. And that was about all she had comfort in knowing.

"Pull your men out." Ares pointed toward the hallway entrance to the cave.

Nikita counted five agents as they backed up, taking in their surroundings, hesitation and caution printed on their expressions.

She could still hear their footsteps, echoing through the narrow passage, when the agents retreated. Nikita stood by Ares' side, his massive frame making the cave seem even smaller.

The air was full of sediment from falling rock. She squinted through the dismal dark surroundings.

"I've given you the victory you prayed for," Ares told her.

She looked up at him. He looked stern, not focusing on her, but at the pile of demons crumpled dead in front of them.

Nikita looked that way as well. The bodies slid off each other. Arms and legs twisted together and then fell apart as bodies untangled and something rose from underneath them.

Suddenly all the sediment in the air made it impossible to breathe. Nikita's eyes burned and she grabbed hold of Ares. Gripping the hard muscle in his arm, she choked, her gag reflexes kicking in when Julian rose out of the dead bodies.

"You pathetic mortal. You can't destroy me," he growled, his human body a mess of blood and torn flesh.

"She can't. But I can." Ares' muscles grew under her grip, harder than steel and reassurance that in spite of the grotesque creature rising before them, she was in no harm. Ares pointed at Julian with his free hand. "You exist no more!"

The entire cave shook and she ducked into Ares. He pulled her to him, holding her tight against his warm, hard body. His heat that burned through her offered enough distraction while they moved through space that Nikita wasn't dizzy when they were no longer in the cave.

She inhaled fresh air and opened her eyes, looking around the room they were now in. Something vibrated against her hand, which rested on Ares' chest. His face was smeared with soot, his body just as dirty when he let go of her, reaching into his shirt pocket and pulling out a cell phone.

"Yes," he said simply.

It didn't look right seeing Ares talking on a cell phone. Nikita could see him bare-chested, spear in hand, raging into battle. But standing before her, dust covering his leather pants and boots, his long hair stringy from dirt, he appeared out of place using such a human device.

"That's fine," he told the person on the other end and then closed the phone.

"That was Joseph? And what is fine?" She imagined she must look worse than Ares did.

Ares stroked her hair, his gaze growing softer, more passionate, as he looked down at her.

"Your Centauri leader asks to speak with us. I agreed."



"A shower would be nice first."

"Now you read my mind."

Once again they disappeared. Nikita had nothing to hold on to when they moved through space. Ares simply stood facing her. She reached for him, the sensation that she was falling gripping her and throwing her off balance.

An array of smells filled her senses before she felt the ground underneath her. Looking down, her bare feet pressed against smooth, cool rock. The loud spray of a waterfall filled the air with moisture. And the flowers. So many flowers.

Roses twisted along the rocks, a variety of color mixed with honeysuckle and other wildflowers she couldn't identify. The air smelled so clean, the temperature perfect.

Quickly distracted from her surroundings by the fact that she was naked and that Ares stood before her without a shred of clothing on, she met his gaze. He reached for her hand, the strength of his grip warming her fingers and traveling straight up her arm.

"What is this place?" she asked, allowing him to lead her along the large flat rock.

"One of my special sanctuaries." Muscles glided under his tanned skin as she stared at his back.

He had incredible buns of steel, solid muscle that faded into thick and muscular legs.

Ares led her over the smooth rock, approaching the large waterfall. The nearer they came to it, water sprayed around them, quickly making his perfect body glisten with moisture.

"You wanted a shower," he said, turning so she could see the horny grin spread over his face. "Come get wet with me."

This was a new side to Ares. Such the warrior, the predator, and the protector. He also had a gentle side, holding her carefully as she stepped into the hard spray of water, the rock underneath them smooth and somewhat slippery.

Daring to look up, water fell with a perfect pounding force. Nikita couldn't see its source. It was as if it fell from heaven. The sweet smell of the surrounding flowers added to the magic of the place.

The water pelted her skin, cleaning her, its temperature perfectly warm.

Ares pulled her to him, finding her mouth as water poured over their faces. Heat swam through her. His hard cock pressed against her while his leg moved between hers. Hard muscle touched her everywhere. The warm water rinsed the dirt from her body, her hair, leaving her feeling wonderfully clean as if she'd just scrubbed herself thoroughly.

She opened her mouth to him. The water tasted sweet. And Ares' mouth was hot, demanding. Her knees wobbled from the intensity of his kiss. She stretched into him. Their skin glided against each other.

Ares gripped her soaked hair, pulling so that she arched further, her head falling back into the force of the water while he nipped at her neck.

"Are you satisfied with your victory?" he asked, stroking the most sensitive part of her neck with his tongue.

She had to lower her head to speak. Water streamed over her face. She ran her hand up his arm. His skin was so smooth, muscles twitching against her palm as she blinked water from her eyes.

"The victory wasn't mine. You destroyed Julian." The water had soaked his dark hair, pressing it against his head and adding length. It straightened over his shoulders, curling over the bulges and curves of his perfectly tuned body. "But yes. I'm satisfied for now – as far as the demons are concerned."

She couldn't keep her hands off him. Soaked dark chest hair tempted her. Running her hands over his chest, down his hard abdomen, and then along his thighs, watching as his cock jumped to attention, begging for her touch as well.

Ares cupped her breasts. She could melt in the glow from his dark green eyes.

“You begged for a human battle and I gave it to you. As for Julian, the best I could do was to allow you to battle him alone briefly. It’s true. Humans couldn’t destroy him. He had moved beyond your average demon. And it will take a while before another of their kind can master that level and attempt to lead them. The taste of victory wouldn’t have been as sweet had I altered your abilities, worked through you to kill him.”

He was right. She nodded slowly, knowing victory could be so easily tarnished if her efforts were in fact the result of someone else.

His long fingers pressed against her sensitive flesh, kneading and stroking her breasts. Tingles of desire shot straight through her to her pussy.

The aroma of the flowers was intoxicating, the warmth of the water soothing. She didn’t want to talk about demons anymore. The velvety softness of his shaft made her ache to feel it stroking away the itch growing deep inside her.

“The itch is bad, is it?” He flicked at her nipples, sending currents of electricity stabbing through her.

“Very bad.” She blinked away water that washed over her face.

“Can you swim?”

She stroked his cock, imagining her hands were her cunt and his thick shaft was inside her. It took a moment to focus on his question.

“Yeah. Why?”

He let go of her nipples and turned her, pressing against her back, his cock throbbing along her lower back.

“Jump,” he told her.

Nikita took in her surroundings, grossly distracted by his hard body stroking her backside. He seemed to touch her everywhere.

Wiping wet strands of hair from her face, she stared at a large pool of deep blue water so clear she could see the sides and bottom of the confined water. Her toes gripped the edge of the rock, the pool no more than six to eight feet below. Water

rushed over her feet, falling into the pool. The water rippled from the runoff from the waterfall, yet remained still enough to see through clearly. She looked over her shoulder at Ares.

"This place is incredible." She swore the whole atmosphere of the place sent a warm peacefulness through her.

Just looking around, foliage so thick she couldn't see past their private sanctuary, it was as if they existed in a world big enough for two.

"I'll show you incredible," he told her, gripping her waist, lifting her as he pushed the two of them off the cliff.

For the briefest of moments she was airborne, before splashing into the pool beneath them. The water was bathwater warm, closing around her as she sank deep into its depths. She could feel Ares sinking next to her and turned under water, grinning as his hair drifted around his strong face. Bright green eyes stared back at her as he reached for her. They surfaced together, tossing hair out of their faces as they laughed and splashed each other.

It had been years since Nikita had enjoyed herself so much. Ares lunged at her, dunking her under the water again. She managed to swim out of his grasp, coming up for air again only to have him wrap his powerful arms around her.

She twisted around so they faced each other and wrapped her legs around his torso, positioning her pussy against his cock.

"Fuck me," she ordered, sliding down on his thick shaft.

The water made her tighter, allowed her to feel his pulse throb through his cock as he slowly glided deep inside her. He moved to his back, floating easily on the water like he had a raft underneath him. Nikita straddled him and then reclined over him, for a moment drifting as one with him deep inside her.

They floated toward the edge of the pool and he moved to a sitting position, keeping his cock inside her. "Have you ever fucked in the water?" he asked her.

"You already know that I haven't. Not like this." She decided he enjoyed keeping track of how many firsts he offered her.

And she had a feeling with Ares there would be many firsts.

He straightened and then stood in the water, which was suddenly shallow enough to come up to his chest. Holding her in his arms, he moved her body, starting a slow rhythm. Nikita let her head fall back, her hair floating behind her in the warm water as he lazily made love to her.

Water rippled around them, splashing in her face, but she didn't care. The sensation that she could feel every inch of his cock, his swollen cock head, the thick vein running through his shaft as he teased her insides, built the pressure inside her to the point where she couldn't stand it anymore.

She gripped his shoulders, squeezing solid muscle. Licking her lips, she let go, enjoying the intensity of the flames that burned out of control inside her.

"That feels...so...fucking good," she cried out in between breaths.

He held her hips, strong fingers pressing firmly against her flesh. Controlling her movement, preventing her from increasing the momentum, he shoved his cock deeper inside her with every stroke.

The water around her seemed to get warmer, heating her body while the rich scents from the flowers grew intoxicating. She closed her eyes, feeling his cock continue to stroke her sensitive muscles. His cock grew thicker, longer, reaching places that had never been touched before. Her insides swelled, pressure consuming her until she swore she would explode.

"Nikita," Ares growled, or rather roared.

She opened her eyes, her lashes full of droplets of water, and stared at him through blurred vision. His expression was intense, his jaw firmly shut, every muscle in his face pulled taut. Fire burned through his green eyes, making them glow with a passion that matched the heat that coursed through her body.

"Come for me now," she said through clenched teeth, knowing she couldn't hold out any longer. "Fill me while I soak your cock."

His vision cleared as if he focused on her for the first time. Her breath came in pants, water splashing between them. He moved faster, tearing into her. There was no way she could enforce her order. A dam broke inside her, wave after wave rushing through her. Her orgasm took her breath away. The heat of the water made her dizzy.

She would pass out from it. All of this perfection matched with his wonderful cock and she would fade away, taken from reality by the best orgasm she'd ever experienced in her life.

"My turn, my love," he grunted and then let out a growl that sent shivers rushing through her.

His cock convulsed inside her, squirting cum that burned her cunt, filled her with a heat that consumed her. Slowly wrapping her arms around his neck, she nestled into him, resting her head on his shoulder.

Her world already spun around her and it took a minute before she realized they were no longer in water. Ares stretched out underneath her, adjusting her so that she could relax alongside him on the large bed in the bedroom in Iowa.

Their bodies were wet, clinging to each other, her hair soaked down her back. But she didn't care.

"I've decided that I want you to stay with me," Ares mumbled, his arms lazily wrapped around her.

"I wasn't planning on going anywhere." She felt so warm, even though they were both dripping with water.

"That's a damned good thing."

She felt sleep consume her and allowed it to take over, suddenly too tired to give his words much thought.

## **Chapter Eleven**

Joseph glanced up when Nikita entered the large conference room and approached the round table where a handful of agents already sat.

She pulled out an available chair and sat, Ares taking the chair next to her. The laptop in front of her was blank, no orders awaiting her like they had so many times before when she'd sat at this table.

Joseph cleared his throat, and the rest at the table straightened, giving him their attention.

"Our assignment was successful. We have all of you to thank for that." Joseph didn't smile, using his usual technique of making a compliment sound like a reprimand. "For now, the demons are in a state of disarray. But they will be back. Eliminating them isn't an option."

A short silence followed although none of the agents showed any sign of making any comments. Nikita glanced at Ares who stared at Joseph. He looked neither bored, nor amused. She couldn't imagine him willing to take orders from Joseph and had actually been surprised when he'd agreed to the request that he partake in the assembly meeting that Joseph had called for.

Dressed in black jeans and a pullover black shirt, his dark hair falling to his shoulders and his long lashes hooding his gaze, he looked like he should be the one issuing orders. Nikita knew the best of warriors always respected the chain of command. But she couldn't see Ares being anything but at the top of that chain. His hands relaxed on the table in front of him, his fingers intertwined. Nothing about his presence gave any indication of what he was thinking. She turned her attention back to Joseph.

"A new group will be formed, its focus to continue to learn about the demons, focus on where they're located, and ensure they are kept at bay. Nikita, you will be in charge of this group. Ares has agreed to be your advisor."

Nikita blinked. This was news to her. Ares had agreed to be part of Centauri?

She looked at him again, but still his attention rested on Joseph.

"That's fine," she said, although she had a feeling that her opinion wasn't being asked.

Joseph stood, and the other agents at the table suddenly shifted as if restless. He walked around the table and handed Nikita a disc. "Study this. Make sure your agents are trained."

When he left the room the other agents filed out quickly, giving her no more attention than they ever had. No one was anxious to hurry out and fight the demons again any time soon.

Nikita stood slowly, looking down at Ares. "I thought I was done with Centauri."

"You love this line of work." He stood slowly, turning toward the door without looking at her.

She had always enjoyed investigating, figuring out the criminal mind, and taking them down.

"So now I return to my life as it was before?" She hurried after him.

Waking up in his arms this morning had been perfect. And getting ready to come down here, as if they left for work together, had seemed like a routine she'd enjoyed all of her life. They moved so well together, from showering to morning coffee.

They left the conference room, walking slowly toward the larger area where several agents worked at computers, glancing up at them curiously.

An older man, vaguely familiar, stared down at some papers on one of the worktables and looked up at them as they approached. His narrow eyes shifted from



her to Ares as he straightened. Claspings his hands behind his back, he waited as Ares approached him.

“What are you doing here?” Ares asked quietly.

“Thought I’d ask you the same thing. Will you work among humans once again?” Terrance, Ares’ watcher, glanced around the large room.

Nikita glanced from the tall thin man to Ares. The two of them were as opposite as day and night, but she sensed their connection as one that had existed for a long time.

Remembering when she’d met him briefly before and his mention of a coven, she realized how much she’d learned about Ares in such a short time. There was still so much she didn’t know though.

“Nikita and I will work together, and you can put that in your report.” Ares stroked the back of her hair, a possessive gesture.

“And is this a permanent relationship?” Terrance asked.

“Very permanent.” Ares didn’t hesitate.

Nikita’s stomach twisted, then did a major flip-flop. She looked up at Ares. His expression had never been more serious.

Terrance rocked up onto his heels, something that might have been a smile appearing on his face. “Well then, I guess congratulations are in order.”

“Nikita.” Joseph called for her and she almost jumped.

Ares’ implication that they were a couple—a permanent couple—distracted her. For a moment she’d forgotten where she was.

Joseph walked up to her. “Since the two of you will be staying at your apartment here in the city, I’ll contact you later this week. We’ve already got word from several different cities of possible demon activity.”

He nodded to Ares and then headed toward one of the computer geeks who handled intelligence on their missions. Nikita glanced back at Ares. Terrance no longer stood next to him.

"I'm not sure I care for you making decisions for me without consulting me," she told him, too confused to know if she were upset or not.

But he wouldn't own her. That much she knew for damned sure.

Heading toward the elevator that would take her to the exit, she didn't look behind her to see if Ares followed or not. But she didn't have to. He put his hand over her shoulder, holding the elevator door for her as she entered. They rode down quietly with a couple of other people from Centauri and then exited to the parking garage.

It seemed ages since she'd parked her car in the garage and shouldn't have been surprised that it was right where she left it. He put his hand over hers when she held her keys in her hand, aiming the lock on her keychain at her car.

"I'm not used to asking for something that I want," he told her, closing his fingers around hers.

Nikita looked up into his strong face, confused when she saw turmoil darken his gaze. His brows closed together, his forehead creasing when he studied her.

"Nikita. Be with me." His words were strained.

"Be with you? What does that mean? Be your girlfriend, your lover? What do you want to do? Shack up for a while? Be business partners?" She shook her head. "For someone with so much power you must be able to express yourself better than that."

"Be my wife."

Nikita took a step backwards, her jaw dropping as she stared at him, stunned.

"Your wife." She stumbled over the words.

All of her adult life, she'd focused on her career, having a lover or two but no one who'd ever remained in her life that long. Working alongside someone during a mission could bring them close together. But time and time again she'd learned that when the job was done, all commonality between the two of them had faded. The lust would die, and they'd go their own ways.

"We're not going to go our own way." His expression hardened and he grabbed her arms, pushing her back against her car. "You want to stay with me."

Nikita shoved against Ares—hard. She glared at him when he wouldn't budge.

"You've arranged for me to stay with Centauri. You've conveniently moved us into my apartment. Now you've decided we're a couple, announcing it to Joseph and to your watcher." She slapped her hands against his chest, the hard muscle stinging her hands. It simply fed fire to her irritation. "You're not going to control me like that. I make my own decisions."

Ares growled, his entire body vibrating with the sound. And she knew he struggled to maintain his emotions. Well, if he wouldn't let them out, share with her how he felt, ask instead of tell her, she wanted nothing to do with him.

"Let me go, Ares. This isn't going to work."

He took a step backwards, his mouth a thin line of anger. His green eyes burned with so much emotion they had turned dark, almost brown. Clenching his hands into fists at his side he stared at her. The look was terrifying. But he wouldn't bully her either.

Nikita almost fell into her car, the empty feeling in her stomach making her sick. Somehow she managed to start it. Her eyes burned with tears.

Somehow she managed to drive to her apartment, a place that hardly felt like home anymore. It seemed years since she'd been here. Walking aimlessly through the rooms, Ares wouldn't leave her thoughts.

She didn't want him out of her life. All she wanted was for him to understand. The man was so damned bullheaded, that with all his powers, all of his strength, he wouldn't see that.

Damn it.

Sometimes it took banging them upside the head with the truth for them to figure out how things were.

"Ares," she cried out to the silent apartment. "Come here. I want to talk to you."

Just a few weeks ago she would have considered herself batty, overworked, for screaming at her furniture to make a man appear. Right now it seemed perfectly natural.

Ares appeared in her living room, looking just as mad as he had when she'd left him in the parking garage.

"First of all," she began, pointing a finger at him. "I'm not your property. Is that clear?"

He didn't say anything and slowly crossed his arms over his chest.

"You won't make decisions for me. No matter how big or small the matter, we discuss it and decide together. Is that clear?"

He pursed his lips. No matter that he looked disgusted with her tirade, she wasn't through.

"I decide who I work for, where I live. I'm a grown woman. And if I'm going to marry someone, it will be out of love, not because they wish to possess me."

Ares raised his hand and a large red rose, dripping with moisture, appeared before her. Her heart swelled as she took in the intoxicating fragrance from the waterfall. Swallowing the lump that quickly rose to her throat, she stared up at him.

"I've let you into my heart, taken you to my private sanctuary where no other woman has set foot. No matter that we are different species, you're my soul mate. The sooner you accept that fact, the better."

"Is that the only way you know how to tell a woman that you love her?" Her voice cracked, too many emotions surfacing at once.

Ares dropped the dew-soaked rose to her coffee table and then grabbed her by the back of her neck, crushing her against his chest. His arms went around her, pinning her to him, and then with his fingers, he forced her chin up, meeting her gaze with a passion-filled stare.

“Woman. I’m more than in love with you. I won’t be able to survive without you.”

Before she could answer, say the words that were on the tip of her tongue, he crushed his mouth over hers, demanding her surrender as he almost doubled her over backwards with a breath-stealing kiss.

*I love you, too.* All she could do was think the words, and the way he swept her off her feet, she was doing damned good to manage that.

Ares growled and made love to her with his mouth.

## **About the Author**

All my life, I've wondered at how people fall into the routines of life. The paths we travel seemed to be well-trodden by society. We go to school, fall in love, find a line of work (and hope and pray it is one we like), have children and do our best to mold them into good people who will travel the same path. This is the path so commonly referred to as the "real world".

The characters in my books are destined to stray down a different path other than the one society suggests. Each story leads the reader into a world altered slightly from the one they know. For me, this is what good fiction is about, an opportunity to escape from the daily grind and wander down someone else's path.

Lorie O'Clare lives in Kansas with her three sons.

Lorie welcomes mail from readers. You can write to her c/o Ellora's Cave Publishing at 1056 Home Ave., Akron, OH 44310-3502.

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