

# **Python Place 2: Hot and Bothered**

## **Kate Hill**

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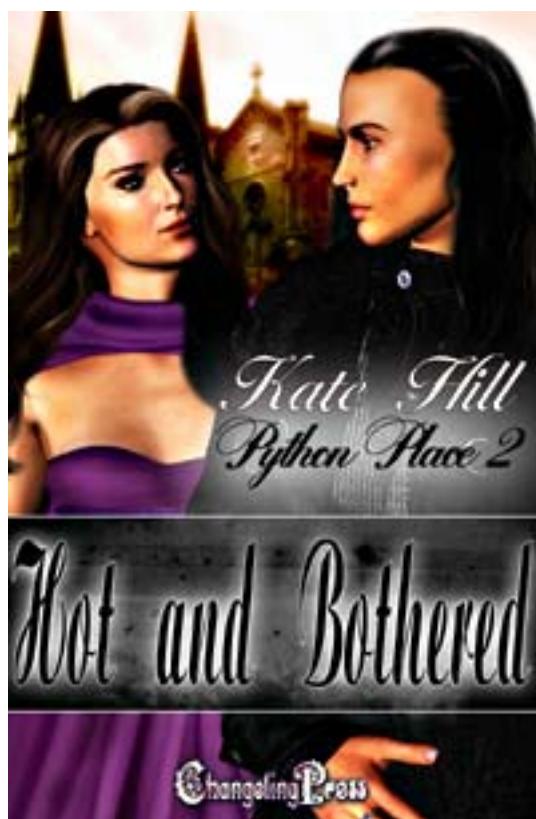
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ISBN (10) 1-59596-440-1  
ISBN (13) 978-1-59596-440-3  
Formats Available:  
HTML, Adobe PDF,  
MobiPocket, Microsoft Reader

Publisher:  
Changeling Press LLC  
PO Box 1046  
Martinsburg, WV 25402-1046  
[www.ChangelingPress.com](http://www.ChangelingPress.com)

Editor: Sheri Ross Fogarty  
Cover Artist: Sinamin



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## Chapter One

Pier sighed deeply and gazed out the window overlooking the garden outside her bedroom. Every now and then movement in the bushes revealed the presence of couples making love in the darkness. Though it was well past midnight, her home was filled with guests -- mostly men who should have been home with their wives and children. Pier despised a majority of them and it galled her that they were necessary to her survival.

Most of the pathetic, lustful men who kept her women in business and Pier herself supplied with much-needed sexual energy were so far beneath her that she could scarcely look at them much less drain their essence. At least they were controllable and every now and then a handsome, interesting one came along to amuse her, but not for any length of time. She wouldn't allow herself to become too attached to one, even if he was merely a pet. When a woman became attached, she surrendered her freedom and nothing was more important to Pier than her independence.

"Pier. Darling. Look this way."

Distracted by the voice of her good friend Dion, she turned and gazed into his gleaming onyx eyes. He was the only man of power with whom she chose to associate and that was because he had absolutely no romantic interest in her.

"Sorry, love," she said. "I wasn't paying attention. What were you saying?"

For several seconds he studied her in silence. When his intent gaze became almost unbearable, she snapped, "What is it? You have a look on your face like a mouse who stole the cheese."

The slightest smile touched Dion's slender lips and he said, "You haven't been yourself for months now and I know what the problem is."

"Oh really?"

"You're bored."

Her first impulse was to protest, then she sighed again. Unfortunately he was right. She was bored out of her mind.

"Darling, you need a man."

"In case you've forgotten, Dion, my home is *crawling* with men. They're my livelihood, after all."

He shook his head, his smile broadening. "I mean you need a real man. Not the useless, pathetic creatures who come here to sate their lust on whores..."

"My women are not common harlots. They're the highest quality --"

"Spare me. You know exactly what I'm talking about. The truth is, Pier, you wouldn't allow a man who is truly worthy of you to set a foot into this house. You're too afraid."

Now she was offended. "Afraid? I'm not afraid of any man. And if I'm bored, there's no man intelligent enough to stir my interest."

"Excuse me?"

She nearly smiled. Quite inadvertently she'd repaid his insult in full. "I don't mean you, Dion. But you're not like other men."

"I'll take that as a compliment. Now let's be honest. Intelligence isn't really what you're looking for. I mean of course you want a man who can dress himself and carry on a fairly decent conversation, but what you need is someone to excite you, overpower you --"

"Stop right there." She held up a defensive hand, stood, and began pacing the room. Her robe fell open and the warm summer breeze caressed her bare flesh. "No man will ever overpower me. In the mortal world women have little power. If I were not a daemon, I wouldn't enjoy the freedom I have and I will not give it up to some pathetic mortal man."

"I'm not suggesting you further your boredom by taking yet another mortal lover. Another daemon, however --"

Pier raised her eyes to the heavens. "Oh please. That's the last thing I want. They're only immortal versions of their human counterparts. Arrogant. Self-absorbed. And not half as appealing as they think they are."

Dion studied her carefully. "You're not exactly easy to please. That's why we must be careful when choosing a recreational partner for you. Fortunately, I know just the one."

To her annoyance, this caught her interest though she refused to admit how much. Instead she gave a snort of laughter and said, "Somehow I doubt that."

"If I told you I had found a man who could permanently end your boredom, who was your perfect match, what would you say?"

"That you've had one glass of wine too many."

"Impossible. I'm not human nor daemon. I'm a full-fledged spirit and can drink, eat and fuck as much or as little as I want with no ill effects. You, my beautiful daemon friend, are not so lucky. You have certain requirements that need to be fulfilled. You need to make love just as mortals need food. Unfortunately you're so bent on keeping a semblance of power that you've surrounded yourself with useless fools whose sexual energy is like a diet of stale bread. You need passion. Excitement. You need a man whose appetite is as ferocious as your own."

Once again she sat in the chair across from him and shrugged. "Sounds interesting, though I seriously doubt such a man exists."

"I told you he does. Actually, I believe you've heard of him. Dimitri Terence."

A chill swept down her spine at the mention of that name. Dimitri Terence and his brothers owned Python Place, the only pleasure house in England that rivaled hers. In some daemon circles the brothers were known as traitors, having turned on their mother, a dark spirit called Eris. Pier knew of Eris and had to admit she almost agreed with the brothers' decision to spurn her. Though Pier was no saint and enjoyed flaunting her daemon powers, Eris had reached a level of wickedness that sickened even her.

"What makes you think that a mongrel who has turned on his own kind will satisfy a woman like me?"

This time Dion's smile was sinister. "He might be wise enough to rebel against the evil in his soul, but Eris is still his mother. That power and passion must somehow be released and while he loathes torture and senseless killing, he has found *wickedly* pleasant ways to exercise his dark side. I see the interest in your eyes. Do you think you're ready to meet a man like Dimitri or shall you continue hiding here in your decadent yet unsatisfying fortress?"

"I'm not a child to be tempted by your taunts, Dion." She stood once again and approached. This time she sat on his lap and looped her arms around his neck. Gazing into his large, dark eyes she couldn't resist the slight yet triumphant smile tugging at her lips. "You're so certain you've found my match, but what about you?"

"What about me?" The hard edge to his voice told her that he didn't like the turn their conversation was about to take. She doubted he would tolerate much goading. Still, she couldn't resist after his meddling in her life.

"You've been kind enough to take an interest in my romantic involvements. Let me return the favor by offering you a bedmate tonight. You may have the loveliest young man in my house. Free of charge, of course."

His lip curled. "As if I need you to supply my bedmates."

"I thought you might be a little out of practice considering I haven't seen you with anyone since Orion."

Dion stood so abruptly that Pier landed on her backside.

"I told you never to mention him."

In spite of her anger, she felt a hint of guilt. Her vicious side always seemed to get the better of her. She knew how much Dion had adored his mortal lover and she shouldn't have mentioned Orion simply to get back at him for something as petty as matchmaking.

"I'm sorry," she said, the words sour on her lips. One thing she despised was admitting she was wrong, but in this case she had little choice. The fury and pain in

Dion's eyes were completely uncharacteristic of him. Obviously he still hadn't come to terms with the loss of Orion and if she wanted to keep their friendship intact, an apology was necessary. "I shouldn't have mentioned him."

"No, you shouldn't have," he said coolly, but offered her his hand. She took it and he tugged her to her feet, then released her. Folding his arms across his chest, he walked to the window and stared outside.

"You really believe Dimitri Terence can satisfy me?" she asked.

"If I didn't, I wouldn't have mentioned him at all."

"Well, as you know, I love a challenge." Her pulse raced with a combination of apprehension and desire. "If you think he is capable of amusing me, then I'll agree to a meeting with him."

She couldn't quite fathom the look in Dion's gleaming eyes. He thoughtfully chewed his lower lip before he said, "Good. Consider it done."

He disappeared in a pink haze and Pier nearly panicked. Dimitri Terence. A daemon with a reputation. A son of Eris. What the hell had she gotten herself into?

\* \* \*

Sprawled on his oversized bed, a large gray cat sleeping on his chest, Dimitri Terence glanced at Dion who sat in a high-backed oak chair by the hearth across the room. Though Dion was a good friend, he had a tendency to interfere in the affairs of others, and it seemed tonight he was in top meddling form.

"Why won't you trust me on this?" Dion said, his black eyes gleaming in the firelight.

"Dion, look around. This is Python Place. Here I have all the women I could possibly want. Why do I need to meet this Pam --"

"Pier."

"Whatever. Why would I want to meet her? First off, she's a daemon and being half spirit myself, I know better than to take a woman too much like myself. Daemon females are far too arrogant. They think only of their own pleasure and expect men to be lust machines."

The slightest smile tugged at Dion's lips. "I see. You feel you're not up to par. I can understand that."

"Excuse me?" Dimitri raised himself on his elbows, causing the cat to mewl in protest. "Is my name not Dimitri Terence? There is no woman I can't satisfy, but that's beside the point. I'm looking for pleasure. A daemon female will only be looking for competition. Contrary to popular belief, lovemaking is an art, not a sport. Human women seem more appreciative --"

"You mean more submissive."

"That too. There's no such thing as a submissive daemon female. They're all wretched bitches."

Dion sighed and shook his head. "You're thinking of your mother. She's colored your vision of all immortal females. Eris is like poison, especially to you and your brothers, but not all immortal women are like that. I know you, Dimitri. I know your likes and dislikes. Do you honestly think I'd suggest you take a woman who couldn't please you? Ow!" Dion gritted his teeth, picked up the shaggy white cat that had jumped onto his lap and tossed her on the floor. "How can you stand these little beasts?"

Dimitri chuckled. His cats were a point of annoyance to his brothers as well as Dion. His wing of Python Place was home to a dozen felines.

"These damn cats are why I so seldom visit your wing," Dion muttered.

"Perhaps that's the method in my madness."

Dion cast him an annoyed look. "Will you or will you not meet Pier?"

Dimitri shrugged. He knew how much Dion wanted the Terence brothers to find their soulmates. As daemons -- the product of human fathers and a spirit mother -- they survived off the sexual energy of others. If deprived of that energy, they would become raving, violent creatures and eventually slip into a vegetative state from which they could never recover. They would spend eternity frozen, sensing the world around them but unable to participate in it. A state of living hell.



While the brothers' human fathers were good men, their mother, a malicious spirit called Eris, constantly did her best to lure her sons into evil. The last thing she wanted was for them to find their soulmates, the women who could forever help them fight their evil side. The eldest Terence, Adrien, had already found his soulmate and had recently married. Though Dimitri was happy for his brother, he didn't exactly envy him. Dimitri relished his carnal appetite. He loved women. Loads of women. Thin, plump, tall, short, dark or fair. As long as they were willing to submit to his voracious appetite and his sexual quirks, he gave them as much pleasure as they could possibly want. The idea of one day finding his soulmate, having only one woman to enjoy, was almost disappointing.

"Your problem, Dimitri, is that you have no idea of the magic of finding your soulmate," Dion said. "When you finally meet her, all the women you've ever had in your entire decadent life will not please you half as much as she will."

The sexual glutton in Dimitri stirred at the idea of a woman that magnificent. Still, he tried to sound indifferent. "Really? That's hard to believe."

"So will you meet Pier or not? If I'm wrong about you and her, then what's the worst that can happen?"

That was true. If they weren't compatible, they would simply part ways. But if they were... Dimitri's stomach clenched at the thought of finding a woman he liked too much. He'd seen how love had changed Adrien. Though his brother kept up his business end of Python Place, he no longer had any interest in the women. Not that Adrien had ever been particularly excessive. In spite of how many women fawned over him, he satisfied his hunger as necessary, usually with one partner at a time.

"Aren't you feeling the slightest bit left out?" Dion asked. "Adrien is happily married --"

"Disgustingly happy," Dimitri chuckled. "Tyrus says he's so lovesick over Hailey that it's enough to make a person sick just watching him."

"Tyrus has no sense of romance."

Dimitri couldn't argue that point. While Tyrus' sexual appetite was as powerful as his brothers', he harbored more anger than either of them. With his background it was understandable, yet Dimitri knew that anger pushed Tyrus closer and closer toward the evil all three brothers strove to fight.

"As I said, Adrien is married. Lately Tyrus has been occupied with Adrien's wife's sister, Abigail --"

"A lovely lady, though a bit uptight. She doesn't have Hailey's charm."

"Stop changing the subject. My question is will you or will you not meet with Pier?"

"I'm not completely opposed to spending some time with her. However, I know she runs a brothel in London."

"She prefers to call it a pleasure house."

Dimitri curled his lip. "What's the difference? People pay to fuck there, correct?"

Holding up his hands in mock defense, Dion said, "I'll leave you to argue about brothels and pleasure houses with Pier."

"My point is she lives in London. You know I hate London. Crowds. Noise. Filth. Pompous asses trying to impress one another."

"She's already agreed to come here."

"Really?" Dimitri's interest sparked a bit. If she was willing to bend to his wishes before even meeting him, she might have some potential after all. Not only that, he'd heard she was quite beautiful.

"She can arrive on Monday after nine. Shall I tell her you agree?"

Dimitri scratched the gray cat behind his ears, making him purr.

"Dimitri!" Dion snapped after several moments.

"Fine. Tell her I agree."

Nodding, Dion disappeared.

## Chapter Two

Amidst the sensation of soft flesh pressed against his back and lips and the strong scent of floral perfume, Dimitri heard the sound of barking dogs and shattering glass. He lifted his face from where it had been buried in the smooth, bare shoulder of Clarice, the woman in his arms. She moaned softly in protest, as did Adel, the naked beauty clinging to him from behind. Employees at Python Place, both women pleased guests and enthusiastically provided for the Terence brothers' need for sexual energy.

"Dimitri?" Clarice murmured, clinging to his arm as he stood.

Adel tightened her grip on his back. "Where are you going, lover?"

"I'll be back," he growled, thoroughly annoyed by this interruption. Yet the dogs were barking incessantly and now he heard cats crying as well. If Tyrus' dogs had somehow gotten into his wing of the house again, Dimitri would thrash his younger brother. Of course, he had no idea how the dogs could have gotten in since the door at the end of the corridor leading to his wing always remained closed.

Dimitri pulled on his silky blue robe and belted it loosely before leaving his room and striding barefoot down the hall. Cursing under his breath about annoying canines, he jogged halfway down the steps only to nearly fall down the flight as several of his panic-stricken cats dashed by followed by an enormous black dog trailing a brown leather leash. Spinning on his heel, Dimitri managed to catch the end of the leash. Pulled to a sudden stop, the dog turned, slammed into Dimitri and both tumbled down the stairs and landed rather hard at the bottom. The dog squealed, Dimitri cursed, and a woman laughed.

"Are you all right?"

Dimitri turned toward that feminine voice, ready to bellow in fury, then he froze. The woman's smile faded and she paused in a half-crouch beside him, staring at him

with large, thickly lashed eyes that stole his breath. In fact he wasn't sure how many heartbeats passed before he remembered to breathe again. A sensation such as he'd never felt before struck him. It was like being wrapped in midnight -- velvety, dark and intimate. Everything about her, from her womanly scent mixed with vanilla perfume to the beauty mark just above the corner of her full, luscious lips seemed to capture him. This was without doubt the most sensual creature he had ever had the pleasure of meeting.

Two more enormous black dogs, these attached to the leashes in her gloved hands, barked and snapped him out of his intoxicated state.

"What the hell is going on here?" he demanded and pushed himself to his feet, the leash still locked in his fist. "What the hell are these?"

She also seemed to have fully recovered from her stupor and stood, staring at him with a look of challenge and -- could it be annoyance? -- on her face. "These are dogs, sir."

"I know they're dogs!" he snapped. "What the hell are they doing in the house?"

"Surely you were expecting us?"

Dimitri curled his lip. "Expecting..." Good Lord, was it after nine already? Was this woman actually Pier? If so Dimitri was going to kill Dion. "Pier?"

"Ah, yes. He sees the light," she said with a smile that was a bit too sweet. "Now, if you would be so kind." She handed him the leashes to the other dogs then turned toward the open door where two servants stood with trunks. "Please show us to my room then walk the dogs. Also, please alert your master that we have arrived and do put on some clothes. I know this is Python Place but surely there must be some level of decorum among the staff, at least when wandering the halls."

Dimitri had been with this woman for two minutes and already he wasn't sure if he wanted to kill or fuck her. Of course the former was out, for he knew she was as immortal as he.

"First, I am not a member of the staff," Dimitri said with forced calm. "Second, you take these beasts and *get rid of them.*"

He took the leashes and thrust them into her hands. The dogs didn't seem to like such a sharp move toward their mistress, for they barked and growled, their fangs bared and eyes aglow with anger. Dimitri returned their glare, his teeth clenched.

"What do you mean get rid of them?"

"I mean are you crazy, woman, bringing them here? Didn't you notice there are cats..." Dimitri's sentence trailed off as his gaze drifted toward the corner of the foyer. On the floor were shattered pieces of what had once been a prized antique vase.

Pier's gaze followed his and she said, "I am sorry about that, but the dogs didn't actually do it. When we stepped inside there was a fat white cat sitting by the little table where the vase was. She panicked when the dogs barked and leapt onto the stairs. Her back feet tipped the vase and..."

"I don't need to hear any more." Dimitri held up his hand. "I agreed to this meeting with you. Not with three hell hounds."

"Hell hounds? These are sweet, beautiful animals. And, Mr. Terence, I was told by Dion that you understood that I do not go anywhere without my dogs and that it was perfectly fine to bring them."

Again Dimitri gritted his teeth and balled his fists. Dion! Oh, he and the mischievous spirit were going to have a *long* talk.

"I see there are problems already," she continued. "We've had a long journey and would like to rest before taking our leave. I must say, sir, this has been a disappointment. Somehow I thought with your reputation you would be... different."

Leaving? She couldn't be leaving. At least not before he fucked her. The woman was obnoxious, arrogant and annoying but so compelling that he found he couldn't stand the thought of not tasting her at least once.

"Sir?" Anthony, the butler, arrived rather breathlessly from another section of the wing, two maids behind him. All three looked around in surprise, then he ordered one of the maids to clear away the broken vase and the other to show Pier to her room.

"And I shall find a place for these..." Anthony's brow furrowed and he cleared his throat as he held out his hand for the dogs' leashes. "These handsome creatures."

Pier smiled and handed him the leashes. She gazed at Anthony through her lashes and Dimitri's gut tightened upon seeing the usually stern butler melt. "Thank you. There's nothing more attractive than a man who appreciates quality beasts. We shan't be staying long, as your master shares neither your appreciation nor your good manners."

Dimitri resisted the urge to growl. This woman would surely drive him to madness. He must have had some masochistic tendencies that prompted him to say, "There's no need to leave."

She turned to him and when their gazes met another shock of unprecedented desire rushed through him. His cock stirred and his gut tightened with raw need. By the way she moistened her lips, the slightest hint of pink coloring her porcelain cheeks, he knew she felt the same.

"You haven't made us feel very welcome, Mr. Terence."

"I'll see if I can rectify that over dinner. Once you've rested, of course."

Smiling, she nodded. "Thank you."

"Dinner will be in one hour in my room."

He almost expected her to refuse. Though she ran a pleasure house in London, she carried herself with such poise and distinction that one would think her a woman of flawless reputation. Of course she was a daemon and their kind were insatiable. He didn't doubt she was looking forward to a long, hard fuck as much as he was.

"About the vase..." she began.

"Don't give it another thought," he said. *It's only a priceless antique passed down for generations in my dead father's family.*

"I pay my debts, Mr. Terence, therefore I will find a way to repay you." The slightest smile touched her lips and she held his gaze with such fire that he thought he might come then and there. His heartbeat quickened and he felt sweat break out on his forehead and back. Damn, he hadn't been so mad about a woman in ages. It was like he was a youth again, trying unsuccessfully to control his wild daemon urges.

"I'm sure we can work something out," he agreed, his own gaze burning into hers.

She swallowed hard and her finely shaped nostrils flared a bit. Dimitri couldn't resist a slight smile. He had always possessed a talent for charming women whether they be human, daemon, or full spirit. It seemed the beautiful Pier was no exception. He intended to use his every charm and skill to advantage. Before their meeting was over, Pier would be his completely. Dominated. Pleasured beyond reason. Willingly and happily on her knees before him.

\* \* \*

Pier followed the maid up the wide staircase and down a long corridor carpeted in dark brown. Embossed cream-colored paper covered the walls, and at the end of the corridor stood a life size statue of a leopard. Dion hadn't mentioned Dimitri was such a cat person and obviously the devious spirit hadn't told her host about her love of canines. Still, there was no rule that said two such opposite people couldn't mix. Of course she was only thinking that way now that she'd met Dimitri. When their gazes locked a feeling such as she'd never experienced had flowed through her, thrilling while at the same time soothing her like warm, scented water. The man was rude and arrogant, or so she had first thought. Once he'd calmed a bit, he exuded a charm that even she, a daemon, found almost irresistible. She didn't doubt their attraction had been mutual. He'd stared at her with such lust that she could almost smell it and the aroma was delicious.

Dimitri was even more gorgeous than she'd imagined. Rumors of the Terence brothers' superior looks circulated even in the spirit world. Yet hearing about it was nothing when faced with the reality of Dimitri's ruggedly handsome face and long, sleekly muscled body. The blue robe he'd worn had draped his broad shoulders and had been so loosely belted that it revealed a good portion of his powerful, hair-dusted chest. She longed to run her fingers over that marvelous expanse and see if it felt as rock-hard as it looked.

Soon, very soon, she would have the chance. Dimitri had invited her to his room for dinner so he was most likely as eager as she was to find out if they were as compatible as Dion had suggested.

The maid opened the door to a spacious room with a thick brown carpet, tan walls, and simple yet elegant oak furniture. There was a fireplace and double doors leading to a balcony. Another door to Pier's right led to a smaller room containing a tub with legs shaped like cats' paws.

"I'll have bath water sent up for you," the maid said, then bowed her head and left quickly.

Once alone, Pier removed her cloak and tossed it on the bed, then walked out to the balcony. It was a rather warm night and the scent of flowers and trees from the garden below wafted on the breeze. In spite of her calm appearance, Pier practically exploded inside from the thrill of the coming night. She could hardly wait to touch Dimitri and have him touch her. She wanted to feel him deep inside her, wanted to taste him, inhale his fresh, masculine scent and run her fingers through his thick, wavy hair. More than anything she wanted them to explode with unsurpassed mutual satisfaction. She wasn't a fool. As much as she might like to deny it, the truth was obvious. Dimitri Terence was her soulmate. Like a full-fledged spirit, each daemon knew his or her soulmate instinctively. It was a sensation that, while only felt once in a lifetime, was unmistakable to any who experienced it.

Though they were meant to be together, she knew by looking at Dimitri he wouldn't be easy to convince or control. Still, he was a man and a daemon. That meant he was doubly vulnerable to a woman like Pier who had perfected the art of seducing the opposite sex. Dimitri was clearly a man of passion, yet from what Dion told her and what she sensed from him as well, he was intensely virile and quite aware of that virility. He enjoyed being in control. Convince a man like him that he was the dominant partner in a relationship, and he would be hers forever. He would do everything in his power to see that his "submissive" partner achieved the best sexual gratification of her life. Pier lived for that kind of pleasure and she wanted it from Dimitri. He looked



masculine enough to satisfy a harem. All she had to do was convince him that he was the one in control and he'd willingly provide as many orgasms as a daemon female could possibly want.

## Chapter Three

Pier's heartbeat quickened as she followed the maid to Dimitri's room. She could scarcely wait to see him and find out if she'd once again experience that wonderful sensation of meeting her soulmate.

The maid left her at Dimitri's door. Drawing a deep breath, Pier tapped once and seconds later he greeted her. His damp hair and the strong yet delicious aroma of herbal cologne told her that he'd recently bathed. Bare-chested and barefoot, he wore black breeches and carried a plump brown cat in the crook of his arm. The animal purred with contentment and Pier couldn't blame it. If she was nestled close to that broad, hair-dusted chest, she'd be doing much more than purring.

Her gaze met Dimitri's for a long moment. Those same wonderful sensations broke over her. Lord, his eyes were beautiful. They were so large and blue that looking into them, she felt like she was adrift in a warm sea.

"Please come in." His deep voice had a rough edge that she found incredibly arousing. It reminded her of a great cat, like a lion summoning her into his lair.

"Thank you." She stepped into the spacious room. The lush brown carpet was so thick that her feet sank into it and she longed to remove her shoes and walk barefoot.

Flames danced in the fireplace across the room. In front of the hearth a round table covered in a brown linen tablecloth was set for dinner.

Three cats slept peacefully on the enormous bed covered in a dark green and brown quilt. Pier thought of all the fun she and Dimitri could have on that bed. A little quiver of passion darted through her. The meal was already on the table, but she wasn't the least bit hungry for food. Though she never allowed her daemon hunger for sexual energy to reach a dangerous point, at the moment she was absolutely desperate. She

longed to feel Dimitri's flesh against hers, to devour him and then, in turn, feed him. She had avoided bedding other daemons, but with him all her personal rules shattered.

Dimitri placed the cat on the bed, then approached the table and pulled out a chair for her.

She offered a slight smile, gazing at him with all the lust she felt, and sat. By the look in his eyes, seducing him would be easy, which was good since she wasn't in the mood to wait.

Dimitri poured wine for them both then took the seat across from her. She was about to take a sip when she felt something soft against her ankle. Glancing down, she saw the brown cat rubbing against her. In truth, she felt a bit awkward around such small, strange animals.

"Do you always keep them around?" she asked.

He lifted an eyebrow then followed her gaze to the cat. "Yes. Does that bother you?"

"Not really."

"If you prefer I can put them out --"

"That's not necessary, at least at the moment. When we want to use the bed, however --"

"Understood. I'm known for certain fetishes, but bestiality isn't one of them."

This comment sparked her interest. "What fetishes?"

A slow smile spread across his lips. He took a long sip of wine, his lovely blue gaze never leaving her. "I'm sure we'll learn all about each other's passions in good time."

"I'm sure."

"Are you hungry?"

"I'm starving," she said, her voice soft yet seductive. Pier slipped off her shoes, stood and placed one foot on her chair. She raised her skirt, revealing a good portion of her long leg, and began rolling off her silk stocking. A discreet look from the corner of

her eye revealed Dimitri staring at her with unabashed desire. "I hope you don't mind if I go barefoot. Your carpet is irresistible."

"Make yourself comfortable," he said, leaning back in his chair, his gaze following her every movement as she removed both stockings and tossed them aside. She approached him and his gorgeous chest expanded in a deep breath that he released slowly. As if responding to her unspoken request, he pushed his chair away from the table.

"Umm," she purred, curling her toes in the carpet before she slowly sank to her knees in front of him. Gazing up at him, she placed her hands on his steely thighs that opened to accommodate her.

"Funny, but for some reason I thought I'd have to work a bit harder to get you on your knees before me," he said, a suspicious look creeping into his eyes.

Pier's brow furrowed. She hadn't expected him to respond like this. Most men, daemons in particular, loved subservient women. She knew by rumor that Dimitri was no different.

"What's wrong?" she asked softly, her hands roaming over his inner thighs. Damn, he had perfect legs. Long and rock hard. The thought of being trapped between those steely thighs sent her heart beating out of control. The sensation was wonderful. The mortals she'd been with had never made her feel quite like this. Perhaps she'd been wrong in avoiding daemon males, or maybe it was just Dimitri who roused these emotions in her. Yes, she'd intended to use submissive behavior to lure him, but now that she was faced with this marvelously handsome man who radiated power such as she'd never felt before, she wanted him to truly dominate her. "I thought having me in this position would make you feel virile."

Dimitri's eyes narrowed and gleamed with annoyance. "I don't need any particular behavior from a woman to make me feel virile. I *am* virile."

Taking her lower lip between her teeth, she sat back on her heels and stared at him. What the hell was wrong with her that she made such a stupid comment? She was

acting like a novice rather than a woman of the world. It was Dimitri. The bastard had her head spinning.

*Take control of yourself, Pier.*

"I didn't mean to offend you," she said.

"I'm not offended."

"You look offended."

"Well I'm not," he snapped.

This wasn't going well. She needed to try another approach. Before she had a chance to act, Dimitri stood abruptly and hauled her into his arms.

Pier's heart fluttered and she instinctively clung to his neck. He carried her to the bed and dropped her on it, sending the cats scattering. Without hesitation, he straddled her, keeping his full weight braced on his knees, and began unfastening the ribbon tied beneath her breasts. He slid a large, warm hand into her low neckline and cupped her breast. Desire shot through Pier and she had to force herself to keep her eyes open.

"I thought you'd like this," he purred like a great cat.

"Umm," she moaned softly and placed her hands on his wrist. It was such a strong wrist, the back of it dusted with hair. Her palm swept up and down his sinewy forearm.

"I knew that to someone like you being dragged to bed by a primeval man would make you feel more womanly."

Pier's desire faded, replaced by annoyance. Raising herself on her elbows, she cocked an eyebrow and said, "Excuse me? Not only are you an arrogant, stupid --" She stopped upon seeing his gloating smile and couldn't resist a slight grin of her own. All he'd been doing was giving her a dose of her own medicine. "That comment wasn't undeserved, sir."

"Do you think we can stop the games now and get on with the evening?"

She had to agree that was the best idea she'd heard since arriving at Python Place.

"I want this evening to be memorable for us both," he said, placing a hand on either side of her head, his lips inches from hers.

"So do I," she replied, her heart thrumming with anticipation of his kiss.

"Tell me the truth, Pier. Do you enjoy being dominated?"

His question took her aback only because she found that, for the first time she could remember, she wanted to answer a man honestly.

"Well?" he demanded after a moment, his eyes burning into hers.

"I don't know," she said. "I've never actually been dominated before. I've feigned submission to seduce men, but in reality I was the one in control."

"That game is familiar to me," he said and took her lower lip between his teeth. He nibbled gently and ran his tongue along her lip. She tried to slip her arms around his neck and pull him closer, but he grasped her hands and pinned them above her head.

"Like you, I can turn to smoke," she breathed, though inside she felt giddy with desire. He was so strong, his eyes so intense that she felt as if she was melting into the bed. "You can't force me to do anything I don't want to."

He cocked his head slightly to one side, his expression thoughtful. "You're wrong, Pier. I can force you. But I'm not a monster no matter what my bloodline says. If you choose to stay with me, if you agree to let me dominate you, I will give you pleasure beyond your wildest dreams."

Though his words excited her, Pier wasn't sure she liked his attitude. Within the space of a heartbeat, she faded to vanilla-scented smoke. Almost simultaneously he changed to smoke as well, pale blue and carrying the aroma of ginger. He seemed to wrap around her, smoke mingling with smoke. Try as she might, she couldn't escape from him.

Pier returned to solid form and found herself still pinned beneath Dimitri. He wore a self-satisfied smile that she longed to wipe off his face. At the same time she felt more aroused than ever, even if his display of power unsettled her.

"How did you do that?" she demanded.

"Obviously you've never been with a daemon who has fully mastered his powers."

"I've never been with another daemon. The males in particular repulse me," she snapped.

"Funny, you don't look repulsed at the moment."

"Get off me. Now."

His smile faded and his gaze took on a harshness that nearly stole her breath. "If that's what you really want, I will of course oblige. However, please be certain of your decision. If you choose to leave, there will be no second chances. Do you want to stay with me tonight, yes or no?"

"I was wrong about you, Dimitri," she purred. He lifted a curious eyebrow and she continued, "You're not simply arrogant. You are absolutely unbearable."

"Is that a no?"

"What do you think?"

In a fluid motion he released her and stood. He walked to the table, picked up his glass of wine and drained it in a single swallow. His back to her, he said, "Be on your way, woman. I don't like having my time wasted."

Little ripples of desire coursed through Pier and she rose on trembling legs. Hell, she must be losing her mind. She couldn't believe what she was about to do.

Dimitri turned to her, his expression hard yet lust burned deep in his eyes. Wearing only a black corset with red lacings, she approached him slowly. His blue gaze raked her from head to foot and back again. When she stood close enough to touch him, she sank to her knees, her gaze fixed on his, and said, "You thought wrong. While I'm here at Python Place, I am yours to command... Master."

His eyes gleamed with desire, yet he made no motion to touch her. Instead he circled her slowly, like a wild beast measuring the worthiness of his mate.

"While here, you will not turn to smoke unless given permission," he said. "You will trust me to guide our pleasure."

"Yes, Master."

"Don't call me Master. Dimitri will suffice." He paused in front of her, took her chin in his hand and tilted her face toward his. "All I demand is that you speak my name with respect. Your tone and actions are enough to show reverence for your Master."

Pier's jaw tightened. This scenario was thoroughly arousing yet at the same time frustrating. She'd played this game with men before, but never with one who could truly overpower her. The sensation was intoxicating, frightening, something new and exciting.

"You surrender to me completely, Pier, but remember this -- my pleasure is derived from pleasing you."

"That's how it is for us," she murmured, unable to tear her gaze from his. "No one but another daemon could ever really know that."

His expression softened the slightest bit and he nodded, then grasped a handful of hair at the back of her head. Though snug, his grip wasn't painful as he guided her to her feet.

"Stand still," he commanded. "Arms at your sides."

She obeyed, her heart pounding with desire.

For several moments he stood in front of her, his fingertips stroking her neck and tracing slow circles over the tops of her plump breasts that swelled above the corset. His beautiful blue eyes lowered, following the movement of his own hands as they cupped her breasts and gently squeezed. His thumbs brushed over her nipples, stiff and visible beneath their satin cover.

Again his hands wandered to her neck, then her shoulders, never breaking contact with her flesh while he moved behind her. Her pulse raced and she tried to keep her breathing slow and measured so as not to reveal the extent of her arousal. After he slid down her lace shoulder straps, she felt his deft fingers unfastening the ties of her corset. Pier's eyes slipped shut and she resisted the urge to arch her neck in pleasure. He had, after all, told her not to move.



His large, warm hands slid inside the loosened corset, warming her waist and belly, then glided upward to cup her breasts. The sensation of his kneading, stroking hands was almost magical. It surprised her that she, a daemon who had so many lovers before, could react this way to a man. But, she reminded herself, Dimitri Terence wasn't just any man. He was immortal. Unique. Her soulmate.

He pushed down the front of the corset and guided it over her hips and thighs. Squatting, he lifted one of her feet then the other and tossed the corset aside. As he stood slowly, his hands roamed from her calves to her shoulders. Again he walked in front of her and stepped slightly away, a half smile on his full lips. His gaze swept her blatantly and Pier's heart soared.

"You're so beautiful I could eat you alive," he said.

"Will you?" she ventured.

His smile became almost sinister yet incredibly sensual. "All in due time."

Placing his hands on her waist, he drew her so close that her breasts pressed against his chest. He kissed her, his warm, moist lips opened slowly against hers. She mimicked his motions, her tongue meeting every thrust of his. Momentarily forgetting his order to remain still, she embraced him. Her hands slid up his back, over his shoulders, then clutched handfuls of his thick black hair.

He broke the kiss, grasped her arms, and guided them back to her sides. "What did I say?"

Frustration kindled inside her, but she squelched it. She had, after all, agreed to this game, and as much as the independent woman in her rebelled, another part of her reveled in being mastered by Dimitri.

"Not to move, Dimitri," she said softly, her voice almost reverent.

A grin tugged at his lips. "Very good." He bent and took her earlobe between his teeth. He nipped and licked it, then ran his tongue along the shape of her ear, tickling her. Pier quivered and squirmed, clenching her fists to keep from clinging to him.

He kissed the delicate flesh behind her ear, then covered her neck with devouring kisses. Taking as much of her shoulder as he could into his mouth, he licked

and bit gently. Though he didn't break the skin, she didn't doubt his teeth left a slight imprint on her flesh. A ripple of passion shot through her. While he continued kissing her shoulder and neck, his hands roamed over her hips and buttocks. He grasped her bottom, squeezing then smoothing the plump globes before sliding his palm from her lower back to her shoulders while his other hand continued teasing her rump.

No longer able to control her excited breathing, Pier's breasts rose and fell with each breath, forcing her nipples to brush his hair-dusted chest. Her clit throbbed and her pussy ached with the need to be filled with his cock. She knew he was just as aroused because every few seconds she felt his erection brush against her, shielded only by his breeches. She longed for him to undress completely so she could see and feel his cock. She wanted to learn its shape, memorize the pattern of veins and the thickness of its head.

Dimitri stepped away, his gaze fixed on her, and removed his breeches. He stood, his arms folded across his broad chest, and stared at her with smoldering passion. Though not a muscle moved in his smooth-shaven face, his eyes practically glowed with desire.

"Pick up your corset and place it on the chair by the hearth."

Pier collected the garment, turned and walked to the chair. Her back was to him but she felt his hot gaze upon her.

"You have a beautiful ass," he said matter-of-factly.

Turning back to him, she smiled and said, "Thank you, Dimitri."

"Come here." He sat at the foot of the bed and drew a deep breath. His broad chest expanded. As he leaned back on his elbows, his flat belly tightened. How wonderful it would be to run her tongue over that gorgeous stomach, to outline every ridge of muscle, then to edge lower, grasp his thick shaft and take his cock head deep into her mouth.

She walked toward him slowly, seductively, and moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. When she'd almost reached the bed, he sat up, grasped her wrist and tugged her to him so quickly that she gasped in surprise. She found herself lying

stomach down across his lap. Her smooth, bare flesh pressed against his hard, hair-roughened thighs.

"Hmm," she purred when he began rubbing her buttocks in slow circles. He pinched and squeezed the flesh. A shiver of desire tore through her when he used a fingertip to trace the indentation of her ass cheeks.

"Your skin is so soft. Smooth. Luscious. There's nothing more beautiful than a woman with a well-rounded ass. Do you enjoy ass play?"

She lifted her head and strained to look at him. "What kind?"

"Look down," he ordered and she once again dropped her head to a more comfortable position. "At the moment I want to spank you. Would you like to be spanked?"

She swallowed. In truth she'd never thought much about being spanked. Never would she have allowed a man to humiliate her in such a way, but at this moment, here with Dimitri, it didn't seem humiliating at all. In fact the idea of him spanking her was rather arousing.

"Unless you refuse, I'm going to spank you. If at any moment you wish me to stop, all you need do is speak. Otherwise keep silent and allow me a free hand with your body. Agreed?"

She nodded, taking her lip between her teeth. Her pulse raced out of control and their game had only just begun.

A moment later she felt the sting of the first slap on her bottom. She gasped but didn't protest. Again his hand fell upon her ass. Then again. He waited several seconds between slaps, giving her time to fully consider what was happening between them.

Slowly he increased the speed of the slaps until his hand fell in quick succession on her buttocks. When he began carefully placing each strike so that it landed in the same place, the sting became almost overwhelming yet at the same time incredibly arousing. Her clit throbbed to the rhythm of his hand on her behind.

When he finally stopped, Pier's eyes were closed tightly, her heart hammering, ass aflame, and clit pulsing with need.

"That was excellent, Pier," he said, his breathing also a bit ragged as he gently soothed her hot, stinging flesh with gentle sweeps of his hand. He tugged her into his arms and placed her stomach down on the bed. "Rise to your knees. Bottom thrust high."

She followed orders, wishing to ask what he had planned next, but she couldn't speak. Not without ending the game. Still, she couldn't keep from crying out sharply with pleasure when he grasped her bottom and thrust his tongue into the crevice between. He lapped and teased her sphincter, the tip of his tongue circling the taut ring of muscle. Pier's pulse raced, her fingers clenched the mattress and she moaned. Dimitri licked and explored her asshole until she felt ready to collapse from the pleasure. When he finally stepped back, she fell forward, panting and squirming with need.

"Get up now," he said.

In spite of the weakness in her legs, she pushed herself to her feet. How badly she wanted him to fuck her!

His smoldering gaze upon her, he wrapped his fist around his thick cock and rubbed vigorously. His eyelids lowered halfway and his neck arched as passion grew. Abruptly he stopped pumping his shaft and squeezed the base tightly as he drew several deep, calming breaths.

Unable to resist, Pier reached between her legs and dipped her fingers into her drenched pussy. Then she rubbed her clit.

"Stop," he commanded. "Don't touch yourself until I tell you to."

Immediately she obeyed. This time instead of frustration she felt only excitement, arousal, and anticipation. She enjoyed this feeling of surrender, of knowing he had complete control over their pleasure. She never imagined feeling like this, but at the moment she was too lustful to worry about the implications of her submission.

He approached her and cupped her soft mound, then inserted two fingers into her pussy, gathering moisture. Slowly he withdrew the slick digit and rubbed her clit. A shudder of pure desire ripped through her and she moaned.

Covering her mouth with a penetrating kiss, he continued stroking her until her legs shook and she felt ready to burst from the pleasure. As if sensing her limits, he stepped away.

Her breasts heaving and face flushed with desire, Pier gazed at him. She trembled and her pussy throbbed.

"Stroke your breasts," he told her. "Yes. Just like that. Cup them and lift them. They're so full. So flushed with desire. Pinch your nipples. They're so large and pink. I'm going to suck them, Pier."

"Mmm," she sighed, so aroused that for the first time in her life she thought she might come without stimulation to her clit or pussy.

"I'm going to suck those plump, beautiful nipples, but first..."

Her gaze followed him as he walked to a chest across the room, lifted the lid and withdrew a black silk scarf.

Dimitri walked toward her, sliding the silk through his fingers, then he wrapped each end around his hand and pulled the black fabric to a taut line.

"Lie on the bed, Pier, and raise your arms above your head."

She knew what he planned to do. He was going to bind her hands with that length of black silk. Physically it couldn't hold her because she could turn to smoke, yet she had promised not to use that daemon trick. Therefore she was bound emotionally, something just as powerful.

Lying on her back, she lifted her arms overhead. Dimitri tied her wrists to the carved oak headboard. Stretching out beside her, he tenderly caressed her face then kissed her mouth. He nibbled her lower lip and kissed her from her brow to the base of her throat.

Cupping one of her breasts, he squeezed in a gentle rhythm. At the same time he took her nipple between his lips and sucked. He rolled his tongue over the sensitive bud. With the utmost tenderness, he worried it with his teeth then tugged on it.

The most wonderful sensations broke over Pier. She closed her eyes and arched against him. Her hands twisted in the bonds. She longed to hold him, but couldn't until he chose to release her.

Dimitri took his time, pushing her to the brink of control. After he finished licking and kissing one breast, he moved to the other. When the plump mound was damp from his lapping tongue and her nipple so sensitive from his teasing that his touch was almost painful, he moved to her stomach. He licked and kissed her belly and finally lifted her legs over his shoulders and covered her clit with his mouth. At the first touch of his tongue on her plump nub, she gasped.

The pleasure was so intense she forgot everything except her desire for fulfillment. Her daemon hunger rose to such heights that she couldn't resist absorbing his energy.

Dimitri groaned. In between licking and sucking, he said, "Oh yes. That's right, Pier. Take from me. Take my energy. Lord yes!"

His very essence filled her, pushing her over the edge into bliss. She moaned in protest when his mouth left her, but a moment later his thick, hard cock filled her cunt and she cried out sharply from the pleasure.

"Yes, Dimitri! Oh yes!"

He thrust fast and hard, and she wrapped her legs around his lean waist. Tugging on her bonds, she matched the rhythm of his pounding hips.

A moment later he reached up and, with a swift tug of the silk, freed her hands.

"Hold me tight, Pier," he gasped, his deep voice ragged with pleasure. "As tight as you want. As tight as you can!"

She didn't hesitate in following his command. As his thrusts increased in intensity, she felt him drawing upon her energy. Never in her life had she fed a daemon lover. The sensation was heady. Knowing that he needed her as much as she needed him was the most intimate feeling she'd ever experienced. Their spirits seemed to mingle and she felt an overwhelming sense of love for him. Their bodies and souls

aligned so perfectly that there was no doubt in her mind they were meant to be together.

She needed him so desperately. At that moment she would have done anything, given up any freedom, to spend eternity with this gorgeous, passionate daemon.

"You're mine," he murmured. "Look at me, Pier."

Slowly she opened her eyes and drew a sharp breath at his fiery expression. "Dimitri..."

"You belong to me, Pier. You're my soulmate."

She nodded, a bit numb from the barrage of emotions assaulting her. He'd felt it, too. The connection.

"Yes," she whispered. "Soulmates."

By the laws of the spirit world, they were bound. No matter what happened between them, that was something that could not be denied.

\* \* \*

When Pier and Dimitri finished making love, she slept for a short time but even her dreams were filled with concerns. In them she made passionate love with Dimitri on a satin-covered bed in a room fit for a goddess. Afterward he left, but she was unable to go. The door disappeared and even when she turned to smoke, she was trapped -- a sexual toy to be used at his whim, her freedom gone.

She awoke with a pounding heart. Fear and disgust made the hair on the back of her neck tingle.

A glance at Dimitri who slept soundly beside her, his handsome face relaxed, calmed her a bit. After all, it was only a dream that she was forever under his control. She'd enjoyed her submissive role when they'd made love, but never would she completely give up her all her freedom to him. In the bedroom was one thing, but she was a daemon female who valued her independence. Surely Dimitri realized this. Though he'd acknowledged that they shared the special binding of soulmates, he hadn't mentioned anything about stealing her freedom.

She studied him for a moment, unable to keep the slight smile from her lips. He was incredibly handsome. His eyes were closed, the thick lashes casting shadows on his cheeks. Stubble shadowed his jawline and his full lips were slightly parted, as if waiting for a kiss. It took all her self-control not to kiss and wake him. Though she'd love to fuck him again, she needed time to think about the events of the evening and the changes that would undoubtedly occur from meeting her soulmate.

Quietly she left the bed, donned her sheer robe and walked onto the balcony. She closed the door behind her and inhaled deeply, enjoying the scent of a warm night breeze.

"He's a magnificent lover, isn't he?"

Pier turned sharply, startled by the sound of a woman's voice. At the corner of the balcony stood a beautiful woman with long black hair. Her large breasts swelled above the plunging neckline of her black satin gown. Full lips were painted scarlet and her almond-shaped blue eyes looked so familiar it was unsettling.

"Who are you?" Pier demanded.

The woman's ivory hand fluttered to her throat. "I'm hurt," she said, looking more amused than upset. "Dimitri didn't mention his mother."

Eris.

Inside Pier stiffened though she did her best to appear calm. As a daemon in her line of work, she'd learned to become a fabulous actress.

With her vile reputation, Eris must be up to no good, but Pier was not about to be intimidated by her.

"If you're here to see Dimitri, he's asleep."

"Darling, I'm here to see you." Eris approached with a disarming smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "My sons are under the impression that I don't want what's best for them, but I do. I happen to think you're the best thing that could happen to Dimitri."

Pier raised an eyebrow. This woman made her flesh crawl. "Really?"



"Of course. It has always been my wish that my sons ally themselves with other daemons or spirits. True spirits, not the mongrel his brother Adrien took as his mate. He had to *make* her immortal, but people like us have been *chosen* for immortality. You understand the truth about our kind. You know what we're meant to be."

"I also know lies when I hear them," Pier said sweetly. "What is it you really want, Eris?"

"To warn you."

"Warn me?"

"About my son. You see, in spite of how they're tainted by their fathers' weak blood, part of them still belongs to me. They're daemons who are denying their true nature and it can only end in disaster. With you, Dimitri can fully understand the joys of our nature. And with your submissive tendencies, you won't mind at all about his uncontrollable appetite for women."

"We all have an uncontrollable appetite. I have it for men as well."

Eris looked worried. "Oh, but Dimitri would never stand for that."

"Excuse me?" In spite of herself, Pier grew annoyed. Surely he didn't expect her to remain faithful to him if he continued to flit about with other women.

"When it comes to affairs, he's like his father. He could never remain faithful to one woman, yet in his heart he's insanely jealous of his possessions."

"I'm not a possession, Eris."

"I know that and you know that, but Dimitri, being male, won't understand. Darling, unless you intend to remain subservient to him in every way, I suggest you take things slowly. Very, very slowly."

"You'll have to forgive me if I don't believe you. Surely you must be well aware of your own reputation?"

"I feared this would happen. Well, I've done all I can. You must make your own decision, of course, but now I can rest easily knowing I've at least warned you about Dimitri. Not that I should worry. Being one of us, you'll have had much experience in handling daemon males."

Damn, this woman seemed to know exactly where to strike. The truth was, other than tonight with Dimitri, Pier had no experience with daemon males, at least when it came to love affairs. The characteristics Eris ascribed to her son were exactly the reason Pier had avoided daemon lovers.

"I didn't mean to upset you, Pier." Eris brushed a cold hand across her arm and Pier nearly shivered.

Such coldness was the sign of an evil spirit. How could Pier possibly believe anything a woman like Eris told her?

"Even if you don't like what I've told you, at the very least look for warning signs when you're with Dimitri. You'll know if he's becoming obsessed with you. Let his actions speak louder than my words. Good night, Pier." Eris disappeared in a silvery haze that carried the faint aroma of cinnamon.

Pier drew a deep breath and gazed at the moon without really seeing it.

"Pier?" Dimitri said.

She glanced over her shoulder as he approached, his dark hair rumpled from sleep and his large blue eyes calm. That calmness faded when he stepped onto the balcony and sniffed the air.

"Was someone just here?" he demanded.

She was about to tell him the truth, then shook her head. "No. Did I wake you? I couldn't sleep."

"I thought I heard voices. Must have been dreaming." He wrapped his arms around her from behind and nuzzled her shoulder, then paused. "I could have sworn I smelled cinnamon. Come back to bed. I'll make sure you get to sleep."

Smiling slightly, she wriggled as he kissed her neck, his stubble slightly rough but pleasant, too. She closed her eyes when he took her earlobe between his teeth and nibbled gently.

"I can't get enough of you," he said. "How long can you stay? No matter how long, it won't be enough. I don't think I'm ever going to let you go."

Pier's eyes snapped open. "Excuse me? I do have a life in London, you know."

"Yes, but there's life and then there's *life*. Don't tell me you haven't felt it? Our kind know when we've found our soulmate. It's not the same as with slow, plodding mortals who sometimes take years to find the right mate. We belong to each other, Pier."

"Wait a moment." She pushed away from him and stepped back into the room where she began pacing in front of the hearth. "Remember we're daemons. That means half of us is human. Maybe spirits decide in a heartbeat with whom they want to spend eternity, but I need some time to adjust."

His brow furrowed. "Damn. You're right."

"I am?"

"Yes. Of course. This whole soulmate experience is like a disease."

Pier stopped pacing and cocked an eyebrow. "A disease? Thank you very much, sir."

"I meant no insult," he said, then *he* began to pace. The muscles in his long legs flexed with each step and she couldn't keep her eyes from his slightly swaying balls.

*Do not think with your libido, Pier. This is too serious. You must keep a clear mind.*

"Put this on." She walked to the chair, picked up his robe and tossed it at him.

His lips twitched in an amused smile. "Can't keep your eyes off me?"

"In your dreams."

"How did you guess?"

"Just put on the robe so we can discuss this."

"Good lord, woman, you're starting to sound like a wife already," he muttered, slipping on the robe and belting it loosely. "I can only hope you learn to obey as a wife should."

Rage boiled inside Pier, mostly because in the back of her mind she was still listening to Eris' advice. Coming to this house had been a complete mistake and it was all that busybody Dion's fault. The next time she saw him she was going to --

"What's wrong, love?" Dimitri tried to take her in his arms, but she shoved him hard in the chest. He was too strong to truly be affected by the motion, but he did drop his hands, his brow furrowed. "Pier, would you talk to me?"

"Do you really want to hear what I have to say or am I supposed to 'obey like a good wife'?"

"You're acting insane."

"I acted insane when I came here, but I'm rectifying the mistake now." She picked up her dress, yanked it on, and stormed out of his room.

Dimitri followed her down the hall. "What are you doing?"

"Leaving."

"You just got here."

"I don't want to overstay my welcome."

"You're welcome to stay forever."

She stopped and glared at him. "That is a terrible thing to say!"

Dimitri looked stunned. Not that she blamed him. She probably did sound crazy, but the more she listened to him the more seriously she considered Eris' words. Yes she was a vile bitch, but she was still his mother. Surely she knew *something* about Dimitri. Not only that, his use of "obey" and "wife" in the same sentence terrified her in a way she'd never imagined possible. His viewpoint was far too human while at the same time his soul was all too daemon. He was dangerous. She didn't want to think about the consequences if she lost herself to a man like him. This wasn't only because of the doubt Eris had planted in her mind. In truth, she had been concerned about meeting Dimitri from the first. All her life she had followed her gut instincts. She should have done the same in this case.

She stepped into her room and her dogs, who had been resting on the bed, lifted their large heads and wagged their tails.

"Pier, this is ridiculous." Dimitri followed her. "Why don't we talk about this like calm, rational --"

"Get out of this room!"

"It's *my* house."

"You deny me my privacy? How dare you?"

Sensing their mistress' anger, the dogs growled, jumped off the bed, and stood between Pier and Dimitri.

Dimitri curled his lip in a sneer. "Call off these mutts before some real damage is done, and I mean to them, not me."

Now Pier was really furious. "You would sink to threatening dogs? You make me sick."

"You didn't say that a couple of hours ago!"

"A couple of hours ago you were charming and almost polite."

"A feat in itself considering with whom I was dealing."

"If that's how you feel about me then you should be glad I'm going."

His teeth gritted and fists clenched, he stared at her for several seconds. His chest rose and fell with agitated breathing and Pier had the sudden urge to leap into his arms. The anger between them was, in a sick way, arousing. Damn, if he made a motion to fuck her right now she wasn't sure she'd have the strength to stop him.

His took a step closer, the look in his eyes so harsh that she was almost taken aback. Grasping her shoulders in spite of how the dogs growled, he spoke against her lips. "Get the hell out of here if you want to, mutt woman."

He released her abruptly, glanced at the dogs and growled at them, then stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Pier was trembling with rage. Still she folded her arms across her chest and bit her cheek to keep from laughing. *Mutt woman?*

\* \* \*

"Dimitri, what is wrong with you?" Tyrus demanded from where he sat behind the large oak desk in his study.

At his brother's sharp tone, Dimitri turned away from the window out of which he'd been staring. He, Tyrus, and Adrien were engaged in a monthly meeting to discuss business at Python Place as well as some of their other more respectable ventures.

Today, however, Dimitri couldn't seem to focus on anything except Pier. It had been several days since she'd stormed out of Python Place, and since she'd left he could scarcely sleep or eat. Even worse, he couldn't enjoy women. Oh, he still bedded them to appease his hunger for energy, but his zest for life seemed to have vanished with Pier. It frustrated him completely that a woman he'd only spent an evening with could affect his life so profoundly.

"Can you at least pretend you're interested in our discussion?" Tyrus said. He'd always been the most serious and sullen of the three. Dimitri could understand why.

As a boy, Tyrus had been very close to his father, a soldier. After he was killed in battle, Tyrus lived with Eris for a short time. She'd immersed him in her evil ways. Having been raised by a decent man whom he loved deeply, he'd felt torn. Mothering a young boy proved too problematic for Eris. She brought Tyrus to live with Dimitri's father who was raising both Dimitri and Adrien since Adrien's father was also deceased, killed by Eris in a fit of mad lust.

Learning of this senseless murder had sealed the pact between the brothers to never bend to Eris' evil. In spite of her blood flowing in their veins, their fathers had been good. Eris might have succeeded in turning the brothers had she selected different men, evil men, as their sires, but she hadn't bothered to look beyond the good looks of the men she'd chosen to breed with. She'd wanted handsome sons and thought her wickedness would be enough to ensure their daemon side would control their hearts. Adrien and Dimitri were sired by Lord Terence and his younger brother while Tyrus' father was a mutual friend of the two. In their time, they were probably the handsomest men in Britain. Unfortunately for Eris they were as decent as they were beautiful.

Dimitri remembered his father with affection. He, more than anyone else, had kept the brothers on the straight and narrow, taught them with kindness, discipline and unconditional love. It was from him that Dimitri had inherited his usually calm and pleasant nature. Calm and pleasant! Those traits seemed to vanish in Pier's presence. It was as if the woman provoked emotions he didn't know he had, and not all of them were good. But they were certainly exciting.

"Dimitri, have you heard anything we've said?" asked Adrien, who stood behind Tyrus so he could better read the ledger that was open on the desk.

"Pardon?" Dimitri asked. In truth he hadn't been listening to any portion of the meeting thus far.

Tyrus' jaw tightened and he looked ready to make a sharp retort but Adrien stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. "Why don't we continue at another time?"

"Fine." Tyrus slammed the ledger shut. "Just let the business fall apart because of a *woman*."

"Tyrus," Adrien said. "This isn't just any woman. It's Dimitri's soulmate."

"Some soulmate. She leaves after a single night and now he drags himself around the mansion like a lovesick gorilla. If that's what finding a soulmate does to a man, then I'm staying happily single."

"Not by the way you look at Abigail Watson you're not," Dimitri retorted.

Tyrus stood, his eyes blazing. He looked angry enough to strike Dimitri, which wasn't unusual. The boy had a terrible temper. Perhaps a knock-down, drag-out brawl with his brother was exactly what Dimitri needed to get him over this depression. He needed a physical release that for once had nothing to do with women.

"Stop acting like a couple of children," Adrien said. "The truth is, Dimitri, you won't be happy until you settle things with Pier."

"What's to settle? The woman is a witch and she made it perfectly clear she wants nothing to do with me."

Adrien's gaze bore into Dimitri. One thing about the eldest Terence, he could stare down a hungry snake.

"I will not go begging her for another chance," Dimitri said. He stood and paced the room. "I've never had to crawl to a woman in my life and I'm not about to start with that arrogant, dog-loving wench."

"And ugly," Tyrus added. "I caught a glimpse of her when her carriage arrived and she's a beast of a woman."

Anger tightened Dimitri's chest and he advanced on Tyrus, glaring. "Have you lost your sight? She's stunningly beautiful..." Dimitri stopped upon seeing Tyrus' evil smirk. He'd obviously been taunting him to find out exactly how much Dimitri liked her.

"Are you certain you're soulmates?" Adrien asked.

"Yes. I already told you. We both felt it. Powerful. Indescribable. I've never experienced anything like it and probably never will again." *Unless I somehow get her back.*

"Then chances are she's feeling as terrible as you are," Adrien continued. "Go see her. Now. Today."

"But what about Python Pla..."

"Since when does it take all three of us to oversee this place?" Tyrus demanded. "Adrien and I can handle it, probably far better than with you around in your current state of mind. If seeing this woman again is the only thing that will bring you back to normal, then do it."

Dimitri's heart pounded at the thought of seeing Pier again. He could almost taste her lips and catch her delicious scent. His hunger for her surpassed any he'd ever felt for other women.

"Go." Adrien pointed toward the door. "And don't come back until this problem is resolved one way or the other."

Dimitri raised his eyes to the heavens. At times Adrien took his position as the eldest brother too seriously. Still, Dimitri had to admit he and Tyrus could always depend upon him. He'd been the one to keep their family together after Dimitri's father died. There was nothing he wouldn't do for those he loved. That was why Dimitri had been glad when he'd met his soulmate, Hailey. For all the times they'd depended upon Adrien, it was nice to know there was now someone he could turn to for his emotional needs.

"Did you hear me?" Adrien demanded.



“Yes, General Terence,” Dimitri growled, but smiled slightly before he left the room and ordered a servant to have his horse saddled.

## Chapter Four

Pier sat in her private parlor on the top floor of her London mansion and stroked the fluffy white dog that rested comfortably on her lap. Her thoughts on Dimitri, she sighed so deeply that two of her three large black dogs lying by the fireplace lifted their heads and gazed at her with their velvet brown eyes.

Since leaving Python Place she hadn't been able to focus on anyone or anything except Dimitri. How nice it would be to hear his voice again and gaze into those gorgeous blue eyes. She longed to feel his hard body against hers, to relish the sensation of his thick cock deep inside her. Most of all she wanted to absorb his energy again, to feel his power. Feed on him and then feed him in return. She wanted her soulmate with her.

Leaning her head against the back of the chair, she closed her eyes. Perhaps it was best that she'd decided to leave him so soon. If she was this attached to him after a single night, who knew what would happen if she'd remained with him for an extended period of time? She could very well have become his slave outside the bedroom as well. For a woman like her such an existence would be unbearable.

Any man who tempted her to give up her freedom was not the man for her, no matter what nature had intended.

Still, if she could only make love with him just one more time...

It had been days since they'd parted and she had yet to feed her daemon hunger. It had been slowly building inside her and now the burn was almost intolerable. She knew she must feed soon or lose herself to madness, then a corpse-like state worse than death. In spite of the discomfort she suffered, her obsession with Dimitri was still too fresh and strong for her to considering bedding another man just yet.

The sound of barking dogs and servants shouting shook her back to reality. Before she had a chance to fully react, a smoky figure that carried the scent of ginger stepped through her door and solidified into Dimitri's familiar form.

"Dimitri," she breathed, her heart beating out of control. Just looking into his handsome face, its expression fierce, she became instantly wet. Her clit and pussy throbbed. Her nipples tightened to spikes of passion.

The black dogs rose, growling, and approached while the tiny white one barked sharply then flew at Dimitri. It wrapped its front paws around his riding boot, gnawed on the leather.

"Get the hell away from me!" He shook his leg vigorously but the dog refused to let go. "Pier, you and I need to talk." He walked toward her, the dog still attached to his boot, and Pier bit back laughter.

She approached and pried the dog off his leg, resisting the urge to run her hand over his muscular thigh. If she did that, then all would be lost. At least she wanted him to stew for a few moments before she dove on him.

"What's the matter, Samantha?" she cooed to the dog and stroked its white fur. "You don't like that obnoxious daemon either, do you?"

"What do you mean obnoxious?" Dimitri growled. "What do you mean either?"

The door burst open and three tall, burly men -- Brad, Chad, and Thad -- whom she employed for security purposes rushed inside. "Forgive the intrusion," Brad said rather breathlessly.

"You!" Thad snarled in Dimitri's direction. "We told you to get out!"

All three advanced on Dimitri who turned with such a vicious look that she feared for her guards. They were, after all, only human. Pier stepped between her daemon lover and the men. "Thad. Brad. Chad. You may go. I will take care of this situation."

Dimitri curled his lip. "Thad, Brad, and Chad? I think I'm going to be sick."

"You are sick," she snapped at him, then turned back to the guards.

"You're sure you want us to go?" Brad asked, his gaze darting toward Dimitri.

"Yes. Now. And take the dogs with you." She placed Samantha in Thad's arms then called to the black dogs who trotted over so that Brad and Chad could take hold of their collars.

Grunting with annoyance at their failure to stop Dimitri from entering her home, the guards left. Once the door closed behind them, Dimitri and Pier faced each other, many emotions burning between them.

"What are you doing here, Dimitri?" She sounded much calmer than she felt. What she really wanted to do was leap into his arms.

"We need to talk," he said in an authoritative tone that sent a ripple of combined desire and annoyance down her spine.

"And if I don't want to talk?" She folded her arms across her chest and glared at him.

"Whether you like it or not, you're going to listen to --"

She silenced him with a hot, wet kiss. Her hands slid up his hard chest and locked around his neck. Dimitri wrapped his arms around her and held her so close that their hearts beat in unison.

When the kiss broke, she gazed into his eyes and whispered, "I don't want to talk right now, Dimitri Terence. I want you to fuck me."

The surprised look on his face lasted but a moment before a lustful smile touched his mouth. He took her face in his hands and spoke close to her lips. "I'll fuck you, you beautiful bitch, but you'll wait until I'm good and ready."

Desire blazed inside her and she nodded.

His lips brushed hers but when she edged closer he refused to deepen the kiss. Instead he took a step back, grasped her arm and turned her around so he could unbutton her dress. As he worked the buttons, he spoke in a low, soothing voice that was completely at odds with his passionate words.

"I've never lost myself to a woman before. I never thought it was possible after a single night."

Her belly tightened with pleasure while at the same time a hint of fear coiled deep in her heart. Once separated from him she thought she could resist their spiritual bond. Now that he was here touching her, his arousing scent encompassing her, and his deep voice filling her ears, she once again surrendered.

He finished unbuttoning her dress and untying the satin ribbon fastened beneath her breasts. Then he tugged the garment down her torso. It draped her hips, leaving her bare from the waist up since she wore no undergarments. Resting his hands on her shoulders, he tugged her closer. The heat of his body warmed her exposed back. His cheek, partially covered by stubble, nuzzled hers.

"Since you left I haven't been able to think of anything but the night we shared," he said. "If you tell me to go, I will."

"I don't want you to go," she murmured, her eyes slipping shut so she could better enjoy the soft kisses he was pressing to her neck.

"Then if I stay..." He took her earlobe between his teeth and nibbled while his hands trailed down her arms then slipped around her to cup her breasts. He caressed the soft flesh and rolled her nipples between his thumbs and forefingers, teasing them to sensitive buds. "There is one condition you must meet."

"Whatever you want. Tie me up. Spank me. Make me wait, only not too long because I need you so much."

"Those are tasty conditions, but not what I want."

"It's what *I* want," she breathed.

A chuckle rumbled deep in his chest. "You like being dominated."

"Yes. Oh yes."

"Good." He dropped his hands from her but she remained still, her body taut with anticipation. A moment later he grasped her arms, guided them behind her back and bound them with a length of smooth fabric. When he stepped in front of her, she noticed his cravat was gone. A thrill darted through her when she realized that was what he'd used to tie her wrists.

"My condition is this," he said, his piercing blue gaze on hers. "After we fuck, we talk. No more running away. No more stupid arguments. Agreed?"

She sighed. Her body needed him quite desperately, but her mind still feared their connection. Yet it was foolish to think she could hide from her soulmate.

"Agreed," she said. "Now fuck me. Please."

His smile faded, his expression lustful enough to quicken her already racing pulse. If the thick bulge in the front of his breeches was any indication, he was as ready for love as she was. Still, he shed his clothes with frustrating slowness until he finally stood naked before her. She stared hungrily at his sleekly muscled torso and long, sinewy legs. Most captivating of all was his thick erection. Veins stood out beneath the ruddy flesh. The head was flushed ruby, the tiny eye already glistening with the first droplets of his essence.

Dimitri curled his fist around the shaft and pumped slowly. She squirmed a bit as her passion grew. Her clit and pussy ached, and she felt hot and wet with need.

As Dimitri's stroking increased, the muscles of his broad chest twitched, revealing how close he was to climax.

"Kneel," he practically growled.

She obeyed, almost dizzy with lust.

Clamping his hand at the base of his shaft, he approached and stood so close that his cock head brushed her lips. "Suck me," he commanded.

"Hmm," she moaned. This was too damn arousing. Her lips slid over his cock head, relishing his musky scent and the texture of his flesh. Her tongue swirled over the head, then she took him deep into her mouth and sucked.

Dimitri's hips thrust yet she sensed he was holding back. More than anything she wanted him to lose control and become as much a slave to passion as she was.

She sucked fast and deep, stopping only to run her teeth along his shaft or swirl her tongue over the head. If only her hands were free so she could knead his balls and caress his ass.

"Ah! If a daemon could die you'd have killed me with pleasure already." He grunted and buried his hand in her hair to pull her away from his twitching cock. "Enough. I'm ready for you now."

Thank goodness. She'd been ready for him for days.

He tugged her to her feet and gently pushed her, stomach-down, on the bed. Kneeling behind her, he guided her legs around his waist and entered her swiftly. She was so wet and ready that she came after only a few thrusts.

"Dimitri, oh, yes!" she cried, her heart pounding and pussy throbbing.

Dimitri freed her hands and she gripped the sheets tightly. He thrust until the last quiver, then rolled her onto her back.

Again his body covered hers. He kissed her, his tongue thrusting into her mouth as his cock filled her in a single fierce thrust. His fast, hard rhythm nearly stole her breath. Pier clung to him tightly. Her fingers gripped his back and her legs wrapped around his waist. Unable to resist a moment longer, she drew upon his energy, feeling it flow through her and feed her daemon hunger. As she approached her second orgasm she felt him absorb her energy as well.

By the strength of his feeding, the raggedness of his breathing and the trembling of his powerful body, she knew he was headed for a violent orgasm. This spurred her toward ecstasy. She came again, her drenched pussy clamping around his cock.

He tore his mouth from her and practically roared from the intensity of his climax. His body stiffened then surged into her while at the same time he drew so forcefully upon her energy that for several moments she floated in oblivion.

\* \* \*

Pier's eyes opened partway and she rubbed her cheek against Dimitri's hair-roughened chest. Her hand caressed his stomach and he kissed the top of her head.

"Now I want to talk," he said. In spite of his relaxed tone, his voice held a note of authority. This time there would be no avoiding the discussion.

"I suppose we must," she sighed, repositioning herself on the bed so they could face each other.

He rolled onto his side and propped his head on his hand, his gaze on hers. "There's no denying we're soulmates," he said.

"True."

"After you left --" He paused and shook his head. "I don't know quite how to say this. It's unlike me. You have to understand, Pier, that while I don't like the idea of daemons attacking mortals in the night and stealing their life's essence, I do enjoy a good fuck."

A smile flickered across her lips. "I hadn't noticed."

He returned the gesture, but continued in a serious voice, "What I mean is, I've relished life at Python Place. All the women I could possibly want willingly offering their bodies and their energy."

"You think I don't enjoy the same?" she asked. "Remember I'm a daemon, too."

"The thing is, I never imagined wanting just one woman forever. Until I met you."

Pier's pulse quickened and she couldn't decide if she was happy or terrified. Finally she admitted to both. "I didn't expect this."

His brow furrowed and he caressed her cheek with his fingertips. "You must have known I'd feel this way."

"How could I?" she murmured. His touch was warm and oh so welcome. She closed her eyes and brushed her cheek against his palm. "You are a daemon male. I've never trusted anyone like you and your mother only confirmed my suspic --"

"My mother?" he said sharply and rose to his feet. Slamming his fist into his palm, he growled, "I knew it! She spoke to you that night at Python Place, didn't she? I thought I caught her scent on the balcony. Pier, listen to me." He returned to the bed, grasped her shoulders and held her gaze. "She is the epitome of evil and will do everything in her power to take away any happiness my brothers and I might have."

"Dimitri, calm down."

"I can't. Not when it comes to her interfering in my life. Do you know who Eris is? Have you ever heard of her?"



"Yes. I have and while I admit she didn't seem like the most trustworthy person, she spoke like a woman who knows the minds of daemon males. Don't think that because we're soulmates I will surrender my freedom to you and become your slave."

"Slave? What exactly did she tell you?"

"She didn't need to tell me that you thoroughly enjoy a submissive lover. What happens when you grow bored with being dominant only in the bedroom?"

"I don't have to dominate anyone anywhere, Pier, because I am a man."

"Excuse me?" She pushed away from him and stood, her hand on her hip. "So you admit you think yourself superior just because you have a cock and balls?"

"I didn't say that. I mean that I am confident in myself and don't need to feel superior by constantly making a partner bow to me. Yes, I enjoy it in the bedroom, but why would I want a companion who can't think for herself? Talk about a bore."

"From what I saw of Python Place you and your brothers seem to like it well enough. I saw your *employees*."

"Yes. The key is that they are *employed* by us. Am I married to one of them? Have I selected one to make immortal and join with me in the binding ritual?"

Pier sighed and shook her head. She walked to the window and gazed out, her arms folded across her chest. "I enjoy being with you, Dimitri. You're the most magnificent lover I've ever had, but the truth is we've only just met. Why should I believe you?"

"You won't believe me but you'll believe Eris?" The frustration in his voice seemed to be tainted by something else. Hurt, perhaps?

She felt his arms slip around her from behind and he rested his cheek against hers. "Pier, whatever she told you about me isn't true. She's trying to manipulate you. She knows we belong together and she knows that if I have you I'll no longer be tempted by my evil side."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"Because if I have you I'll never need anyone else. I didn't believe Adrien when he told me that his wife saved him in every imaginable way. I thought he was being

overly dramatic. Weak. Foolish. I was the one who was a fool for not believing in the power of finally meeting my soulmate."

Pier closed her eyes and leaned against him, caressing his forearms that were crossed snugly beneath her breasts. She didn't doubt that he felt the pounding of her heart. Never had she been as content as she was in his arms, but she couldn't act on impulse. Not when her future was at risk.

"I need time, Dimitri. I can't just -- I need time."

"I understand, but please don't avoid me while you're trying to decide. Let me show you I'm serious. Let me love you. Give yourself the chance to love me in return."

How could she possibly refuse him? Especially when she wanted nothing more at the moment than to dive back into bed with him. Still, part of her rebelled.

"How can this possibly work? I'm in London and Python Place is --"

"We can *make* it work. I won't lie to you, Pier. Until Tyrus finds his soulmate as well, I must remain connected to Python Place. My brothers and I made a pact to fight our inborn evil and never harm an innocent. Python Place is not simply a business venture. It's a place where our combined powers keep us on the right path. A place where we can feed our hunger on willing mortals. Once we've found our soulmates, we no longer have to worry about appeasing our hunger."

She turned and gazed up at him, noting the seriousness of his expression. "It's really that difficult for the three of you?"

"You know the hunger."

"Yes, but I've never felt the urge to harm a mortal. Maybe because my spirit father isn't evil, nor was my human mother. I've heard stories about how it's nearly impossible for a daemon with the blood of an evil spirit not to surrender to the devil's lure."

"I'm glad you've never felt that kind of temptation. Sometimes I --" He paused and shook his head.

"What?" She slipped her arms around his neck and gazed into his eyes. "You can tell me. How can we learn to trust one another if we can't talk to each other?"

"Sometimes it's so hard to fight the urge to kill, even when a woman gives herself to me willingly."

"I'm not surprised." She smiled softly. "When you take my energy, you're so powerful. I've never felt anything like it."

His brow furrowed in anger. "Have I hurt you? A couple of times I got so carried away that I lost complete control of myself --"

"You didn't hurt me. I enjoyed it. One thing you can be certain of, Dimitri, I'm strong enough to handle anything you can give, or take, in the bedroom."

"Good." He sighed and held her closer. His chin rested atop her head and his large, warm hands stroked her back.

Pier closed her eyes and rested her cheek against his chest. "I understand about Python Place and I'm willing to stay there with you, but I must return here every now and then to ensure my business is still in order."

"Of course."

"And let's hope your brother Tyrus finds his soulmate soon."

Dimitri sighed. "With him it might not be so simple. Tyrus can be difficult even to those of us who love him."

\* \* \*

One week later, Dimitri and Pier returned to Python Place. They had sent word of their arrival and Dimitri asked his brothers to arrange for a family dinner so he could properly introduce Pier.

When they arrived at the house, Dimitri took the leashes of Pier's three black dogs while she carried the small white one. The little beast, Samantha, was far more difficult to get along with than her oversized companions. She seemed to dislike Dimitri in particular and nipped him more often than not. Pier explained that she was overly jealous and a bit finicky, which was why she usually left her home when traveling. Now that she was going to be residing indefinitely at Python Place, she wanted Samantha to become accustomed to the house as well.

Dimitri's butler, Anthony, greeted him with a message from Adrien. Dinner would be served at nine in Adrien's wing.

"Please have my bath readied," Dimitri commanded.

"Immediately, sir."

"I would like one as well," Pier said.

Dimitri turned to her and gazed into her eyes. "I was hoping you'd share mine."

She smiled. "Sounds like a perfect arrangement."

"Would you like me to walk the dogs, sir?" Anthony asked.

"Yes, thanks." Dimitri passed the leashes to Anthony. "Then you may have them brought to the same room Pier had last time."

"Thank you, Anthony," Pier said, passing Samantha to him.

"Watch yourself. That little beast bites," Dimitri muttered.

Pier raised an eyebrow in his direction. "She only reacts that way to you, Dimitri. I wonder why?"

Dimitri curled his lip, though an affectionate look gleamed in his eyes as he playfully tweaked Pier's nose.

The couple went directly to his room where three cats lifted their heads from where they slept on the bed. They stretched and approached their master and Pier, purring and rubbing against their ankles. After briefly greeting his pets, Dimitri locked the door to the adjoining bath.

Pier, who had stooped to stroke the cats, raised an eyebrow in his direction.

"For the time being, we require privacy," Dimitri said, grasped her arm and pushed her gently against the wall. He covered her mouth with a penetrating kiss, then began nuzzling her neck while at the same time pulling down his breeches.

"Dimitri," she murmured, her eyes fluttering shut and heart pounding.

"Mmm," he growled and lifted her skirts. He covered her soft mound with his hand and kneaded gently while he ran his tongue along the side of her neck. When he began licking her ear, she giggled and squirmed with desire.

Her clit and pussy already ached for him. Slowly, gently, his fingertip slid inside her. She was slick and warm with passion, so he easily inserted two fingers and explored, drawing tiny mewls of pleasure from her lips.

Again he covered her mouth with his. He sucked on her lower lip, then her upper lip. All the while Pier's hands roamed over his shoulders and back. She slid her palms up his neck and ran her fingers through his hair. Then she felt the tip of his cock against her pussy lips. His tongue plunged into her mouth at the same moment he drove his cock deep inside her.

Pier gasped and tightened her grip on him. Her tongue met his with wild thrusts that revealed how desperately she wanted him.

Dimitri grasped her buttocks and raised her a bit higher. Pier's legs wrapped around him and he supported her completely, his powerful arms pumping her while at the same time his lean hips drove her against the wall. Pier was seconds away from exploding, yet she wished the moment could last forever.

Impossible. She cried out into his mouth as she convulsed, her pussy clamping tightly around his cock and little shivers of delight running from the roots of her hair down her spine to the tips of her toes.

Dimitri tore his mouth from hers and with a savage cry lunged hard.

"Pier, oh lord!" he gasped, his breathing ragged.

When he finished, he released her slowly and leaned forward, trapping her between his hot, hard body and the wall. For several seconds they stood panting and enjoying the aftermath of pleasure.

Finally he swept her into his arms. She clung to his neck and, smiling, they held each other's gaze. Dimitri carried her to the bed, tossed her upon it, then stretched out beside her, his head resting upon her belly.

"I'm so glad we decided to give this a chance," she said, stroking his hair.

"So am I," he murmured, his eyes closed.

They lay quietly for a while, Pier stroking his hair and enjoying the closeness of their bodies.

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A short time later, Pier lay in Dimitri's arms in a tub of warm water.

"I'm so happy here with you that I'm tempted to cancel our dinner arrangements," he said, nuzzling her neck.

Little quivers of pleasure darted through her. She closed her eyes and smiled. "Your family is expecting us and I want to meet your brothers. I'm curious to see if they're as charming as you are."

"Hmm. I'm not so sure I want you to meet them now. Adrien in particular can be quite charming. And Tyrus -- well, he's not exactly charming but women seem to respond to him anyway."

"Don't worry, Dimitri. You're the only man I want. At least on a permanent basis."

"Vixen!" He tickled her and she laughed, squirming and fighting his hold on her. Finally she managed to turn and straddle him. Taking his face in her hands, she kissed him, a moist, warm, loving gesture that left them both gazing at each other in wonder.

"You are made for me, Pier," he said.

"No." She smiled, running her fingertip over his lips. "You're made for me."

"All right. Then we're made for each other."

She nodded slowly. His hands slid up her wet back and his gaze darkened with desire. Holding her so close that her breasts flattened against his steely, hair-roughened chest, he kissed her again. The sensation of his swollen cock trapped between them sent her heart beating out of control. Already she wanted him to fuck her again, but they didn't have time.

"We'd better get ready for dinner," she whispered.

"We'll continue this later," he said and dropped his hands from her, though the look in his large blue eyes told her that he wanted her as much as she wanted him.

Reluctantly they left the tub. Dimitri reached for a towel and wrapped it around her shoulders. Pulling her into his arms, he rubbed her back then kissed the top of her head before releasing her again and taking a towel for himself.

After covering herself with one of Dimitri's robes, Pier went to her room to dress for dinner. She wore a gray satin gown with a moderately low neckline and several strings of pink pearls. The maid had just finished arranging her hair in a mass of soft curls atop her head when Dimitri knocked on the door once and stepped inside.

Pier thanked the maid who left immediately.

Dimitri approached, looking handsome in white and pastel blue that accentuated the beauty of his eyes. His long black hair was bound at his nape.

"You look beautiful," he said, offering her his hand.

She took it and smiled warmly. "Thank you. And you, sir, are very handsome."

He brushed her lips with a kiss, then escorted her to Adrien's wing. When they stepped into the dining room, Dion stood by the picture window talking to an attractive chestnut-haired woman and a stunning blond gentleman. Though the rest of his features looked nothing like Dimitri's, the man's almond-shaped blue eyes were almost identical to his. Wine glasses in hand, the small group paused in their conversation and with pleasant smiles, turned to Dimitri and Pier.

"Hello, love." Dion kissed Pier on both cheeks.

She returned the gesture. "Dion."

"Pier, allow me to introduce my brother, Adrien, and his wife, Hailey."

She offered her hand, which Adrien took and bowed over it. "A pleasure. Miss--"

"Please call me Pier. And the pleasure is mine," she said, nodding to both Adrien and Hailey.

"You must be hungry after your journey," Hailey said. "Dinner is ready to be served. Tyrus and my sister Abigail should be arriving directly. She wanted to take some air in the garden."

"And Tyrus decided to play the part of a gentleman and escorted her?" Dimitri lifted an eyebrow.

"It seems," Dion replied, an amused look in his eyes.

At that moment the door opened and a tall, attractive yet haughty-looking woman stepped inside followed by a young black-haired man who greatly resembled Dimitri.

"You're wrong again," the woman said.

"I don't think so," the man snapped. "The problem with you, wench, is that everyone *except* you is always wrong!"

"Tyrus!" Adrien snapped. "That is not the way to speak to a lady. And if you haven't noticed, we have a guest."

Tyrus glared at Adrien.

Before an argument could break out between brothers, Dimitri said, "Tyrus, this is Pier, the woman I told you about."

Tyrus glanced at Pier and nodded. "Welcome."

"You'll have to forgive Tyrus," Dimitri said. "His manners aren't always what they should be."

"You mean they're rarely what they should be," Abigail said.

"I've had quite enough of you and your insults," Tyrus told her.

"Abigail, come sit with me," Hailey said. "Pier, would you like to join us?"

Pier glanced at Dimitri and they exchanged smiles before she walked to the table and began talking to the other women.

Dimitri and Tyrus poured wine for themselves, Pier, and Abigail.

"Behave yourselves," Dimitri whispered to his brothers.

"Me?" Adrien looked surprised.

Tyrus flung him a gloating look and the three joined the women at the table.

Moments later they were enjoying a delicious meal.

Pier noticed that everyone except Tyrus engaged in pleasant conversation. The youngest of the brothers spoke little. His brooding glance kept returning to Abigail and Pier couldn't help doubting that he disliked her as much as he pretended.

Pier thoroughly enjoyed the evening spent with Dimitri's family. She especially appreciated having female companionship. Other than her mortal servants and the



women employed at her pleasure house, she had little contact with other females. As a daemon, she was often looked down upon by many full spirits and she had no close contact with other daemon females.

It would be nice living at Python Place and having Hailey and her sister as friends. Abigail didn't reside at the mansion, but she visited Hailey often.

As much as she enjoyed the evening, Pier looked forward to retiring and curling up in bed with Dimitri. After saying good night to the others, Pier and Dimitri saw that her dogs were settled for the night then returned to his room. They undressed and climbed, naked, into the bed. Dimitri drew her into his arms and she rested her cheek against his chest.

"Did you enjoy the evening?" he asked.

"Very much. I'm going to like being here."

"I'm glad."

"Good night, Dimitri."

"Pleasant dreams, my sweet."

\* \* \*

For the next few weeks, Pier and Dimitri were almost inseparable. When he needed to attend business meetings with his brothers, Pier spent time with Hailey and Abigail. They shopped in the village or went riding. Sometimes they had picnics with the brothers in the lush fields surrounding Python Place.

Pier could scarcely believe how little she missed her home in London. Probably because she was so happy with Dimitri. She'd thought her business meant everything to her, but that was before she'd found her soulmate.

Unfortunately she knew it was time to return to London briefly to be certain her pleasure house was being run properly. Dimitri wanted to join her, but she refused.

"Are you sure you won't change your mind?" he said before she stepped into her carriage.

"I'm sure." Though she would have loved his company, she refused to become too dependent upon him. She'd said from the first that maintaining her independence

was most important to her and she would not relent. Even though he had shown no signs of becoming the overbearing monster Eris had warned her about, a few weeks of pleasure was not enough for her to surrender to him eternally. At least not outwardly. Inside she loved him so much she couldn't imagine existence without him. Already she wished her trip to London was over so she could be with him again. The longing in his eyes was almost enough to make her change her mind about traveling alone.

"I'll miss you," Dimitri said, taking her in his arms.

"I'll miss you, too, but I won't be gone long."

"One week."

"That's what I promised."

"And be careful."

"Yes. Yes. You warned me about your mother. I can handle her."

"Don't be so arrogant. Remember she's a full spirit and as daemons go, you're young. Very young."

Damn, she hated it when he treated her like a child. She tried to pull away from him, but he tightened his grip and covered her mouth in a kiss so deep and fierce that it made her feel anything but childlike. She momentarily forgot where she was and clung to him, her eyes closed and tongue stroking his. When he broke the kiss, she was leaning heavily against him.

"I'll be waiting to welcome you home," he said quietly, then leaned closer and whispered in her ear. "I love you."

A bolt of desire shot down her spine and she felt warm all over. Hearing those words felt wonderful. Too wonderful.

Clearing her throat, she stepped away from him. "See you soon."

He stared at her, his blue eyes burning with such ferocity that she was forced to look away or fall into his arms. It took all her self-control to step into the carriage. As it drove off, she glanced out the window and saw Dimitri staring after her.

## Chapter Five

When Pier didn't return in a week as she'd promised, Dimitri grew concerned. On the eighth day, his worry turned to outright fear and he decided to travel to London as quickly as possible to find out what had happened to her.

"She probably got delayed on business," said Tyrus who had volunteered to accompany Dimitri on the journey. It was decided that Adrien should remain home to oversee Python Place. They were concerned that Pier's disappearance could have been a result of interference by Eris who might use the brothers' panic over a missing soulmate to destroy Python Place.

"If she got delayed for any reason she would have sent me a message," Dimitri said, trying to control the sick feeling in his stomach.

Something terrible had happened to Pier. He could sense it. He should have gone with her, or even followed her, regardless of what she'd told him. She was a daemon, but Eris was too dangerous an enemy for the Terence brothers to allow a loved one to go anywhere unprotected. Though Pier could turn to smoke, there were ways of trapping her even in her vaporous form. He didn't doubt Eris, as a full-fledged spirit, had mastered the skill of restraining her own kind.

What the hell was wrong with him? He had been trying so hard to prove to Pier that he wasn't a controlling bastard that he'd exposed her to danger.

"I know what you're thinking, Dimitri, and guilt doesn't suit you," Tyrus said. "No matter how much you might like to force someone to bend to your will, you cannot do it. Trust me. I know."

"That's beside the point."

"We don't even know for certain anything is wrong. Let's at least get to London first and find out," Tyrus said.

"You're right. Let's go."

The brothers faded to smoke.

\* \* \*

When they arrived at Pier's pleasure house, they were greeted by a sullen-looking butler who immediately summoned Chad, Brad, and Thad. The oversized guards looked both furious and worried. Their expressions alone were enough to nearly send Dimitri into a panic, yet he prided himself in the level of control he mustered.

"Where the hell is Pier?" he bellowed, grasped Thad by the collar and pinned him against the wall.

"Dimitri!" Tyrus leapt on his brother and with Chad's help pulled him off Thad.

"She's gone," Brad said.

"What do you mean gone?"

"We didn't know until a few hours ago. The maids said they had been trying to get into her room to clean, but the door had been locked since last night. When she didn't answer our call, we broke the door down and found the room empty. We asked in the stable if she had left without us noticing, but the groom and stable hands said they hadn't seen her at all and her horses and carriage were still on the property," Chad said.

"I want this house and grounds searched from top to bottom," Dimitri said.

"We've done that already," Brad told him.

"Do it again. My brother Tyrus will remain here to help you."

"Where are you going?" Tyrus demanded.

"To find Eris. I would bet my soul that she is behind this and mark my words, if she has harmed Pier she will pay."

Dimitri faded to smoke but before he could disappear, he felt Tyrus' vaporous form wrap around him. They solidified and Tyrus held his gaze. "If Eris is behind this, then you're playing into her hands. She wants you to lose control. She wants to raise your anger and incite your violence. Even if it's against her."

"I don't give a damn, Tyrus!"

"You'd better give a damn or else she has won."

"If she's taken Pier from me, then she has won. Without her, I no longer care about my own life."

\* \* \*

For the next three days Dimitri, his brothers, and Dion searched tirelessly for Pier. In their smoke form, they were not only able to cover all the British Isles in record breaking time, but could see other spirits and daemons who were invisible to mortals or immortals in human form. Some helped the brothers, while others who either disliked daemons or agreed with Eris' evil ways, tried to thwart them.

To Dimitri, knowing Pier was in danger but beyond his reach was worse than any physical torture. His temper was uncharacteristically short and he felt more like a daemon than ever before. The evil part of his soul that had been buried for so long surfaced in the face of unbearable anger and fear for his lover.

Early one morning the brothers met in Tyrus' private dining room at Python Place.

"Dimitri, we'll find her. It's just a matter of time." Adrien rested a hand on his shoulder, but Dimitri shrugged it off.

"We don't have time. She's been missing for days and her daemon hunger must be at its worst. Somehow I doubt Eris has been allowing her to feed. If we don't find her soon, she'll be destroyed. A living corpse. I cannot allow that to happen!"

Adrien and Tyrus exchanged concerned looks.

"You need to get some rest," Tyrus said. Unlike pure spirits, daemons required sleep and food to function normally. Since Pier's disappearance, Dimitri hadn't been getting nearly enough of either. Nor had he fed his daemon hunger.

"Not until I've found her."

"You'll do her no good if you can't even think straight from exhaustion. And what about your hunger? You need to feed."

Adrien was right. His hunger was becoming increasingly painful, but the thought of bedding any woman but Pier soured his stomach.

"Get some rest. I'll send a woman to you," Tyrus said, reaching for Dimitri who backed away.

"A short rest," he said, his jaw taut. "But no woman. If Pier is to spend eternity as a corpse, then so will I."

"Dimitri, you don't know what you're saying," Adrien told him.

"No, you have no idea what it's like to lose your soulmate. Hailey is safe here with you at Python Place. God knows what that bitch mother of ours is doing to Pier. When I get Eris, I will make her wish for death!" Dimitri smashed his fist into a nearby china cabinet. The wood splintered and several dishes inside shattered. He pulled back his fist and glanced at his bleeding knuckles.

"Are you fucking mad?" Tyrus roared. "This is my wing you're destroying!"

"Who gives a damn about dishes? My soulmate is missing!" Dimitri bellowed, shoving Tyrus full in the chest and knocking him into a chair which tumbled over backward.

"Will you control yourself!" Adrien stepped between the brothers and placed his hands on Dimitri's heaving chest. Always the calmest and most good-natured of the brothers, Dimitri seemed to have gone quite insane from worry. He'd prided himself in being the "least evil" of the three, but obviously his bad side had simply been well hidden.

"Get away from me, Adrien," Dimitri snarled, his eyes blazing.

"Not until you calm down! We're on your side, remember?"

Dimitri drew a ragged breath. His fists clenched but he turned away. What was happening to him? It was as if he no longer cared about anything except getting Pier back. He would do anything to ensure her safety, even become the monster Eris had always wanted him to be.

"Dimitri!"

"What?"

"You haven't heard a word I just said, have you?" Adrien asked.

In truth he hadn't realized his brother had spoken at all. His thoughts were too filled with Pier and the horrible things Eris could be doing to her.

"Try to get a few hours sleep," Adrien said in a softer tone. "Tyrus and I will keep searching and Dion is still out there. He has many contacts in the spirit world. If anyone can locate Pier, Dion will."

Dimitri sighed. He walked toward the door and paused. "I'm sorry about your furniture, Tyrus."

"Don't think about it," Tyrus replied. "It's only wood and glass. It's not a lover."

Nodding, Dimitri stepped into the hall. He walked to his wing but instead of going to his room, he entered Pier's. The four dogs approached and gazed at him with sad eyes. He patted the three black ones and picked up Samantha. To his surprise she didn't so much as nip him.

"You all miss her, too," he said. "I know."

After washing his bleeding hand in a basin of water and binding it with a strip of cloth, he stretched out on the bed, not minding when the dogs joined him. They were part of Pier, so to him they were welcome. He must have been more tired than he realized, because moments later he drifted to sleep.

\* \* \*

Dimitri awoke to the sound of dogs growling and the sensation of cold fingers brushing across his face. His eyes, heavy and dry from lack of sleep, opened slowly and focused on Eris. Sickened by the sight of her, he leapt off the bed. The dogs stood close to him and Samantha yipped angrily.

"You look so adorable when you sleep," Eris said with an evil grin. She approached him and all four dogs barked.

"Quiet," Dimitri ordered. "Sit and stay."

"Now that's my son. Such a commanding tone. Is that how you got Pier to fall in love with you?"

"Eris." Dimitri sounded much calmer than he felt. He strode toward her, his fingers aching to wrap around her long, white throat and squeeze.

"Yes, my darling?"

"You have Pier, don't you?"

"Of course. Why else would I be here? You and your brothers have made it clear you don't wish for me to simply drop in for a visit."

Dimitri's self-control snapped and he grasped her shoulders hard. He shook her slightly and spoke through clenched teeth. "If any harm has come to her, I will make your existence a living hell!"

Eris' eyes gleamed and her eerie grin broadened. "I knew that some of my spirit had to be inside you. All this fury. All this hate. It's beautiful on you, Dimitri."

He released her abruptly. "I'm nothing like you, Eris."

"But you can be. And you will."

"Never," he seethed.

"If you won't join me in darkness, then you can at least prove that when pushed you have the capacity for evil. That you're not a complete failure as a daemon. Do you want your soulmate back?"

"I will have my soulmate back. We will find her. You know how many connections Dion has in the spirit world. Even if you thwart us brothers, you can't evade Dion."

"Maybe so, but Pier has been gone for several days and is nearing the end of her hunger. You know how the hunger is. In fact you're feeling it now, aren't you? Quite badly, too."

He couldn't deny that the hunger was grating on him, painful in its intensity. At least he could satisfy it at will. He couldn't imagine how Pier must feel, imprisoned and starving.

As if reading his thoughts, Eris continued in a deceptively soft voice, "If she doesn't feed soon she'll become a living corpse. You can prevent this from happening."

He turned his back to her, not wanting her to see the hatred in his eyes. It would only stoke the flames of her wickedness. Still, he felt her arms slip around his waist. His



flesh prickled with disgust but he didn't pull away. The bitch wanted him to wager for Pier and, lord forgive him, he was willing to risk anything to save her.

"I'll return her to you if you do one little thing for me," Eris said.

"What do you want?" The words were ripped from his lips.

"Very simple. All you have to do is satisfy your hunger. Take a mortal woman and drain her to death."

He turned and glared at her. If he thought it would do any good, he'd try to force her to tell him Pier's whereabouts.

"You've never killed for pleasure before." She leaned closer and whispered in his ear. "Kill one woman, an innocent woman, for me and you can have Pier back."

Trembling with fury, Dimitri snarled, "Never. I am not like you, Eris. My brothers and I will never do your bidding. Now get out of my sight."

Eris' expression froze. "Well, well. It seems your love for your soulmate isn't as strong as you wished to believe."

He reached for her in anger and she faded to smoke. He followed her, his vaporous form seeping into hers and holding her until she solidified again. The surprise on her face made it clear that she hadn't expected her daemon sons to have mastered the art of restraining spirits in their vaporous form.

"Release me at once," she snapped, "or I swear I'll rescind my offer and you'll never see your lover again."

He glared at her, but this time when she changed to smoke he let her go. Why was he wasting time arguing with her when he should be out searching for Pier?

As Eris faded in a cinnamon-scented haze, her breathy spirit voice whispered in his ear, "There's still a chance to save her. Take a human female and drain her to death. I'll know when you do it. I'll sense it because part of your spirit is mine. Kill an innocent mortal and only then will I release Pier. Hurry, though. Her time is running out."

\* \* \*

The following evening, the brothers once again met in Tyrus' wing, no closer to finding Pier than they had been nearly a week ago. Though Dimitri had told them about

his conversation with Eris, he had omitted her offer to return Pier in exchange for him murdering an innocent mortal. If Adrien so much as suspected that Dimitri was considering the crime, he'd never let him out of his sight. Even Tyrus would most likely try to stop him. If murder was the only way he could rescue Pier, then he needed to keep that option open.

Adrien and Tyrus also know that if Pier hadn't fed, she was nearing the end of her hunger.

"We'll continue the search of course," Adrien said, "but even if we find her, you must prepare yourself, Dimitri. It might be too late."

"Yes," he said quietly. "I know."

Adrien and Tyrus exchanged glances.

"You're taking this rather well," Tyrus said. "Only yesterday you nearly knocked me through the floor for saying less than what Adrien just suggested regarding Pier."

"Obviously ranting and raving didn't help the situation," Dimitri replied.

"I wonder why Dion hasn't checked in," Adrien said. His brow furrowed and he tapped his fingers on the arm of the chair he was sitting in. "It's been days."

"He's probably following a lead," Tyrus said. "Hopefully the right one."

"We'd best continue the search," Dimitri said, though he had no intention of doing so. There was only one possible way for him to get Pier back before the hunger destroyed her completely. Though it sickened him, he had no other choice.

Tyrus placed a hand on his shoulder and Dimitri rested his over it for a moment before he faded to smoke. He wanted to go find someone deserving of death. At least then he could tell himself he was doing more good than harm in taking a life, but Eris had not left him such an option. She had specifically instructed him to kill an innocent woman, meaning one who hadn't committed a violent crime. Someone whom he could never in the smallest way justify killing. If he didn't obey her orders, Pier didn't have a chance.

He hurried to what the brothers called the common wing of Python Place. It was there that they hosted parties and provided "escorts" for their many patrons. Their

women were well paid and protected. The brothers tolerated no abuse of their employees and their women were, in turn, very loyal to them. Completely trusting and willing to offer their sexual energy whenever a brother needed it.

Wanting nothing more than to get the hideous task over with, Dimitri stopped the first woman he came across. A young redhead called Estella whom he'd bedded many times before. She always seemed to enjoy his company and tonight proved to be no different.

"Mr. Terence." She smiled and took the hand he offered. "What can I do for you tonight?"

"I'm hungry, Estella," he said. At least that much was true. The hunger was almost overwhelming. Unfortunately killing her would probably be all too easy. Perhaps Eris was right after all, and he was his mother's son. "Please come with me."

Without hesitation, Estella followed him to his room. He scarcely looked at her as she undressed, yet when he climbed naked into bed with her, he made a point to take his time, kissing and caressing her. If the woman was to die, she could at least die happy. He wasn't so much of a bastard that he couldn't use the carnal skills possessed by all daemons to make this kill tolerable for her.

When he finally pinned her hands above her head and thrust into her hot, wet cunt, she was so aroused that she came almost immediately. Moaning and thrashing beneath him, she was scarcely aware when he began taking her energy. It crashed over him, making him gasp as his near-painful hunger was finally satisfied. Still the experience was empty of emotion, except for disgust and sorrow.

As he felt her life begin slipping away, he stopped abruptly. Panting, he gazed down at her pale face. Her eyes were closed, her pulse fluttering in her throat.

"I can't do it! I can't," he said.

"Then damn Pier to an eternity of living death," a breathy voice whispered in his ear.

Closing his eyes, he began thrusting again, his daemon soul enveloping Estella's mortal one and driving her closer to death.

The door burst open. Adrien leapt across the room and knocked Dimitri out of the bed.

"Let me go, you bastard!" Dimitri roared, struggling against Adrien's fierce hold. He struck his brother hard in the ribs. Adrien grunted but refused to let him go.

"I knew you were being too quiet earlier," Adrien snarled. "That's why I followed you."

"What business is it of yours who I fuck and how I feed?" Dimitri bellowed.

"You weren't feeding. You were killing her. Why?"

Dimitri faded to smoke but Adrien changed form as well. Their vaporous bodies entwined, sapping one another's energy until they both solidified and dropped to the floor in a panting, tangled heap.

"Why?" Adrien panted. "It was Eris, wasn't it? What did she do to turn you into a murderer?"

Dimitri glared at his brother. "How can you possibly understand?"

"Try me."

"If I kill this woman, Eris said she will free Pier."

Adrien's brow furrowed. "And you believed her?"

"What choice do I have? We haven't been able to find Pier. If she's been deprived of energy this long, she's bound to be at the end of her hunger. What if it were Hailey? What would you do?"

Adrien sighed deeply and lowered his gaze. He stood, offered Dimitri a hand up, then shoved him toward the bed. "Do what you feel you have to. Kill her if you think it will save Pier, but remember it's Eris you're dealing with. Her word is meaningless."

Dimitri glanced over his shoulder at Adrien and saw disgust yet also pity in his brother's eyes. Overwhelmed by frustration, he took a hesitant step closer to the bed. To Estella who lay unconscious.

At that moment Dion and Pier appeared in a smoky haze.

"Dimitri," she said, her eyes gleaming with raw hunger.

"Pier." He pulled her into his arms and buried his face against her shoulder.

Dion grinned. "I love happy endings."

"This one is even happier than you know," Adrien said, picking up Estella and heading for the door.

"What's going on?" Dion asked, glancing at the unconscious mortal.

"I'll explain on the way to the common wing."

Dion followed Adrien out of the room, closing the door behind him.

"We'll talk later about that woman in your bed. Right now I need to feed before I lose my sanity. Fuck me, Dimitri. Fuck me hard."

He knew by the desperate look in her eyes that she teetered on the edge of control. Sweat misted her face and he felt shudders tearing through her body. Clearly she was seconds away from the madness of a starving daemon. Death always followed the madness.

"Oh, Dimitri, please. I need you." Her hands roamed over his bare chest.

He swept her into his arms and carried her to the bed. After placing her upon it, he rolled her onto her stomach and quickly began unbuttoning her dress.

"Just tear it off," she said, her voice raw with need.

He ripped the fabric and she rolled over, sliding off the torn dress. Grasping his face, she kissed him deeply while at the same time drawing upon his energy. Her tongue thrust into his mouth and he met it stroke for stroke. She pushed him onto his back and straddled him, her smooth legs claspings his sides. Raising herself on her knees, she clasped his stiff cock. The heat of her stroking hand seeped into him, making him swell to full erection.

"Oh, Dimitri," she moaned and lowered herself onto his shaft. The feeling of her lust-dampened pussy clamping around his cock sent his heart pounding out of control. Gripping her waist, he thrust his hips upward as hers swooped down.

Practically shrieking with pleasure, she rode him fast and hard. Her voluptuous body glistened with sweat. Her head thrown back and her fingers raking his chest, she drew so forcefully upon his energy that he momentarily floated in a blinding haze of

passion. Groaning with unimaginable pleasure, he rolled her onto her back and continued thrusting into her.

"Ah!" she cried, clinging to him hard.

Her cunt pulsed around his cock and flung him into such an intense orgasm that he nearly lost consciousness. Thoroughly drained, he collapsed atop her. Their damp bodies pressed together, their hearts pounding and breathing ragged.

Finally he stirred and lifted his head from her shoulder. Moving aside so as not to crush her, he said, "Feeling better?"

"Much." She smiled and sighed, a contented sound. Her arms draped loosely around his neck. "Thank you so much, my love."

"For what? Nearly destroying your life? After what Eris did, I wouldn't blame you if you never wanted to see me again."

"On the contrary, experiencing her evil first hand has only made me realize how much I love and admire you."

"Admire?"

"It takes a strong man to fight that kind of evil. You're a daemon and half your blood belongs to Eris, but you refuse to surrender to her wickedness. I love you for that, and I respect you.

Guilt washed over him and he closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them, he found it difficult to meet her gaze. "I'm not the man you think I am. Just before you came in, I nearly drained an innocent mortal to death."

"To save me," she said, surprising him.

"How did you know about that?"

"Eris told me. I know how much you hate her, Dimitri, and how hard you've fought against your evil side. You were willing to consider surrendering to her to save me. How can I not love you for that? I just thank heavens Dion found me and got me here before you actually went through with it."

"You mean you still want to be with me?"

Smiling tenderly, she caressed his face and gazed at him with such affection that his heart leapt. "You're my soulmate. I was wrong to fight the connection between us. I love you, Dimitri."

"I love you, too, Pier." He kissed her and they held each other tightly. The feeling of having her back was indescribable.

Her feet ran up and down his calves. The erotic sensation made his cock twitch.

Then he thought of something.

"What about your pleasure house?" he asked.

"It seems to me the arrangement we had will be fine. Living here and visiting there on occasion, just to keep an eye on business." Her brow furrowed and she shook her head, then smiled.

"What is it?"

"I've just surrendered to you, haven't I? And for the first time in my life it's acceptable because I think, in a way, you've surrendered to me as well."

Caressing her face, he said. "With us it's not surrender, it's an expression of love. However I do have one condition regarding your pleasure house."

A teasing grin tugged at the corners of her mouth. "With you there's always a condition. What is it this time?"

"That whenever you return to London, I'll accompany you."

"Agreed. In truth, Dimitri, I hated being apart from you."

"Then we must see to it we never part again."

\* \* \*

The following night, Pier and Dimitri underwent the ritual that bound them for eternity. Draped in a sheer black veil trimmed with gold, Pier looked breathtakingly beautiful and Dimitri had never felt more complete in his life.

In the presence of Adrien, Tyrus, Hailey, and Abigail, Dion performed the ritual.

The couple exchanged blood then kissed as Dion spoke the binding words, "Dimitri and Pier are forever bound. One soul from two. The heavens have allowed this so the joining is unbreakable. Now and always."

When the kiss ended, they gazed deeply into each other's eyes. Pier smiled, her expression one of pure love that Dimitri fully returned. He knew at that moment neither would ever again question whether or not they belonged together. As he had once said, they were made for each other.

**The End**



## **Kate Hill**

Kate Hill is a thirty-something vegetarian New Englander who likes heroes with a touch of something wicked and wild. Her short fiction and poetry have appeared in dozens of publications both on and off the Internet. When she's not spending time with her family or working on her books, Kate enjoys reading, working out, and researching vampires and Viking history. Feel free to drop her a note at [katehill@sprintmail.com](mailto:katehill@sprintmail.com) or visit her website to learn more about her current releases and upcoming projects. You can find Kate online at <http://www.kate-hill.com>