



Demon Hunting

Book Two of the Orion Authority series;
Book One of the Ashley, Illinois sub-series

Lisa Andel

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Dedication

In memory of Ferg.

And as always, to my editor Lynne, and my cover artist April Martinez.

Prologue

There was a time in my life when I would have said that I was happy just being me. I was young, filled with energy and an eagerness to learn about everything. I had two older brothers that I idolized, and a younger sister that idolized me. My parents were happy, affectionate people, who raised us to be happy, affectionate people as well. We lived in the scenic, peaceful suburb of Ashley, Ohio. In a big, beautiful house. Life was bright and shiny and perfect.

It was all a lie.

I found out about it on my eleventh birthday. My parents were throwing me the party to end all parties late that afternoon, and I'd gotten a really cool outfit that morning to wear to it. There was even going to be a live band.

I was running up the stairs to my room, excited to be getting ready, when the most incredible pain I'd ever known sliced through me. I missed a step, crumpled to the floor, and bumped my way back down to the bottom. By the time I'd come to a stop, I was barely aware of my surroundings, too dazed to move.

My father found me at the foot of the stairs several minutes later.

But it didn't end there. Next I felt the burn of a thousand fire ants crawling through my veins. A shriek echoed inside my skull while the burning grew worse. Then a horrible, blinding flash of light exploded in my head, and I knew no more.

* * * *

When I came to, I was lying on my bed, drenched in sweat, but the pain was blessedly gone. I tipped my head to the side, and found Dad sitting tensely beside me. I opened my mouth to ask him what had happened, when I felt myself dissolve.

I slipped through the mattress, through the floor, and kept on falling until I smacked into the concrete floor of the basement.

Stunned, I lay there a moment, then started wiggling my toes and fingers, followed by my arms and legs, and when I was sure that nothing was broken, I rolled to my feet, and started to climb the stairs back up to my room.

My father was standing, staring at my bed when I walked through the door. He didn't hear me enter until I blurted out behind him, "What the hell is going on?"

His face was ashen when he turned around to gape at me. Then he slumped down on the bed, and hung his head.

"I didn't want you to find out this way." His voice broke.

My heart hammered against my rib cage as fear flooded my system. "Find out what?"

"You came to us as a baby. Your mother begged us to raise you as one of our own. She said your life was in danger. That you were special, and that your father's people were trying to take you away from her. She didn't want you to be brought up by his people, see. She said he was the devil."

I dropped into the chair that my father had been sitting in earlier.

"The devil?" I raised a disbelieving eyebrow at him.

“Devil, demon, something like that, something that was dark and evil, that could vanish in the blink of an eye, reappear the same way.”

“So what was she?” I asked, a blessed numbness filling me.

“Said she was a witch. Powerful enough to call the devil, strong enough to spirit you away from him. But not mighty enough to keep him and his minions from getting their hands on you if they really concentrated on doing so.”

The sorrow on his face nearly made me cry.

“You believed her? You never said witches and demons were real, but you believed her?” I didn’t think I believed it. *Well, not much*, I thought as I glanced at the center of the bed.

“Yeah. She turned me into a dog for a couple of minutes before I was convinced. But the experience made me a believer.” At least this brought a touch of a smile to his lips.

“So what does that make me?” *Devil spawn?*

Dad grimaced. “Dark-witch is what she called you. She said you’d have the use of both types of powers. Said you’d come into your—magic—when you reached maturity. I just never dreamt that meant eleven.”

“Huh.” Hell of a birthday present. I hoped there weren’t any more surprises today like the ones I’d had so far. Frankly, this was all a little too surreal for me.

The golden glow of sunlight in the room suddenly dimmed. The air around us dropped in temperature until we could see our breath puffing out of our mouths. I moved to my father’s side, and he wrapped an arm around me as a chilly wind began blowing through my room.

A swirling black mass of smoke appeared between where we sat and the door. The smoke cloud drew in upon itself until it formed the shape of a man. The figure shook and the darkness fell away, revealing a human enough looking guy except for his bright red eyes.

“Daughter, at last I’ve found you,” the man said to me. “I’m here to take you home.”

I clung tighter to my father. “I’m not going anywhere with you.”

He let out a laugh that sent chills skittering along my spine. “Of course you are.”

I felt myself being wrenched from my father’s arms as my bedroom disappeared.

Chapter One

“That’s it!” My voice was deadly calm as I flicked my wrist and sent a bolt of energy into my bodyguard. He flinched backwards, his body stretching and contracting in reaction to the magic I was using. I knew it was painful. I’d worked hard to find something that would work against my father’s people.

Twelve years it had taken me to find the right formula. To find and memorize the paths that led out of this beleaguered place. All the while hiding my growing strength and abilities. Twelve long, miserable years of living without the sun, or the people I loved.

I pressed my advantage and fired off a series of blasts into the creature until he was writhing on the floor.

He was stiff as a board, I noted as I stood over him. I bent down, stared at his face, and waited until I could see the hint of awareness return to his eyes.

“You tell my father if he ever thinks to come near me again, I’ll be ready for him. Only this time, I’ll be the only one left standing.”

When I knew the Raechon had gotten my message, I sent a surge of energy into him, rendering him useless for several hours.

Snagging the backpack I’d secured months ago, I slipped it over my shoulders, and approached the door. I placed a hand on the greasy, metallic surface, and reached out with my senses. My next obstacle was going to be the Tripor at the top of the passage to the next level. Tripors were large, stupid creatures that were prone to violence, *if* they didn’t know you. Unfortunately, Tripors had faulty short-term memory, so you never knew if one would remember you or not. I touched both blades at my hips, and the two on my forearms, checked the hilt of the short sword strapped to my back, then eased out the door.

Fortunately, I’d enchanted the blades myself. Otherwise they would have been useless against my father’s minions. There wasn’t much that had an effect on demons. I’d learned that the hard way at the age of eleven. Evidently demons don’t have a clue what children are, or they just don’t care. I was put into training the day after I arrived. Hand to hand combat, blades, and minor magic, mostly. They continued to train me until I reached my sixteenth birthday. Unknown to them, I’d learned a whole lot more in those five years than they ever intended to teach me, including how to enchant blades and how to create useful spells against demons.

With a thought, I gathered invisibility around me like a cloak, then swept down the hallway. I saw the Tripor tense, the fine hairs on its head waving as it scented the air.

I dropped one of my arm blades into my hand, let the cloaking ease, and let it sense me before I struck. Not that I had to disclose myself, but I refused to be like they were, striking without giving them the slightest chance.

Even at that, it barely had time to snap its teeth in my direction before it dropped to my feet. Its body churned, then turned into a mist as it lost what was considered its life. It was good to know that my spells were working as I’d intended them to. Otherwise I’d leave a trail of bodies in my wake that would surely announce my intentions.

Once again I searched ahead of me. The next guardian I confronted would be more difficult to get by.

* * * *

I was descending. I'd found the easiest way to the surface realm was not up, but down four levels to the gateways. Each level housed significantly stronger demons and utilized far more powerful guardians. Each descending level held more lethal traps than the ones preceding. The Haithe, my father, was seventeen levels below the surface, lower even than the dwelling of the infamous Thanatos.

Fine by me. The farther away he was, the longer it would take news to reach him. Maybe.

I kept the blade palmed in my hand as I sauntered down the slope and exited into the common hall, lowering my cloak about me before stepping into the room. I stuck close to the walls.

Several denizens were milling about the large, open area. Some few were fighting, but most were just glaring, minding their own business. I counted nearly twelve naked humans among the group, their eyes blank, tugged along on magical leashes by their owners, or bent over the sides of the long tables as their owners or a favored fiend fed.

I'd felt a kinship to these people when I'd first seen them. Until I realized their minds had fled the moment they'd been brought into this realm.

Hugging the wall, I inched my way around the room, careful to mask the sound of my movements. I jerked to a halt as a Xiantrope swung two of its eyestalks in my direction. Holding my breath until it went back to watching a Raechon feed, I finally made it to the far passage, slipped out of the room, and continued through the maze of corridors that led to the pit.

As I neared the chamber, I heard the guardian at that passageway speaking with someone—or something.

I strolled casually inside, like I had every right to be there. I'd done it before, and as long as my father hadn't found out about my activities yet and made it known I was wanted, or a prisoner, the guardian would never bat an eye.

If he did, it could mean trouble. He was a fierce warrior, a Mortidorte, armed with poison claws and null-magic.

But I was still stronger than he, able to avoid his spell-dampening effects. His poison would have no effect on me, considering who I was. Not that I'd ever thank my parents for *that* particular gift.

"Terri, tell this pester that he's not strong enough to descend into the pit."

I let my eyes wander down the ner-Ischmin that was glaring at the guard. I allowed a sneer to curl my lip before replacing it with a wicked smile.

"He's not, but if he keeps insisting, I'd let him do it."

The guardian's eyes began to glow. "You might be right."

Leaning against the wall, I crossed my arms over my chest while the ner-Ischmin tried to make up his mind. I was almost at the point of pitching the indecisive bastard into the pit myself, when he glared at the guardian and stalked out of the room.

"They never learn." I shook my head as I approached the rim of the abyss.

"Or learn the hard way." The guardian also looked into the inky depths below.

The key to crossing the pit is not to try. Simply jump towards the far wall, and allow yourself to pass through it wherever you hit. You always end up in the pit room the next level down. If you try to cross, or descend the pit in any other way, you simply plummet to your death nine levels down.

“Well, I’m off.” I winked at the Mortidorte and launched myself into the air.

I ducked and rolled as soon as I entered the lower room. When I came to my feet, I found myself looking into the eyes of the demon that had been the most kind to me throughout the years. I regretted that, since I had no doubt my father would take his anger out on every guardian I had passed.

“Forgive me,” I told the Raechon. Then I slammed a bolt into him that knocked him out.

I cast the illusion of the demon form ner-Raechon over myself, then slipped into the passageway beyond. Only one more level to go, and I’d be at the gateways.

About halfway to the tunnel I encountered my first resistance. An arch-Raechon stopped me and threw me against the wall. “Why aren’t you at your post?” he growled, glowering at me.

I figured he must be the new head of the guardians. I’d never met him, and I wasn’t sure if that was a good thing, or if it would prove my downfall.

Nudging him back with some of my power, I snarled at him, “Not my time.”

“I made up the roster myself. I should know.” He was butting up against me, and I had to act fast to keep him from noticing that I was a female, and smaller than I appeared.

“You’re mistaken. I’m not even in your unit,” I responded. Just great. I’d apparently taken on the appearance of an actual demon.

I added a little “light” to my aura that the demon would find distasteful. All I needed was for him to look away for a moment. When he shook his head and stepped back from me, I shifted my illusion slightly.

“I know damn well that...” His voice trailed off as he shoved his face closer to mine, then jerked it back. He did it again, shaking his head when he retreated. “You sure as fuck look like him,” he snapped, then stomped off down the passageway, kicking a couple of imps hard enough to splatter them against the walls.

I continued through the corridors, my nerves stretching tighter as I met no further trouble. Before long, I was just around the corner from the tunnel. Or tube, as I thought of it.

This one shouldn’t have been that difficult for me to figure out, but it had taken over a year of clandestine observation for me to discover the key.

The tunnel in this room is perfectly cylindrical with glassy smooth walls. Looking down this tube, all you see is deepening darkness. Looking up, you see gathering brightness.

Nothing else.

To access the next level down, the level with the gateways, you simply had to jump upward into the tube. Up towards the light. Something no demon in his right mind would want to do. Probably why it took so long to figure out. I did get to see a lot of demons explode, though, while they gave it a try.

There would only be the one guardian. That wouldn’t be a problem, unless the previous one had been found, and the news was out. I didn’t relish fighting an arch-Raechon, but I was prepared for it. The real challenges would come the next level down. Since the gateways led to virtually every known realm, they were heavily guarded, and not always by demons. It had been a challenge to come up with spells to combat the unknown creatures I might face. In the end, I figured anything the demons would find attractive would have to share enough traits that my magic should be effective against

them, regardless.

I'd been fortunate in my previous forays to see this was the case. At least at those moments. What they had guarding the passages changed daily, though, so I'd just have to hope that my luck would see me through.

I tapped my weapons, adjusted my grip on the knife I held in my right hand, squared my shoulders and strode into the tunnel room.

My eyes met the guard's, and I saw his hand move for his hip. He carried a weapon there, so I relaxed my stance, shifted my center of balance to the balls of my feet, and bounced lightly while I waited for him to make his move.

Instead he touched the talisman on his belt. "She's just..."

Without thought I leapt forward and brought my knife across his throat. Without stopping to clean the blade, I snapped it back into its sheath, and reached over my shoulder for my sword. I flashed it out from behind me, and raised it for the killing strike. "You even think about finishing that sentence and I'll take your head."

His mouth clamped shut, his throat already healed. He tipped his head in a nod, then crossed his arms over his chest. "You're probably too late already." He shrugged, unconcerned with the situation.

I sheathed the sword. "Yeah, you're probably right."

Before he got it into his head to detain me physically, I ran for the tube, and leapt into the air. There was a sensation of shooting upward towards the nova that illuminated the ceiling, then I was tumbling across the floor of the tunnel room, one level down.

Rolling to my feet, I gave a curt nod to the guardian, and walked out of the room, thankful, but disturbed by the fact that he hadn't tried to confront me.

It took me several minutes to find the "trigger" I'd left the last time I'd been here. It had taken the better part of four years to set the traps beyond this point, throughout the maze that led to the gateways. Of course, the demons had the place filled with snares themselves. Mine were set more in defense of these, and the creatures I would find here. I figured some of my traps might have been stumbled upon, but kept the faith that the majority were undisturbed. I'd need all the help I could get from this point on.

Then I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and envisioned the path I would be taking. I reviewed it again in my head, dropped a knife into my hand, then placed my other palm on the slightly irregular bump where I'd hidden the magical trigger, and activated it.

I immediately set out at a sprint, dodging down the passageway, running in a pattern that took me from one side to the other as deadly, cursed shards of metal shot from the ceiling in a lethal shower.

I flipped over the section of flooring that would open under the unwary, dropping them into an acid bath below. Then I slapped my other wrist sheath and dropped that blade. Armed with the two knives, I sprinted around the next corner and started cutting the tentacles off of the Occulat that guarded the passageway.

Dancing out of the path of the remaining tentacles and ducking under the Occulat's snapping beak, I pushed past it, and turned the next corner. I flung my hand upward, tossing out a strand of power that locked onto the ceiling farther down the corridor, then jumped, swinging over the crevasse that was hidden beneath a slender layer of concrete on the passageway's floor.

As soon as my feet touched down, I released the strand, and raced towards the blank

wall at the end of the corridor. I slammed myself into the rock, willing myself through it. I felt the pressure of dark magic close in against my front, trying to toss me back, then a wrenching in my gut, and a sudden absence of sensation as I passed through, and landed on the other side.

A Jerind-hult stood blocking the passageway. His over-large body hunched at the neck to accommodate his height. His shoulders squeezed between the walls.

I stopped dead in my tracks, and started counting down from ten. If the trap didn't spring by that time, I'd have to use a backup method to get through the hulk. It was unlikely he'd alter his size himself to allow me through.

Since I didn't advance, the Jerind-hult waited, flat black eyes studying me, unconcerned.

Then the trap burst over his head, releasing an intense flare of magic that sparkled on his skin, causing him to howl. I watched in fascination as the spell I'd created worked a net around the entire creature, then began drawing in on itself, shrinking the behemoth as it tightened its hold.

When the beast was no taller than my knee, I dashed past it, crossed an open area, and turned sharply left.

I crouched and snapped my right knife into its sheath, then drew my short sword. A blast passed over my head harmlessly, allowing me to home in on the arch-Ischmin's location. I rose, catching the next bolt of power on the flat of my blade, and whispered up a shield as I wove my way closer to the guard.

He spewed a corrosive tar at me, blocking my vision momentarily as it smeared across my shield. I instinctively jumped aside, narrowly missing the raking claw that slashed straight down where I had been standing.

I struck, swinging my blade from low to high across his body. My sight clear now, I slapped my left blade away, grasped the hilt of the sword with that hand, and drew the sword backhand across the arch's neck.

He stood blinking at me for a moment before his eyes widened and his head rolled off his shoulders. I skipped backwards, away from the small fountain of black blood that spurted from the stump, and waited until he'd started to disperse before rounding the next corner.

Before me lay the arch to the gateways.

I shrank back against the wall, pulling the illusion of shadow around me. Then I opened my senses, and allowed my eyes to *see*.

The slowly swirling fog of demon magic came into view, writhing like a living thing, thick in the air around the doorway. An odd blankness to the right of the arch drew my attention and I knew only one thing could cause that disturbance in the forces that protected the archway.

My father was here.

Closing my eyes, I began to weave the spells I'd worked ahead of time for this very moment. Spells to shield me from the dark magic. Spells of confusion and misdirection. Spells that protected me and strengthened me. Every kind of spell I could think of that I might need. I used them all. My entire time spent in this misbegotten place had been focused on this one event. The moment that I would leave the netherworld and return to the realm of light.

Feeling my magic settle around me in a warm embrace, I eased away from the wall

and headed for my father. I felt him reach out towards me with his power when I was still several paces away. He used a containing spell that I easily abolished.

“Won’t help you, Father.” I continued stalking down the corridor, only peripherally aware of the flares of energy around me as the corridor’s defenses attacked, only to be defeated.

My father shimmered into view, not looking one bit different than he had twelve years earlier when he had come to me on my eleventh birthday.

“You will not leave!” he commanded, his face twisting into a mask of fury.

I cocked an eyebrow at him and bared my teeth, not even trying to project a pretense of affection. “If you had come to me as one being to another, I might have accepted you into my life. Instead, you asserted your will over mine, and took me by force. Now I’m asserting my will over yours, and leaving.”

He clutched at me with clawed hands. “Don’t. You’re my only child.”

I clenched my jaw, then relaxed it, allowing the rage I felt for him to flicker in my eyes. “Listen well, because I won’t repeat myself. You are not my father, and never will be.”

Then, with an ease that made my father take a step backwards, I removed his hand from my arm. I started past him, turning back one last time. “You ever come near me again in an effort to trap me, I will kill you.”

Then I walked into the swirling mists, and straight to the portal that would take me home.

A shudder wracked my entire body as I stepped through the gate.

Chapter Two

I stood looking at the new house that sat on the lot where my family's house should have been. When I rang the doorbell, a man that I didn't know answered. He had thick gray hair, though it was thinning around his temples; flesh sagged below his jaws.

I asked after the owners, the Petersons. He told me—though I already discerned the truth from his sad dog eyes—that my family home had been burned to the ground.

With my family inside of it.

If I hadn't vowed to kill my father already, I would have in that moment.

I couldn't even go inside and soak up the atmosphere that had been home. It was all long gone, not even ash.

With a will that had seen me through the past twelve years in my father's domain, I turned my leaden feet around, and trudged away from the house and the pity that was radiating off the new resident.

I slogged down the sidewalk towards the intersection knowing, for the first time in my life, a total and utter misery.

Heedless of the startled and frightened glances I was getting from passersby, I raised my fist to the sky and sealed my fate with my oath, screaming it to the heavens.

"I swear by the powers that reside in me that I will hunt down and destroy any denizens of the lower realm that seek to do harm in this one."

I shook with the intensity of my conviction, my anger, my very soul.

"Nothing will stop me from fulfilling this vow."

There was a mighty crack of thunder, followed by an explosion of light. The wind whipped around me with a gale force. The earth shuddered beneath my feet, but I did not fall.

When the world righted itself once more, I straightened my shoulders, took a deep breath, and strode down the street.

It was just the beginning.

* * * *

Dylan took a sip of coffee while he checked the figures on his bill. The familiar buzz that told him there was a demon nearby crept over him, drawing his attention. Setting the sales slip on the table, he scanned the other patrons, not really believing any of them were the source.

Still, it paid to cover one's bases.

Among the customers scattered about the booths and tables, he counted a dozen humans that were at least half something else, and four that didn't have any human in them at all. Most of them he'd seen around town, and he knew they weren't in league with anything dark.

A slight movement caught his eye and he turned, just enough to evaluate the people at the counter. One woman in particular stood out. He watched as she surreptitiously scanned the diner. Saw the glint of calculation in her eyes as she dismissed those present just as Dylan had.

He took a closer look at her, noting she was an odd mix of something light and something dark. Not as dark as he was, though.

Her caramel-colored hair flowed freely down her back, ending below her shoulder blades. She was wearing soft leather pants, a black sweater, and a soft leather jacket. As he watched, she lightly tapped both hips, then both her wrists.

Digging his wallet out of his pocket, he placed a tip on the table, then rose with the check in his hand. She had moved to the register and was paying for her coffee when he walked up.

The cashier bobbed the change as she handed it to the woman, her eyes flashing to Dylan's crotch and then down as coins fell to the floor. Both women bent to retrieve the change, giving Dylan an unfettered look at the brunette's ass, the leather pants clinging to the folds of her sex. His cock stretched, forcing him to shift his stance to adjust it.

Pocketing her change, the woman picked up her coffee, flicked a glance in his direction, then headed for the door. *Gray eyes*, he thought as he rested his weight against the counter and watched the sway of her hips as she left.

He paid his check, flipped the collar of his jacket up, and followed her out the door.

After starting his Explorer, he drove the short distance to the lot behind the service station, the closest of his usual parking spots. His cock was still hard when he threw the vehicle into park, and he promised himself he'd take the time that night to find some willing pussy.

He slipped his dagger into the sheath on his left hip, then strapped a longer blade down his right thigh. As an afterthought, he pocketed a switchblade he had recently had charmed by a witch who'd enjoyed the fuck he'd given her.

He remembered her cunt in more detail than her face.

Clenching his teeth, he exited the vehicle, and let his senses search until he touched what he sought.

Then he set off with his long-legged stride, prepared to meet the beast.

*

I homed in on the creature the minute I left the restaurant. The thing was moving fast, but not fast enough. Jumping into my Jeep, I pulled out of the parking lot and set off after it, sparing myself a side thought to go to the DMV. I couldn't really keep driving around without a license. Even if I could magic any policeman that might catch me doing so.

I'd only been in town a week, and most of my time, so far, had been used creating real bank accounts with magically produced funds, finding a house, furnishing it, getting the utilities turned on, and buying clothing and supplies. And appropriating the information I needed on traffic laws and operating procedures from the sales clerk who had sold me this vehicle. All the little things in life that one needs and has no time to deal with.

I'd bought a computer, and already had Internet access. Just another random tidbit I'd picked up from the car dealer. I'd had little use for the World Wide Web the last time I was on the surface, but I was finding out it was a valuable tool now.

This was only my second night out on the prowl, and the first time I'd found what I was looking for. I pulled over into a vacant lot and scrambled out of my vehicle, concentrating, narrowing my focus, attempting to pin down the exact location of the demon I had sensed. I took off at a jog, closing the distance between us, not bothering to

mask myself until I was twenty feet away.

It was a ner-Raechon that was undoubtedly working on his promotion.

There are four basic ways for a demon to rise in rank. One is through the death of innocents; another is to kidnap those innocents and bring them back to the realm for sport. The third, and the one that occasionally came to the attention of the media—the tabloids, at least—is taking possession of a corrupt human, then doing something noteworthy. Last, they could simply kill a higher ranking demon, and assume its power.

I studied this one for a moment while he, in turn, analyzed the house he was going to enter. Reaching out, I felt the presence of three humans inside the lodging. Good, clean souls. Just what the demon ordered.

Thinking of my own family, I felt my anger rise to the surface, the burn calling for me to jump the creature now before he acted. I couldn't let myself do that, even if it would be satisfying. There was no way to know if the demon before me would actually go through with evil intentions, or simply turn around and drift away.

So I waited and watched.

When he did make his move, I was right behind him, following him as he passed through the wall of the house and into a small bedroom where a little girl lay curled on her side, a teddy bear clutched tightly to her chest.

As soon as the demon picked the child up, I was on him.

He dropped the girl and sank his claws into my arms where I had them wrapped around his chest. I rocked my weight back, throwing a little power into the move, and we both fell through the wall and onto the ground a floor below. I rolled away from the demon, and dropped my knives into my hands.

"Hey, Terri, didn't expect to see you here," the ner said to me, making me narrow my eyes at him.

"You fucked up, Welek." I began gathering my power, readying it to blast him into oblivion. "Was it you who killed my family? Did you torch my home?"

The demon started circling me, waiting for my attention to waver.

"I had nothing to do with that, Terri."

Like I'd believe him.

"Fine, but tell me this, what were you planning on doing with that little girl?" I'd managed to work him far enough away from the house, on the other side of some shrubs, so that our activity couldn't be seen should someone look out a window.

He made his move then, but I was prepared. I shot a blast of energy into him, at the same time snapping the knife in my right hand into its sheath. I grasped the hilt of my sword, and in one swift movement, fueled by anger and pain, I swung the blade and severed his head from his body.

Thick gouts of black blood erupted from his neck, indicating to me that he had fed recently. He collapsed onto his back. I stood waiting over his body, ready to hack on him some more if he didn't start to dissolve soon, wishing I could kill him again.

When his body was finally gone, I bent to the grass and drew my sword across it several times, cleaning the gunk off it the best I could. Then I slipped it back into its sheath, reminding myself to fashion a spell to take care of that detail in the future.

I was hyped up with adrenaline, thirsting, craving another demon to kill. One that would be more of a challenge than this one had been. My nerves vibrating, I opened myself all the way up, and searched in an ever-widening circle from where I stood.

*

Dylan followed the woman as she stalked the demon. It was a good view; his gaze followed her ass, enjoying the way the leather loved her curves.

He tensed when the two of them went into the house, but when he searched, he didn't detect anything happening that required him to follow.

Then they were tumbling back out onto the lawn.

He'd gotten his first surprise when the demon called the woman by name. It *knew* her, firing his curiosity even higher.

He started to work his way closer, when he noticed she was leading the demon in his direction. He moved into the darkness beneath a tree, rested his shoulder against the trunk, and watched the pair, interested in seeing what her intentions were.

She dispatched the creature with barely any effort at all, causing his cock to throb and harden with the thought of the power she must wield.

He took a longer look at her then, knowing it would be easy for him to fuck her, wondering just how much power he could gain by doing so. He felt her magic washing out away from her, seeking. Her magic touched him, and he allowed her a shallow glance at what he was, who he was; at the same time, he assessed her power, a plan forming in his mind. Then he leaned back against the tree and waited for her to come to him.

He was Dylan Vaughan. And what Dylan wanted, Dylan got.

*

Close, very close to me I felt the flicker of something dark. As black as a demon, but not as ... greasy feeling, but definitely not human. My head swung in the direction my senses indicated, and I saw him leaning indolently against the trunk of a tree.

He was *dark*. The darkness was edging around him, through him, something very similar to the powers I'd been around the past twelve years. Adrenaline surged through me again as I dropped my blades to my hands. He was taller than I was, six-two, maybe six-three, to my five-six. Black hair feathered over the collar of his jacket, a swath of it falling across his forehead and over one eye. The other eye, the one that was staring intensely at me, was also black, an internal fire burning within. His features were harsh; his bones, defined. Sharp cheekbones, angular jawline, golden skin. A muscle ticked in the side of his jaw.

I relaxed my stance, allowing my limbs the freedom of movement they'd need if I had to act.

He eased away from the tree and strolled in my direction with a loose-hipped gait that almost mesmerized me. Despite myself, the sight sent a charge through my body that collected in my groin. I tried to write it off as a conditioned response, something I had become proficient at during the last few years in my father's domain. This man was definitely dark enough to set off my demon meter, but he was so much more attractive. I tensed, my heart rate elevating as it never did when I faced an enemy. When he was still a few feet away, he stopped and held his right hand out in my direction.

"Nice work." His lips turned up in a cocky grin at one side.

I looked at his hand, snapped the right-hand knife back into its sheath, and placed my palm in his.

"Dylan Vaughan." His voice eased over me like a caress.

"Terri Peterson."

His hand was large and calloused, and his grip was firm.

“Mind telling me what you’re doing hunting on my turf?”

I blinked at him. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Not at all, and I take exception to poaching.” His expression hardened.

I still had the blade in my left hand, and I felt like stabbing him for his attitude. I retracted it, because the notion held far too much appeal to me. Taking the next best option, I stabbed him with my finger instead, in that soft section of flesh below the shoulder, near the armpit.

“Of all the nerve. You should be grateful the demon was destroyed, not who did it. It’s not a game, and I’ll be damned if I ask your permission.”

Faster than I’d ever seen another being move, he had my hands trapped behind my back, my chest smashed against his. His face was close, too close, and I found myself flushing with arousal.

“Since you’re new in town, I’ll give you some advice,” he snarled.

I stared into those black eyes of his so full of life, of fire. So unlike the eyes I’d been looking into the past twelve years. Color flushed across his cheekbones, and something shifted inside of me. This man promised to be infinitely different than the minions that had taken me before.

“First, you have to register with Savage. He keeps track of the hunters in this area.”

I probed him with my magic, and was immediately blocked.

“Second, it’s not nice to take a look inside someone without their permission.”

He lowered his face another inch, and my heart raced.

“And the last piece of advice I’m going to give you...” I held my breath as his eyes dropped to my lips, then moved back to capture my gaze. “Don’t fuck with me.”

He crushed his mouth down on mine, using my arms to drag me up along the length of his erection. I’d never been kissed by a man like this, never felt the hard muscles of a human, male body pressed against mine. Oh yeah, I’d had plenty of demons; or rather, they’d had me. It had been a form of recreation for the beasts that my father not only had no objection to, but had often arranged for, himself. He’d even admitted to me that he had hoped I’d become impregnated by one of them, as he desired an heir.

I parted my lips, and the man’s tongue swept into my mouth, stroked erotically along the length of mine, then swept throughout the interior. My body heated further, my brain turning to mush by the time he released me. He stepped back from me, studying my body with an intensity I’d never experienced before. Heat flooded my crotch, my nerves tightening in anticipation of his next move. “Take your pants off,” he commanded, his hands going to the waist of his jeans.

“What?” I gaped at him, wondering if I’d really heard him ask me to do the very thing I *wanted* to do.

He glared at me, hunger blazing in his eyes, grabbed my shoulders and gave me a shake.

“I want your pants off now,” he growled.

He went to work on the front of my pants. I watched him for a moment, entranced by the thought of having sex with this man. Wondering, at the same time, if this was typical behavior between adults. Or if it had something to do with what he was.

He flicked a glance at my face, his expression hard. “I’ve got every intention of fucking you, so if you want me to stop, you’d better do something about it now. Later, you won’t get a chance.”

Curious, and wildly aroused, I took over with my pants, dropping my sheaths, then kicking off my boots to get the legs over my feet. He was staring at my crotch, and I felt a wash of moisture leak out of me in response to his attention.

He reached for me, flicking the clasp open that held my back sheath in place. I felt the scabbard drop to the ground just before his arms came around me, and hefted me off the ground. I wrapped my legs around his waist as he carried me over to the tree he'd been leaning against. Then he braced my back against it, guided his cock to my sex, and plunged inside.

"Damn." I gritted my teeth as he buried himself to the hilt, stretching my inner muscles as they'd never been stretched by demon flesh.

"Fuck me," he muttered, his eyes going darker yet, his features harsher as he started working his penis in and out of my sheath.

Adjusting his hold on my ass, he changed the angle of my hips and took to hammering into me. The deep, hard strokes set my nerve endings buzzing, and way down inside me, I felt a coil of tension drawing tighter and tighter.

The head of his cock ruthlessly rubbed over an extremely sensitive spot I didn't even know I had. It felt incredibly good, bordering on painful. Then the spring inside me reached its crisis, and the most intense jolt of pleasure I'd ever felt ripped through my groin. Shards of that pleasure blasted through me as my muscles locked down on his shaft and then released it. He drove into me in ever faster strokes, his breathing harsh in my ear, his fingers digging into my flesh.

I exploded again, the sensations blinding me, my body writhing against his, my cunt squeezing him in time with the jolts that shook me. I felt him hardening further, throbbing. He cursed, and liquid heat blasted into my core.

When I came back into my head, I was still pinned to the tree, breathing hard. My body, though still trembling, was calming now. His muscles twitched; his cock, half-hard, was still buried deep.

He withdrew from me, set me on the ground, tucked himself back into his pants, and stepped away.

I found my clothes and dressed, then turned to look at him. Oddly, I felt like thanking him for the experience he'd just given me, though I sensed it was better not to do so.

He glared at me when I opened my mouth to speak.

"So how do I get hold of this Savage?"

"Come on." He walked away from me, and I had to jog to keep up.

He led me to an Explorer and opened the passenger door, motioning for me to get in. He angled his body so that he could study me as he pulled a cell phone out of his pocket.

"Savage there?" He slouched against the side of the vehicle. "It's Vaughan. I found a new hunter in my territory."

I watched him as he listened to the other end of the conversation. Rough, I decided; he looked rough, rugged, masculine. He had a dark stubble just showing on his face; his jeans were well-worn, and his leather jacket had seen better days.

An expensive knife sat on the console though, looking very sleek and sporting a specialized grip. I suspected his vehicle, though an older model, was well-kept.

"I'll put her on. Just know that I'm not happy having her in my area," he said before he handed the phone to me.

“Hello?”

“Who are you?” The voice on the other end was gruff, displeased.

“Terri Peterson.”

Vaughan crossed behind the SUV and climbed into the driver’s seat.

“What are you doing hunting in Vaughan’s territory?” The man bit the words off.

“Didn’t know there were territories. Though I wouldn’t have cared if I had known.

What’s with you guys anyway?” Once again, I had trouble seeing the problem.

“What’d you hunt tonight, anyway?”

“A ner-Raechon.” Why would they care who eliminated the demon, so long as it was gone?

“Humph. Get directions to my office from Vaughan. I expect to see you within the hour.” He hung up.

“You got something to write with? I’m supposed to get directions to his office.” It was going to be harder than I had anticipated figuring out how people on the surface worked.

He held his hand out for his phone, and when I placed it in his palm, his other hand locked around my wrist. Then he jerked me partway across the console.

“Want to tell me how that demon knew your name?” His face was close to mine, his eyes alight with his power.

I felt a flutter of arousal at his handling, and cursed myself. “Sure. I met him when I was living with my father.”

Pulling me nearer, I felt his magic pushing into me. “Who’s your father?”

I suddenly realized that if he really wanted to enter me with his magic, I wasn’t strong enough to stop him. “He’s a Haithe. He kidnapped me when I was eleven.”

He leaned harder on me with his energy, his power inching under my skin, infusing me. “Whose side are you on?”

I felt him breach my first barrier, so I didn’t bother to answer. I closed my eyes instead, and worked on fortifying the rest of my walls.

He released me unexpectedly and I tumbled forward across the console, my face ending up planted in his crotch. He dropped his hand on the back of my head, holding me there. He eased himself around in his seat until my cheek rested along the length of his rigid shaft.

He ground himself against my face. “Another time, perhaps.”

I scrambled back to my seat, parts of my body screaming at me to take my clothes off and jump him. My eyes locked to his groin, heat flushing from my face to my crotch. It took me a moment to understand that he was trying to hand me something. It was a piece of paper with the directions to Savage’s and a phone number. With a hard look, he motioned towards the door.

I opened it to leave, and he stopped me, with a hand on my shoulder. “Don’t let me catch you hunting on my turf again. You won’t like it.”

Slanting a look at him, I thought about finding a way to kill him. Or get him naked.

“I’ll hunt wherever the demons are. So fuck off if you don’t like it.” I slammed the door shut behind me.

Chapter Three

The office Savage worked out of was in the front part of a large older home on the south side of town. It was situated in a neighborhood that was a mix of similar houses and home businesses, all set on spacious, well-cared for lots.

I had no idea what this “hunter registration” was about, but I expected to get a lot of flack from this Savage guy, just because of the tone he’d taken with me on the phone.

I parked at the side of the house in an area paved to accommodate several vehicles. Then I took the path to the front door, rang the doorbell, and thought about the fucking I’d had earlier from Mr. Territorial.

The guy that opened the door looked to be in his late thirties. He had sandy blond hair, blue eyes, a lean muscular body, and an aura that told me he was definitely not human.

“Peterson?” His expression was neutral.

Had I told him my name? “That’s me.”

He scanned my body, then stared hard at my eyes. “What are you carrying?”

“Four knives and a short sword.” I hadn’t bothered with any of my guns tonight.

“Silver?” He crossed his arms over his chest.

“Enchanted.”

“Come on in.” He stepped back, then closed the door behind me.

Since he took the lead, I checked out his ass. Nice ass. Not as nice as Vaughan’s, though. Still a hell of a lot better than demon ass.

“Have a seat.” He motioned to a chair in front of a battered oak desk, taking the one behind the desk for himself.

He tapped away on a keyboard for a minute, then turned to focus on me.

“We keep track here of every hunter in Ashley. I’ll need some information from you.” He dropped his eyes to his monitor. “Full name and address. You might as well get out your ID while you’re at it.”

“Don’t have an ID yet.”

He flicked a glance at me, and I just shrugged. He lowered one eyebrow, but turned back to his keyboard and continued.

I answered his questions for the next ten minutes. He pretty much asked me for everything except for bra size and when I’d last menstruated. I was thinking I didn’t like him very much. Even if my body did.

“I’ll have the evaluator in here in a minute, but first I want to tell you the few rules we do have.” He waited for me to nod.

“Don’t step on the other hunters’ toes. If you change sides, consider yourself prey. If I call you, for any reason, at any time of the night or day, answer the call, or get back to me as soon as possible. I don’t waste my time; I don’t expect you to, either.”

He gave me a stern look. “Any questions?”

“Yeah. I was born in this town, and lived the first eleven years in a house in Vaughan’s territory. My birth father kidnapped me, and had his minions burn down my home. With my family inside of it. I claim the right to hunt that territory, regardless of Vaughan’s feelings on the matter.”

“He mentioned that you knew the demon you disposed of this evening.” Resting his elbows on the desk, he narrowed his eyes at me.

So he’d talked to Vaughan again after I’d left. “I know a lot of them. Just means I have more of a reason to kill them.” Most of them, anyway.

Savage assessed me. “What about your father?”

“I told him if he ever tried to force me back to his realm I’d kill him. That was before I found out about my family.”

“Now?” His concentration was intense, his body absolutely still while he waited for my answer.

“I hope he decides to visit.” I felt the chill in my smile, and knew that my eyes had shifted to the flat, soulless appearance of my darker half.

He shook his head. “There’s no good demon but a dead demon.”

“You’re wrong, Savage. Demons are mostly evil, but you have the rare few that are rather decent. If not for them, I wouldn’t be back on the surface.”

For the first time since I’d met him, he smiled. It nearly took my breath away.

“Looks like we’ve found ourselves a good one.” He pressed a buzzer on the side of his desk. Then he offered me a drink, which I took. We’d just moved to the conversation area when the door opened and a reed-thin male entered the room.

He had to be an albino, or maybe his race, whatever that was, had no color to it. He had the whitest skin I’d ever seen, with white hair and white eyes.

“Terri, meet Dave. He’s our evaluator.”

Dave and I shook hands, then he turned and walked out of the room.

I raised an eyebrow at Savage.

“All he needs is a touch.”

I shook my head, and sat on the couch. Savage took the chair next to me, and rested his left ankle on his right knee.

“Are you involved with anyone right now?” he asked, with a far too casual air.

“Yes and no.” Probably no, when I really thought about it.

“Nothing serious?” He watched his glass while he swirled the golden contents.

“Definitely not.”

His eyes flicked to my breasts, then my groin. “Are you free for breakfast tomorrow?”

Used to being awake overnight, this was the equivalent of asking me to dinner. Though his look told me it was more than that.

“Sure, why not?” He’d asked my crotch, so I’d let my crotch choose my answer.

“I’ll bring the food. How’s five for you?”

Glancing at the clock on the wall, I saw that it was only a little after eleven.

“Five is good.”

He stood, so I slugged down my drink, and got up.

“I’ll see you then.” He placed his hand on the middle of my back as he walked me to the door.

“Terri?”

I turned back to him, and his arms came around me. He bent his head, his lips stopping a fraction above mine, holding there for a breath, then closing the distance. They were warm, mobile, moist. He danced them over mine, the tip of his tongue brushing the seam of my lips. I opened my mouth to him, and he teased his way in, deepening his

pressure, exploring my mouth with his tongue. When he pulled away, his eyes were hooded with desire. "I'll see you then."

* * * *

I trolled the area around my childhood home. I was ready to tackle just about anything. Wanted to, *needed* to get my hands on some demon flesh every time I thought about what had been done to my family. I had just passed the new house once again when I felt the frisson of energy that heralded something dark.

I followed the magic into the yard across the street, and found a ner-Raechon with a pair of windredges staring up at the second story windows. I reached inside of the house with my senses, and cursed when I found another ner already at work inside.

I ran for the closest window, spelling it out of my way, even as my feet left the ground. I dove through, head first, rolled, then bolted for the stairs on the left. I took them two at a time in a race that I was afraid to lose as I felt one of the humans' life-forces begin to weaken. Following instinct alone, I raced down the hallway as I muttered another spell so I could pass through the wood of the door, then flung myself into the room.

The ner-Raechon completely covered the body beneath him. The human's energy level dropped again, and I was out of time. I drew the dagger off my hip, and ran the tip of it down the gelatinous mass of the demon. He shrank in on himself, but didn't stop feeding. So I sheathed my weapon, grasped two handfuls of his flesh, and yanked.

The majority of the ner's body stretched towards me, trailing strings of itself like taffy back to various parts of the human. I adjusted my grip, holding the bulk of the glob with my left arm while I retrieved my sword with my right. A moment before my blade severed the tendrils of its flesh, it realized what I was doing. A second later, it had most of my body encased inside its own.

Worked for me. I *thought* the spell that opened the window as I bent my legs. Then I sprang for the opening. The ner-Raechon clung to me as we sailed out the second story window, only retracting his form a second before we impacted with the ground. I ended up hitting face first into the shaggy lawn, but immediately rolled, having lost track of the ner for the moment.

And came to a sudden stop against the legs of the ner-Raechon with the two windredges. *Fuck.*

I rocked up onto my shoulders and kicked my feet over my head at the same time I placed my palms on either side of my head and shoved upwards. Even with the claw that managed to scratch my ankle, I reached enough height that when I came back down to the ground I landed on my feet. I felt the first burning tingle as the windredges' toxin entered my system, but blew it off as I snatched my daggers and danced backwards a few steps to assess the situation.

Both ners stared at me, talking quietly to each other. I sensed, more than saw, when the one I'd snared inside the house moved towards me. He came at me in a blur of motion, but I equaled his speed, slicing my blades repeatedly through his flesh before he careened into me and sent us both sprawling on the ground. I was seriously getting tired of this.

As I lay there I realized that the demon was no longer moving, that the zitz of his energy was dissipating. I levered him over onto his back, ending up on his chest, dragged

there by the dagger I clutched in my hand that was buried in his heart. Then I heard his partner move, an additional rustle letting me know that the windredges were on their feet. I struggled onto my feet, the bloody dagger held out before me in warning.

The ner-Raechon looked at me with his fiery red eyes, glanced at the knife, then motioned to the windredges. The three demons turned as one, and fled the yard, too fast to follow for long with my eyes.

I glanced back, to make sure the one I'd killed had disappeared, before I bent to clean my blade. Then I replaced it in its sheath and headed back to my Jeep. I started the engine and, deciding to head over to the café for a cup of coffee before my next round of hunting, cranked the wheel to the left to execute a U-turn and came grill to grill with a Ford Explorer.

The driver's door opened, and an angry Vaughan jumped out and stalked his way to my side of the Jeep. He wrenched the door open and yanked me from behind the wheel.

"I thought I made it clear to you that you're not hunting in my area." He pinned me to the side of the car.

"See that house?" I pointed at the one half a block down the street. "That's where the house I grew up in *used* to stand. After my father kidnapped me he had his servants burn it to the ground." I was nearly yelling, so I took a breath, and gave myself a moment to calm down. "My family was inside of it at the time."

Several emotions passed over Vaughan's face as he stared at the house I'd indicated. But when his eyes swung back to mine, his irises were filled with the fire of anger. He clenched his jaw, a vein popping into sharp relief down his forehead as he slammed the palm of his hand against the door frame. Then he dragged me towards his SUV, opened the back, shoved me in, and climbed in after.

"Pants off!" Lust and anger deepened his voice.

I did as he asked, but I thought it was kind of a funny reaction on his part. Then again, what did I know?

The minute I cleared my pants from my legs, he dove on top of me, jammed himself between my thighs, and speared his way inside.

"I can smell him on you," he sneered.

"So?" I assumed he meant Savage, as I hadn't run into anyone else this evening. Well, there was Dave, but I'd only shaken his hand.

Instead of answering me, he assaulted my mouth with his, grinding our lips together, plowing his tongue inside.

He powered his cock into me with the same driving force.

I shot over the edge, convulsing around him, dragging him to the brink, then sending him over with the rhythmic grasping of my vagina.

He collapsed on top of me, heart pounding in his chest. "You can hunt around here as long as you don't get in my way," he said, his words muffled against my neck.

"I'll try not to."

He levered his upper body off me, a fierce scowl on his face. "Don't just try."

Then he rolled over, fixed his jeans, and hopped out of the car.

I wiggled back into my pants, grabbed my weapons, and crawled out, expecting him to be lurking outside with some final dictate to impart to me.

He wasn't there. In fact I didn't see him until I was at the side of my vehicle. He was standing on the sidewalk staring at the house that had replaced my home.

* * * *

Five o'clock in the morning rolled around. I'd showered, but I couldn't decide what to wear. I was pretty sure Savage was really coming over to fuck me, and breakfast was just an excuse. I didn't have the experience with men to be certain.

I brushed out my hair and pulled on an oversized white silk shirt. I was ready.

The doorbell rang as I flipped the switch on the coffeemaker. Trotting to the door, I unconsciously "looked" at the person on the other side before I opened it.

Savage had cleaned up since I'd seen him. His hair was softer looking, messier. He was dressed in comfort clothes: loose flannel pants and a sweatshirt. He dropped his jacket over a hook on the hall tree, then took me in his arms.

He kissed my forehead, my neck, my jaw, and then my lips, working hungrily over them before stroking his way inside. His hands inched the back of my shirt up until he found bare flesh.

With a groan, he cupped my buttocks in strong hands, and rocked his erection against my stomach.

"Where's your bedroom?" he breathed as he licked a path of fire down my neck.

I mumbled something I thought sounded right, and waved my hand in the general direction.

We stumbled up the stairs, still groping each other. At the top, he almost knocked me down to the floor, so I took off, running and laughing, as he growled and gave chase.

I skidded to a halt in the center of the bedroom. Savage caught me up in a flying tackle that landed us both on the bed. He worked his clothes off, still managing to end up between my thighs.

I slipped out of my shirt so there was nothing left between us, just flesh on flesh. Braced on his elbows, he gazed down at me with such heat, several parts of my body clenched at once.

"I can't wait," was all the warning he gave me before jerking his hips forward and impaling me. "Oh, Christ." He dropped his head to my shoulder as he dragged his cock back along the length of my sheath. "I've been thinking about what you would feel like all night."

A slow glide in, teasing my nerves, my senses.

"Wrap your legs around me," he croaked.

When I did, the shift caused his dick to enter me another inch. I moaned, and he rumbled in response. He rolled his hips, starting the rhythm, then building on it, working it harder, higher. Until he was ramming his way into me, crashing against my womb, our bodies coming together with a satisfying slap.

He scraped the side of my neck with his teeth, then grasped a sensitive section at the base of my neck and suckled on it. I exploded in a series of shocks. He tipped his head back, and watched my face as his own tightened with his nearing climax.

Gritting his teeth, he rammed his cock in deep, and stilled. Then he cursed, and started spewing his seed in hard, intense bursts.

He wrapped me up in his arms as we shuddered through the final stages of our completion, then he rolled us onto our sides, and promptly fell asleep.

I wondered if this was normal, or if he'd just had a very long night, and with the expenditure of energy he'd just released, that was all he could do.

Figuring it didn't really matter, I snuggled closer to his warm, hard body, and let

myself join him.

* * * *

I woke with a start, alerted by a sound that didn't belong. Then I relaxed again when a large hand landed on my belly, and began tracing circles on my flesh.

Rolling over to greet him, I was pleased to see the lazy smile on his face.

"Afternoon," he rumbled, and drew me closer, the head of his cock poking me in the stomach.

I glanced down at it. "Happy I'm awake?"

He laughed, and tipped me onto my back, nuzzling my neck. "I've got the strongest urge to take you in the ass." He nipped and suckled a trail down my shoulder.

"I think people should pay attention to their urges."

He raised his head, and our eyes met. I smiled, and he shuddered.

"On your knees. Now."

He gripped my hips and practically threw me over onto my face. With his help, my butt was raised and my legs spread in no time.

He palmed my sex, digging a finger between the folds, and dipping the tip of it inside my vagina. Then he drew it out and circled the bud of my anus. On his next pass he inched a finger inside that passage, followed shortly by another, working my cream into the darker channel until his fingers glided easily.

I absently compared his method to Vaughan's, then forgot about everything when Savage started pressing his shaft through the tight ring of muscle.

"Come on baby, let me in, let me in," he kept saying over and over as he pressed forward. When he'd planted himself to the balls, he relaxed his death grip on my hips and sighed. "Fuck, Terri, you've got one fine ass."

He took a few slow strokes, sparking off sensations in my rectum, fueling my arousal. He nudged me forward, changing the angle of my hips as he bent over me, one hand pressing down in the small of my back, the other planted on the mattress.

His thrusts came faster, harder, his breathing accelerating. My muscles spasmed, then the pressure of an orgasm started to build low in my pelvis. He groaned, moved his hand from the bed to my hip, and powered his cock faster yet.

I felt his penis hardening further and knew he was close. Dropping down onto my shoulder, I placed my hand on my sex, found my clit, and rubbed it frantically with the tips of my fingers.

I shot over the edge, my vagina clenching on nothing, my rectum vising down on his shaft. He growled, then the heat of his cum warmed me.

We lay connected for a while before he withdrew and turned me onto my back. Brushing the hair out of my face, he studied me.

"Would you consider being a consultant for us? We've never had a hunter in the area that has as much personal knowledge as you do about the creatures we hunt."

I didn't have to think about my response. "Of course. As long as it's only a sometimes thing. I'm more interested in hunting these bastards than sitting around talking about them."

"Agreed." He brushed his lips against mine, then settled in for a deeper kiss.

My stomach growled and, laughing, we pulled apart from each other.

I threw on my shirt, and headed downstairs for the kitchen. He followed in a

moment, having taken longer to dress. Coming up behind me, he circled his arms around my waist as I stared into the fridge.

"I've got to run." He kissed my neck. "It's been a pleasure meeting you."

I walked him to the door, kissed him good-bye, then went back upstairs to clean up. Savage hadn't brought any food with him, and I hadn't seen a damn thing worth eating in the fridge.

* * * *

The night was turning out to be a busy one. So far I'd come up against two ner-Raechons, a windredges, and three Jel'arindas. I was currently chasing a Zergot that had gone ephemeral.

Ashriam, the domain my father held sway over, didn't host any of this breed of demon. Don't ask me why, though I'd heard some of his personal Raechons make some rather derogatory comments about the creatures. Kind of funny when you thought about it.

The Zergot had stopped its forward motion, and sat undulating four feet off the ground in front of a hedge two houses away from where I stood.

Willing my movements to be silent, I worked on a netting spell as I closed the distance between us.

The Zergot was still bobbing in place when I was within casting distance, and I wasted no time flinging my powers over it. Then I drew the energy net closed, locked it off, and enforced its containment.

I reviewed what I knew about the Zergots, trying to remember what it was that destroyed them. I registered that someone was nearing, the brush of power familiar, so I didn't pay it any mind. Then Vaughan was looming over me, his expression hard, his eyes flashing in anger.

"You're crowding me." He took a step forward, forcing me backwards.

"I was following the Zergot," I snapped at him, pissed that he'd hassle me in the middle of a catch.

This time he just leaned into me, lowering his face. "So? I thought I made myself clear. Your chasing the Zergot into this area caused the pack of ner-Raechons I was closing in on to bolt."

"Well, the Zergot didn't get away from *me*," I yelled back at him.

He fisted his hand in my hair, and wrenched my head to the side.

"Who's been sucking on your neck?" I felt his body vibrate with ire.

"Is it any of your business?" Actually, I had no idea if it was his business or not. My parents hadn't thought me old enough for certain discussions, and the demons had a different view on the matter from almost any other race.

He glared at me, bending close to smell my neck.

Then he did something that I'd never even heard of before. Not in this context, anyway. He bared his teeth at me, flashing wicked-looking fangs, said "Savage," then sank his fangs into my neck over one of Savage's love bites. There was a flash of pain, then he drew me tighter, locked his arms around me like a vise, and sucked my blood into his mouth.

An orgasm blasted over me, surprising a scream out of my throat. He continued sucking, lengthening my climax for several moments. When he withdrew his mouth from

my neck, my legs collapsed under me, and I would have fallen to the ground if Vaughan hadn't been holding me up.

"Now it's my business," he said. Then he stepped away from me and let me fall.

I watched his feet as he walked over to the Zergot, heard him mumble something, and in a flash of light, the creature was gone.

I expected him to come back, and didn't want to be lying on my face in the dirt when he did. Try as I might, I couldn't do more than flop over onto my back. I took stock of my body, trying to figure out what he'd done to me.

His face appeared over mine, his eyes hooded. "Don't worry, Peterson, you'll be able to move again in a few hours."

Then he was gone.

Chapter Four

Out of all the hunters, there were a couple that I hit it off with. Not in a sexual way, though both were very appealing males. Burghill was easily six-five, and built. He had long red hair and vivid green eyes. His skin was a wonderful shade of light milk chocolate that made him appear terribly exotic to me. He was a fire sprite, the first I'd ever met. He had a sharp wit and a laid-back outlook—the latter quality such a contrast against the other men in my life. Finch was only a few inches taller than me, maybe five-ten tops, with a lean, rangy body and shiny, brass-colored hair and eyes. His eyes were large and slanted, and totally captivating in his mahogany face. He was a spirit-mage, another first for me.

I went out with them one night, about a week after I'd last seen Vaughan. I'd gone out to eat at a pub on Savage's side of town, feeling a serious need for sex, or some really energetic fighting. I'd just gotten my food when Burghill slid into the booth, opposite me.

"Terri, haven't seen you in here before. You made a good choice." He nodded towards my food, then turned his attention to the waitress that had appeared beside the table. "I'll have two burgers, fries, and a mug of Guinness."

Finch plopped down on the bench beside me, shoved my plate over so he could put his half-eaten sandwich down in its place. "Hey Terri, Gus."

The waitress brought Burghill's food, and the three of us set about devouring our meals. Finch finished up first, then headed off to the bar to get each of us another beer.

"You ever hunt in this area?" Burghill asked me around a mouthful of beef.

"Nope. Whose territory is it, anyway?" I drank the last of the brew in my mug, then exchanged it for the full one Finch held out in my direction.

"Finch and I usually work this section of town. Savage sometimes joins us." Burghill shoved a fistful of fries into his mouth with his partially chewed burger.

"Why so many of you?" I pushed my empty plate to the end of the table and concentrated on my drink.

"Don't really know what it is about this particular spot, but we get some really weird activity here." Burghill stuffed the last of his food into his mouth and piled his plate on top of mine.

"Okay if I tag along tonight?" This sounded like just the thing I needed.

"Fine with me. What do you say Finch?"

"I thought she'd never ask." Finch winked at me, and I wondered if he thought I'd just agreed to have sex with the two of them—or just with him, at least.

Burghill smacked his mug down on the top of the table. "Let's head out."

I threw back the rest of my beer, and poked at Finch to get moving. The spirit-mage grinned at me, then slid out of the booth. I couldn't stop the snort that burst out of me when I stood up in front of him and he pinched my ass.

"Save it for the demons." I smiled back at him before starting towards the door.

"Nah, they're too ... spongy."

"Who's too spongy?" Burghill asked as he put his shoulder to the front door of the pub and pushed it open.

"Demons," I told him, and he raised an eyebrow at me.

“Their asses are spongy.” Finch said with a straight face. But he couldn’t hold it and burst out a snort that was quickly cut off as we all felt an enormous surge of energy.

“This way.” Burghill set off down the street in a long-legged stride that had me jogging to keep up.

We cut into the alley behind a row of businesses on Market Street before Burghill slammed to a stop and flattened himself against the back wall of a bakery. I peeked around him and searched the dimly lit area ahead of us, but I didn’t see anything.

“Slowly.” He mouthed the word more than spoke it. Then he took the lead once again as we continued down the alley towards the back of a building that faced Elmwood, its loading dock door gaping open.

A snuffling sound came from the interior, somewhere beyond the open door.

Burghill crossed to the other side of the dock while Finch and I made our way closer on the near side.

I studied the steps that led into the opening and was considering taking them when the distinctive buzz of demon wafted out from the building. Whatever had gone in there was on its way out again.

Then a darkness, blacker than the shadowed interior, grew in size and came closer, until it filled the entire doorway.

“What the fuck is that?” Finch hissed.

Its head finally appeared as it jammed through the hole, and I rolled my eyes.

“Jerind-hult.”

“Big fucker, isn’t he?” I could feel the spirit-mage gathering his magic.

“Shrink net.” I drew my own powers up and started forming the trap I’d used successfully before on this type of creature.

The rest of the beast popped out, then it rose to its full height and scanned the alley, looking right over the three of us. I saw Burghill unsheath his sword, and prepare to attack. I motioned to him that Finch and I were about to strike. He nodded, but kept his blade at the ready.

I made eye contact with the mage, then started weaving the incantation in my head. A speck of light formed in the palm of my hand, and grew as I continued to shape my spell. When the ball was as big as my fist, I was ready to launch it.

I took aim at a point just above the behemoth’s head, drew my arm back, then let it fly. Finch mirrored my motions, his own sphere of power smacking the Jerind-hult right between the eyes.

The demon blinked, then my magic burst over him, and I smiled as the twin nets flowed down over the creature’s body. Too late, the Jerind-hult realized what was happening. He roared, but the sound was muffled behind the threads of our magic. Then he tottered where he stood, overbalanced, and started to fall in a strange slow motion straight at me.

I danced to the side, then went flying as the side of the demon crashed into me. I landed a few feet away, the ground shaking at the same time, accompanied by a dull thud as the Jerind-hult hit the pavement. The nets began to contract, and I watched in satisfaction as the giant of a beast was compressed into an ever-smaller bundle.

When it was reduced to the size of a windredges, Finch flicked his hand at it, muttered an oath, and the entire package burst into ash.

“So that’s a Jerind-hult, huh?” Burghill resheathed his sword with an economy of

motion. “What’s their purpose?”

“Guard dogs, muscle.” I kicked the pile of ash apart.

“Well...” I glanced up at the fire sprite when he paused. “I was just wondering what would have happened if I’d actually gotten to fight it.”

“I’m sure you’ll find out soon enough.” I shook my head at him.

He winked, then turned and started back down the alley. “Let’s see what else is out here tonight.

Unfortunately, we didn’t run into anything else.

* * * *

Nothing much happened for the next week. I continued to consult with Savage and the other hunters. Savage didn’t try to fuck me again, and I didn’t know what to think about that. Some of the other hunters flirted with me, but none of them tried to follow through.

I was surprised by that, and the fact that none of the others I met were anything remotely like Vaughan. Or Savage, for that matter. None of them had that kind of power, or appeal.

Beyond that, I’d had a couple of erotic dreams involving Vaughan. Quite detailed. Leaving me itchy for another run-in with the man.

I finally got my wish, though the circumstances could have been better. I was having it out with a Mortheer that had bitten the head off an old lady before I’d come upon him. I knew I had the power to defeat him, but he was craftier, more slippery than most of the demons I was used to dealing with.

He’d managed to get a shot through my defenses, and I could feel the dark half of my soul blossoming as the nether realm magic wound through my system. The shadows grew within me, my demon half coming to the fore, the fight turning in my favor.

I felt wicked and wild, and loved the feeling. Reveled in the corruption of my darker half. Feeling every inch the demon that was always brought to life whenever I used, or was touched by that realm of magic. Tipping my head back, I howled at the moon, then I opened my arms wide to the creature.

“Come, let me taste you.” My voice was a testament to seduction.

The Mortheer paused in its attack. It took a tentative step towards me, but stopped.

Allowing the darkness within me free rein, I slinked closer to the beast.

“I’ve never had a Mortheer. Are you better than an arch-Raechon?”

It squealed, then started backing away from me, shaking its knobby head. I continued to advance, and it turned to run. Drawing my magics to me, I bundled them, compressed them, then pushed them at its retreating form.

The power-ball burst on contact, covering its prickly hide with a greasy black substance. Then its entire surface erupted in searing blue-white flames.

I laughed as the Mortheer danced and screeched, dropped, and finally exploded. Fine ash settled over the ground, the shrubs, and my hair and shoulders.

Elated, I sucked in the flavor of the night, reaching out, searching for something to quench my hunger. A hunger that was burning low in my belly, growing brighter, hotter by the minute.

Next thing I knew I was flat on my back, my wrists trapped above my head, a hard, heavy body pinning me to the ground.

I wriggled, sliding my knees up and over his hips, rocking my crotch against the rod I felt between his legs.

"Fuck me, Vaughan." I circled my hips, smiling when I felt his cock twitch.

He slapped a palm down on my shoulder, and I felt his magic surging into me.

"You've been corrupted."

"I was born corrupted. Now I want to be fucked."

He pushed. Pushed with his mind, and his power, and in a blaze of agonizing pain, he filled me with his essence. I felt my eyes roll up into my head; my back arched and froze, muscles locked in place. Then I jerked and twitched, wrenched and shuddered in the grip of an anguish that clung with tenacious claws. I was shredded inside as the talons of darkness were plucked from my soul.

When I came back to my senses, Vaughan was still on top of me, holding me to the ground.

"You're a danger to yourself," he said, biting the words off in anger.

"I wasn't in any danger." I'd been corrupted several times in my father's care. It was nothing more than my darker self taking control of my thoughts and actions. "It's like getting drunk. It would have worn off by afternoon."

"Just what would you have done between now and then?"

"Fucked somebody's brains out," I snapped, annoyed with his arrogant tone.

"What?" The low, lethal quality in his voice caused me to modify my answer.

"That's what I felt like doing this time. Before, I've usually opted to sleep it off."

His jaw clenched, and he closed his eyes for a moment. Then he jumped to his feet and wrenched me off the ground. Keeping a lock around my wrist, he dragged me down the street.

"Care to tell me where we're going?"

He didn't answer, just hauled me to his SUV, and stuffed me into the passenger seat.

*

Dylan didn't need to look at the woman beside him to be totally aware of her. He'd been so fucking aware of her since he'd met her that it grated on his nerves. He liked his life simple, his sex uncomplicated. There were plenty of women out there just dying to part their legs for him. But something about this woman fired him up, pissed him off. It wasn't rational.

Right now, he was doing something he had never done before. He was taking her to his place. *Fuck*. He never took women to his house.

Still, he felt a certain calm in the knowledge that she was unlikely to find the experience as fulfilling as he would. He slid a glance in her direction, and felt his lips curve in a grin. Oh yeah, she was in for one hell of a night.

His cock hardened further at the thought, and he depressed the accelerator, eager now to get this woman home.

He was, without a doubt, going to fuck her out of his system.

*

Vaughan pulled down a drive that was so heavily lined with trees I could only see the tunnel of it in front of us. We were abruptly spit out of the end, and I caught a brief glimpse of the house before we pulled into a darkened garage.

He parked the vehicle, came around to my side, and latched onto my arm again. Without saying a word to me, he dragged me inside and down a long, dark hallway.

He continued through the door at the end, and I found myself in a decidedly masculine master bedroom. I would have looked around at some of his stuff, but he shoved me towards the bed.

“Get your clothes off and get on the bed,” he snarled.

Maybe he wasn’t angry. Maybe it was just his heritage that gave that slant to everything he did.

I stripped, then clambered onto the bed, watching the muscles in his chest and legs flex as he took his own clothing off.

“Are you always this mad?”

He glared at me, then prowled across the mattress until his face was in mine. “You bother me, and I don’t like being bothered.”

“If you can’t stand being around me, you have a funny way of showing it.”

His expression darkened even further. “I do not want this to happen.” The words were spoken on an intake of breath, sharp as a knife, even though they were almost too soft for me to hear.

“Maybe I’d better just go.” I started scooting towards the edge of the bed.

He grabbed me around the chest, wrestled me onto my back, and dropped on top of me.

“Or not.” I stared into his deep, dark eyes, and saw the most incredible heat burning inside of him.

The fire called out to me, drew me in, flamed an answering response in my breasts, my groin. I arched against him, curled my hips, and rubbed my vulva along the length of his shaft.

He burst into a frenzy of activity, biting at my lips, stroking them with his tongue before thrusting it inside. His hands cupped my buttocks, urging my legs higher around his back. Flexing his hips, he entered me, burying his entire penis inside of me. He immediately set a furious pace, stabbing his cock into my core.

I raked my fingers through his hair, tangled them through the locks at the base of his skull, dueled with his tongue as I powered my hips ever faster to match his.

He dragged his lips across my cheek, then down the side of my neck. I felt the scrape of his fangs just before he drove them into my flesh.

My world exploded. I became hyperaware of the texture of his skin, the roughness of his hands on my ass, the firm pressure of his lips on my neck. The sensual draw of my blood into his mouth shot arcs of pleasure to my breasts, my clit. I was intensely aware of the flare of his cock head as it rubbed the walls of my sheath, the veins that rode its surface trailing sensation along my nerves.

The climax that claimed me started low in my groin before blasting outward, through my body, through my brain. When his cock swelled and hardened further as his own crisis neared, I blew apart again.

Sobbing, I convulsed around his dick, and clutched desperately at him where my fingers were tangled in his hair. He buried his cock in me completely; his shaft throbbed, then filled me with his seed.

Time stilled, then moved forward in slow motion, our heartbeats timing down, growing fainter. Our lungs expanding and contracting less and less.

Then in a rush, time accelerated, and we were left lying there, panting and sweaty, still clinging to each other with iron grips.

He shook himself, and when his eyes met mine, something moved through his that I couldn't define. He stared at me for so long, I dropped my gaze to his jaw, convincing myself I was interested in studying his face.

It was composed of sharp edges and angles. His face was basically rectangular, the jaw narrowing down to a squared chin. High cheekbones, the flesh beneath them dipping inward. His eyebrows were two straight black slashes, with just the hint of an angle near the outer edges. Large eyes, evenly spaced and slightly-almond shaped, beside a straight, thin nose, that led to his mouth. Lower lip slightly fuller than the upper.

With his black hair tumbled over his forehead, and the shadow of whiskers on his cheeks, he was the most incredibly masculine man I'd ever seen. If he'd been a were, I'd have bet he'd be a leopard or a panther, one of the large, sleek felines.

He withdrew, then stood looking down at my face, his expression still unreadable. "On your knees. Back up to me."

Interested in what he had planned, I backed across the bed until I bumped into him. He positioned my body the way he wanted it and told me to stay put. I glanced at him over my shoulder and watched as he went to his nightstand and withdrew a tube from it.

He squirted some gel into his hand, then stroked the substance over his erection. Caught another dollop on his fingers, which he worked into my rectum. He dropped the tube on the floor, pressed the head of his cock against my anus, splayed his hands around my hips, tensed, then speared into me in one violent thrust, burying his dick to the hilt.

I exhaled harshly, threw my head back and clenched my teeth, but the expected burn from his invasion didn't happen. As he began to pump, I experienced nothing more than a biting pleasure. A pleasure that was even now building towards culmination.

I felt him getting larger, and not just the part of him that was pumping in and out of me. His hands covered more of my hips, his fingers grew harder, and his palms took on a tougher, leathery feel.

A peek over my shoulder confirmed my suspicions. He'd partially shifted, even though I was sure he wasn't a were. His hair, still long, clung now to the back of his neck, down over his shoulders, and down the outside of his arms. His hands were halfway between human hands and paws.

As I watched, his eyes turned a deep golden color and his chest sprouted a fine pelt of black hair that tapered as it neared his waist. Definitely a large, predatory feline of some kind.

He snarled at me and stabbed me with his cock to get my attention back on what we were doing. Bending over my back, he nudged my face with his head, and nipped my shoulder.

"Down in front." His voice was more guttural, deeper than before.

I lowered myself to my forearms. He rumbled, a deep resonating sound of approval, before riding me with a wild animal abandon.

I came just before he hunched over me, grabbed my shoulder between his teeth, and started spewing his release into my dark depths.

He continued to come, a steady vibration rolling through his chest and into me where he lay across my back. As the tremors slowly subsided from his body, I felt him shifting back to his human form.

Then he simply shoved me over on the bed, flopped down on his face, and fell asleep.

* * * *

He slammed me awake the next morning. I found myself on my back, legs spread high and wide.

He kept at me until we'd both come more than once, then he rolled out of bed and sauntered away.

I heard water running, so I dragged myself after him, stepped into the shower, and was immediately pinned to the tile wall as he devoured my mouth.

Then he let me go, and began washing his hair.

I wished, and not for the first time, that I'd been allowed to grow up with my family so I'd know how people were supposed to act towards each other. Then I cursed myself for not having paid more attention the first eleven years I'd had the opportunity to learn, not allowing myself to rationalize it away as being too young to have done so. No, I'd been too involved being a kid, not thinking ahead.

It left me ill-prepared to pick up on the signals men sent me now, or to be able to tell what Vaughan's actions really meant. As it was, my formative years, sexually speaking, had been spent in Ashriam with the demons, my time divided between bouts of sex with various creatures my father sent to impregnate me, or learning how to fight, how to use my magic, and finding the path out of my father's domain.

Not a lot for me to work with here.

I washed as quickly as I could, and still Vaughan left the shower before I was done.

After I dressed, I wandered about his house in search of him, finally finding him in the kitchen, cooking.

I was thoroughly fascinated with the fact that he could cook. I'd spent some time, since I'd left my father's, trying to learn, but so far the skill was escaping me. Making an effort not to distract him, I moved quietly to his side and watched as he worked two large frying pans filled with slabs of meat.

He flicked his eyes in my direction, repeatedly, tension visible in the set of his muscles, but he didn't say anything, so I didn't have a clue what was going on in his mind. I watched as he scooped the meat out of the pan onto a platter, then set the dish on the table. He glanced at a chair, shook his head, and twisted around enough to look back at me.

He was up against me in three long strides. His hands locked around my upper arms, hair falling into his face as he bent over me.

"I've got to know," he rasped.

Then a shaft of pain shot through my head, and a second one through my heart. My legs buckled, but he held me up with a firm grip. I tried to scream, but even that was beyond my control.

This was different from what it had been last night. This was no saving energy; this was harsh, invasive. The pain became brighter, larger as I felt his essence pour into me. I felt him move, knocking down walls, pressing hard against others. His power swirled throughout my system, along my muscles, my veins. Shards of agony spiked my brain as he invaded as many crevices of it as he could.

Then, in a sudden rush of magic, he sucked everything of himself out of me between one beat of my heart and the next.

I felt myself losing consciousness, and struggled to stay present. He shook me, causing my head to jerk back and forth on my neck.

“You will not pass out,” Vaughan insisted, his expression fierce, eyes glittering with the remnants of his power.

Blinking wildly, I first focused on those eyes, then let my gaze drop to his mouth when the magic there threatened to suck me in. Staring at his lips, I felt the first stirrings of anger. I knew anger well. It was one of the few emotions that reigned high in my father’s realm.

Pulling that fiery emotion close around my body, I steeled my spine and raised my eyes once again to his.

“You can take your hands off of me now.” I was pleased that my voice was low and cool.

“I don’t think so.” He crowded closer, forcing my back against the counter, his front tight to mine.

“Very well, then.” I felt the side of my mouth curve in a smile that I knew wasn’t pleasant. I grabbed my power, squeezed it into laser fineness, and pierced straight into his head through his eye.

I had to give him credit when he didn’t even jerk in reaction to my intrusion.

Once inside, I let my essence expand and filter through his thoughts and memories. I didn’t pay close attention to what I came across, as I was searching for one thing in particular. I kept filling him up until I brushed across his *ego*, the tight bright spot within all of us that makes us who we are. I curled around that central core and let myself sink into it, explore it, feel the very core of *him*.

There was a rush of sensation as another magic flared up around me, circled me, washed through me. Then it enclosed my power in its own and drew me outward, ever outward, until it had me untangled from the various nooks I’d invaded. When I was clear of his mind, that other energy took hold of mine and very neatly threw me out.

I was back in my body, staring into Vaughan’s eyes. He looked pissed; I was feeling better. Even though he’d shown me that he was the more powerful of the two of us.

“I’m starved,” I said and tried to slip around his side.

His fingers tightened, digging into my flesh, and I suddenly realized it wasn’t anger I’d seen burning in his eyes.

His mouth came down on mine with enough force to bruise. He gripped the back of my head with one hand, his other arm like an iron bar across my back. He held me immobile while he ravished my mouth and ground his arousal into my stomach.

He moved his hands to the front of his jeans, breaking away from my lips for just a moment.

“Take them off, or I’ll tear them off,” he said, flicking a heated glance at my groin.

I pulled my pants off again, rolling my eyes, wondering why we’d bothered to dress in the first place. I kicked out of the legs just before he picked me up and carried me to the table.

He set me down on top, pushing on my shoulder until I was lying flat on my back next to the platter of meat. I wondered absently if there was any significance in that.

I felt his magic enter me first, calling my powers up, spiraling together with them when they met. Then his cock was inside of me, deep and hard and fast, so fast that a whoosh of air left my lungs.

I heard him mumbling something under his breath, but it didn’t matter to me that I couldn’t make out what he was saying. With his body inside mine, his magic mating with

mine, I was lost in the most incredible sensations.

My orgasm burst over me in a series of shock waves, muscular convulsions, and electrical charges. Our combined energies sparked jolts of power that coincided with the clenching of my cunt.

“Tromhad, tromhad.” Vaughan’s voice grew louder the closer he came to his own release. *“Mo cridhe!”* he shouted, his power flashing hotter, throwing me into another climax. Then his semen jetted out of his shaft as he joined me in release.

He stood, buried deep, his fingers locked around my hips, his eyes glowing with his magic. He grinned, showing me his fangs as he withdrew, and put himself back together. Then he walked over to the cupboards, removed two plates, and retrieved silverware from a drawer.

He handed me one of the plates and a set of tools when he returned, then slouched into a chair, and helped himself to the food.

I dug in. I spared only a glance or two in his direction while we ate, wondering what in the hell had just happened, but not wanting to ask. When we were both finished, he dropped our things in the sink, and left the room. Since he’d driven me here, and I wasn’t sure he was going to offer me a ride home, I tugged my pants and boots back on, then tracked him down once again. He was in the closet in his study that he used for storing his arms.

“Could you give me a ride home?” I leaned against the door frame and watched as he continued to select weapons.

“Yes.” He opened another drawer, and didn’t pay any more attention to me.

I waited, my patience starting to wear thin. When I was just about to snap, he finished, and turned towards me.

He pinned me to the wall with his chest and narrowed his eyes at me as a tic started working in his jaw. “I don’t even want to sense you’ve been near me for the next few days.”

I tried to take a deep calming breath, but he was shoving too hard against me for that, so I rolled my eyes. “Get a grip, Vaughan. I don’t do it on purpose to piss you off.”

He grabbed a handful of my hair, and I thought he was going to kiss me again. Instead he held me in place while he bent to my ear.

“Just knowing you’re alive pisses me off.”

Even without the benefit of normal parents, I was quite certain that was not a compliment. “Then why do you keep fucking me?”

“That...” He spun away from me. “—is a very good question.” With a stiffness to his stride, he walked out of the room.

*

Dylan dropped the woman off in front of her house and drove away as soon as she’d shut the door. He spent several minutes cursing, just because, then several more minutes thinking about the feel of her around his cock.

“Fuck.” He slammed the heel of his hand against the steering wheel.

He just knew she was going to complicate his life.

Chapter Five

I woke from my nap to an insistent rapping on my bedroom window. Scootching over to the side of the bed, I leaned across the gap and pulled the curtain aside, surprised to see one of my father's arch-Raechons quivering nervously outside.

I opened the window and the demon slithered into my room.

"Close the drapes," he hissed, so I dropped them back into place.

"Urian, what are you doing here?"

His eyes flicked to my breasts, so I rolled out of bed and went to the closet for my robe.

"I need your help." Urian moved so close behind me I felt the prickle of his power along my back.

"Why?" I took a step away before I turned to face him.

"Your father has called a *Deramento* against me." He moved closer to me again.

I put a hand on his chest to keep some space between us. "Why did he do that?"

The demon *fluxed*—expanded, then contracted, a sign of embarrassment among their kind. "I wouldn't eat a human he'd ordered me to."

"All right, I'm going to ask, why not? Why didn't you eat the human?"

He flicked his eyes at me, then away. "She'd done nothing to deserve it."

I tried to stop the smile that was threatening to bloom across my face. Urian had always been kind to me. Not that it had stopped him from fucking me; he'd just treated me differently than many of the others when he did.

"I'll do what I can to help," I said, though I had no idea how I would keep him safe and hidden from my father's minions.

He swept me up into his arms. "Thank you."

I felt the sucking emptiness inside of him then, and knew that he'd been too long between feedings. "Come on." I nudged him towards my bed. "I'm only doing this because I don't have any other sources for you yet."

"I understand." But his empty eyes lit with something that I'd never seen in demon eyes before.

Dropping my robe beside the bed, I knelt on the edge, bracing myself for what was about to happen.

His body flowed over mine, a heavy, liquid blanket that was so unlike the rigid firmness of Vaughan that I shivered. He wrapped himself around me, suctioning to my breasts and my clitoris, a fact that surprised me since the demons had failed to pay more than the necessary attention to those areas for the seven years they'd been bedding me in my father's realm.

Then he probed my vagina with an extrusion of his body that grew firmer after he'd entered me. "I've been studying the ways of humans," Urian whispered as the extension of matter inside my channel became rigid.

He started moving it, in and out of me in a spiral fashion that was actually quite pleasant.

"I'll say you have, but you might want to concentrate on feeding." I wasn't letting him fuck me for the pleasure of it, after all.

The reminder had him alter the shaft inside of me to its familiar texture and consistency. A second, smaller extension worked its way into my rectum, stroking in time with his primary member. I'd never thought of it before, but both shafts were fully functional. Different from Vaughan's, more fluid, able to fill areas of me that the human body couldn't reach. At the same time, however, it was less enjoyable, as it caused less friction with my inner muscles and the nerves that flourished there.

He coordinated his movements with the sucking action on my other regions, and I found myself shooting over the edge of an orgasm without warning. I buried my teeth in my lip to keep from crying out, and as my body writhed and shuddered, he drank the energy of my release.

He continued fucking me for over an hour, bringing me several times, feasting on the only form of energy I'd allow him to have. It was the only type of energy I'd allowed any of the demons to have, once I'd figured out how to keep them from feeding off my magic and my life-force.

When he was finally sated, he withdrew from around my body, and sat down next to me. "Will you teach me how to pass as human?"

I looked at him, knowing it would be a major task. "I'll try." It was all I could offer him, realistically.

* * * *

Urian stayed at my house while I went out to hunt; he'd stick to my basement where we'd set up a mattress. As I was cruising past the mall, my cell phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Get to my office, now." Savage bit the words out, and hung up.

I turned at the next corner and began making my way in his direction.

Ten minutes later I pulled into his parking area and spotted him waiting for me on the front porch, which surprised me.

"Hey, Savage," I called as I trotted up the stairs.

He embraced me and sniffed my head and shoulders before he spoke. "Dave was right. You fucked a demon." He shoved me away, wiping his hands on his thighs.

"I *fed* a demon," I corrected, though I wasn't sure he'd get the distinction.

He slanted a look at me that said he did, but he still wasn't pleased.

"Come on." He opened the door, and I was left to follow behind him as he strode off to his office.

Once inside, he poured us both a drink and motioned for me to take a seat on the couch. He placed the glasses on the coffee table, then sat next to me, close enough that our thighs were pressed together.

"Why?"

"My father called a death hunt for him because he refused to eat an innocent human. I don't know how long it took him to find me, but when he did, he was just about used up."

"So what are you planning on doing with him now?" Savage leaned back against the couch, his hand tracing circles on my back.

"He's asked me to help him find a way to avoid my father and his people, and he's asked me to teach him how to pass as human."

"You plan on being his food while you're at it?"

I wasn't sure I liked the tone of his voice. "I didn't want to be his food tonight."

"I'll see what I can arrange for you in the way of help with that." He moved his hand up my ribs, and brushed the side of my breast.

I turned towards him to ask him what kind of help he meant, when he pulled me to his chest and covered my lips with his. He worked my mouth with a savage hunger, nipping at my lips, invading with his tongue. When he broke from the kiss, he'd managed to wrestle me onto my back on the couch and was wedged between my legs.

His eyes were heavy with lust as he bent to my neck and sucked on my flesh. He growled, then nipped me lightly as he suckled.

"Vaughan thinks to stop me?" His voice was deeper, huskier than normal when he spoke.

"Huh?" I had no idea what he was talking about.

"He's marked you." Savage licked both sides of my neck, slowly from shoulder to ear. "He's marked you more than once."

His hands moved to the front of my pants, worked the button loose, and had just reached for the zipper when the door to his office banged open and heavy footsteps strode into the room. Since the top of my head faced the door, I couldn't see who had entered.

"Fuck the woman on your own time, Savage," a male barked, his voice laced with laughter.

Savage raised his head but didn't get off me. "This had better be good, Regis."

The man dropped into a chair across from us, and I got my first look at him. He was big. Muscular. Hairy. He had this wild mane of golden hair that sprayed around his head and fell to the center of his chest. His skin was a caramel color, his eyes a warm brown. He had a blocky face, sort of rough cut, but despite that—or maybe because of that—he was handsome. I'd never seen him before, but that didn't surprise me. There were still a number of registered hunters I'd yet to advise.

"I came across a pack of arch-Raechons." He shoved a clump of hair out of his face, only to have it fall back when he moved his hand away. "When I say a pack, I'm talking a dozen or so of them, together. I don't know what they're hunting, but I'm asking for reinforcements."

Savage looked at me, and I knew we were both thinking of the demon in my basement.

"I'll go," I told him.

"The hell you will. They know you; we'd lose the edge if they saw you coming towards them." Savage lifted himself off of me, then helped me upright. "Where'd you see them?" He dug into his pocket and removed his cell phone.

"Fifth and Dahlia." Regis turned his attention to me, now that I was sitting. His eyes skimmed over my body, coming to rest on my breasts. "Who's the girl?"

"Terri Peterson. She's our new hunter and demon expert." Savage hit the speed dial and waited for the call to be answered.

Regis raised an eyebrow at me. "Since when do you take a personal interest in any of the hunters?"

Evidently I was missing something here.

"Since Terri," Savage said as he moved behind his desk.

"Well, well." Regis got out of his chair and came to sit beside me on the couch. He leaned towards me, inhaled deeply, then sat back. "You've been a busy girl." His eyes

had darkened.

“What’s it to you?” I felt my shadow side rising in response to his tone.

“You’re either one of us, or you’re prey. You smell like prey.”

I saw the bones in his face shift slightly.

Faster than a human, he had me pinned beneath him. He smiled, but it wasn’t pretty. He was showing me his teeth, the canines wickedly long and lethal looking.

“Bear,” I said, just before Savage picked the man up and tossed him onto the coffee table.

“Regis, I’m only going to tell you once. I know what and who Terri is; you only need to know that she’s one of mine.”

“She reeks of demon.” He pushed up off the table, flicking an annoyed glance at the drinks he’d knocked to the floor before returning to the chair. He glowered at me.

“I know. I was working on removing that stench when you arrived.”

I shot a look at Savage. I didn’t get it. Was he just removing the smell, was he replacing it with his own, or did he just want to fuck me?

“What’s Vaughan going to say about that?” Regis looked at Savage, then went back to staring at me.

“That’s my business, as well.” Savage spoke in a low growl. “Now I’ve got some more calls to make, unless you want to face the demons alone.”

“Humph.” Regis crossed his arms over his chest, but kept his mouth shut while Savage contacted several other hunters.

“Savage?” I leaned forward, keeping the bear in my peripheral vision. He held his body tense, prepared to strike, and I didn’t like it.

Savage stopped in mid-motion of dialing his phone again.

“I think you should know that there are others with the arch-Raechons that you haven’t seen yet.”

Regis’s lips parted, allowing me a small glimpse of his teeth.

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve seen him send out death squads before.” I tried to picture in my head the composition of one of those groups. “The arch-Raechons are shielding at least seven ner-Raechons and ten windredges.”

“You’ll need some holy items for the windredges,” Savage told the bear.

“I’ve faced windredges before,” Regis stated. He came off sounding pompous.

“Probably not from Ashriam. You’ll have to be especially careful of their talons. Hell, let them bite you before you let them scratch you. These have glands at the base of their claws that release a toxin. One good scratch, and you’ll wish you were dead, if you’re not outright killed first.”

The big man gave me a wicked half-smile. “I’m tougher than I look.”

I shook my head and turned to Savage. “Take my word for it, the bear is not tough enough to come through the encounter ... intact.”

“You heard the lady, Regis. Take her warning to heart. She knows what she’s talking about.” He glanced back at me, “They do have to drop their shielding to fight, don’t they?”

“Yeah, even the Haithe can’t keep a number of demons invisible and fight at the same time.”

People started arriving in ones and twos, and soon there were nearly a dozen hunters

millling about the room. I nodded to Burghill and Finch, and continued my scan of those gathered, but didn't see Vaughan among them.

Savage gave them a rundown on the number of demons Regis had reported, and included the additional information I had given him, emphasizing that many of them couldn't be seen, and stressing the dangers of the windredges' toxin. Regis filled them in on their location and last known direction. Savage then went into his closet and returned with several crosses and vials of holy water. He passed the items out among the hunters before urging them out the door.

When we were alone again, he took my hand and started leading me out of the room as well. We ran into Dave in the hallway. Savage ignored the man, while I squinted at him behind the shifter's back.

Savage continued up a flight of stairs, turned to his left, and led me to the room at the end of that hallway. It was a bedroom, complete with the requisite bed. I'd been spending a lot of time in those lately. Hell, nothing different there.

He kissed me, his hands working my sweater up over my breasts, then reaching around behind me to unhook my bra.

"Can I ask you a question?" It's not that I didn't want to fuck him, but after his comment downstairs, I was wondering about his motivation.

He ran his lips along my jaw, then down the side of my neck before he answered.

"Ask away."

I waited while he pulled my top over my head. "Why are we doing this?"

That stopped him. He gaped at me, his hands unmoving on my shoulders where he'd been pushing the bra straps aside. "I don't think I understand what you're asking."

I sighed. "Are you just doing this to get rid of the demon scent?" I'd probably still fuck him even if he said yes. I just had to know for myself, though.

Instead, his mouth curved in a grin, lighting his eyes. "No."

Then I forgot about asking any more questions as he went to work on my breasts.

* * * *

Dylan dusted the Jel'arinda, then turned to the creature's handler. "I won't ask you again. What are you doing here?" He pressed the ner-Ischmin with his powers, watching as the beast began to lose hold on its form.

"Urian. We hunt Urian," the fiend hissed.

Ratcheting down on his magic, he squeezed the ner nearly in half. "*I'm* the only hunter in this territory. So either return to where you came from, or die."

"I'll-I'll go," it stuttered.

Dylan held his grip another minute, then released his hold. "I see you again, and you're dead."

He crossed his arms in front of his chest as he waited for the creature to disappear. The ner-Ischmin vanished, but Vaughan still felt its essence nearby. "I can follow you, so I'd recommend you actually leave."

A moment later he felt the snap of sensation that only happened when a being passed through a portal to the netherrealms. Shaking his head, he started for his truck, nearly missing the disturbance in the air before a different creature struck.

Spinning around, he countered the attack, slicing upward with his enchanted dagger. The arch-Raechon tipped his head back and laughed, gathering its power for a killing

blow. Dylan moved faster, driving his hand into the center of the demon, spiking its heart with his magic.

The arch-Raechon looked stunned before its features started to melt. Dylan torqued his power, enclosing a metaphysical fist around the demon's life-force.

"Die," he growled as he tightened his energies, drawing them down with crushing strength.

He sheathed his dagger and set a separate spell burning over the dissolving demon. When the entire surface of the creature was aflame, he withdrew his hand and stepped back, watching until the beast had turned to ash.

He shook the clinging essence of the creature off his hands before climbing into his truck and setting out for another part of his territory. Telling himself he wasn't looking for the woman.

He didn't find her either, but he was once again attacked by an arch-Raechon, this time accompanied by a windredges, an unusual enough occurrence that he called it in to Savage.

"Savage is occupied right now, Vaughan, can I help you?"

Dave had answered the phone, and Dylan wondered what was going on that took Savage's attention. If it had any connection to his run-ins.

"I've been attacked twice tonight by arch-Raechons. I thought he should know."

"He does." Dylan heard the psychic shuffling papers. "Regis reported a number of them showing up on his turf. There's been a death call on a demon named Urian. Terri said that..." He heard more rustling as Dave turned the page. "Terri said that they should expect at least seven unseen ner-Raechons and several windredges to be a part of the squad as well."

"Add Jel'arindas and ner-Ischmins to that list. The first arch I came across had them."

"Shall I let the others know that they're showing up in your territory?"

"Not if you value your life." Dylan bit out the words. "Is Peterson with them?"

Fuck. He couldn't believe he'd asked.

"No."

What was it about the way Dave answered that bothered him?

"Where is she, Dave?"

"She's, uh..." Dave cleared his throat. "She's in a private consultation with Savage."

Vaughan cursed and hung up on the man.

* * * *

I woke up lying on my face, and tangled in Savage's legs.

"Mmmph." I tried to pry my way out from under him, but he apparently liked me there. He rolled on top of me, then wormed his way between my thighs.

"Have I told you how much I like your ass?" His voice was gravelly with sleep.

"I think you mentioned it." I wiggled said bottom against his groin.

"Arrggh." He flexed his hips, probing the crevice between my cheeks with his cock.

"You need a map?"

I should have kept my mouth shut. Just after I'd made that comment, he pressed against my anus and drove himself inside. One long, slow push and he was buried.

"Ooph," I exhaled.

He drew himself out, then plunged back in again, and I moaned.

"You were saying?" he whispered into my ear, trailing his lips down the side of my neck, latching onto my shoulder with his teeth.

He bit down as he shafted me, shoving his hands beneath my hips, and jerking them upwards to meet his thrusts.

My climax ripped through me, a sudden blast through my body followed by spasms down below. The movement caused Savage's teeth to pierce my flesh, and that only prolonged the experience for me.

I felt his cock pulsing out his own orgasm, his semen warming my back passage.

He splayed his hands over my stomach, partially resting on top of me for a moment, before backing away.

"Dave has some food lined up for your ... friend. Take them with you when you go."

I'd managed to forget about the demon staying in my basement.

* * * *

Dave had provided me with a male werebat and a female demi-nymph. I shuffled my feet awkwardly while I looked over the two people until Dave reassured me they were in bonded servitude. I didn't ask what they'd done to deserve the punishment. I was just grateful they were relatively willing participants.

On the drive home, however, it seemed strange to me not to talk to them. But I *really* didn't want to get to know the food. So I didn't.

Urian was more than pleased with them, and as I made my way back upstairs, he was busily stroking himself over their bodies.

I went to my armory and started fortifying the gear I was already carrying. I was depositing vials of holy water in various locations about my person when I felt the surge of power enter the house. I knew that magic, and my thoughts flashed to the demon in the basement and the fact that I needed to intercept Vaughan before he confronted him.

I managed to catch him in the kitchen just before he opened the basement door.

"Don't." I pressed my magic into the door, bracing it to keep it closed long enough for me to convince the other hunter not to do anything rash.

He turned towards me slowly, his eyes glowing with his power, his face etched in harsh lines of extreme anger. A blast of his energy shot through me, taking my breath.

"You're not even corrupted," he snapped.

"He's a good guy." I sidled closer to Vaughan. "He came here seeking my help against my father."

Vaughan loomed over me, using his sheer size to let me know how much power he wielded. I'd faced that type of behavior a lot growing up with dad, so it didn't have the expected result with me.

"I gave him my word." Okay, so that might have come out a little softer, a little less commanding, than I'd wanted. His nearness wasn't intimidating me, which was his intention; rather, it was turning me on.

His features softened. Not much, since his face would always be made up of hard angles, but the knife edges of his cheekbones dulled somewhat.

"If he checks out, I might be able to offer you some assistance."

My eyes widened in surprise at that statement. "Thank you," I said, and I meant it.

"Don't thank me yet." Vaughan wrapped a hank of my hair around his fist, pulling

me to my toes. “You may not feel like thanking me after I get through ... discussing Savage with you.”

Using my hair to control my head, he bent me to the side, and sank his fangs into my shoulder over Savage’s mark. Pain screamed through me just before he sucked, and I blew apart, twitching and bucking in his grasp, held up only by that hand in my hair, and his grip on my shoulder.

Then both were gone, and I dropped to the floor like a stone.

“Does this mean you’re upset about Savage?”

Oops. He lifted me to my feet by my hair and shook me, but not very effectively.

“I will deal with you later.” His eyes burned into mine, and it wasn’t lust I was seeing there. “Right now I’m going to check out your demon.”

I was prepared this time when he let go of my hair, so I remained standing. He threw open the basement door, and I padded along behind him as he stomped down the stairs.

It took me a moment to figure out what I was seeing when I joined Vaughan at the side of the bed. There was an undulating black mass covering most of the surface. I could see the outline of a human shape—the male, I think. He was moving up and down in a manner that suggested he was screwing the female, who was visible only as a bulge that might have been her leg, giving the only indication of her location.

“Never seen one feed before, I take it.” I almost laughed at Vaughan’s expression. I’d already lost interest in the mound.

“No, I haven’t.” Vaughan sounded kind of fascinated.

The dark substance that was Urian began to draw back into itself. It was an effect that reminded me of the ocean surging back out to sea. When the entire mass was centrally located, it began to re-form into human shape. The arms lengthened near the top of the mass; the legs stretched from the other end. Before long, the entirety of Urian could be discerned, and I felt Vaughan shudder next to me as he watched the demon stroking himself in and out of the male’s ass.

Vaughan opened his mouth to say something, but at that moment, Urian tipped his head back and groaned as he spilled his seed inside the man.

I sensed the fluctuation of power that preceded another bout of feeding, so I stepped forward to delay the process.

“Urian, someone’s here who may be able to help you.”

In a fluid movement that I’d only ever seen performed by demons, Urian was on his feet in front of us.

Vaughan was in a defensive pose, power radiating off of his body in waves. Urian stood submissively in front of him, correctly assessing the true threat of the hunter.

“Will you let me probe you?” Vaughan’s voice was deeper, colder than I’d ever heard it.

Urian nodded his head. “Yes.”

I felt the demon’s shields drop, and knew that I would fight Vaughan if he decided to harm Urian.

*

Dylan was absolutely stunned when the demon dropped his defenses. That, in itself, spoke volumes about the creature’s intentions. He had to rethink this moment. Half-demon himself, he didn’t have the bias that all demons should be killed on sight.

Instead of blasting the man with his magic, he eased his way through him. What he

found thoroughly impressed him.

He dropped his gaze to Terri's. "I'll help. If he'll let me."

She studied him for a moment, and he felt the tentative touch of her power. Then had to grit his teeth to keep himself from smiling when she didn't push.

"What can you do for him?"

"I can provide him a place to live where your father's people won't be able to find him." He shifted his eyes to the demon. "I can help him pass as human, and I can provide him with a means to acquire food that is acceptable."

*

I would have bet good money that Vaughan didn't have a humanitarian bone in his body. What he was saying, what he was offering to do, simply blew me away.

"It's your choice, Urian," I told him.

"I'd be grateful." The demon shrank in upon himself, the most submissive pose his kind could achieve.

Vaughan nodded, one short jerk down of his head, then back up. Without warning, he pulled me in front of his body, locked one arm around my waist, and held my back tightly to his front. With his other hand, he moved the hair away from my neck and angled my head to the side.

"You didn't think I'd do this without some kind of compensation, did you?" He had to ease his grip slightly in order to bend low enough to capture my flesh between his teeth. Then I felt the brief sting of his fangs as they pierced my skin.

I was sent into a powerful orgasm that had me clawing at the arm around my waist, writhing against the hard flesh I felt at my back. He continued to drink from me, and I lost myself in the sensations, in him. A spicy flavor invaded my mouth, my senses, but I was too far gone to figure out what it was. All I knew was that after the spice hit my tongue, every nerve ending in my body became hypersensitive.

"My blood, my soul, and my power forge this joining. One that can only be broken by my word. Now, tomorrow, and forever."

With his voice whispering in my mind, I came back to my senses. I had his wrist grasped between my hands, my lips pressed hungrily to his pulse. I dropped his arm, unsure of what I'd been doing. He licked my neck where he'd been drinking from me and brushed his lips across the shell of my ear. "Get your pants off," he rasped, before swiping his tongue over the wrist that I'd suckled.

I looked at Urian, then blinked, stunned by the change in his appearance. He looked very human. He was over six feet tall, with dark brown skin, and long curly black hair. All muscular, masculine beauty.

Vaughan hissed behind me, and my pants vanished. I spun around, my gaze landing on his, falling into the burning, swirling depths I found there. He picked me up, turned, and slammed my back to the wall, impaling me a second later, crushing his lips down over mine.

He fucked me hard, fast, then faster. Eating away at my mouth, devouring me with his kiss.

I came, with Vaughan climaxing at exactly the same time. I felt our powers swell, each reaching out to the other, twining, merging, then breaking apart. When my magic settled back within me, it echoed warmly of his. He moved, and I slumped to the floor, my back resting against the wall, my legs sprawled in front of me, boneless. I slowly

became aware of Vaughan talking to the demon, and I had to force myself to focus on the conversation.

“...okay. Get your food, and I’ll show you to your new lodgings.”

I struggled to my feet, swayed, then forced one foot in front of the other until I caught up with Urian as the hunter led him towards the stairs.

I stopped him with a hand on his arm, and he turned to look at me with very human eyes. “Keep in touch. Let me know if you need anything, okay?” I felt responsible for him.

He smiled, showing straight white teeth, and my heart beat a little faster.

In a movement that looked like a bow, he bent and placed a tender kiss on my lips. “You’ve done more than I could have hoped for already.”

I hugged him, then watched as the four of them walked away.

*

Dylan laughed softly to himself as he flicked a glance at the demon in the passenger seat. He didn’t know why he felt the need to help the man, but he couldn’t deny the pride that surged through him as he watched the guy’s glittering eyes take in the city around them. It felt good, and part of him cursed the feeling. The rest of him enjoyed it.

Urian’s stomach growled, making the demon jump, and look down at it.

“What was that?” He sounded curious, but unafraid.

“The human body requires food to sustain it. Though you can still feed when you’re in your demon form, this body requires a different food than you’re used to consuming. When you neglect that, it has ways of reminding you.”

The demon beamed at him. “Isn’t that great?”

He just shook his head, and began scouting the sides of the street for a restaurant.

Chapter Six

Savage looked up from his paperwork to find Dave hovering on the other side of his desk. "What can I do for you, Dave?"

The clairvoyant gave him an impatient scowl. "I thought we discussed the woman."

He rocked back in his chair, giving the man before him all of his attention.

"We have. You've felt her power, and you know her understanding of the enemy. I'm just doing what needs to be done to ensure she stays on our team."

"Or risk losing Vaughan." The man placed his hands on the top of the desk and leaned into them. "Piss that man off enough and he'll move his operations elsewhere. The only question there is, would he kill you first before he left?"

Savage's lips curved in a grin. "If he did, he wouldn't have to leave. Besides, I have you. Something that dramatic would certainly come to you before it happened."

Dave's lips curved in a sad smile. "And so it has."

He straightened in his chair. "What did you see?"

The psychic stared at him for a moment. "You were right in his reactions as far as the woman was concerned. But you've underestimated his anger in regards to your involvement with her." He swallowed, his white eyes unfocusing as he reviewed his vision.

Savage wanted to shake him. Yell at him. Anything to get him to just spit it out. "So I fucked her after he'd marked her. I covered his marks with my own. Covered his scent with my own. It's what we do."

"It might be what *you* do, but it is not what Vaughan does."

Savage scrubbed a hand over his face. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that you underestimated how he feels about the woman. He's beyond angry that you fucked her. He will be coming here, tonight, to punish you."

"And you see me die?" The good thing about precognition was the outcome wasn't set in stone.

"I see him lashing out at you with all, and I do mean all, of his power." The psychic took a deep breath. "Can you survive that?"

Savage wasn't sure. He wasn't any slouch himself when it came to power, but Vaughan was an odd mix of magics. Very old, very strong, terribly dark magics. That the man had never been corrupted by his powers always amazed him. His own mix was closer to the opposite end of the spectrum.

"Maybe, maybe not. Now that I know, I'll work on a solution that won't require me to find out."

At least he hoped he could come up with something.

* * * *

Dylan passed a bag of food and a tray of drinks to the people in the backseat, then fed the demon a couple of Whoppers, fries, and an apple pie. The new man enjoyed both the chocolate milkshake and the Coke that had accompanied the meal. While he was finishing up, Dylan took him to the protected cottage just outside of town.

He kept more than one of these types of lodgings. They were usually for himself, though, as he'd been hunted by more than a few demons that would take offense at some creature or other he'd killed. Since the magic he used was anchored to the ground the dwelling sat on, it required no maintenance and stayed strong and sure, energizing itself from the earth.

Once inside, he sat the demon down at the table.

"Since you're passing as a human now, you'll need a human identity." He lifted the envelope he'd conjured to the house earlier, removed several items, and laid them out on the table. "These sheets contain information about living on the surface. It explains in detail what all these other items are, and what you are expected to do with them. You've got a new name, as well. It's Ethan Matthews." He made sure the demon was following him. "You can read English, can't you?"

"Yes."

Dylan thanked the gods for that; not all of them could. Though he was pretty sure the food would help him with anything he couldn't figure out.

He showed the new Ethan the television and instructed him in how to operate it before giving him a quick tour of the house, all the while explaining various things to him. The bathroom caused the demon more trouble than he'd have expected. Seems he knew about showers and baths, but had never used a toilet before.

Telling him he'd be by the next day to check in with him, Dylan left the man staring wonderingly at his brand new penis.

* * * *

I used my magic to cleanse the basement of Urian's presence. Dad's people could find me; in fact, I rather wanted them to, but it wouldn't do for them to know I'd sheltered the arch-Raechon.

There was a trace of Vaughan in the air when I'd completed the task. It made something deep inside of me heat up.

After I trudged back upstairs, all the energy in my body abruptly drained out of me. Knowing I'd be useless tonight if I didn't take a nap, I continued on up to my bedroom and flopped down on the mattress, asleep as soon as I hit.

* * * *

Savage smiled to himself as he led the brown-haired beauty up the stairs to his bedroom. She was taller than Terri, but her build was similar, and her hair only a shade darker.

Dave had given him enough information about the coming confrontation that he'd been able to come up with a scenario that he thought might work.

He chuckled to himself as he undressed the two of them, then guided the woman to his bed.

Vaughan would be here in half an hour, and Savage was planning on getting caught fucking the woman. The woman that he hoped Vaughan would mistake for Terri. It was a dangerous gamble on more than one level. He'd prepared a shield to throw into place as soon as Vaughan entered the room. That was the one thing he was counting on to keep the danger to a minimum.

Before the confrontation though, he planned on enjoying himself with the decoy.

* * * *

Dylan returned home to change his clothes and arm himself for the coming evening. His first order of business tonight would be to deal with Savage.

Ready, he climbed into his Explorer, and set out for the other side of town.

Dylan felt his senses heighten the closer he came to his destination. His magic coursed through his veins, firing him to the point of readiness. Savage was werewolf, but also more. So much more.

As he pulled into the lot in front of headquarters, he felt his darkness gather around him like a glove.

He slammed through the front door of the house, and turned into Savage's office, where a quick scan of the room showed that the shifter was not there. He reached out with his senses, and located his aura on the second floor.

Stalking towards the stairs, he nearly plowed over Dave, and had to rein in the automatic pulse of energy that he'd nearly loosed on the psychic.

"Out of my way," he snarled, sending a searing look at the smaller man.

"Don't do this, Dylan." Dave stood his ground, his whiteness even paler with the fear Vaughan could scent rising off the man.

"I've got no quarrel with you." He pushed the clairvoyant with just a touch of his power.

Dylan watched as thoughts passed behind the man's eyes, and let a slow breath out when he saw the man had come to the right decision.

"I'd rather you didn't kill him," Dave stated, his eyes downcast, his shoulders hunched.

"It's not my intention." Dylan was pretty sure he meant that, too. He stepped around the psychic and started up the stairs.

On the second level, he turned left, and covered the distance to the end of the hall in a few strides. Pausing with his hand on the door, he touched the room beyond. He brushed over Savage, anger flaring as he "felt" what the man was doing.

Rage flooded his system, his mind focusing down to a single thought that screamed through his brain. *Mine!* He burst through the door, saw Savage's naked form thrusting into the smaller brown-haired woman that Vaughan had claimed as his own.

Power shot out of him with a thought. Dark power, hard and sharp, that sliced through Savage like a sword. Dylan closed in on the bed, staying only a few feet away to give himself the room to maneuver. The shifter took the first strike in stride, and raised glowing eyes to him.

"What the fuck is your problem, Vaughan?"

Dylan blinked. This was not the reaction he'd been expecting. He'd expected a counterstrike.

Savage levered himself off his partner, the scent of her reaching Dylan just before Savage stretched out his hand for her. He shot a look at the girl, saw the same caramel-colored hair, the same delicate build as Terri's, but the scent was wrong. He took another step towards the bed, and marshaled his concentration.

It wasn't Terri. He'd never seen this woman before, had no idea who she was.

He swung his gaze back to Savage, his eyes narrowing. "Get over here, wolf."

The shifter spoke softly to the woman before heading for a door at the side of the room. "In here, Vaughan."

Dylan followed him through the door, taking in the new area, but not moving further into the room.

Savage stood with his back to him, fixing himself a drink. "Can I get you something?" He turned around and leaned back against the bar, not in the least uncomfortable with his state of undress.

"You know why I'm here." Dylan stepped forward, his anger flaring, then settling down again.

"Because I had the audacity to fuck a woman you'd marked? Get real, Vaughan, everyone knows you have no intention of getting serious with anyone."

Dylan had to give the man credit for that. He didn't intend to get serious with just one woman. But there was something about Terri that he intended to keep for himself anyway.

"This one's different," he finally admitted.

Savage choked on his drink. "You're going to settle down?"

Hell no. He slouched into a chair, shaking his head. "I doubt it, but I know I don't want anyone else touching her."

Savage gave him a hard look. "You mean that."

"Yeah."

Savage kept staring at him. "What have you done?"

Fuck. "I bound her to me." He must have lost his mind. When Savage had ignored his mark, he'd gone insane.

"Fuck." Savage mirrored his thoughts. "That's generally a permanent condition."

"I know." Dylan did know, but he hadn't been thinking clearly when he'd done it.

"What are you going to do?" Savage handed him a drink as he moved to the chair across from his.

He thought about the question while he took a long sip from his glass. "I don't think this really changes much of anything." He straightened in his chair. "I'll just kill anyone that tries to fuck her."

Savage chuckled; both men knew that wasn't going to happen. "Have you told her?"

Dylan glared at him. "I don't need to. Anyone that gets near her will be able to sense the joining."

"She's not a shifter, Vaughan. She's still capable of finding other males attractive; she can still find fulfillment in another man's arms."

"Are you trying to *get* me to kill you?" Dylan's voice dropped to a lethal drawl.

Savage shrugged his tone off as he leaned forward, his own eyes stormy. "You might be the most powerful hunter I've ever had, but you don't know shit when it comes to dealing with women."

"Women would kill for a chance to get me in their bed," Dylan countered.

"Not the same thing, Vaughan. Doesn't matter how good a fuck you are; you're talking about keeping Peterson all to yourself. You're thinking she'll just go along with it because she's *lucky* you want her. Well, I've got news for you. Terri's got a mind and a will of her own. She might not be as powerful as you are, but she's still got more than any other hunter in this region."

Dylan stood and stalked over to the bar, grabbed the bottle of scotch and brought it

back, filling up both their glasses.

"You probably haven't even noticed that she doesn't have the usual human inhibitions or understanding. She was eleven when her father took her to live in Ashriam. She had some knowledge of how humans interacted, but not enough. Have you even taken the time to notice she doesn't have a clue how adults, males and females, are supposed to interact? If some guy just knocked her down and raped her, Terri would look at it as an interesting situation *if* she enjoyed it, and probably beat the hell out of the guy if she didn't. You've got to spell things out to her, Vaughan, because she has no frame of reference for them."

Dylan's lips curved in a smile that made Savage wince. "You do know what I am, don't you?"

Savage started to nod his head, stopped, then narrowed his eyes at him. "What are you saying?"

"I know you're aware I'm half-demon. Do you know what the other half is?" Dylan lounged back, enjoying the look of confusion on the man's face.

"Dark elf. That's what you reported to us, anyway."

"True, but my mother wasn't just a dark elf. She was a paladin." He watched the shifter, wondering how informed he was.

"A *true* paladin?"

Evidently the man was very well informed. "Yes."

"You are such a bastard." Savage shook his head, but there was no heat in his statement.

"Thank you." Dylan raised his glass in a silent salute and drank it down.

* * * *

Greatly refreshed, I showered and dressed for the evening hunt. I was in the kitchen fixing myself a pot of coffee when there was a knock at the back door.

Opening it, I found Absalom, another one of my father's arch-Raechons that had been kind to me during my stay.

"Absalom, what the hell are you doing here?" I backed away from the door, allowing him to enter.

"Your father has declared a *Deramento* against all of us that were on duty when you made your escape. There are several others outside that are seeking a life away from Ashriam." He flushed a shiny black, a sign of pride. "Since you are the only surface dweller we know, we've come here hoping you'll assist us."

"Just how many others?" I wasn't sure I liked the sound of this. There hadn't been all that many nice ones that I remembered.

"Twenty." He dipped his head.

"Good God." I pulled out one of the kitchen chairs and dropped into it. "You'd better get them in here," I told him, plopping my forehead onto my arms. *Twenty-one runaway demons.*

I could hear them filling up the room, the soft shuffles of their steps, their murmured conversations. With so many packed together in the small space, their magic tingled over my skin.

Raising my head, I looked at the beasts. "Hey, Kraal. Nedrus." There were several faces I recognized, and more than a few whose names I knew. I didn't see a single

creature there that had ever caused me undue harm, so at least they had that going for them.

Absalom joined me at the table. "So, where do we begin?"

For a demon, he sounded positively giddy.

I needed Vaughan. He'd helped with Urian, I wondered if he'd help with these.

Another thought followed on its heels. *How am I going to feed them all?*

Again, a knock sounded at the back door. Sensing demon, I raised an eyebrow at Absalom. "Were you followed?" I patted my arms and thighs, checking my knives.

"No," he said, with the regal air that only the highest of the arch-Raechons achieved.

"Be ready to fight." I sighed and headed for the door again.

Opening it, I was confronted with an even larger group from the netherworld.

"What?" I snarled at the Xiantrope that danced from ped to ped on my back stoop.

One of his eyestalks waved above my head as he expanded with excitement. "See, I told you the others were here." He crowded forward, trying to gently shove me aside so he could enter my kitchen.

"Hold on. Just why are you here?" I pushed on his midsection, keeping him back, unless he wanted to force the issue.

"We've left Ashriam, and we want to join Absalom's group."

Just great.

"How many you got out there?" I tried to separate out the individual forms from the writhing mass behind him.

"Maybe forty. There are some from every level of Ashriam. Who'd have thought so many of us hated the Haithe enough to travel to the surface?"

"Yeah, big surprise." I left the door open and worked my way between the demons that had crowded towards it to see what was going on. The creatures squealed at each other in excitement like a bunch of schoolgirls.

I opened the door to the basement, and as soon as I could get them to pay attention, started ushering them below. They all went, their voices pinging in the confined space as they talked about their escape from their ruthless leader.

Absalom stayed with me, cloaking himself against detection, adding additional support to my shields over the basement.

Since I didn't have Vaughan's phone number, I figured I had to call Savage. Either that, or leave all the creatures in my basement while I violated the hell out of Vaughan's territory in hopes he'd catch me.

Savage answered on the fourth ring.

"Savage, I've got a bit of a delicate situation here," I began, wondering if he'd just send his hunters over to annihilate the lot of us.

"What, exactly, do you mean?" There was a touch of humor in his voice that I brushed off.

"Uh ... seems some of my father's denizens have decided to abandon ship."

"I thought we already dealt with that one."

I heard Savage say something to someone on his end, his voice muffled.

"Let's just say more of them showed up here this evening."

I glanced at Absalom. He was watching me calmly, obviously knowing enough about this realm to know I was talking to another person on the device I held to my face. Then again, he could probably hear Savage's half of the conversation.

"How many more?" Savage asked.

"Oh." *Shit*. "Fifty or sixty." I gritted my teeth, waiting for him to explode.

"Fifty or sixty, huh? That's a good one, Peterson." He no longer sounded entertained. "I told you once not to waste my time. You're not going to like the consequences."

"Get pissed off at me later. Right now I've got a basement full of the things, and I need some serious help feeding them."

I could hear Savage talking again in muted tones.

"I'm on my way," he snapped. "And Peterson? If this is some kind of joke, you are going to fry."

*

Savage shook his head, then slanted a look in Dylan's direction.

"So, what do you think we should do?" he asked.

Dylan thought about it for a moment. "If she's telling the truth, then I suggest we find some food and figure out where to stash the lot. She can't very well keep them in her basement." He could tell the amusement in his voice irritated the shifter.

Savage rose and crossed to a chest of drawers, pulling out a pair of jeans, a T-shirt, and some socks. "I'll have to check the computer, see what I can drum up."

Dylan slouched back on the couch. "I wonder how the others are doing with the death squads?"

The shifter put his pants on, then went to the desk and punched the computer's power button before pulling on the rest of his clothes. He dropped into the chair, typed commands on a laptop, and scanned the screen while he worked. "I figure no news is good news."

Resigned to waiting, Dylan closed his eyes, then sought out the link that he'd forged with the woman. Traveling along that connection, as quiet as a whisper, he closed in on her essence at the other end. He skated past her shields, then eased himself into her mind.

Through her eyes, he watched as she talked with an arch-Raechon at her kitchen table.

"Is this Savage going to help?" the demon asked.

"I think so," Terri responded. "I just wish I knew how to get ahold of Vaughan."

"Who is Vaughan?"

Terri sighed. "He's one of the other hunters. He helped me before in a similar situation."

A demon popped out of the basement door. "Say, Terri, you got anything to eat? We're getting hungry down here."

Terri plunked her head down onto the table and groaned.

Dylan backed out of the link, leaving no trace of himself behind, then refocused on Savage.

"Okay, this should work out, I think," Savage was saying.

A printer whirled to life beside the desk. The shifter laced up his boots before grabbing the pages as they spat out of the machine. Folding them, he got to his feet and put the bundle in his pocket.

"If there's really any demons there, we can split this list up and make the calls." He strode past Dylan.

Dylan followed him outside and headed for his own vehicle, grinning to himself at what he knew Savage would find when they got there. "I'll follow you over."

Savage nodded, climbed into his SUV, and started the engine.

Dylan took one last look at the house behind him, realizing that they had just walked away from the woman in his bed without saying a word to her about his leaving.

The shifter was definitely up to something.

Chapter Seven

The doorbell rang and I jumped to my feet to answer it. I didn't care who was on the other side. I just wrenched it open without checking.

It was Vaughan, and I threw myself at his chest, wrapping my arms around him because I was so happy he was there.

He cleared his throat, patted me awkwardly on the back, and glared at me. I noticed Savage then, standing just behind Vaughan. "I'm glad you're here," I told both men, meaning it.

"Last I heard, you were ready to tear Vaughan a new one for giving you shit about hunting in his territory," Savage said as he shoved past us and wandered into the house.

"Give it a rest, Savage." Vaughan still stood on the stoop, studying me warily.

"Please tell me you came to help." I fisted my hands in the front of his T-shirt, prepared to drag him into the house if he tried to get away.

Something passed through his eyes. He sighed, then the side of his mouth curved wickedly. "What will you give me in return?"

The magic of sixty demons pressed on my senses. "What would you accept?"

I heard Savage talking in the kitchen and figured he'd found Absalom, but was too concerned with Vaughan's answer to care.

"You," he said, and I didn't like the look in his eyes.

"You'll need to be a little more specific."

He cinched his arms tightly around me. "You give yourself to me. No other lovers, not even to feed demons."

That seemed too easy. "For how long?"

He bent closer, his lips whispering over mine. "For as long as I say." Then he blocked any protests I might have by capturing my mouth with his.

"Hey, Terri."

"How's it going, Terri?"

"Who's the guy?"

Vaughan broke the kiss, a wave of irritation rolling off him as he looked over my head. I turned in his arms, my brain spinning when I saw more demons flooding in from the kitchen.

Vaughan shoved us into the house and slammed the door shut.

"More?" he chuckled.

"Oh God." I cringed back into his chest. "Why? Why are they all coming here now?"

"I'm going to have to change my fee. There's got to be twice as many here as you told Savage." His laugh sent a shiver down my spine.

"Absalom!" I yelled over the murmured conversations of the creatures still flowing into the room.

I watched as the beasts were shuffled aside, and Absalom, with Savage in tow, came through the crowd.

"You sure know how to throw a party," Savage said with a grin.

"What do you need?" Absalom asked.

"How many more?" I was afraid to hear his answer.

“Only about a hundred. Most of them are still in your back yard. Seems your father has gone quite berserk since you escaped.”

“Name your price, Vaughan.” I groaned.

The hunter was quiet for so long, I started to sweat. *This is going to be bad.*

“Say you’ll pay it, and I’ll let you know when I have time to think of something—appropriate.” His expression was positively feral.

I swallowed the lump in my throat, then looked around the room at the demons that filled it. “I’ll pay.” And I would. If somebody didn’t help me, well, I didn’t want to think of what would happen when this bunch set out to find their own food.

“Who’s the spook with Savage?” Vaughan asked.

“Absalom. One of dad’s highest arch-Raechons.”

Vaughan turned. “Absalom.” He addressed the demon directly.

Absalom turned his flat black eyes at Vaughan, then shuddered. He bowed his head to the hunter. “Sir.”

I glanced at Vaughan, trying to see in him what the demon saw. I couldn’t figure out what I was missing.

“I’m placing you in charge. You’ll answer directly to me. Understood?”

His eyes looked darker, blacker to me, but beyond that, he looked the same.

“Yes, sir,” Absalom replied sharply.

“Gather everyone in the back yard. Be ready to transport in ten minutes.” Vaughan made some kind of hand gesture I’d never seen before, and Absalom dashed out of the room.

“Sir?” I crossed my arms in front of me, standing closer to Savage.

Vaughan looked at me, then Savage, his eyes narrowing. “Sir,” he snapped in response, then grabbed my arm and started leading me through the house.

“Sir,” Savage snorted, following behind us, his laughter causing heat to radiate off Vaughan.

The hunter stepped out onto my back deck and moved to one side, next to Absalom. He flicked his hand at the gathered creatures on the lawn, and I felt shields snap into place. Savage and I moved to the other side of the door as more demons came from the house to join the others. Vaughan simply broadened the shields.

When it was down to just four of us standing on the deck, Vaughan closed his eyes, and I felt him gathering his power.

I’d thought before that he was strong. Now I was floored by the amount of magic the man commanded. He’d never told me what his ancestry was, and neither had Savage. Now I had to wonder, especially in light of the way Absalom deferred to him.

The air around us crackled, and the stiff wind that accompanied a temporal shift slammed into me. I braced into it, eyes scrunched shut, my breath trapped in my lungs. Before they were screaming for air, the wind died, and I lurched forward, Vaughan’s hand snatching the back of my neck, his move the only thing that kept me from falling flat on my face.

We were standing inside a vast warehouse. The level we were on was at one end of the building, and four steps up from the rest of the floor. Vaughan kept a grip on me and took me to the railing, where he looked out over the mass of dark flesh that waited in anticipation below us.

“Open yourselves to me and I will furnish this place to be your new home.” The

hunter looked around the room. “Open, and I will shield this dwelling from the Haithe.”

“Yes, yes,” hissed from a multitude of mouths.

Vaughan tipped his head back, spread his arms, and drank from the demons below. He glowed with the energy of over a hundred and fifty dark souls. His hair wafted around his head in the mystical breeze that accompanies great magic.

The air rippled and wavered as ephemeral furnishings began appearing around the floor. Creatures moved, relocated, and moved again as the place where they’d been standing slowly solidified with a sofa, chairs, tables, a wall. Lights blinked on brightly, then dimmed. And still Vaughan drew power from the beasts. Still he wove magic throughout the entire structure.

As I watched him work, it dawned on me that he was beautiful. Not beautiful in any conventional sense, but the absolute power he wielded, mixed with his total masculinity, pierced my soul. Whatever he asked of me for this gift to my father’s people, I was willing to give.

He lowered his arms and took a look at all he had done. Then he turned that gaze on me, and I was trapped. Overwhelmed by his magic, by the utter power I saw reflected in his eyes.

With inhuman strength, he lifted me from the floor and crushed me against his body. My eyes still locked with his, I watched, spellbound, as he brought those glowing orbs closer.

He assaulted my mouth and I went up in flames of desire unlike anything I had ever known. His tongue forged its way in beside mine, and I surrendered to his superior strength. All thoughts of demons, or warehouses, or even Savage fled my mind as he devoured me with his kiss.

With a thought that echoed inside my head, he removed my clothes, and relieved his erection from the confines of his pants. He angled my hips, and I screamed into his mouth when he pierced my core with a brutal thrust. Every nerve ending in my body blazed with his energy. With just his hands—one under my buttocks, the other angled across my back—he held me still as he began to move.

Long, fierce stabs of his cock brought him hard against my womb, blasting me with electric jolts of pleasure. The intensity of his magic brought me, shot me over the edge. A firestorm of sensations raged through me and kept me writhing in his arms as he beat himself frantically into my sex.

Then he was searing me with hot jets of cum laced with power. Energy that surged into my vagina, drilled straight through my womb, and into my heart. I screamed again, my head falling back on my neck as my heart shocked to a halt. He continued to spew inside of me, my blood being forced through my veins, my breath driven into my lungs by his magic, and his magic alone.

Then his heart merged with mine, its strong, rapid beat drawing the dead muscle in my chest into an identical tempo.

I collapsed against his chest, buried my face into his shoulder, and wept.

He held me for several minutes. Not moving, not speaking.

I didn’t try moving either, enthralled as I was with the feeling of our hearts beating in unison, our lungs breathing in time.

Then he lowered my feet to the floor, throwing clothing onto my body with a negligent wave. He fixed his own clothes while he stared at me, his expression

unreadable.

When he finally broke the spell by turning away from me, for that's what it felt like, what it certainly must have been, I found my voice.

"What have you done to me?" I started shaking, and I wasn't sure I would ever stop.

With his back to me, he replied, voice harsh: "I made you mine."

Chapter Eight

In the deepest level in Ashriam, the Haithe fed his powers with the lives of his people. His highest ranking minions served themselves up to him in his hour of need.

“She thinks she can just leave?” he screamed as he drank his last arch-Raechon dry. “She thinks she can just flounce out of here without my say?” He wrapped a hand around the beefy wrist of a Jerind-hult and dragged him to his knees. “We’ll just see about that.”

He’d felt the others leaving; he’d deal with them as well, just as soon as he had recaptured his daughter. “She thinks to deprive me of an heir!” he yelled. “And just when negotiations with Thanatos were nearly complete.” He continued to rant as he turned the Jerind-hult’s carcass to dust.

Jerking to his feet, he paced before his next victim. “Thanatos assured me he had the power to impregnate the girl. I even agreed to let him keep her after the child was born.” He turned in a fury and slashed his claws through the arch-Ischmin’s chest, snaring the creature’s gelatinous heart. “I’ll get her, though. And when I do, she will never escape from me again.”

With that, he sucked the demon dry.

Expanding with his ever increasing power, he reached out with his senses to touch the surface realm. *Just a few more lives and they will all be mine.*

Laughing, he willed his next subject in.

* * * *

I was going to have a serious talk with Vaughan once we got the demons settled.

Savage was on his cell phone, arranging for food, or so he’d told me. Vaughan had gone upstairs with Absalom, making sure his work had been completed to his satisfaction.

Not that I wasn’t impressed. He’d turned the empty husk of a three-story warehouse into a multiple unit dwelling for nearly two hundred souls. It was beyond impressive. Especially as I studied the results of his magic.

The main open area had been filled with several conversational groupings of furnishings, with one end devoted to an enormous plasma TV. There were two bars, one on either side wall, complete with stools. Doors led off the main room to what I found out was an entry area with a walk-in closet, an oversized office, and four half baths.

The upper level that we’d been standing on had been converted to a kitchen/dining area, with two additional bathrooms off to one side. The two stories above us had been changed into individual living quarters.

There was a sub-level, as well, which Vaughan had altered for demon use. Something of home, as he’d put it. Protected from entry above by humans, and from below by enemies.

As a grand finale, Vaughan had changed the appearance of every last demon so that each could better pass as human. A remarkable job, though it was somewhat disconcerting when I noted several blue-eyed blondes.

Feeling out of sorts, what with both Vaughan’s display of power and his statement to

me, I slumped in a chair at one of the tables and wondered if anyone would notice if I left. I'd just decided to do so when Vaughan appeared at my side, his face set in hard lines.

"You've got it under control, Savage?" he asked, without taking his gaze off me.

"For now," the other man answered.

"We'll see you tomorrow, then." Vaughan wrapped his hand around my biceps, and flashed us out of there.

Straight into his bedroom.

"Every last one of them," he started, his voice a low growl, "every single one of those demons has either fucked you or fed from you." He was dead in my face, snarling at me, his eyes burning with rage. "Hundreds of them, Terri, you fucked hundreds of demons."

He shoved me hard, and I flew backwards onto the bed.

"What the fuck do you know? My father was trying for an heir," I spat back at him as I watched him strip off his shirt, then drop his hands to the fastenings in the front of his pants.

"Your father wanted an heir?" he rumbled as he kicked off his boots.

"I was a prisoner in my father's domain, Vaughan. I came into my magic when I was only eleven. He considered me sexually mature at sixteen. He'd have three or four of his minions take me every day, until I was eighteen, and he'd had no success. Then he upped the numbers. To sometimes as many as fifteen in a single day." I crawled across the bed, my magic sparking along my skin, heating my blood with a potent mixture of anger and arousal.

Naked, his cock jutting arrogantly from the thatch of dark hair at his groin, he advanced on me. With a wave of his hand my clothes were gone, and I found myself flat on my back, spread wide.

He moved between my legs, lowering his powerful body over mine. He stared into my eyes, his own swirling with a power that fueled the fire burning in my blood.

"This time when I take you, you will drop all your shields. Every last one of them, do you hear me?" The glint in his eyes was so deadly hot, my entire body clenched.

"I will if you will." I raised my face, caught his lower lip between my teeth and nipped it.

"Bring your knees up," he commanded through gritted teeth, his breathing harsh.

"What do you say, Vaughan? You gonna let me in?" I brushed my lips over his jaw and down the side of his neck, grasping a section of flesh near the base of his throat.

He groaned, arching his neck for me as I sucked and bit. "You first," he gasped.

I did as I was told, a wild excitement filling me. Then the head of his cock nudged my opening, and I held my breath.

"Now," he rasped, and plowed into my core.

I started dropping my shields as quickly as I could. There were so many levels of them it was slow going. Deeper and deeper I went, knocking down the walls, opening the windows, opening myself farther than I'd ever been since my father had taken me from the surface.

With a final wrench, I removed the last of my protection. Laid bare, I stared into Vaughan's eyes, and let him in.

He entered with a vengeance, ripping into the very center of my being as his cock

slammed repeatedly at my cervix. He tore through my memories, my life, my essence, touching everything, searching deeper, leaving no niche unexplored. I came, a strange, almost out-of-body experience, since his penetration of my inner soul was so much more intense than the sensations he was creating with his cock.

I felt the warmth of his seed as he pulsed out his release inside of me, but instead of stopping, he kept hammering on, still as hard as before.

He poured more of his power into me, expanding me, filling me. Causing twinges of pain throughout my system wherever he invaded. Then came a deep, wrenching twist that jolted me off of the bed, taking his body with mine.

He cursed, then a blinding light filled my head. He continued swearing as I felt his presence literally suck right out of me. The brightness slowly dimmed and I could see again, only everything started looking transparent, and I realized, that for the second time in my life, I was dissolving.

Instead of falling through the bed, however, I shot straight up. Passing through Vaughan, into the attic, then out through the roof. I blasted out of the house without slowing, straight up into the night sky.

I sped upwards at an exhilarating speed, my pace only slowing as my body began to solidify and increase in density.

I hung motionless for a heartbeat, then started falling back towards the ground, my rate of descent alarming. I watched the roof rapidly drawing nearer and wondered briefly if I would stop at the bed, in my downward journey, or continue through to the basement.

My question was answered moments later when I smacked into the roof, bounced, then rolled off the edge, finally coming to a stop in the azalea bushes that lined the front of the house.

I decided to lie there for a while and enjoy the fact that I was no longer shooting about without any control.

Vaughan's face came into my field of vision, and I smiled thinly at him.

"Can you move?" he asked, his eyes too dark to read.

"I don't know." At least I could talk.

Vaughan bent down, and worked his arms under my back and legs, and heaved me out of the shrubbery. He carried me all the way to his bedroom, where he laid me gently on the bed.

The mattress dipped as he sat next to me and brushed the hair out of my face, then plucked some errant twigs out of the mess.

"What the hell was that?" I asked.

"What are you?" he questioned in return, and I found myself grimacing at him in irritation.

"Dark-witch," I snapped.

He shook his head. "Who told you that?"

"My father," I told him. "My human father," I added for clarification.

"Ahhh." He stroked the side of my face, staring at me oddly. It was creeping me out.

"What are you looking at me like that for?" I reached for his hand, and lost myself for a moment in the sheer satisfaction of being able to move.

"How did you come to live with humans, anyway?" His hand traced lower, evading mine.

So I told him the story that my father had told me on my eleventh birthday.

Now he was nodding. “Yes, it all makes sense.” And I didn’t have a clue what he meant.

“Vaughan,” I barked out, tired of waiting for him to enlighten me.

His hand stopped on my breast, lightly cupping the globe as he stared into my eyes. “Once every millennia or so, there is a quirk in the elemental magic that brings life and power to beings like us. If other conditions are right, as a result of that quirk, a child is born with a very special talent. The ability to draw upon the *pure* magic. It is a higher, more powerful, more devastating magic than elemental. But that’s not all; the child’s blood is *pure*, its very essence is *pure*. It is virtually immortal, and those that it bonds with acquire gifts of purity, and life.”

It was the most he’d ever said to me at one time, and he said it with awe in his voice, instead of his usual anger.

“This child is classified as a ren-witch, a *pure*-witch.” He bent over me then, lowering his face towards me. “You, my love, aren’t a dark-witch at all.” His lips brushed mine. “You are, beyond a doubt, a ren-witch.” Then he trapped my mouth, sinking his tongue inside to mate with mine.

When he pulled away, his expression was triumphant. “And I…” His grin turned positively wicked. “—have bound you to me.”

I blinked at him, not sure if I understood everything he had just said. I was some kind of super-witch, apparently. I didn’t feel like a super-witch. I didn’t have superpowers. “I don’t get it. You’re more powerful than I am.”

“Your mother said you would come into your power when you reached maturity? Well, you might have gained your parents’ powers when you turned eleven, but you gained the *pure* power tonight. In fact, I think I accidentally triggered it when I was poking around inside of you.”

Then I remembered what he’d said at the warehouse, and again just a moment ago. “Hey.” I struggled to sit up, but he pressed me back down on the mattress. “What, exactly, did you mean when you told me you’d made me yours?”

“Just that.” His eyelids closed, then opened in a lazy blink. “My—kind—does not mate, or marry like other species. When we find a lover that we wish to keep, we bind their life to ours. A special binding, one of five total. Though I have never known anyone to take it past the third level. My own parents were only bound to the second.”

Maybe I’d shaken something loose in the fall, but he still wasn’t making any sense to me. “I guess I just don’t get it.”

“You will,” he rumbled, then levered himself over me. “Now shut up while I fuck you.”

*

Dylan had never felt the kind of power that was coursing through his veins now. He’d awakened, in the chill light of dawn, when his magic had surged, strengthened. Gazing down at the woman who was the cause of it all, he smiled to himself.

Terri Peterson had no idea what he planned for her. Stretching, he rose from the bed in a fluid movement, allowing the rays of sun to gild his naked flesh. He wrapped his fingers around his erect shaft, and stroked himself idly for a moment. Then he went to the nightstand and removed the lubricant that he kept there.

Returning to the bed, he greased his cock while he admired his woman’s body. He would wait for the right opportunity, to place her under the third binding. For now, he

had other things in mind.

Allowing the power to roll through him, he prowled across the mattress to the slumbering female. He stretched out along her back, raised her leg over his hip. Then he guided the head of his cock to the tight ring of muscle that called to him.

Seating himself firmly at her opening, he splayed his hand across her abdomen and pushed inward as he drilled his cock straight into her rectum.

She woke with a start, crying out at his invasion. Grinding his hips against her ass, he chuckled darkly in her ear. "Honey, when a dark paladin claims you for his very own, he claims *all* of you."

With the tremendous amount of magic rushing through him, he pumped his dick inside her dark passage energetically. A thrill ran through him when she started shoving herself backwards to take his cock. Raising her thigh higher, he gripped it tightly, using it as leverage to drive himself ever harder, faster, into her.

"Come for me," he growled into her ear.

She screamed his name, then the muscles of her rectum were squeezing his cock, milking him with a powerful fisting action that snapped his balls tight to his body. His climax shot like a bolt of lightning up his spine and out through his shaft.

Ramming himself as deep as he could go, he anchored her to his groin as he filled her with his seed.

Then he bent forward, opened his mouth, and sank his fangs into her neck. Sucking in the sweet, spicy flavor of her blood, causing her to come apart again. He continued to feed, taken by complete surprise when his cock pulsed, and another climax ripped through him.

Now that's the way to start the day.

*

Vaughan backed out of me, and I started to roll over, interested in cuddling up to his chest. Maybe get a little more sleep. I didn't get the chance, though, as he shot out of bed and strode into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him.

I was lightly dozing when he slapped me on the ass. "Bathroom's all yours. Make it quick, if you want a lift home. I've got things to do today."

Showered and dressed, I found him in the kitchen, drinking a cup of coffee. I headed towards the cupboard to get a mug for myself when he intercepted me. Without saying a word, he slung an arm around my waist, and flashed us into my house.

He looked at me, his expression blank, his eyes dark. Then he was gone.

I started my own pot of coffee going, took a peek through the front door, checked for the mail, and brought it back with me to the kitchen. Nothing but bills and ads. Then again, I didn't know anyone who would write me a letter anyway.

I'd just taken my first sip of the heavenly caffeinated beverage when the doorbell rang. Taking my mug with me, I went to see who was there, once again placing my hand on the door to "sense" the presence on the other side. Whoever it was, they were packing quite a bit of power. Light magic, though, so I opened it.

A woman stood on my stoop. She was slightly taller than me, with rich, reddish brown hair that fell in waves to her waist. She had an hourglass figure that made mine look like a boy's. Her eyes sparkled at me while a soft smile played about her lips.

"I know you don't remember me," she said in a sultry voice, "but I'm your mother."

Holy shit.

She just better not be there to kidnap me.

I leaned against the door frame, curious, but beyond that, she was a stranger. Even if she really was my mother, where the hell had she been all this time?

“So?” Maybe I could have phrased that a little better.

“I felt you come into your power, and thought I’d check up on you.” She *leaned* into me, using her magic to try to get me to step back into the house so she could come in.

I didn’t budge.

“Huh.” I eyed her for a minute. “Well, I wondered what you looked like. Now I know.”

“Aren’t you going to invite me in?” She batted her eyelashes at me.

Please. “No.”

She just stood there, kind of sputtering.

“Look, *Mom*, you haven’t been here for me my entire life. You didn’t stop my father from kidnapping me, or the hundreds of his gofers that he had fuck me in an attempt to gain an heir. You didn’t save my family from the fire Dad’s minions set. And you didn’t rescue me from the man.” I narrowed my eyes at her. “But now that I’ve come into some kind of power, you suddenly show up on my doorstep. So, nice meeting you. Don’t bother coming by again.”

I started to close the door when she blasted me with a fireball.

I screamed before I realized her magic had passed harmlessly around me.

“*Terri, what’s wrong?*” It was Vaughan, and he was speaking to me inside my head.

“*Mom showed up, and when I wouldn’t let her in the house she tried to blast me.*”

What the hell, might as well take advantage of this development.

I felt the air shiver behind me, and knew without turning that Vaughan had arrived. He stepped forward, dropping his arm around my shoulder.

“Is everything all right?” I heard him gulp when he got a look at the woman.

“No, I don’t think it is,” I told him, never taking my eyes off her. “She claims she’s my mother, but when I wouldn’t let her in the house, she threw a fireball at me.”

“Who are you?” Mom purred, inhaling so that her breasts puffed up.

*

Dylan stared at her, then pushed with his magic, slipping beneath her first defensive shield. “*I hate to say this, but she feels like your mother.*” He continued to drive himself through her protection, picking up bits and pieces of her capabilities, but he could sense nothing yet as to why she was here.

The woman took a step closer to him, and he felt the brush of her magic over his groin. His cock hardened in response. Ignoring the reaction, he leaned harder on his power, delving deeper yet into her psyche.

“Surely you can understand why I would be visiting my daughter at this time.”

She doubled her efforts on him, creating the feel of a warm, moist mouth sliding its way down his shaft, sucking him into the tight confines of a throat. He breached another layer, and knew he was nearing his goal.

The phantom mouth continued to work over him, and it became a race to see if he could garner the information before he was thrown into climax.

Trashing subtly, he drew on his lover’s power, and punched his way into the woman’s core. Her eyes widened, the magic around his cock surging. He gritted his teeth and let his essence invade. She tried to flash out, but he was stronger, holding her rooted

where she stood.

Then the images were flowing over him, through him. The evening Terri was conceived, her birth, being shown to her father for the first time. He watched as she was given to the human family. The knowledge that her father had gotten hold of her. The absolute apathy of this woman in regard to what the man was doing to his child, their child. Her complete conviction that the girl was not worthy of her attention.

Until the power spike when Terri came into the ren-magic.

There it all was, laid bare for him to see, in all its ugly, self-serving glory. The reason her mother was now standing in front of them, and the only reason she'd bothered to look up the daughter she'd long ago written off. She wanted Terri's power for her own. Though a strong light witch, she had been darkened by taking a demon as her lover. She was tainted, marked by a type of corruption that had steadily worked its way deeper into her soul. Her blood connection with her daughter was just the thing she needed to incorporate her, consume her life-force and with it her magic.

Rage flooded into the center of his being, a red hot beast that hungered for this woman's destruction. "She's here to kill you, and take your magic for herself." His voice sounded flat to himself, giving no indication of the anger roiling through his veins.

"I don't think I'd much like that," Terri stated with an edge to her words.

Before Dylan could even decide what he wanted to do to the light witch, his lover acted. She wrested control of both their magics, and in one blinding flash of energy, Terri bound her mother to her father, and sent her to his lair.

"I figured the way you were all over Dylan, Mom, you must need a good fuck. Tell Dad he can get his heir from *you*."

Chapter Nine

The halls of Ashriam echoed hollowly as the Haithe made his way up through the levels towards the gates. The power rushing through his veins was a heady thing. He stopped to savor the feeling for a moment.

Sensing a disturbance in the air before him, he threw a protective shell about himself. Then a sight he'd never expected to see again in all of eternity flashed into reality.

It was her.

He quickly wrapped her in his arms, forcing her back against the stone wall. Casting a silent spell, ensuring she could not escape him. This was something he planned to make permanent.

She opened her mouth, but he was beyond caring what she had to say. He'd dreamt of this moment, envisioned it, craved it. Now she was here, and he was going to fulfill every fantasy he'd entertained about her since she left him.

Crushing his mouth over hers, he quickly disposed of their clothing.

As he buried his cock deep inside her vagina, the idea came to him that he could impregnate her once again.

Yes. That's exactly what he'd do, only this time he'd make sure that she left the infant in *his* care.

* * * *

Damn. Dylan shook his head, knowing that Terri had no idea what she'd just done. Her father was powerful enough on his own. Paired with her mother...

He had work to do. Flashing back to his house, he thought briefly that he should have said something to Terri before his abrupt departure. Then decided it didn't matter.

Not really sure when he'd made the decision to complete all five levels of binding with her, he gathered together the supplies he'd need for the armbands. As he worked, he made a promise to himself to take care of the third binding this very evening.

*

I blinked at the spot where Vaughan had been standing just a moment before.

Well, hell. The man had abrupt down to a fine art form, and it was starting to irritate me.

The doorbell rang, and I didn't bother to check who was on the other side before I threw it open. I was itching for something exciting to do, and a fight would fit the bill just fine.

Savage gave me a wicked grin, and I changed my mind. "Get your ass in here and let's fuck." I grabbed for his arm, blowing off the ripple of unease that worked through me.

He let me drag him into the house, even joined me in a heated kiss, but then he peeled my arms from around his neck.

"Terri, as much as I'd like to, you're off limits now." He shrugged.

"What do you mean I'm off limits?" His cock was hard; I could see it straining against the zipper of his jeans. I reached for him, intending to rescue it.

He stepped back away from my hands. "You're Vaughan's. If I were to fuck you, I'd probably burst into flames."

I wrenched my eyes off his crotch, and searched his face. He looked totally serious. "No way."

"That's what happens when a dark paladin claims you."

"Why do I still want to fuck you then? That doesn't seem right." I had to ball my hands into fists to keep from stroking him.

"That will change if he takes you to the next level," Savage assured me.

"Can this be undone? Whatever he's done to me?"

"No."

He grinned, and I scowled at him. "Can't someone else ... I don't know, put their mark over his?"

Savage shook his head. "He's a true paladin, the highest order. His binding cannot be undone."

"Vaughan! Thanks for fucking up my sex life, you asshole." I wasn't positive he could hear me, but I hoped he could.

I felt him as he appeared behind my back. Savage raised his hands, palms out, and took another step back. "Don't look at me; it's all her doing."

"Terri." Vaughan growled my name.

I spun on him, fisting my hands on my hips. "Savage says if he fucks me he'll burst into flames because of something *you* did to me."

"What are you doing thinking of fucking Savage anyway?" He stepped closer, looming over me. "You know you're mine. Or have you already forgotten the deal you made?" Without taking his eyes off me, he addressed the other man. "What are you doing here anyway?"

"I wondered if Terri wanted to visit the warehouse. They've been asking for her."

Vaughan's eyes flared, the planes of his face growing sharper as his anger rose. "I'll just bet they have." His hand went to the back of my neck, his fingers digging into the muscles there. It was oddly soothing. The moment I relaxed, though, he flashed us into my bedroom.

I looked around, then started for the door.

"Woman," he roared behind me.

I stopped, but didn't turn around. The heat of his body warmed my back moments before he circled me with his arms. He lifted me off the ground and carried me to the bed, tossing me on top of it, my clothes disappearing before I landed.

I glared at him but had trouble keeping it up, seeing how he was naked and aroused something fierce. He crawled across the mattress to me with a fluid grace, causing my heart to kick into high gear, my vagina to flood with cream.

"I've never known a more willful, pain in the ass woman before," he snarled.

I scuttled away from him, not really wanting to escape. "You get many women with lines like that?"

Faster than I could see, he had me on my back, his large, hard frame smashing me into the bed.

He stabbed his cock into me with a brutal thrust of his hips. "Before you, I had accommodating women." He pulled out and speared me again. "Women who went out of their way to please me." He hammered into me a few times, hiked my ass into the air,

then tried the new angle. "Women who would jump at my command." He rammed away at me. "Women that kept their bargains. Women that knew their fucking place," he shouted, delivering an especially hard series of thrusts.

I exploded. Lights flashed through my brain as my body jolted against his, my vagina clenching and unclenching around his cock. He pounded on, his face a mask of fierce determination.

I shuddered through the last of my orgasm, then started winding up towards another blow.

"You are mine," he gritted out, his jaw tight. "You will remember that." He ground his pelvis against me. "Or would you rather I return the demons to your basement?"

Then his magic surged into me, calling mine in a rush of lust and anger. My power bloomed, expanded. The two energies twined around each other growing larger, mating, merging.

He pulled out of me, flipped me onto my stomach, and wrenched my hips into the air. He slammed back in, finding and keeping a driving rhythm that brought him to the back of my vagina with every thrust.

Our magics swirled between us, through us. I started ramming myself backwards against his every inward stroke, the two of us grunting with the impact, sharp bursts of pleasure flashing through me.

Then the magics found my brain and infused it, sending me into a surrealistic overload of sensation. Both mine and his. My climax detonated outward from my groin. Vaughan ground himself deep, lifted my upper body against his chest, angled his head to my neck, and sank his fangs in with a swift stab of pain.

When he drew my blood into his mouth, I lost my mind. Intense pleasure shot from his teeth to my crotch, causing every muscle in my body to spasm. I heard Vaughan speaking in my head, but had no way to grasp the meaning of his words. Then he was spewing into my core. Hot jets of cum warmed me, filled me, overflowed down the insides of my thighs.

Still I rolled with the waves of my climax, our climax, jerking hard when his hands found and toyed with my breasts. My vagina milked his cock with a powerful fisting action that kept him locked in release as well.

"Vaughan," I gasped as I started to grow lightheaded.

He wrenched his mouth away from me, swiping harshly across the flesh with the flat of his tongue. He mumbled something under his breath, and our magics started drawing apart, away from each other, until they snapped back into their rightful places. We collapsed on the bed, me on my face, Vaughan on my back.

My heartbeat had just about returned to normal when he pressed his hips into me, his still hard shaft throbbing in the confines of my sheath.

"Power to power, blood to blood, I claim you." He rolled his pelvis, sending a wave of energy through me from his cock. "Say it, Terri." He eased his dick out of my sex while he waited for me to comply, and shoved the tip of it into my rectum.

"What are you doing to me, Vaughan?" I shook my head, trying to clear the lust that was clouding my mind.

He locked his hands around my waist and slammed himself in, spearing me with a bolt of his magic. "Power to power, Terri, blood to blood, I claim you." He slowly withdrew, then rammed into me again; this time his energy forced my magic to rise.

He jerked my hips into the air, adjusted his hold on me, then powered into my rectum with brutal, mind-blowing thrusts. “Damn it, woman, I’m taking you to the next level; what more could you ask?”

How he could form a sentence, I didn’t know. Couldn’t figure out, in my present state. I felt my body coiling, tightening, and everything narrowed down to the need I had, the need to come.

“Say it, Terri,” he growled, battering wildly away at me.

In a flash of understanding I knew he held me back from reaching my release. That he did this because it was so very important to him that we bind to the next level. It became important to me, too, as I felt the emotions he wouldn’t express. All I had to do to strengthen our joining was ... say something.

Suddenly the words appeared in my brain. “Power to power, blood to blood, I accept your claim.”

The world around me shattered. Bright and dark flashes of light rent the air, as the bed shuddered and convulsed beneath my hands and knees.

Pleasure, so sharp it bordered on pain, ripped through me, wrenching a scream from my throat. Vaughan cried out at the exact same time, his cock lurching within me. Then he was flooding me with a mixture of cum and power so intense, I felt my soul as well as his tear free of our bodies.

While I quaked beneath him, a part of me watched in awe as the two entities merged. They shone together for a moment, then they drew apart, reforming into two separate incorporeal bodies, each a mirror reflection of the other.

With the last of the tremors still running through us, our souls sank back into our bodies, anchoring themselves in place, and welding the tightest bond I had ever known.

We crashed onto our sides, Vaughan’s cock still buried in my ass.

“Damn,” he hissed. “That was only the third level.”

Third? *Third*? There were *five* levels to the binding. He was right, though he hadn’t put it into words. If he were to take the next two steps with me, it was likely we’d not survive.

* * * *

Savage was nowhere in sight when we wandered down to the first floor on our way to the kitchen.

“You’re not going to take me to the warehouse, are you?” I asked as I rinsed out the coffeepot and refilled the maker.

“Not likely.” He was prying up the edges of food containers in the fridge, and checking out the contents.

“Aren’t you their leader or something now?” I got mugs out of the cupboard, and set them beside the pot.

He didn’t answer for a moment while he stuck his finger into a box, then tasted it. “Yes,” he threw out as he slid the food into the microwave and started it heating.

“So what’s the problem with my going?” I filled the mugs, and took them to the table.

He grabbed me as I passed on my way to the fridge. “I happen to have a problem with your past.” The irises of his eyes had taken on a fiery shine. His left hand came up, his thumb pressing the tender flesh under my jaw, his fingers cupping my cheek. “I’m not

sure I could contain the anger.” He pressed harder into my skin, and I could feel the roiling tension he was keeping leashed.

I rolled my eyes.

His expression suddenly turned harsher. “You’ll find your way there without me, won’t you?” He didn’t give me a chance to answer. “I think it’s time you moved in with me.”

“What?” I gaped at him.

“Pack some things; we’ll get the rest later.” He let go of my face.

“What if I don’t want to live with you?” I felt my forehead furrow with my frown.

He grunted. “Impossible.” Then, without giving me a chance to do anything, not to grab any of my stuff, or even to set the mugs down, he threw an arm around me and flashed us to his house.

* * * *

The Haithe stood back and admired his handiwork. He’d bound Qiana with his powers so that she wouldn’t be able to leave him this time. In addition, he’d adorned her with a cursed collar and bracelets, insuring that her magic was trapped within.

She glared at him, in all her naked glory, where she was stretched out on his bed. “Karun, you won’t get away with this.”

He smiled at his beloved. “Oh, I believe I already have.”

She shuddered as he crawled across the bed towards her, but her eyes gave her away. She could say whatever she wanted to, but she craved his touch as much as he did hers.

Settling himself between her legs, he eased the very tip of his cock into her passage.

“I’m not just going to fuck you, love, I’m going to open our link while I do it.”

Her eyes widened, and the look of hunger was instantly replaced with fear. He drew in a deep breath, reveling in the scent, the power of it. “That’s more like it,” he muttered, then slammed his way in.

Chapter Ten

“Terri...” Vaughan dragged me away from the drawer I was digging through. “—do you have to look through everything?”

I blinked at him. “Of course.” Then I spotted a desk I hadn’t rummaged through yet, and started in that direction.

He stopped me by wrapping his arms around me from behind. His chin brushed the top of my head when he spoke. “I’ll take you hunting tonight.”

I spun around and sought out his eyes. “Really?” I raised my eyebrow at him, clearly not believing what he’d said.

“Yes.” He gave me a half smile. “After I check on the warehouse.”

I watched him expectantly, but I didn’t ask him to take me with him again. I’d find my own way there sooner or later.

“No, you won’t.” He smirked.

“That’s really inconvenient,” I grumbled.

“Only when you don’t want me to hear your thoughts,” he said and laughed. It was a short bark of sound, one that I rarely heard from him.

“Try this on for size.” I smiled sweetly at him, as I envisioned a steel sphere enclosing my thoughts. *I’ll ask Savage where the warehouse is. He’ll tell me.*

I was almost sorry when the laughter faded out of Vaughan’s eyes as he realized what I’d done. Then I felt the pressure of his power against the wall I’d constructed, and waited to see what would happen.

The force increased, a low ache blooming throughout my brain. I felt my eyes water as he fed more energy into his efforts. Soon my head was throbbing, my skull tight with the contained magic, tears flowing freely down my cheeks.

Then it was gone.

When my eyes cleared, I found Vaughan looking at me with an expression I’d never seen on his face. “What? Why did you stop?”

“I was hurting you.” His eyes widened in surprise at his own statement. “Oh, hell.” Then he held me tightly to his chest. “Who’d have thought that last binding would make me feel this way about you?”

“You’re not going to get all mushy now, are you?” I wouldn’t know what to do with him if he did.

“You don’t like mushy?”

I let my breath out at the teasing note in his voice. “Did I fall for a mushy guy to begin with?”

He stiffened against me. “You fell for me?”

“Yeah, Vaughan. I’m pretty sure that’s what they call this emotion I have for you.”

He set me away from him and took my face in his hand. Watching my eyes, he said, “Describe it to me.”

I took a breath. “You don’t think I’m cursed or something, do you?” I’d been cursed before. I knew what it felt like. This wasn’t it.

“No. Just tell me about it.” His jaw clenched, and I was happy to see a muscle ticking along the edge.

“Well ... when I think of you, my heart speeds up and I get ... warm. If I think of sex, I think of you; my nipples harden and I get hot. When Mom tried to blast me, you’re the one I called out for. Oh, and if I dream about sex, it’s always with you.” I nodded at him, pretty much done with my list.

“That’s it?”

“Pretty much.”

“Tell me the rest.” His voice was a low rumble.

“I want to...” I couldn’t say it when he was looking at me like a bird of prey that’s spotted a mouse.

“Say it,” he commanded.

“I want to snuggle with you after sex,” I blurted out in a rush of nerves.

“Snuggle?” He snorted, and I felt like kicking him. “Since you’re sleeping in my bed, you just might get your wish.”

I still felt like driving his nuts an inch or so into his groin.

* * * *

“So how are they doing?” I asked Vaughan as he flipped his turn signal on.

“Why do you care?” he growled at me.

“Because they’re trying. Because they left that evil bastard that calls himself my father,” I snarled back.

He was quiet a moment, his eyes taking in the surrounding area as he pulled into a vacant lot, and shoved the vehicle into park.

“They’re fine. Half of them want to work with us. The other half wants the group to band together and attack your father.”

“Huh.” I thought about both options for a moment. “What do you think they should do?”

“If they take over Ashriam, they’ll have a home.” I opened my mouth, but he held up a hand to stop me. “I’ve got a call in to Savage. I’d like to train them.”

“I think that’s a good idea.” I reached for the door handle when a thought stopped me. “The Haithe will come for them. What do we do about that?”

“*We* do nothing,” Vaughan snapped. “*I’ll* work with the demons to prepare them for that confrontation.”

I spun on him. “Dylan...” I narrowed my eyes at him, irritated. “—you know damn well I’m going to be a part of that confrontation. Not only do I owe that—man—for what he did to me, but he’s likely linked with Mom by now, and that much stronger because of it.”

Vaughan hopped out of the truck without responding. I threw open my door, and stomped around the back. “You know that as well as I do.” I poked him in the chest while I spoke.

“We’ll talk about it later.” He glanced at my finger. I followed his gaze, and started inching it away from him when he snatched hold of it and squeezed. “If you’d pay attention to your surroundings, you’d sense the demons that are almost upon us.” He flung my hand away.

I reached out with my magic and, sure enough, not twenty feet away I found the vibration that the darker beings radiated. “Fuck.”

“Later.” Vaughan smirked, then motioned for me to follow him as he blended into

the shadows.

We paused at the edge of the trees that lined the back of the lot. There were two Raechons and three Jerind-hults, silent as a breeze, staring at the upper windows of a large colonial.

"Shit. I'm sensing a couple already inside the house," Vaughan said within my head.

"I say we make a front entry, take care of the two inside first," I sent back to him.

One of the Jerind-hults twisted around and stared right at us.

"Looks like we're going to deal with these first." An edge of humor colored his thought.

I felt the drop in air pressure behind me that indicated something was arriving. I lowered myself to the ground, opening my senses wide, as I gathered a ball of energy in my fist. The air sifted through the leaves of the trees, and a hush of expectancy rose as even the nocturnal creatures quieted and waited.

Three more areas around the edge of the lot suddenly dropped in pressure. They made an inaudible pop, a repeating snap of discomfort against my eardrums. I worked my feet under me, and crab-walked as I relocated to a point further out, on the far side of the disturbances.

I registered two more arrival spots, as even the faint breeze died down to nothing.

"What the hell is going on here, Dylan?"

"I don't remember ever seeing anything like this before."

I glanced over to where he knelt behind me.

The screen door at the back of the house creaked open, loud in the unnatural silence of the night. A man, looking entirely too human, stepped into the yard, two arch-Raechons exiting after him, positioning themselves one pace away, on either side at his back.

A chill crept over me when several more points of entry snapped into place. The air crackled as one demon after another, demons of every type, stepped into the realm. They drifted forward, coming to a stop in the yard, until it was packed with their darkly shining flesh.

The human shot a look from one side of the gathering to the other.

"The Haithe has promised his daughter to me. He has yet to produce her."

The demons hissed.

"I expect you to find Miss Terri Peterson, and bring her to me."

The crowd undulated with eagerness, its anticipation scenting the air with a smoky taint.

"Who is that, Terri?"

"I've never met him, but I'd wager the demon possessing that man is Thanatos."

"Thanatos? The Thanatos?"

"Yup."

"Don't fail." The man's words sent a shiver through the demons.

They started shuffling around the yard, easing away from the speaker. Vaughan grabbed my arm and flashed us back to his truck, shoved me through the driver's door, and climbed in after me.

"We'll have to assume they know, or will soon learn about our connection," Vaughan said as he keyed the ignition and pulled calmly out onto the road.

"I suggest..."

"I know what you're thinking. I don't like the idea, but you might be right." He turned another corner, and before long we were coming up on the freeway.

"We can handle any demons that stumble upon us." As long as they aren't searching in large parties.

"Unlikely. They don't get along well enough to coordinate their efforts that way."

"I hate when you do that."

He grinned.

"I wouldn't underestimate the demons under Thanatos either." I thought back to all the conversations I'd ever heard about the arch-Haithe. He outranked my father, even if he didn't live as far below the surface. He'd been around longer, too. There was something else, but I couldn't quite pull the memory from my brain. "I'd like to talk to the demons at the warehouse, at least. There's something I'm not remembering about Thanatos..." I let the thought trail off as I grasped at a memory.

I'd been with the Haithe for seven years, and he was growing frustrated with his minions' inability to impregnate me. I was currently being screwed by another one while he stormed around my quarters having a tantrum, blasting some of the lesser demons into particles, when his eyes lit with an idea.

He spun around, and stomped out of the room calling for his arches.

"What do you suppose that was all about?" I said out loud, not expecting any of the demons lolling about my room to answer me.

"Off to see Thanatos, no doubt," one of the Raechons said.

"Whatever for?"

The creature humping me let out a groan, then I felt his ejaculate surge into my vagina.

The Raechon stood, and strolled casually over to the bed, watching as the demon on top of me finished up, then slid from my body. He waved a hand over his groin, dissolving his pants, creating an engorged penis and scrotum in their place.

He grabbed my ankles and yanked me to the edge, flipping me over onto my stomach. He slammed his cock into me and started stroking before he continued. "He knows we spend as much time fucking you in your mouth and ass as we do fucking your pussy." He ground his hips against me, and I felt the drain of energy as he fed. "He's yet to figure out why you're not getting pregnant, and none of us will tell him we simply enjoy the exercise too much to give it up." Picking up the speed of his thrusts, he hummed to himself as my power levels dropped. "Thanatos, now there's a demon he can make a deal with. His arch-Raechons will advise against it, and that may work for a while, but eventually the Haithe will take that route." He pounded into me with enthusiasm. "Too bad."

Little did they know I'd figured out early on how to keep the bastards from impregnating me. Rather a double-edged sword, when I thought about it.

The Raechon's body stiffened, then he blasted his semen into my depths. "Ahhhh." Without pause, he whipped his cock out of my vagina and drove it to the hilt in my ass. "Now this, I'm going to miss."

"I did *not* need that memory," Vaughan barked at me from the other side of the truck.

"It's not what I was trying to dredge up anyway." I scowled at him, my scowl changing to a grin as I replayed the first time Vaughan had ever fucked me.

When he didn't say anything, I moved onto the second time, then the time after that.

The truck tires squealed as he slammed on the brakes and pulled to the side of the road. He jerked open the door, reached across the seat, and dragged me out behind him.

With a flick of his wrist I was naked from the waist down. He slid his zipper down, a flush coloring his cheekbones. "Turn around." He drew the words out, his voice half an octave lower than usual. With impatient hands, he turned me so I faced the bucket seat. "Bend over," he commanded.

The seat was too high to bend over properly, so I placed my hands against the edge of it, and kind of hung from them, planning on bracing myself with my palms.

"You think you're cute?" he growled, stepping behind me, rubbing the head of his cock down the crease of my ass. "You think it's humorous to taunt me with all the demons you've screwed?" He dipped into my anus, then moved lower. "If I have to, I will burn the memories from your mind," he hissed as he drove himself into me in one brutal thrust.

He grasped a handful of my hair, wrapping it around his fist, while his other hand locked on my hip. He pulled out, then stabbed me again. "I will fry the memory of every last one of those dark bastards out of your brain."

He thrust again, his grip tightening in my hair, arching my head backwards. "I will fuck you until I'm the only one you think of when you think of sex."

The sharp bite of his fangs caused fire to race down the side of my neck.

"You're the only one I think of now," I whispered, as he continued to pound into me.

"Tell me, *amante*, who you belong to." He sank the tips of his fangs back into my neck, his hips jerking erratically as his breathing suddenly deepened.

"You," I gasped.

"What?" He moved his hand to my abdomen, pressing his palm roughly into the soft flesh.

"You, I belong to you," I practically shouted, caught up in the furor of emotion swirling through his magic, through me.

"Forever," he grated.

"Forever." The word turned into a scream as he sank his fangs all the way in, his magic bursting into me with his teeth.

He drew my blood into his mouth, and I exploded. My powers blasted out of me, through him, then back in a wild, untamed rush. His magic surrounded mine, embraced it, then merged with it into a single red hot stream that looped between the two of us. His cock throbbed within me, then the sweet, hot pulse of his cum filled my core.

The fire of our energies raged through us, taking our ecstasy higher. My inner muscles continued to spasm as wave after wave of release ripped through my core, his cock spewing, then spurting again.

He finally wrenched his mouth away from my neck, and our magics snapped. Each sucked back into our bodies, no longer two distinct energies, but mine colored heavily with his, and his filled with mine.

I would have crumpled to the ground had he not been holding me in a death grip. As it was, I barely had time to brace my legs when he shoved away from me.

"Damn," he shouted, and flashed out.

I blinked stupidly at the spot where he'd been standing. The tickle of his cum as it drained out of me and down my leg, a tangible reminder of what had just transpired. I

suspected we'd just crossed the fourth level of binding. Even though no ritual words had been spoken, his intentions to claim me, all of me, had been clear.

Numbly, I looked around for my clothing, knowing it wasn't going to be lying around where I could see it. I searched anyway, and tripped over my own feet, sprawling on my ass on the ground. I stayed there, wondering where the hell Dylan had gone. And why.

Several minutes passed before he returned. He glanced around, and found me where I sat, slumped in the dirt and gravel.

He knelt before me, and grasped my arm. "Blood to blood, soul to soul, power to power, you are mine." He snapped a band around my arm. The metal flared, and the smell of burnt hair filled the air as I jerked my wrist out of his grip.

"Say it."

I sat up straighter, and he snared my other arm, holding another band against my biceps, but not putting it on yet.

"Blood to blood, soul to soul, power to power, I am yours," I relented. He slapped the other piece of metal on me, and I gritted my teeth while it singed my skin, the end result looking like an intricate tattoo.

He helped me off the ground and brushed the dirt off my ass, his motions stiff and jerky. Then I was smothering against his chest, his arms tight around my back.

"What have I done?" he murmured into my hair. He released me only after a strange shudder passed through his body.

With a wave, I was clothed again, my weapons where they should be. "Get back in the truck," he said, and I noticed his eyes were a darker black than I had ever seen them, glints of magic sparking in their depths.

I heaved myself onto the seat, then lumbered over to the passenger side. He climbed in, and just stared out the windshield, but whatever he was seeing, I was sure, was not the dark, middle-class neighborhood that I observed.

When he turned to look at me, there was a silver-gray ring around his irises. I leaned closer for a better look. "Your eyes..."

"Yours too," he said, nodding. He grasped my chin and twisted my face towards the rearview mirror.

I gasped as I found a black-gold ring encircling the gray in my eyes.

He pulled out onto the road as I sank back against the seat. "Mine look cool, but yours are ... awesome."

The side of his mouth twitched.

"Have I ever told you, Dylan?" I slunk closer to him, hampered only by the center console. I brought my hand up so I could play with the hair that feathered the back of his neck. "How positively sexy I think you are?"

His lips twitched again. "You'd be surprised what I picked up from your mind before you found a way to block me."

"Like what you found?" I dug through his hair until I felt the warmth of his flesh.

"Yes." He dropped a hand on my thigh, his fingers stroking along the inseam.

"Since I haven't poked around inside your head that deeply, why don't you tell me what you think of me?" I dragged my nails lightly down his flesh.

"I think you're a right pain in the ass." He pulled into the parking lot at the warehouse.

“Damn it, Dylan. Do you find me attractive, or are you only binding me to you for my power?”

I suddenly found myself on Vaughan’s lap, held close as he glared down at me. “I walk around with a hard-on most of the time because of you, witch. I had already started binding you before you even came into your power. And I’ll be damned if you’re not the most aggravating woman I’ve ever met, but I can’t stop thinking about how you fit around my cock. How perfectly your ass molds to my flesh. You’re a mass of contradictions that fascinates me. You look like a girl, but fight like a warrior. You’re ignorant when it comes to how people, men and women, are supposed to act towards each other, but you’re a vixen in bed. Your inner core is full of purity and light, but it’s encased by a darkness as black as my own. You’re one of the toughest people I know, and yet your heart is so big, you help and protect the very creatures that preyed on you.”

My God. He’d never said so much to me since I’d met him. “I love you, Dylan.” The words spilled out of me before I even knew I was going to say them. Realizing I hadn’t uttered those words to anyone in over a decade.

“I think I’m heading that way myself,” he snapped.

“You’d better kiss me, then. Seems like the proper way to seal the deal.” I grinned up at him.

He shook his head, but lowered his lips to mine. His mouth moved with a tender insistence that caused a surge of emotion to fill me. I followed his lead, whispering his name in my mind as he deepened the kiss, entered my mouth with his tongue, and possessed me.

A ray of moonlight caught his face when he drew away from me, causing my heart to stutter.

“About time,” a muffled voice sounded from the far side of the vehicle.

“Stop fucking around, and get your asses into the building,” another said.

I glanced out the window next to me, and found several very human-looking faces peering in at us.

“Hi, Terri.” One of them waved at me.

Vaughan grunted. “Back off, so I can open the door.”

The demons clustered tighter around the window.

“Hey, Vaughan,” several of them said.

“Fucking children,” he muttered, then louder: “Back up.”

They finally got the idea, and moved, as a unit, away from the door.

He glanced down at me as he opened it, and lifted me out of the vehicle. He stepped down behind me, but moved past, turning back, his lips quirked in a grin. “Coming, love?”

“No,” I started walking towards him, unable to stop the wicked smile that broke out across my lips, “but I’m sure you’ll take care of that later.”

*

Dylan placed his hand on his mate’s waist, and pulled her to his side. He was destined to—determined to—take her to the fifth level, and wondered idly if it would happen tonight.

She greeted the demons, who pranced around them like happy puppies.

Strangely, he found it didn’t bother him any more. He watched her for a moment longer, finding the whole scene rather amusing. *Damn.* He closed his eyes, clenched his

teeth, and resolved to get a grip on himself. Then he shook his head, took a breath, and started steering her towards the building.

A general shout went up when they entered the large common room. He glanced around at his incredibly human-looking netherworlders, wondering what in the world things were coming to. At least it was only Ashriam that had been purged of its denizens. He'd mentioned to Terri that he suspected there was going to be a heavy price to pay to balance out the inequity in nature that had been caused by this uprising.

Ignoring the various creatures clamoring for his woman's attention, he led her up the stairs to the raised floor of the kitchen. The lights were brighter here, reflecting off the stainless steel appliances kept clean by demon and food alike.

He'd balked at Savage's idea, at first. Opening the doors to volunteers who wanted to "feed" the demons out of the goodness of their hearts. But the system seemed to be working out just fine.

With his arm tight around his mate, he turned the two of them to the railing and raised his free hand for quiet. "Thanatos has called his minions to the surface with the express purpose of finding and capturing Terri."

A murmur rose from the demons, and he waited until they'd settled down again.

"I'd like to know what your thoughts are on how we should deal with this situation."

They started talking amongst themselves, the level of noise escalating as their excitement grew. Dylan pulled his cell phone out and dialed as he watched their bodies undulating with purpose.

"Savage. We're at the warehouse. Why don't you grab a couple of hunters and join us."

"Sounds like something's up," the shifter responded.

"That it is." Dylan returned the phone to his pocket, and gathered Terri to his side. "I'd say they're enjoying the challenge."

One of the arch-Raechons—Raum, he thought—approached as the crowd wound down to a whisper.

"Raum, what have you come up with?" He kept his voice loud enough that it carried to the far side of the room.

"Terri, Vaughan. First, we think you should train us in your ways of fighting. Then we thought we'd split up into units, and spread throughout the city, to hunt the arch-Haithe's creatures." Raum waited for Dylan's response.

"Sounds good, so far. But I'm not sure we really have the time to train all of you right now." By their very nature they'd still be useful to him, though. "I'd like you to choose ten men to oversee twenty units apiece. Ask the rest of the—guys—to split up into groups of around sixteen to twenty. Let me know when you're ready, and we can take the discussion to the conference room."

"And Raum?" The demon turned his attention to Terri, but only after Dylan nodded his okay. "There's something about Thanatos that's important, but I can't seem to remember it. Something different about him that I'm thinking we need to know."

Raum's face turned thoughtful. "I'll have to ask around." He shook his head, then grunted and set off across the floor, his stride aggressive.

Savage strolled into the room, followed by Regis and two other hunters. The men who hadn't been there before eyed the demons, but made no other movements towards them.

“Vaughan,” Savage said as he came up the steps. “Terri.” His voice was much warmer as he bent to Dylan’s woman and placed a kiss on her lips. Savage drew her closer to his chest, slanting his mouth, before abruptly stepping back. His eyes searched hers. “How many?”

“Four,” Terri replied. She glanced over her shoulder and smiled at Vaughan. “It’s a good thing,” she added as she looked back at the shifter.

Savage inclined his head to Dylan. “Congratulations.”

Dylan’s lips twitched. “Let’s get down to business.”

He pulled a chair out for Terri, claiming the one next to her, while Savage herded the hunters away from the fridge, where they were rifling through the contents, eating anything that struck their fancy. Once they were all seated, Dylan began.

“Terri, these demons here can learn by touch, can’t they?” She nodded assent. “Good, then we’re going to train the demons how to fight in small teams. They’re interested in hunting Thanatos’s boys, and I say we let them.”

“Since they learn by touch, you’ll have to marshal your thoughts so that you only give them the information you want them to have, or they’ll suck up everything in your head.” Terri glanced at each man at the table.

One of the hunters curled his lip. “Is it dangerous?”

“Not at all,” Terri assured him.

“For every one of them you share the information with, they can turn around and share it with someone else. That should cut down on the amount of time it takes to get them ready.” Dylan made sure everyone was following him, then turned to his mate. “How soon will they be able to take that secondhand data and actually use it physically?”

“Not very long; they’re fighters already. They’ll be much faster at using your information than I was at learning how to fight *them*.”

“After we train them, what do you want us to do?” Savage questioned.

“I don’t see us heading out until tomorrow night, at the earliest. At that time, I’d like all of you to stick close to Terri. I think the hardest fight is going to be near her, and I want our people to back us up.”

Savage nodded, the other hunters joining in.

“Vaughan,” Raum yelled, even though he was standing on the lower level, flush with the end of the table.

“Yes?”

“We’re ready whenever you are.” The demon practically saluted him. “Oh, and Terri? Thanatos isn’t just an arch, he’s a viznesen.”

Dylan saw his woman flinch at the news, and had to clench his jaw to keep from smiling. So Thanatos was also an overlord. There weren’t many, in any of the realms, that could wield more power. But there were a few...

He returned his attention to the Raechon. “We’ll meet you in the conference room.”

* * * *

I stretched out on the bed in one of the few empty rooms in the warehouse. I’d had enough practice, enough training, enough everything. All I wanted now was a few hours of undisturbed sleep. The noise from the area below as the demons clashed in mock battle was keeping me awake, though.

That’s what I told myself anyway, until I’d thrown up a sound block, and still had

trouble falling asleep.

Oddly, I missed Vaughan's presence in the bed. I was coming to see there was much more to the man than he let others know about. There was a depth to him that he hid well behind his anger and his domineering personality. Above all, and what mattered to me most at the moment, he was a safe haven for me. He'd protect me where no one else had, since my human family.

I flopped over onto my face and checked the shielding on the building. I found it to be stronger than any I'd ever cast, and was grateful when I couldn't find any weak spots in it. I should have known, but I still felt better for having confirmed it.

As I wrapped myself in the security of that knowledge, I drifted off to sleep. The last thought I had was that I'd seriously fallen in love with the dark paladin.

Chapter Eleven

The Haithe released the last binding, no longer needing it with the link open between the two of them. She was his to command.

“Kneel.” He shed his clothes as she positioned herself on the bed. He moved behind her, his cock jutting out ahead of him, ready for the evening’s entertainment.

He sensed Thanatos’s arrival just before the arch-Haithe appeared beside them.

“Oh.” The man’s eyes went to his cock, his features sharpening as Karun slid his entire length into the woman’s vagina.

“Join us.” The Haithe’s lips curved in a wicked grin as he stroked slowly in and out of his woman. His *mate*. Thinking this was a perfect situation in which to test the strength of their link.

Thanatos waved a hand down his body and his clothes disappeared. His ruddy shaft bobbed as he climbed onto the mattress, near the woman’s head.

“My pleasure,” he murmured as he angled the tip of his cock to her lips.

“Suck him,” the Haithe commanded. “Swallow his cum.”

Qiana immediately and enthusiastically set to work on the task.

Karun increased his speed, drawing a wash of the woman’s cream. A few more strokes and he gathered her juices on his fingers, circled her anus, then thrust a finger through the tight ring of muscle. He pumped a few times, then gathered more moisture. His eyelids dropped over his eyes as he worked two, then three fingers into her ass, spreading and twisting them as he plunged them deeper.

“Yes,” he purred, pulling his cock from her pussy, and moving it up to her back entrance.

Thanatos cursed, and as Karun jammed his cock deep inside Qiana’s rectum, Thanatos unloaded his cum into her mouth. A shiver swept down Karun’s spine as he watched his wife’s throat work, drinking down the other man’s semen. His balls twitched, and he threw his hips into a brutal pace, grinding his shaft through her tender flesh.

“Damn!” Fire shot from his sac and through his cock. He gripped her tighter, buried himself to the hilt, and filled her with his seed.

Still hard, he pulled his shaft from her warmth and stretched out on his back, at the woman’s side. “Qiana, come straddle my hips, and take my cock into that hot cunt of yours.”

She complied without hesitation, placing the head of his shaft into her opening. He thrust upward, impaling her with his entire length, then stilled.

“Care to take her ass, Thanatos?”

The arch quickly positioned himself between their legs, shooting a wicked grin at Karun over the woman’s shoulder. Then he speared her dark passage, shoving his cock to the balls in her depths with one hard stroke.

The men set up a rhythm that soon had the three of them groaning as their tension built.

“Damn, Karun.” Thanatos shifted his weight and delivered a series of driving thrusts. “I haven’t felt anything this good in ages.”

Qiana came, her inner muscles milking both of the men’s cocks. They went wild,

pounding their way into her body relentlessly, both of them drawing nearer, closer to release. They came at exactly the same moment in a flash of ecstasy, each man cursing and groaning as they pumped her full of their seed.

As Karun savored his climax, he couldn't help but congratulate himself on how completely he'd linked his woman. She could deny him nothing now.

Not even her life.

* * * *

I woke up with the weight of Vaughan's arm over my chest, and his leg over my thighs. The sun was shining in through the blinds that covered the small windows, set high into the wall. I snuggled back into his body, but he was totally out of it, not even twitching at the movement. The clock on the nightstand let me know it was eleven already, and I wondered if I should try to get more sleep, or forage in the kitchen for some much needed food.

My stomach won out, urging me to the side of the bed. I found my clothes, and ventured to the kitchen. The place was eerily quiet, what with nearly four hundred beings in the surrounding rooms. Four hundred. The number still astounded me, and sparked a bit of anger at Vaughan for not telling me that more demons had arrived. I wondered, briefly, why they hadn't come to me. Leave it to Vaughan to come up with a spell that diverted any new demons seeking refuge to him.

I gathered eggs, cheese, and butter from the fridge, then helped myself to a glass of orange juice while I got the coffee going in one of seven makers. *Christ*. They even had espresso and cappuccino machines. Demons drinking cappuccino. Just something—odd—about that image.

I ate standing at the counter, shoveling the food in, sorry I hadn't made more. Thought about scrounging for something else.

"I don't know what you're doing, woman, but get your ass back to bed."

"Aye, aye, captain." I flipped him a saucy mental salute, rinsed my dishes in the sink, then headed back to Vaughan. A woman with a mission.

As soon as I closed the door behind me, I stripped out of my clothes. Vaughan's eyes darkened with lust as he scanned me from head to toe. I threw my clothes on the chair his were draped over, then stalked towards the bed and the man on it.

"On your back, Vaughan." I knelt on the side of the bed and gave his shoulder a push.

He narrowed his eyes at me, so I just shoved a little harder, throwing a leg over his hips while I was at it.

"I've got every intention of fucking you, so if you want me to stop, you'd better do something about it now. Later, you won't get a chance." I couldn't stop the grin that stole over my lips, didn't even want to.

He lay flat on his back, resting his hands loosely on my hips as I leaned forward and reached between us for his cock. I guided him to my opening, braced my hands on his chest levering my upper body higher as I sank down his shaft.

"Damn," he muttered.

"Fuck me," I breathed as I started a rocking motion.

I moved my hands lower, onto the hard muscles of his stomach, and picked up my pace. His fingers dug into my flesh as he started to thrust upward in counterpoint. I felt

his magic flare, and brought mine up, reaching out with it to twine with his.

His arms came around my back and pulled me down to his chest, one hand capturing the back of my head as he sought out my mouth with his. Our lips met and our powers surged. I thrust my tongue between his teeth, urgently rolling my hips as the muscles in my pelvis tightened.

My movements became erratic as I drew ever closer to the edge, my breathing harsh. I dropped my head down beside his, and grasped his shoulder between my teeth.

Then I let my fangs extend and for the first time in my life I allowed myself to bite. Vaughan cried out, locked his arms around me and the next second I was on my back with Vaughan on top of me.

I sucked, drawing his blood into my mouth and I exploded.

Vaughan went wild, pounding into me while I jerked and writhed in the grips of an intense orgasm. I drew another mouthful of his blood and his body stiffened. Then he twitched, his cock throbbed, and heat blasted into me as he spewed his semen into my depths.

I finally let go of his neck, swiping my tongue over the puncture marks, willing my fangs to retract. Vaughan collapsed on top of me, my favorite place for him to be, as our heartbeats slowed and our breathing returned to normal.

“That was the most incredible sex I’ve ever had.” Vaughan shuddered. “You have got to bite me more often.”

“Now that’s a request I can hardly refuse.”

*

Dylan ran his hand down the curve of his lover’s back, cupped the cheek of her butt, and gave it a squeeze. She mumbled into her pillow. He leaned over her back, moving his hand to the crease of her ass, and teased his fingers between the soft globes of flesh until he found the tight pucker of her anus.

He dropped his hand lower, and smiled to himself when he found her still wet. Gathering some of their cum, he coated her hole, then eased a finger inside.

“Huh?” Terri’s head shot up.

“Time to get up.” Dylan pumped his finger into her, then added a second one.

“Dylan?” The tone of her voice stilled his hand. “Let me roll over a sec?”

He withdrew his fingers, unconsciously pushing at her mind to see what she was thinking. And met a wall.

She wriggled over onto her back, “I think we’re going to win against my father, if not tonight, then when he does confront us, but ... just in case, I wanted to tell you how much I love you.”

His chest tightened at her words, and a feeling of utter contentment passed through him. He dropped on top of her, kneeling his way between her legs, never breaking eye contact. When he was poised and ready to enter her, he gave her a wry grin.

“You know, Terri, my kind doesn’t burden themselves much with that emotion. But there’s something about you...” He zeroed in on her mouth, but stopped just before making contact. “If we had time, I’d take you to the last level right now.” Then he pressed his mouth over hers as he flexed his hips and sank into her sex.

She wrapped her legs around his back, meeting his strokes with an equal hunger. He lost himself in the feel of her sheath, soft and moist around his cock. Tight, so very tight, and warm. As he increased his pace, the heat inside of her rose. He felt her inner muscles

tighten, then she cried out his name, her vagina convulsing around him in rhythmic pulses that shot him over the edge.

Fuck me. He rammed into her hard, then held his position while he blasted his cum against her womb. He drew his cock back, then powered himself in when another burst of release grabbed hold of him.

When he'd emptied his balls, he lowered himself to her chest. *Mine.*

There was a rap on the door right before it opened. Savage shot a look at him, his face grim. "The fighting has begun."

In a fluid movement, Dylan withdrew from his woman, and climbed off the bed. He retrieved his clothes from the chair, and started dressing. He caught Savage watching Terri as she leapt to her feet, and came towards him for her own clothing.

"You going to tell us what's going on, or are you just going to stare?" Dylan smoothed his hand over Terri's ass as he shot a look at Savage.

Savage slid him a grin, then leaned against the door frame. "Both?"

Dylan rolled his eyes.

"Hawkins and Seiger called in from over by Fifth and Elm. They came upon a large group of demons, and called for backup. That was twenty minutes ago. I sent a unit of our own demons out with Cutter. I've also called in the other hunters. They'll meet us here."

"We'll want at least six others in our group." Dylan sat on the edge of the bed while he pulled his boots on. "Even if we weren't planning on confronting Terri's father, I have a feeling he's planning on finding her."

"The question is, will he be working with Thanatos, or not?" Terri sat beside him, shoving on her own footwear.

"What do you think? You're the expert here." He started strapping on his weapons.

"Knowing the Haithe, I'd have to say he's going to come at me alone." She tapped her wrists, and then her thighs in a gesture Dylan had seen her do dozens of times. "Well, he'll have Mom with him, of course, and probably a dozen fighters."

"Let's go." He placed a hand on her back, sliding it to her waist when they reached Savage.

The shifter just nodded at him, and started for the stairs.

* * * *

The demons were amassed in the large common room, the muted rustling of their clothing a testament to their anticipation.

Vaughan raised his hand and pointed to several of them. They came forward, lining up below the railing. The hunters ranged themselves out in an arc behind us, Savage commanding them with hand signals.

"Each of your units will take a designated section of the city. Keep in touch with the other units in case you run into larger concentrations of the enemy. Kill only those you have to. Your lead hunter will know where to take any demons that want to come over to our side. Do not bring them back here." He scanned the room, flicked a glance at me, then returned his attention to the demons. "Any questions?"

There were none, and Savage took over, pairing his men with the lead demon commanders. Some units left through the two main exit doors, others flashed out. In a matter of minutes, only a core group of eight hunters remained standing at our backs.

Savage rested his hip on the edge of the table and crossed his arms over his chest.

“Where did you figure the Haithe was going to show up?” His face was set in harder, harsher lines than I’d ever seen.

“Terri’s house.” Vaughan drew his dagger out of its thigh sheath, and laid it on the table. He whispered an incantation as he passed his hand down the length of the blade, then returned it to his thigh. “Any last words of advice?”

“For every demon you see, count on at least one you can’t.” I stared at where he’d tucked his blade, curious to know what he’d just spelled over it. When I glanced at his face, he shook his head.

Then he dropped his gaze, his brow creasing in concentration. “As soon as we arrive at your house, I’ll cast a revealing spell. I’ll do it again when we have a visual on the enemy.” He slid a look at me, and grasped my upper arm. “You sure you can fight against your father?”

I gave him a shark’s grin, all teeth and soulless intention. “I’m looking forward to it.”

With a nod, he gestured to Savage. “Let’s go hunting.” Then he whisked us to my house.

* * * *

“*Exposé*,” he breathed as we entered inside the house, near the front door.

Nothing registered, and a quick scan with my senses told me that the place was empty.

Savage and the rest of the hunters arrived, glanced at Vaughan, then ranged out around the room. We stood looking at each other for a couple of minutes until I’d had enough. I rolled my eyes and headed into the kitchen to make a pot of coffee, Vaughan following.

“Are we just going to wait?” I dug in the pantry until I found a package of Styrofoam cups.

“Savage is going to check with the other hunters and see if any of them have run into Thanatos or the Haithe.”

“You know...” I grabbed the milk out of the fridge and checked the date. “If he’s coming to the house to confront me, then I’d rather intercept him where he isn’t expecting me.”

I placed the sugar bowl next to the milk, then grabbed a handful of spoons out of the drawer.

“Except he’ll probably gate straight into your back yard.” Vaughan helped himself to a cup.

I thought about the coming battle. “There’s got to be a better place to fight him.”

Savage entered the kitchen, a wicked grin on his face. “Let’s get the show on the road.” He grabbed a mug and poured himself some coffee. “The word I’m getting is the Haithe is on his way.”

“Right now?” Vaughan raised his eyebrow at the shifter.

“Soon.” Savage tossed back his drink, and dropped the cup into the sink. “I say we get the others and head outside.”

Vaughan nodded, shot a look at me, then went with Savage into the living room.

They returned moments later, followed by the eight other hunters. All large, imposing males with grim countenances and hard eyes. I tagged along behind Vaughan as

he led our troop out back. Then I took my place between him and Savage with the merry men ranged in a loose circle around us.

“Did I ever tell you about the time I came up against a Mortidorte?” Savage leaned on one hip. His gaze flicked around the yard, but his body was relaxed.

“Don’t believe you did.” I could feel the tension radiating off of Vaughan, the excitement.

“It was thirteen years ago.” Savage shook his hands out. “Over by the railroad station. I’d just cornered him on the tracks where they rode alongside the passenger terminal. I was concentrating on the demon, and not paying enough attention to my surroundings.” He slid me a grin. “That train sure took me by surprise. I got trapped in the cow catcher, and didn’t get myself pried off until it had almost reached Albany.”

Vaughan laughed, then tensed. “Incoming,” he hissed.

Everybody went on alert.

Vaughan scanned the yard, then altered our position so that we faced away from the house. Savage moved to my other side, the others shifting their places to keep the circle formed, all of us facing outwards.

I felt the gates opening, easily a dozen of them, the one directly in front of us more prominent than the others. The air began to shimmer, the heaviness of magic oozing through the portals, casting a pall over us. Both Vaughan and Savage started muttering incantations.

I tapped my weapons again, aware that the enemy had started to emerge from the gates behind me, unwilling to look in that direction because of the threat I faced. My nerves stretched tighter as I realized there were no sounds of fighting.

None yet, anyway.

Then a dark outline began to take shape in the swirling mists of the portal before me. I concentrated on that shape, working a spell in my mind for protection along our forward ranks. The image wavered, then began to solidify. My heart kicked up into high gear as adrenaline flooded my system. Time slowed down, and everything took on a sharper, more defined appearance. I became one with the texture of the grass, the way it bent and swayed in the mystical breeze that exited the gate. One with the leaves that fluttered in the same stirring of air; one with the bird that screeched in warning, then fell silent.

I saw every swagger and sway of the man that walked out of the gate, the woman on his arm, both standing tall and fearless as they faced us.

“Ah, Terri, how nice of you to greet us.” There was a dark and writhing power surrounding the Haithe. I spared a quick glance at my mother, and actually saw the energy that flowed off of her, out of her, and into the man.

“Haithe.” I inclined my head to him. “I was in error when I told you I’d kill you if you ever tried to take me back to Ashriam.” He grinned, and I clenched my teeth until I got control of myself. “That was before I found out what you did to my family.”

“Ah.” He spread his hands, palms upward. “What can I say? I was jealous?”

I took a deep breath, then let it out slowly. “As I was saying, I had only intended to kill you if you tried to kidnap me again. All that’s changed. Now I’m going to kill you because of what you did to them.”

I started gathering power, compressing it, forming an image in my mind of how I would deliver it. The Haithe did nothing, just stared at me, his lips set in a confident grin. Fighting erupted around me as his minions moved on the other hunters. I quickly cast a

revealing spell, at the same time hearing Vaughan in my mind as he cast one at the same time. From the corner of my eye I saw several windredges appear that had been hidden by the Haithe's magic.

"Impressive." My father inclined his head to me.

Like I'd care what he thought.

Two demons suddenly broke from the right and came at me, claws extended. I spun on them, dropping my wrist knives into my hands, striking up and under the reach of their arms. Another one joined the fight, and I was nearly tagged by a claw as I dealt a death blow to the ner-Raechon in front of me. I dropped to the ground, rolled to the side, and came up in a crouch, swinging the blade in my left hand upwards and into the abdomen of the Raechon that had almost sliced me.

Flashes of light erupted around Vaughan as he battled his own demons, his powerful body moving with a fluid grace that I couldn't help but admire, even under these conditions. Savage, on my other side, was a compliment to his name, as he tore his way through the enemy with the teeth and claws of his beast.

I ducked and thrust as another demon came at me, then another and another. One of my knives wrenched out of my hand as it stuck in the flesh of an Ischmin. I snagged the dagger off my thigh just in time to deflect a windredges before I realized, with a kind of awe, that there were very few enemies left fighting.

A glance over at Vaughan showed him dispatching the last of his creatures in a brilliant explosion of light and dust. I took a quick look around the entire circle and ended up facing my father, the Haithe.

"Hey, Savage, what's that saying you told me about?" I yelled.

"The only good demon?" Vaughan shouted back, his eyes glittering, his lips curving in a grin as he faced me. "That one?" Savage spun and finished off the remaining ner-Raechon, then moved to join us. Together we faced the Haithe and his mate.

"The only good demon..." Savage started.

"...is a dead demon!" The three of us cried out together.

With fire raging through my blood, I gathered my power. It was a heady feeling as it built through and infused me. I reached out and grabbed hold of Vaughan's magic, and sucked it into the furnace my soul had become. Next I tapped into Savage's energy and brought it on board, and through him, every hunter's in the yard.

Ablaze with power, I faced the two that had created me. "Any last words?"

"You're mine." My father threw his head back, sucked more of the life-force out of my mother, then dropped his head forward, his gaze locking with mine. The side of his mouth curved in an evil grin just before he released his powers at me.

I was ready, more than ready, and I rushed to meet his energy with my own. The two magics crashed into each other with a boom that knocked Savage to the ground. The powers expanded, the blue of his surging upwards with the golden glow of mine. Writhing against each other, growing ever hotter as I fed more energy into the struggle.

I saw a black bead of sweat pop out on my father's forehead. Desperately he drew more power from my mother. Her lush body finally crumpled to the ground at his side, rapidly drying, shrinking, then imploding in a pile of ash. More sweat broke out across his brow and ran in black trails down the sides of his face.

I gave it all I had. I emptied every last bit of power that I'd held in reserve, and thrust it at the Haithe with a vengeance. It consumed his fire, raced along the track of his power

and straight at *him*. I curled a piece of it around his body, to keep him trapped in this realm, in this spot, and smiled when I saw him try to turn and found he couldn't.

This time, when his eyes met mine, I could see the knowledge in them of his coming death. "So I'm a good demon after all?" he called to me.

I laughed—the sound of it edgy, slightly wicked—and just before my magic blasted into him, I answered, "No, just a dead one." Then the magic was there, lighting his body like a torch, the fire flaring straight up into the night in a pillar of golden flame.

Just as quickly, the conflagration subsided, dropping down to sizzle briefly over the spot where the two of them had stood, before dissipating in a harmless wave across the ground.

I blinked at the spot for a over a minute, until Vaughan slapped me on the back and broke the spell. I grinned up at him, feeling his approval through the link that was still open between us.

"God, that felt good." I bumped against his chest, and his arms came around me.

"Gave me a fucking hard-on," he growled.

"Vaughan." We both turned to look at Savage, who held his cell phone to his ear, his expression hardening as he listened. He slapped the phone shut. "No time to celebrate. We've got another battle going on over on Second Avenue."

I gathered my weapons, wiped the blades as clean as I could get them on the grass, mentally kicked myself in the ass for not working up the spell I'd promised myself to create in order to clean them, and slapped them back into their sheaths. Moments later we flashed in pairs to the new location. Vaughan pulled me into the shadow of a building, his eyes trained on the action we'd nearly appeared in the middle of.

"Thanatos," he breathed. The arch-Haithe and nearly a hundred of his followers were engaged with our demons and hunters. The man himself, right in the thick of things, laughed as he disintegrated members of our team.

I followed Vaughan this time, more than happy to let him wield our powers against this enemy. Savage came to a rest beside me, his back to Vaughan.

After a glance at him, I turned around, putting my back to my lover's as well.

"Is this a fair fight?" Savage flicked his eyes at me.

"I really don't know." And I didn't.

*

Dylan eyed his opponent. The demon inhaled slowly, his body expanding, darkening in color to the greasy blackness of his natural form. A vile, insidious power radiated outwards from the beast, darker than any magic he'd ever felt before.

Thanatos's mouth split in a wide grin, exposing a row of jagged yellow teeth.

"What business do you have here?" he asked, flexing his hands as he prepared a defensive strike.

"What is it to you?" the demon countered.

"This is my realm. That makes it my concern." Dylan traced a line of power to his lover, connecting them so he could draw her energies quickly should he need them.

Thanatos tipped his head in consideration, then without warning flung a flaming, gelatinous mass at Dylan's chest. He slapped a shield into place, just in time. The substance splatted across the invisible barrier, leaving flames in its wake.

*

"So that's how you want to handle this?" I heard Vaughan say just before I felt the

current of power as it flowed from me into Vaughan. Then I gasped as he reached through me and touched the source of my magic. It was different, so very different than drawing energy from the earth. I hadn't even thought to look for it. Wasn't sure I'd have known where to look. Leave it to the dark paladin to be prepared.

I snapped back to attention when he spun off a thread of that power and looped it back to me. Savage glanced over, his eyes wide, and I knew that Vaughan had done the same to him.

As much as I wanted to eavesdrop on the action behind me, I had more pressing matters to attend to—demons closing in on us from the front. I quickly whispered the revealing spell, and the two ner-Raechons that were advancing were each immediately flanked by windredges. An irritation that I didn't know I had with the bloody little creatures flared into rage inside of me, and without thought I worked a spell that I'd prepared when I was still trapped in Ashriam. I reached out to the other hunters, and found myself touching the demons as well. I quickly changed my plans, left the hunters untouched, and drew the darker powers to me.

"Whatever you're doing, keep it up," Savage whispered beside me.

I condensed the enemies' magic, focused my thoughts, and let the tension build. Within seconds it had grown too large for me to fully contain. I thought the last words of the spell, and let the energy blast outward from me.

The result was astounding. All of Thanatos's demons were spread out across the cracked pavement of a defunct factory, most of them engaged with our own demons and the hunters that accompanied them. As the wave of my power raced through them, the windredges burst apart in a shower of molten sparks.

Only the windredges.

"Christ." Savage flexed his claws in front of his body as the destruction continued. The ner-Raechons paused, glanced at each other, then advanced once again.

I focused now on the demon that was coming straight for me, keeping watch for attack from my left, the side away from Savage, making me vulnerable there. Savage sprang into action before his creature could take the offensive, raking his claws low across the demon's body, sprinting past, slicing across its back on the return swing of his arm.

I saw the ner-Raechon before me tense, felt a shimmer of power to my left, and at the last possible moment, I ducked, dropped a knife into my hand, and lunged towards the creature that I couldn't see.

"*Exposé*," I hissed, and a Jerind-hult wavered into view. I dropped my second blade, and buried both blades into its massive chest. It doubled over, and I rolled over its shoulder and twisted around while drawing my short sword. I swung for its neck, missing, but drove him closer to Vaughan's position, aware that I'd left the hunter's back unprotected.

The Jerind-hult swung a huge fist at my head. I dropped beneath the strike, turned, and sliced across the backs of the beast's legs. It grunted, kicked out, and brushed the side of my thigh, causing me to stumble, which saved me as it swept its leg back through the space I had previously been standing in.

Anger flared through me at the amount of time I was wasting fighting this lesser demon. My focus narrowed down to the creature's knees as I added power to my sword. I pivoted, both hands on the hilt, and felt the jarring impact as my blade connected.

The beast crashed to the ground, howling. I held my sword up high as I moved to the creature's side, then brought it whistling down. As enchanted steel severed the Jerindhult's head from its body, I felt the power that Thanatos was gathering from his minions. Flicking my gaze around the lot, I saw the demons dropping as the arch-Haithe absorbed their essence to fuel his spell.

I started running back towards Vaughan; I was farther away from him than I'd thought. Thanatos's lips were moving as he wove his spell. Dammit, I was going to be too late. In the split second before he released that ungodly amount of energy at Vaughan, I altered my course slightly, bent my legs, and threw myself between my lover's body and the arch-Haithe.

I was instantly encased in an agonizing field of dark power. Hot, so very hot, and alive with electricity. Searing my flesh, my lungs, my eyes. I hit the pavement, writhing in pain as I continued to burn. My vision dimmed, darkened; then my brain shut down.

*

"Fuck!" Dylan quickly looked away from his lover's body, focusing his anger on the man responsible. "*Ego dico in meus cruor subvertio vos.*" With every fiber of his being, he cast the spell at Thanatos, making sure to hit his mark, and pouring more energy, more power at the demon when he sensed the arch-Haithe starting to weaken.

He kept up the attack, holding the flow steady, allowing some of the energy to wash backwards into all his demons and his hunters. Then he formed an enclosing shield around Thanatos, spinning it tighter as the fabric of the arch's being began to flux.

So anticlimactic was it when the great black warrior exploded in a small nova, only to be contained within the shield, that Dylan laughed.

Until his eyes fell on his mate's form, silent and still at his feet.

Men and demons gathered around him, cheering. He waved at them, wanted them gone, as he knelt beside Terri and gathered her into his arms.

Savage dropped next to him, his hand resting lightly on Dylan's shoulder. "Will she make it?"

Dylan slid a glance at the shifter. "A fucking lot you know about dark paladins."

The other man blinked at him as he slung his woman over his shoulder. He just shot Savage a grin, and flashed out.

* * * *

I came to, hanging upside down over Vaughan's shoulder, just as he flashed us into his bedroom. I struggled to get off of him and he swatted me on the ass.

I could feel his chest heaving as he tried to control his breathing. A rumble started deep inside him, vibrating outward on a growl. I felt his muscles bunch and shift as the change started coming over him. A change, I had learned, that happened when his emotions were running high. Too high for him to keep bottled up in his human form. He leaned forward and dropped me to my feet, his hands bracing me, keeping me from falling on my ass.

"That was the stupidest thing I've ever seen in my life!" he roared.

"I was only trying to save you!" I yelled back.

"I'm a fucking dark true paladin. My life wasn't at risk."

"Well, I'm a fucking..." Crap, I couldn't remember what I was. "I'm a fucking something that probably doesn't ... You're a what?" I tried to get a grip on myself.

He shoved me towards the bed, his expression hard, his emotions roiling out of him in waves. Anger, mixed with fear, protectiveness coiled with disbelief. Love.

I clambered on top of the mattress, not the least bit surprised that my clothes had disappeared. Then I lay on my back and watched in fascination as he neared. His muscles rippling with contained power, he moved over me. His face looked the same, not so very shifted, but larger, rougher than normal. His hair was wild about his head, his eyes even wilder.

"This body is mine," he growled, grasping my shoulders. "Your life is mine." He knelt my legs further apart, his jaw clenching as he stared into my eyes. "Lift—your—legs."

I started raising my knees along the sides of his body, just as he jerked his hips forward and speared into me with one powerful stroke.

"Ah." Fuck, he was big.

"Don't you ever..." He powered his cock to the back of my vagina with preternatural strength. "...risk yourself..." He slammed into me a few more times. "...like that..." He ground his groin against mine, then returned to hammering away at me. "...again." He moved his hands to my ass, his claws pinpoints of pain as he totally lost control.

My pelvic muscles clenched, the nerve endings in my sheath blazing with sensation as his enlarged penis plowed through the swollen tissue. The orgasm started deep inside of me, gaining speed and intensity as it blasted out of my core. I screamed; Vaughan sank his fangs into my neck at that moment, causing a secondary jolt of ecstasy to blast through me.

"*Mine!*" roared through my brain before his body bucked, his cock throbbed, and thick ropes of cum spewed into my depths.

"*Yours!*" I managed to project as my vision dimmed.

He thrust again, shooting another spurt of semen into me, and yet again before his balls ran dry.

"Don't move," he rasped.

I kept my eyes closed, trying to catch my breath as I felt him shift back to his human form.

He whispered in that language of his that I didn't know, the cadence making me think it was a spell. Then he spoke out loud. "By my heritage as a dark true paladin, by the power of the earth, I bind you to me, Terri Peterson. By my blood, my body, and my soul, you are mine, and will remain so, until time itself ends."

He drew his dick part way out of me, and glided it back in. Then he levered himself up onto his elbows, and looked down at me with his black eyes circled in a brilliant silver. "Repeat after me." Another slow slide of his flesh through mine. "Dylan Vaughan, dark true paladin, everything that I am, is yours. Everything I have ever been, or will become, I give to you. By your blood, your body, and your soul, I belong only to you, until the end of time."

I repeated the words as he picked up the pace of his thrusts. Watching, totally captivated, as he drew a single claw along his shoulder.

"Drink." He bent towards my face, and I hesitated as his blood welled on the surface of his skin. Then the memory of his taste flowed through me, compelling me forward to latch my mouth over the wound. I sucked; at the same moment, he pierced my flesh with his fangs, and drew my blood into his mouth.

His heart immediately took over the task of beating for both of us, his lungs powering the air in and out of my own. I felt myself sinking into him, joining him, becoming him.

Then we were one. One glowing being of energy and sensation. Thoughts roiled through my brain, both his, and mine. Memories I'd forgotten, or never had, rolling through. Emotions followed, a full spectrum of them, full of color and power.

I was vaguely aware that his hips continued to drive his cock within my depths. I felt orgasm after orgasm ripple through me as he filled me repeatedly with his seed. But it paled in comparison to this other joining.

Then, in a rush of wind and light, I raced back into my body, my consciousness becoming my own, though still attached to his.

I jerked as sensation returned to me, my heightened awareness assaulted with the pleasure that strafed through my groin.

He cried out with a jumble of words as he locked his pelvis to mine, and came again.

Then he slumped over me, his weight pressing me into the mattress.

"It is done."

The fifth, and final step had been taken, and I would never be the same again.

Chapter Twelve

I leaned forward, resting my arms on the railing as I watched Vaughan down on the main level arguing with the demons. Seemed they didn't really want to go back to the netherworld, and my lover was trying to convince them otherwise. I'd heard his arguments before, about the imbalance between good and evil, blah, blah. Oh, he had a point, but demons weren't exactly known for being altruistic.

In a huff of energy, he stormed across the room, and climbed up to where I sat. "Can you believe these guys?" He grabbed a beer from the fridge before he plunked himself down at the table. "They're having fun up here, they say; they don't want to go back."

"Whatever will you do?" I couldn't help the sarcasm that laced my voice.

He narrowed his eyes at me and sat up straighter. "I am a dark paladin."

I waited for him to continue, but he just sat there, one eyebrow raised at me, apparently thinking I understood what he was saying. "So?"

"Watch." I didn't like the way he hissed the word, or the strange glint in his eyes as he rose from the table and approached the rail.

He took a deep breath, and I felt the pull of his magic. I shifted my gaze, and watched in awe as a black swirl of dark powers wound around his body, enlarging his already impressive frame until he was over seven feet tall, and far more muscular than he was as a man. The tone of his skin had deepened as well, though not as dark as the demons' jet black; he was more of an earthy burnished bronze.

Then he shot me a look over his shoulder, and I saw red flames in the center of his eyes, sharp teeth lining a wicked smile. He tipped his head to me, then descended the stairs and worked his way through the crowd. The demons glanced at him, straightened their stances, then continued their conversations, otherwise unconcerned with Vaughan's appearance.

He motioned to Absalom and Raum to follow him as he continued to the far end of the room, then back again. With my vision still skewed, I could see the mist of power he left over everyone he passed.

He brought the two demons with him to the table, grabbing a beer before sitting down, dwarfing the rest of us.

"You know what I am?" His voice was deeper, rougher, and sent an unexpected thrill through me.

The demons immediately quieted and nodded their heads, their eyes large as they stared at him.

"Good." Vaughan touched Absalom's arm, and Raum's shoulder in an almost affectionate gesture. I felt a flash of energy leave me, and flow through him.

"Absalom," he rumbled, not saying another word until the demon looked up at him. "I'm placing you as the new Haithe of Ashriam." He stared at the man, letting his words sink in. "Raum will be the new Haithe of Thanatos's realm."

"Desultory," Absalom uttered.

"Do you understand?" He looked between the two men, waiting for their answer.

"Yes, sir," Absalom gasped out a moment before Raum's "Of course, sir."

Black tendrils of smoke shot down Vaughan's arms, then spiraled around the

demons' bodies. When they were completely encased in the magic, I felt Vaughan wrest hold of my power. Lightning flashed from his palms into the men. They stiffened.

"Swear allegiance with me," Vaughan growled.

"By my blood, I am your ally," Absalom choked out.

Raum repeated the phrase, his body jerking as soon as the words left his mouth. Then Vaughan sucked most of the power back into himself, and shrank back to his human form. He shot me a sinful smile, winked, and rose. Turning to those gathered below, he raised a hand and waved for their attention. "Gentlemen, may I introduce the new Haithes of Ashriam and Desultory."

The two new leaders strutted to the lower level and reveled as their people fawned over them.

Vaughan slouched into a chair across from me, his lips quirked in a grin. "I think they'll be ready to go home soon."

I didn't say anything, but I had my doubts.

Vaughan finished his beer. "Come on." He stood, came to my side, and waited while I rose. Then he dropped his arm around my waist, and guided me down into the main part of the room.

We didn't stop moving until we'd made it through the knot of demons surrounding the two new Haithes.

"Gather your people, Absalom, it's time for them to go home."

"On two conditions, sir." The demon sucked in his breath, shrinking slightly at his boldness.

Vaughan raised an eyebrow at him. "And they would be?"

"That we're allowed to come to the surface, and those that want to, are allowed to join the hunters." Absalom shrank further, while Raum nodded his head.

The dark paladin closed his eyes, and I took a step forward, thinking to intervene. "Not until we work out the details." Vaughan opened his eyes and stared hard at the two leaders.

"Agreed," they responded in unison.

Absalom gestured to the room; most of the demons stepped closer to the far wall, with the new Haithes following. The rest pressed themselves closer to the wall opposite.

Vaughan flicked negligently in their direction, and every last one of them disappeared.

"Well, Raum, I'll just send these to their new home and we can head over to the other warehouse and collect the rest of your gang."

The demon smiled at him.

Vaughan tucked me closer to his side, and a moment later we were standing in the kitchen of the other building.

A flash of movement came from our left and, without thinking, I dropped my knives into my hands. Vaughan turned and flung his hand out, throwing a protective barrier between us and the threat.

A Zergot hovered above the floor, eight feet away, its eyes glowing orbs of hatred. "You!" he spat, his body flexing with agitation. "Don't think I won't get you."

A loud thunk followed by a howl rose from behind us. I cursed myself for having left our backs unprotected as I spun to see an arch-Raechon lever himself off the floor.

Vaughan's protection shimmered with the impact. The shield, I saw now, completely

encircled the three of us.

Raum lifted his hand, then looked straight up. I tipped my head back, and watched as an Ischmin dropped from the rafters, bounced off the shield, and slammed into the floor.

I chuckled and turned back to Vaughan, who flicked a spell at the Zergot, dissolving the creature.

"I've got it from here," said Raum, sidling up on the paladin's other side.

"I'll be in touch." Vaughan inclined his head, grasped my arm, and transported us home.

* * * *

Savage made a few more notes in the file as Dylan finished his narrative.

"And what were you thinking of doing so your demons stood out to the hunters?" The leader leaned back in his chair, his expression showing he was not happy about this turn of events.

"I would think the fact they can look more human than most comparable demons would be a factor, and I can put my mark on them." Dylan shrugged. "We don't act, anyway, until the creature does something to call for it."

Savage raised his eyebrows and nodded. "True." He levered his lean frame up from the chair and wandered over to the bar. "Though you may find it difficult to get the other hunters to work with them."

He picked up a bottle and stared at the golden liquid. "There's another reason I asked you both to give your report in person." He poured the whiskey into three glasses and handed one to Terri, another to Dylan. "I'd like you to start recruiting hunters. Besides the demons. I'm thinking we should start branching out into surrounding towns."

Dylan snorted, the contents of his glass sloshing only inches from his lips. "Not likely."

A glance at Terri showed her shrinking back into the couch, her eyes flicking repeatedly at the door. He dropped an arm around her shoulders, and pulled her close. "*Don't even think about it.*"

"*I wasn't!*"

"At least keep your eye out, in case you run into someone we'd be interested in." Savage relaxed in the chair across from them, letting his eyes wander over Dylan's woman. "What about you, Terri?"

"Me? Um ... no. I already consult for you; I think that's enough." Dylan tightened his hold on her, having felt her muscles tense.

Dave entered the room and leaned against the edge of the desk. "You about done here?" he asked his superior.

Savage studied the two of them for a minute. "Yeah, we're done."

The clairvoyant took a step closer to the shifter when Dylan came to his feet, bringing Terri with him. He couldn't help but wonder what Savage was really up to. He just knew the man too well. When Dave slid closer yet, it confirmed his suspicions, but didn't enlighten him.

"Do I want to know?" He leveled a look at the shifter.

"Probably not." The side of Savage's mouth curved in a grin that didn't reach his eyes.

"I figured you'd be done with this kind of shit after Terri." Dylan felt his lips twitch

as Savage grimaced, telling Dylan the shifter had deliberately pushed his buttons where the woman was concerned.

“What about me?” She shot a look between the two men.

“Later.” He placed his hand in the middle of her back and started her moving towards the door.

Had he not been paying attention, he would have missed the slight brush across his back as he and Terri left.

* * * *

Savage returned to his office, having walked the two hunters out. Dave was at the bar fixing himself a drink. He stopped by the smaller man and refilled his own glass, uneasiness rippling over him.

He glanced at his desk, then settled into a chair across from the couch, and waited for the clairvoyant to join him. His nerves stretched tighter when the man did, but he wouldn't look him in the eyes.

“Out with it,” he growled, then took a breath, got hold of himself. “Whatever it is, we'll find a way to deal with it.”

Dave glanced at him, then looked away. “That's just it, I'm not sure we can deal with this. I don't really understand what I'm seeing.”

Savage raised an eyebrow at the statement. “Well, that's a first.”

The man across from him laughed tensely, eased farther onto the couch, and leaned stiffly against the back. “Vaughan is standing next to four men I've never seen before. At a location I don't recognize. This petite brunette comes racing past the men. She yells something at them, but she doesn't look particularly upset.” Dave studied the contents of his glass, and tipped it to his lips.

“The biggest, ugliest *something* I've ever seen is lumbering along behind her, eyes bugging out of its face, lips curled in a snarl, jagged teeth.” The clairvoyant jumped up, crossed to the bar and fixed himself another drink. “The men watch the beast run by, then sort of look at each other. Vaughan, his eyes sharp, studies the men.”

He stood there for a minute, staring into his glass, then he returned to the couch. “The woman runs past again, going the other way this time. She's laughing.” He shakes his head. “One of the men, very dark, as dark as Vaughan, raises his hand and when the creature stomps close to the group, he flicks his fingers at it.”

He took a long sip of his drink. “The thing just freezes. The man that cast the spell glances over his shoulder until the little brunette appears. He slings his arm around her, and returns his attention to the other men.”

Savage refreshed his drink, and when Dave still hadn't continued, he eyed the man. “What is Vaughan doing?”

Dave shook himself. “Walking around the beast, examining it. He says something to the others, grasps the creature by the wrist, and flashes out with it.”

Savage raised his eyebrow. “Really?”

“Yeah.”

There had to be more. The clairvoyant was still fidgeting, taking fast sips of his drink. Savage narrowed his eyes and drew on his other power, sending feelers of energy towards the psychic.

“Don't.” Dave shifted in his seat. “I'm getting to it.”

“Just spit it the fuck out.” Christ, how he hated when Dave did this.

“I see Terri staring at her abdomen in the bathroom mirror. I can see part of a shower behind her reflection. She’s white as a sheet. Vaughan comes up behind her, splays his hand over her stomach and rubs it ... gently. Terri bursts out in tears.” He slugged the rest of his drink. “I didn’t even know she ever cried.”

“You think she’s pregnant?” Savage felt a grin curl his lips.

“Yeah, and I don’t think she’s happy about it.”

Damn, that was great. He knew he’d been right fixing the two of them up. Suddenly filled with energy, he levered himself out of the chair and started pacing the length of the office. “Go on.”

“The scene changes. It’s dark, it’s another location I don’t know...” He trailed off.

Savage turned, and started back towards the desk.

“There’s a flickering light.” The clairvoyant’s voice grew softer as he spoke. “Terri is lying on the ground, in a pool of black liquid. She’s not moving at all.”

His words finally filtered through Savage’s brain. He ground to a halt, his gaze going to the couch. “Are you saying she’s dead?”

Dave nodded, tilted his glass, realized it was empty, nodded some more. “Looks like it to me.”

“Fuck.”

The psychic slouched back on the couch, his expression tight with exhaustion.

“Any time frame? Any references?” He hovered over the man, wanting to shake the answers out of him.

“No, sorry.”

Savage took a deep breath. “We’ll either have to pin that down better, or bring Vaughan in on it.”

“I’ll let you know if anything else comes to me.” Dave looked positively sick to his stomach.

“Don’t worry about it too much, Dave, I’m pretty sure she’s immortal. And you know how hard it is to kill off one of those.” Besides, they both knew that the outcome of Dave’s visions could be altered.

“One other thing.” The clairvoyant spoke so softly Savage almost didn’t bother listening. “There’s a name running around in my head that makes me think it’s important.”

Savage stopped by the chair and leaned a hip against the back.

“Sage.”

“Sure it’s a name?”

“Yeah, and I’m pretty sure you’re going to fuck her.”

He laughed. “Now that’s the kind of news I like to hear.”

Epilogue

The moon stood fat and white in the late evening sky, casting a silvery glow over the neighborhood. The soft sounds of nocturnal creatures rustled through the leaves. The only demon buzz I was feeling was coming off Vaughan, radiating through my back where his chest pressed against me.

We were once again standing in front of the house that was built where my childhood home had stood. Vaughan's hands tucked up under my jacket and sweater, rubbing lightly over my belly.

"How are you feeling?" he whispered in my ear, nudging his erection against my back.

I knew he wasn't talking about sex, though. "Better." I'd killed the man responsible for my family's death. That went a long way towards righting that wrong, in my mind.

A shimmering in the air near the front corner of the house drew my attention. I reached out to it with my senses, disbelief washing through me when I felt the familiar presence.

I struggled out of Vaughan's embrace, and crossed the yard in a haze of anticipation. The vague shape coalesced the nearer I came, until a recognizable form stood before me.

Without thinking, I threw my arms around the vision, only to find myself unable to touch him. His rich laugh filled me with a warmth I hadn't felt in over a decade.

"Dad," I breathed as I took in his beloved features.

"Hi, honey." His voice sounded the same to me, even though he was only a spirit.

"You haven't been hanging around here all this time, have you?" I wondered about Mom and my sister and brothers.

"Lord, no. I met someone who arranged this for me." He smiled, then looked over my shoulder.

I could feel Vaughan, knew he'd be watching this scene with his usual attentiveness and lack of concern. "Dad, I'd like you to meet my mate, Dylan Vaughan." My lover moved to my side. "Dylan, this is my father."

"You've got a hell of a daughter here," Vaughan said, surprising me.

Dad's smile reflected his pride. "That I have. I've been keeping track of her since she was taken from us." His smile deepened. "She's a sight to behold."

I felt myself flush, and was happy it was too dark for the men to see the color that had risen in my face. "What about you? Are you and Mom okay? How's Cathy and the boys?"

"Your mother is great; she sends her regards and says she'll visit you soon. Erik found himself a wife, Marc thinks he might be gay, and Cathy dyed her hair blue."

I blinked at him. "Uh, aren't you all ... dead?"

"Not exactly. We died here, but we ended up in another ... plane of existence. I hate to use the term parallel universe, but it's the best I can come up with."

I glanced at Vaughan, and saw his eyes alight with curiosity.

"I've got to go."

I turned back to my father, my heart sinking a bit. "Will I see you again?"

"You'll be seeing all of us plenty. Once we get the hang of traveling back here." He

grimaced.

“That bad, huh?”

He laughed again. “Not really. I’m just not used to all this paranormal stuff.”

“I’m living with Vaughan now, over on Elm.” I reached for him, but caught myself.

“Doesn’t matter; we can find you wherever you are.”

“I killed him,” I blurted out.

“I know.” He gave me a solemn look. “I’m glad you did.”

I heaved a heavy sigh, a weight lifting off my shoulders that I didn’t know had been resting there. Vaughan draped his arm around me, and gave me a gentle squeeze.

“We’ll be around.” Dad tipped his head, and started to disappear.

“I miss you,” I called after him.

“Not for long,” came his response as he winked out of sight.

“Huh,” Vaughan grunted. “Now there’s something I didn’t know about.”

I realized I was staring at a shrub, now that dad was no longer standing in front of me. “Let’s go.”

We turned and started walking back towards the street.

“You know…” Vaughan dropped his hand to my ass and dug his fingers into my buttock. “It’s been a while since I last caught you in this neighborhood.”

I thought back and heat spiked through my system. “What are you saying?”

He glanced down at me, fire flickering in his eyes as the side of his mouth curved in a wicked sexy grin. “You’re mine, Peterson.” Then his hand shot to my wrist, his fingers locking down around it.

He dragged me to the back of his SUV, opened the tailgate, picked me up, and tossed me inside. “Get your pants off,” he growled as he prowled into the vehicle.

“But…” I gaped at him, sparks igniting all over my body.

“Now,” he bit out, his hands going to his waist.

I dropped the hardware first, got one boot off, and was working on my zipper when Vaughan’s hands slapped mine away. In a matter of moments he had my jeans and undies ripped down my legs, off the one, but caught on the boot that was still on my left foot.

He pressed my right leg up and out as he lowered himself over my body. Then he speared his way in, his magic breaching my core along with his cock.

“*Mine.*” He twisted his hips and seated himself deeper.

“*Oh God, yes.*” I rotated my pelvis, taking him inside another inch.

He forced my other leg away from my body, and ground his groin against mine. My back arched, pleasure shooting from my clit where his pubic bone grated against it. My inner muscles clenched, and he went nuts.

He hammered his way into me, the head of his cock ramming my womb, wrenching whimpers out of my throat. He sank his fangs into my shoulder, his magic blasting through me, all raw sensation and heat. I came, my body shattering beneath his, my muscles clenching, gripping.

He powered on, his cock so hard I could feel the texture of it as it forged its way through my tender flesh. He threw his head back, the tendons in his neck stretched tight, his face a mask of concentration.

Then he cursed, shards of power ripping through me as he lost his control, sending me off into another, harsher orgasm. His hips jerked, then his cock spewed semen into my depths.

He braced himself over me on his elbows, head hanging down, breath rasping in and out of his lungs. Our magics spiraling around us, through us.

"Fuck me," he groaned, before he lifted his head, and looked into my eyes. "I don't fucking believe this."

I searched his eyes, a thread of panic racing through me, wondering what was upsetting him so. "What?"

He grimaced, his dark eyes going even darker. "I can't believe I have this strange urge to..."

Tension coiled tighter in my gut, my heart picking up speed as I waited for him to continue.

"Ah, hell, I can't even say it." He glared at me.

"Say what? What are you glaring at me for?" I wriggled, feeling trapped.

He bent forward and nipped my earlobe. "I have this strange urge to ... snuggle."

I snorted, then broke out into a laugh, laughing harder when Vaughan joined me.

"Why, Vaughan, I believe that's love. I get that same embarrassing urge myself, with you."

"So, fine." He couldn't quite pull off the dark look he intended. *"I love you."* His eyes glittered at me as he bent for a kiss. *"But listen up, Peterson..."* He ground himself against my sex, his cock hard again in my depths. *"Don't let the other demons know I said that."*

*

Dylan couldn't tear his eyes away from the woman beneath him. Never in his life had he ever thought he'd bind himself to a single female. He let his thoughts drift for a moment as he lost himself in the feel of her around his cock as he glided in and out of her vagina.

As the sensations intensified, the spot of light that now lived in his soul grew brighter. He'd been aware of it after he'd taken Terri to the third level. Understandably alarmed, at first, by the contamination of his darkness. Concerned that it would weaken his power.

He almost laughed at that thought. Weaken? With every binding he placed on her he grew in strength.

He bent and brushed his lips over hers, a silent acknowledgement of the gift she'd given him. Still gave him. She groaned, and he focused on pleasing her. Letting the light bloom brighter within him.

He lowered his chest to hers, worked his hands under the soft, soft mounds of her ass and angled her hips higher. *Fuck yes.* Damn, she felt good. He picked up his pace, grinding into her deeper and deeper. His blood heating at the little gasps and cries coming from her.

The light expanded, bringing the darkness with it until it overflowed his being, and linked with the mixed power encircling his mate. His breath caught in his lungs as a burst of intense pleasure shot through him as they twined.

He angled his hips, and a few strokes later Terri blew apart beneath him, her vagina milking his cock as their magics fired every nerve ending in his groin into a heightened awareness.

With one thought in his mind, he leaned forward to taste her blood. He shuddered as his fangs sank through her flesh, the first taste of her life-force causing her to cry out as

her body jolted against his. *So fucking sweet.* He continued to draw the divine fluid as his balls tightened. Then pure energy raced up his spine. He wrenched his mouth away, swiped the wound with his tongue, and let his release crash over him.

“Terri!” He surged into her again, and held himself deep as he shot another burst of cum into her depths.

His body shaking, he lowered himself to her chest. The combined magics settled over the two of them, tingling with power, but at rest.

Yes, Nature always sought a balance between the powers of dark and light. This time Vaughan had been the one to change to make up for the demons that had turned away from total evil. Oh, he was still a reigning power of the netherworld, but he’d accepted the light.

He rolled onto his back, taking his woman with him, tucking her up under his chin as he held her in his arms. His woman, his mate, his light. These new feelings were going to take some getting used to. But just listening to her sigh, her murmured words of love as she snuggled closer, and the emotions all these things stirred within him ... made it all worthwhile.

The End

About the Author:

Lisa Andel writes unconventional, often dark, always hot, erotic romance. Her heroines are sassy and unique; her heroes, undeniably sexy.

She loves to work with all things paranormal, but has written both contemporary and futuristic stories as well.

Lisa currently lives in a small town in Ohio, though she has her eye on warmer climates where life is more relaxed and men wear fewer articles of clothing.

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