

I DREAM OF DRAGONS



THE
DRAGONS' DEMON

MARIE HARTE

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Ethereal Foes: The Dragons' Demon

Marie Harte

Dedication

To the Nailiim, and what your future holds

Chapter One

"There's no way I'm paying you when you haven't proven a damned thing. I mean, come on." Eve Sinclair crossed her arms and scoffed at her older brothers through the haze of smoke covering the dark, crowded bar.

James eyed Duncan and grinned, then took a large swallow of ale, staring at Eve over the rim as he drank. With a loud thunk, he slammed the glass on the wooden slab of a table and sighed. "Never thought I'd live to see the day that our little Evil Evie welshed on a bet."

Eve scowled, not amused. Others had leaned closer when James raised his voice, and in just a few minutes the entire pub would be rumoring about her "cheating ways". Not a great way to ingratiate herself into the community, and James, damn him, knew it. She turned her glare on Duncan, who met her stare with a shrug.

"Truth be, Evie. When have we ever failed to deliver as promised? You owe us, and you know it." His blue eyes crinkled with laughter, mirroring his twin's. And without meaning to, hers smoked with heat. "There's our Evil Evie coming to the fore. Now pay up, sis. I want the redhead in the corner, and James prefers the blonde."

"The man or the woman?" she snapped, seeing the pair he referred to speaking quietly in the hazy corner of the taproom with a blond man.

"Good point." Duncan turned to James with a wicked grin.

Instead of rejecting any interest in the male, James appeared thoughtful. "You know, I've been thinking of expanding. Why not try both?"

"Sure, why not? Just shut up, James." Eve felt the heat burning behind her eyes. Her brothers, those jerks, riled her on purpose, constantly needling the youngest Sinclair with the least amount of

control. She blinked down at the napkin on the table, and it started to smoke.

Shit. That's all she needed, to foster another tabloid report. "Demons Invade Conshy," *News at Eleven*. And wouldn't that piss off her father even more than he already was? Her father's number two rule—blend in with the human populace and never, ever invite attention to the demon world. She'd violated that rule once...once more than she planned to ever again. Memories of the pit swam heavily in her mind.

She took a deep breath and waited for her inner fire to recede. "I'm not welshing on a bet since I didn't lose."

"Yes, you did." Duncan leaned back and nodded.

"No, I didn't."

Duncan waved a hand at their waitress, who zeroed in on him despite the crowd. Red hair streaked with blue, brow piercings and a studded tongue accented a face garish in black make-up. Finishing the package, a tribal tattoo raced across one breast, up her neck and over one cheek.

"Dark and slutty, much more your type," Eve muttered, wishing her brother would just once lose his temper. But he never did. The most easygoing demon in all of Philadelphia.

Duncan ordered another drink and winked at the waitress, sending her into a tailspin and causing her to trip on her way back to the bar. "Come on, Evie. You know I can't approach the good girls. All I need is for you to bring them here, let them make their own choices."

"Right." She didn't bat an eye. "I bring them here and you and James *charm* them into bed. Then I'm double-damned to eternal punishment. You think Dad won't know who helped you break the covenant yet again?"

James pursed his lips, considering. "That may be, but you lost the bet, fair and square. And we want that group in the corner as payment."

"Okay, let's just nip this one in the bud, shall we?" She leaned closer. "You didn't steal one of Carmaron's eggs. Because if you did, the lower realm would be buzzing with the news. And it's not so easy to hide a dragon egg in the Ordinary world, now is it?"

James smirked. "It is if you know where to hide one. Valley Green, sis. Mile marker six by the first small cataract. The egg's on the other side of the trail buried in demon flame. And if you hurry, you just might find it before it hatches."

Eve froze, staring at her brothers in shock. "You're telling me you actually stole an egg from the freaking queen of the dragons, a viable, spawn-producing offspring?"

"Yep. And in another few hours, that little sucker is going to hatch wanting mommy. I'm afraid if you don't hurry, it might even, gasp, die."

Eve stuttered, not knowing what to say. James had always been more mischievous while Duncan reveled in vengeance. But neither ever sought to permanently harm the innocent. To kill a creature for want of a bet just didn't seem in character for either of them.

"We're kidding, Evie." Duncan chuckled, relieving her. Suddenly, the redhead from the corner passed their table, and Duncan paused to make eye contact. She blinked and looked twice, then visibly sashayed, *invitingly*, toward the rest room. "Oh, no, not about the dragon egg," he said when he noted Eve's obvious relief. "The egg's sitting in a safe, warm nest on the other side of the Wissahickon River. It's nowhere near death. It probably won't even hatch for another few days. Right, James?"

James nodded absently, still taken with the blond couple waiting on the redhead. "Screw the rules. I'm going to just say hello. And if they invite me to stay, so be it."

"You two have to be the biggest assholes this side of hell." Eve huffed a stray lock of dark hair from her face and stood. "Tainting innocence is not going to please Dad, let alone the angels hanging around what they consider their territory."

"Conshohocken?" Duncan raised a brow and chuckled. "Right. Maybe Amish country, but Evie, Philly and the burbs are ours."

"Desperate housewives and all that," James agreed.

She wanted to bash them both over their rock-hard skulls. "I'm not just talking about those idiots." She waved to the corner. "The dragon egg is unborn, pure as snow, and more dangerous than Dad on a rampage."

Carmaron isn't that happy with us at the moment as it is, not since one of the water demons tried to seduce one of her females. And we have enough to deal with having the angels in a tizzy over your last stunt with the now-damned Sister Margaret."

"But that's the beauty of it." Duncan leaned close, James following. "We made it look like the *angels* took it. And it's a real looker, Evie. The egg's blue and gold, with lines of red bursting through it. I'm sure it's royal. And won't Carmaron be pissed when she thinks Michael stole it?"

He had a point, and the hell of it was that their father would no doubt laud them for their creativity. Incriminating the angels and all that.

"The *point* is that dragon babies don't belong here. The Ordinary needs to stay ordinary." She mentally planned her route to recover the egg. Her brothers would be more a hindrance than a help, and she had a feeling she'd be blamed for the hassle at the end of it all. Somehow, she always ended up in the middle of their messes, left holding the bag. And now wasn't the time to push her father any further. She just had to find a way to return the egg before Carmaron knew it had been stolen. "When did you take it?"

"This morning. So forget it, Evie. She most likely knows it's been stolen by now." James cocked his head and smiled. "Oh yeah. Did you hear that?"

Eve focused and heard an angel's cry and what sounded like a dragon's snarl beneath the clamor within the bar. Angel cry could be heard for miles to those of the Ethereal. And though the pitch was too high to be heard by the humans within, the dogs outside immediately began howling.

"A bet's a bet, Evie. We have a dragon egg, here in this realm. Now pay up."

She gaped, unable to understand how they could both be so casual about the situation. "You've started another war with the angels, interfered with the dragons, and might have seriously injured a dragon's

young. I'll pay up, all right," she growled, "just as soon as I've taken care of the egg."

She flew out of the bar, the patrons instinctively making way for a snarling woman—a demon in a fury.

"Think we should have told her the whole of it?" James stood and stared hard at the two in the corner. The woman raised her head and met his stare, smiling in invitation.

"Why? And ruin her chance to save the universe one dumb creature at a time?" Duncan shook his head. "That desire to save the world is what got her in trouble in the first place. No, let her stew in her juices for a while before we take it back. Besides, it'll do Gabriel and his boys good to knock around with the dragons. They've been getting soft on all that redemption crap."

"True." James turned back to Duncan and snickered. "But I'd still like to see the look on Evie's face when Ranton shows up with that fiery sword in his claws."

Duncan paused. "Ranton? I thought you said you'd worked out the details with Teban. I didn't tell Ranton about this. I told Teban."

"Why the fuck would you do that? Teban can barely hold a thought in his horny head. He's normally too busy screwing anything that moves."

"And he'd play along with us because he loves annoying his mother and his brother to no end. He's not bad, for a dragon. But Ranton has no sense of humor, especially not when it comes to Carmaron's bidding. Why do you think she has her youngest in charge of the legions instead of Teban? Because Ranton lets his sword do the talking."

Both Duncan and James realized their sister was in serious trouble and raced out of the bar...only to find Uriel, Zhephon, and a half dozen pissed off angels waiting with clenched fists.

"Talk about utterly stupid," Eve muttered as she sped on her Harley toward Valley Green Park.

She loved her brothers, but honestly, they played too much when they should have been taking inventory of the souls needing saving. Their particular job, in the hierarchy of the Ethereal, was to assess and beguile those on the brink of Decision. To test those whose souls who teetered between eventually going to heaven and going to hell. Existence in either plane was the goal, because living in limbo screwed with the balance of everything.

Though no one soul was ever wholly good or wholly evil, one temperament or the other weighed predominantly in every creature. Even in the self-possessing dragons.

She grimaced and increased her speed. The dragons, like many of the mythical creatures purported to exist at one time or another on Earth, were, in fact, real. They lived buried in the deeper recesses of the world—in the lower realm near the demons—closer to the Earth's core which provided the necessary heat for their precious eggs to survive.

Unlike the humans, dragons knew about the realities of hell and heaven, and remained free to live in whatever realm they chose. Many often took the form of humans to roam above ground, in the middle realm—in the Ordinary. Like her brothers, they lived for mischief, and for anything that glittered. Partial to gold, they also had appetites far exceeding that of a normal human. They took what they wanted when they wanted, and answered to no one, that she knew of.

And the angels thought they were the favored race....

That her brothers had whisked the egg away from its nest, from its precious heat, meant one of three things. One, they had misjudged the egg's ability to survive without its birthing fire. Two, they had seriously conned her—which didn't mesh considering she'd heard that dragon's angered roar in the bar. Three, and this option seriously sucked, they knew something she didn't, like that the egg had already hatched.

Imagining a baby dragon making a meal of the greater Philly area, she whipped her bike onto one of the main graveled parking lots of the park and made a left down the wide running/biking trail. Luckily, the lateness of the hour, as well as the steady drizzle of rain, had forced

many outdoor nuts inside. The few that still ran stared at her in disbelief as she roared by.

Great. Now she'd have to hurry the rescue so the police wouldn't be on her ass. So unfair. And all to right a wrong.

Huffing and cursing her brothers again, she stopped when she saw a marker denoting the number six.

She parked and leapt off the bike, swearing when she realized she still needed to cross the river. Not deep, it would nevertheless be cold despite the late summer night. Seeing a ridge of rocks, she raced across the slippery surface with the preternatural agility of her kind and hurried into the woods on the other side.

Once there, she stilled, listening, and felt a pulse that didn't belong in the Ordinary.

Climbing several feet over the small finger of land, she found a tiny, contained blue glow, and within, a round object with the blue, gold and red markings described by her brothers. This egg, however, was the size of an ostrich egg, much, much smaller than the typical dragon eggs she'd seen.

"What the hell?"

Staring down at it, she cocked her head, hearing a strange, haunting sound. Unearthly welcome and a powerful joy sent shockwaves throughout the woods caging the small egg. Trees creaked, wind howled, and the water near them swirled, rising in direct proportion to the rising volume of dragonsong.

Enamored and utterly moved, Eve slowly dropped to her knees and took the egg in her hands, dousing the small fire with a nod. The minute she touched the egg's smooth, polished surface, her body lit with ecstasy—a feeling not unlike that she received when she'd made a successful sway.

I'm keeping you.

She felt it, heard herself think it, realized she meant it...and knew she was utterly screwed. Demons and dragons didn't mix. And what the hell was she thinking wanting to keep Carmaron's precious young?

Dragons weren't pets. They were malevolent, vicious killers with an appetite for destruction. Pleasant, to her way of thinking, but they had a thing against siding with Ethereal forces.

An appetite for destruction.... When the sky suddenly darkened and a shadow covered her, she didn't flinch, expecting the worst.

Cradling the egg against her chest, she glanced up. What looked in shadow like a winged angel suddenly showed itself for a furious, fire-breathing dragon. In a human male's body with large, expansive black wings, Ranton, commander of the dragon legion, made an impressive entrance as he lowered to the ground.

He wore black jeans and boots and a clingy black T-shirt through which his wings commandeered wind. His dark black hair and blazing red eyes sat in a face that any woman would consider handsome. Roughly hewn cheekbones and a strong nose complemented thickly lashed eyes and a stubborn chin. He could have passed for a giant human, save for the fifteen-foot expanse of wings and the red flames of anger burning in his gaze.

Seven feet of enraged male glowered down at her, more ferocious than even the demons of war. "I've come for what's mine," he growled, flame curling in his eyes, in his hands and sputtering from his mouth. His fingers elongated into talons as his flesh hardened into black scales, obscuring his clothing. Impressive, beautiful even, but for the fact he meant to do her some serious harm.

Don't do it. The egg's safe now, give him back. But Eve found it impossible to listen to her inner voice of reason. She sighed as she pooled her power, prepared to defend her tie to the new life against her chest with her every fiber of her being. To the torturous bowels of hell, or, God forbid, the starry heights of heaven. "Of course you have. Well, Ranton? Bring it on. I'm ready."

Chapter Two

Ranton blinked in confusion, thrown by the small demon's statement. Ready? Ready for what? To die, or to fight for the precious life she cradled so tenderly against her chest?

His eyes narrowed, staring at her chest, and at the egg glittering with a strange contentment. That the small life inside had recognized safety confused him. Demons, by nature, were cruel. And this female seemed typical of the race. A true beauty, with blue-black hair and ice blue eyes. The demons never chose to appear physically distasteful in human form. They were very much like the dragons in that respect.

"Where did you get that?"

His voice echoed in the night, but she sighed, appearing not at all threatened. Again he stared, bemused at her calm acceptance of his presence. Angels and demons alike quaked when Ranton charged. Yet this female held her ground, ready for what, exactly?

"A pretty bad prank was played on the dragons, with no ill-intent toward the egg. I'm afraid someone played a joke at my expense." He frowned and she added quickly, "Look, none of this is my fault," pleasing him that she'd sensed the precariousness of her position. With one well-placed swipe, he could send her on a painful return to the lower realm, sans body. "I was planning on returning the egg to Carmaron."

"With no one the wiser," he guessed.

She nodded, her eyes glowing, her body throbbing with energy as she readied for his attack. Oddly, her defensive posture stoked a need to press forward, to taunt her into flight. And he wondered at his sense as he pondered the idea of stalking and taking the little thief as his prize.

"If not your fault, then who stole the egg from its rightful place?" he asked softly, hearing her indrawn breath. The egg told him she spoke the truth about not stealing him from his nest. But she knew. The demon knew who'd stolen a precious egg, his charge. By damn, she'd tell him the truth. And the irony of his thought wasn't lost on him.

"Tell me, demon, who stole the egg?"

"I don't know."

"Liar."

"Look, I'm going to return it. Does it matter who took it?"

Ranton clicked his talons together, and the female watched them as if mesmerized. "It matters that my warriors are wasting their time kicking angel ass. It matters that one of my kind was tampered with by the unclean."

"*Unclean?* I'm as clean as you are, jackass." Her eyes swirled, red mixing with the bright blue in anger. The fury he felt from her made him dizzy with...lust?

He blinked several times and lowered his hands, curling his wings against his back. "Did you just call me a jackass?" No one, no one living, had ever referred to him as such. And much as he wanted to spank her ass for daring to insult him, he couldn't help admiring her spirit.

"I...ah..." she stammered and paled, apparently realizing what she'd done. Instead of recanting, however, she looked down at the egg and blew warm breath over it.

"What are you doing?"

"What does it look like I'm doing? I'm holding the egg. And for the record, he's fine. He wants me, not Ja—the jerks who stole him, to take him back."

Ranton stared hard at the egg, feeling the same thing. "He, you say?"

She shifted and he couldn't help noting the plump softness of the breasts cushioning his charge. The demon was of average human height, with slim hips, a trim waist and ample breasts. Her sultry features made him think of the impetuous succubi, and he wondered at her nature.

For a dragon to cling so stubbornly—as his little charge did lying so peacefully against a *demon*—meant the female had something the dragons would want. Burning curiosity warred with Ranton's need to mete out justice. Still, she knew the identity of the culprits responsible for his charge's abduction. And he couldn't let the slight pass.

"You want to return him? Fine. Come here."

He held out a large hand, withdrawing his talons into mortal fingers as he did so. Still, the demon looked to flee, and the pleasure that afforded bothered him.

"If you run, I'll find you," he growled. "I'm losing my patience, little demon. Take my hand or suffer the consequences."

A stubborn look flashed in her eyes, and he huffed a breath of fire, absurdly pleased she'd prove difficult.

"Look, Ranton. I understand you're not happy. But this isn't my fault. I'm going to return him to Carmaron's nest. Hell, you can follow me if you want. But stop telling me what to do and back off."

Ranton studied her form in comparison to his. Less muscle, more curves, and no doubt more pleasure packed into her tense frame.

Smiling, he showed curving white teeth, and watched as she hissed in response, her eyes flashing as her body began to shimmer, surrounded by blue flame. Most demons possessed some control over fire. But he'd never seen blue flames from the lower realm before. He'd never seen anything so intriguing, and had an uncontrollable urge to touch her.

"Back off?" he repeated softly. In the blink of an eye, he had her wrapped in his arms, her delicious scent making him almost lightheaded. She smelled like sex, like fiery passion, and he made a spontaneous decision. "I think not. It's time you and your kind learned not to play with fire, little demon."

She struggled, but not as hard as she might have had she not held the egg. Startled anew that she meant to protect his charge with her own safety, he held her tightly and flexed his wings. He allowed his scales to armor the outside of his body and his face, not questioning his resolve to

maintain his softer, more comfortable flesh against the female, and took to the sky.

Her gasp of outrage, and if he wasn't mistaken, fear, made him grin. If she thought flying a problem, wait until she suffered her punishment soon to come. Cries and screams wouldn't do then. Nothing but unquestioning surrender would suffice.

Eve held onto the egg with all her might, trying her best not to freak out as she hurtled through the air at what felt like a hundred miles an hour. At least the dragon holding her close provided some much-needed heat, as well as a smattering of security. She hated heights and always had, and hoped Ranton would rather torture her slowly—on the ground—than drop her what looked like a bazillion feet to a painful, physical death.

The large, black dragon was every bit as impressive, and intimidating, as she'd heard. The rumors didn't do the arrogant beast justice. She calmed a bit, considering. No, Ranton wouldn't let her go so easily. Falling to her mortal death wouldn't do much more than send her into another human body. The terror would be severe, but not particularly satisfying for a male so commanding. His heart thudded against her chest, his body's massive blood flow only increasing his incredible strength.

Though it hadn't been smart, when he'd thrown out commands, she'd rebelled. Eve hated being ordered to do anything, and she knew she and Ranton would butt heads. He shifted and she swallowed hard. If the erection prodding her belly was anything to go by, they'd be butting more than just heads.

Heat infused her, and Ranton clutched her tighter, pressing her firmly against his groin. The egg sighed with contentment, taking her mind from her sexual abductor, if for only a moment.

I'm keeping you resounded in her mind again, and she realized the thought hadn't come from her, but from the being inside the egg. He, and how she knew it was a "he" she couldn't explain, was in ecstasy

sandwiched between her and the giant black monster taking her to hell-knew-where. Not that she didn't feel a similar pleasure being so close to Ranton.

Not that she would ever admit it.

Seducing humans into finding their path through life was tolerable. Despite her human body, the demon within it needed more than physical contact to experience true pleasure. And though sex with demons could bring both physical and emotional bliss, it had never stirred her to an honest craving for another. Yet being so close to Ranton made her come alive in ways she couldn't fathom.

Maybe I'm as much a perv as James. He's Mister "Try Anything". Maybe that's my problem. I want what's taboo. Dragons now, then what's next? Angels? Ech. "That'll be the day I depart the Ordinary for the lower realm for good." She scrunched her nose. Angel sex sounded so...icky.

"Easy, demon. We've not yet come to my home. Save your terror for what awaits you there," Ranton snarled over the wind.

She glanced up, taken with his pitch black features textured with glittering scales. His eyes were completely red, no irises or pupils showing. His nose had lengthened into a kind of snout. And when he spoke, she could see sharp, white teeth as long as her pinkie finger.

The alien contrast of his features to the soft skin covering muscled flesh enthralled her. Ranton could kill her very easily and held that strength in check. An incredible turn-on, and she couldn't help looking away, confused, and more than wary at her deep attraction. Sure she was overpowered, but when it came to manipulating males, Eve was the expert. So why such concern over mastering a dragon?

Ranton slowed and circled over a dense area of rock on the ground. Glancing down, Eve could barely see more than rocks and a few trees under the glint of moonlight.

"What—"

He seemed to stop dead in the air, and she shrieked when he hurtled head first toward the ground. Everything blurred around them, and she closed her eyes tight, her body heating, pulsing with bursts of fear spiked

with rage. Before she could share her unhappiness, however, they met the ground...*and continued to move.*

Falling into what felt like never-ending darkness, Eve felt anything but calm. Despite the similarities of this seeming limitless cavern to her ancestral home, the sensation of falling took away any hope of appreciation. Her stomach churned, her heart beat so loudly she swore she could hear it, and fear drowned her senses.

“Almost there,” Ranton growled, his large body like a flesh and bone prison.

A few more minutes passed, and Eve’s fear swelled to feverish proportions. The waiting, the anticipation of impact made her want to smash something. *No, not you.* She hugged the egg, soothing it with her fingers. The pad of her thumb accidentally brushed Ranton’s chest, and she tingled at the contact. *Him. Ranton. That’s the one who’ll pay for this.*

Gradually, Eve noticed that their descent seemed to slow, and a faint light took her attention when she was finally able to lift her head. Orange and red fires flickered along the sides of the cave and dotted areas of what looked like solid ground.

The closer they grew, the more she was able to view her surroundings. Dark brown dirt and gray stone mottled the floor upon which they finally landed. At several intervals around the large, oval-shaped chamber sat several torches and fire pots highlighting the scarred walls. Adding to the marks, Ranton held up a taloned hand and ran a nail along the carvings. Then he blasted it with a breath of fire. Apparently he was marking his entrance into the catacombs, the dragon’s main keep in the lower realm, a place she’d always wanted to see.

Her curiosity warred with her need to make Ranton pay. She never, ever, wanted to experience flight with him again. Falling for so long and from such a great distance felt like her personal hell come to life. And had she not known better, she might have thought Ranton in league with her father.

Glancing up, she saw him watching her and stiffened. She might be a “little demon” compared with his behemoth size, but she had one hell of a temper when riled. Setting her egg—the egg—down near one of the ground-set fires, she turned back to Ranton and willed her fury made flesh. Unholy fire consumed her, and she smiled with demon’s promise, her body bathed in ethereal flame.

“What?” Ranton asked with mock innocence. He changed back into the appearance of a man, disconcerting her. “You didn’t like the flight?”

His sarcasm pushed her past the tenuous limits of her control. Hellfire shot from her eyes and he swore as his skin began to burn. In the blink of an eye, black scales replaced his flesh. Red fire danced in his eyes, but he stared at her with more than anger. Curiosity, and a bit of...admiration...lingered in his gaze.

“That demon fire stings. And it’s blue. Not natural.”

“Screw natural. We demons lived here on earth long before dragons existed.”

“You have a temper, don’t you?” He crossed his arms, his eyes glinting with misplaced humor. “What’s your name?”

“Fuck you.”

“Your name, or an invitation?” He narrowed his gaze when she hit him with another blast of blue flame. “That’s twice, demon. Twice you’ve burned me, and twice I’ve let it go. I want your name, and I want the names of those who tried to steal my charge.”

They both glanced at the egg, and Eve felt the impulse to pick it up again, to pet it in soothing strokes of reassurance. *Mine*.

When she looked back up at Ranton, she saw his eyes had cleared and narrowed. Now black with striations of green and white, his eyes looked like hard agates. “Why is it he’s so taken with you? What do you have that calls to mine?”

“Mine? This is your egg? I thought it was Carmaron’s.” From what she knew of the dragons, Carmaron ruled their sect. A queen without a king who’d birthed two sons still living. Ranton led her warriors, ruler of the Legion. And his brother, Teban, reigned as prince in the

mountainous region of the lower realm, over his kind and those banished from the Ordinary thousands of years ago. The blood elves, dragons and havoc lived in relative peace, or at least kept their discord private from their neighbors, the demons. The dragons cared little for demons and angels, and even less for the Ethereals' responsibility, the humans.

So why had Ranton been above the earth? He couldn't have tracked her idiot brothers so quickly. Could he?

"The egg is in my charge for protection," he snarled, showcasing several blade-sharp teeth. "For that reason I'm not at all hesitant about doing whatever it takes to find my answers. Tell me what I want to know and I'll set you free."

Bullshit. The look on his face promised a harsh punishment, one he no doubt relished giving. "My name is Eve."

"Eve." He hummed her name, the reverberation of his voice like a cool caress in the stifling, humid air. "Do you know who I am?"

She shrugged. "Ranton, ruler of the Legion, son to Carmaron, and all around obnoxious dragon. I'm suitably impressed."

His nostrils flared, and his body flexed, tensing muscle making his scales flash under the firelight. Her intention to distract him from questions about her brothers had worked. But at what cost?

"Impressed, are you? And I've yet to show you the real me." He took several steps closer and walked around her to the egg. Picking it up, he held it to his heart and closed his eyes, breathing deeply. His skin rippled, and the egg's blue deepened until it looked almost black. "He wants you to see him home."

She refrained from smirking. "I told you that before."

"Well, what are we waiting for?"

The damned dragon did it again. In a preternaturally quick move, he grabbed her in his arms, set the egg in her hands, and flew down several overlarge corridors, past dark shapes blurred by the speed at which they traveled. Nearly dizzy, she didn't realize they'd stopped until he held her by her arms to steady her.

"A demon who doesn't like heights or speed. Odd." He chuckled and once more reverted to a fully human form. "Place him in that bed there." He pointed to a small fire burning within a nest of soft, nonflammable cloth that lay next to a gigantic square bed. Move over king-sized. That sucker was at least ten feet by ten feet.

"Eve?"

She started when he called her name, and realized she'd been focused where she shouldn't have been.

"Don't worry, Eve. We'll get to that soon enough."

She glared, but walked to the egg's nest and set him down gently. The minute the egg settled she felt as if a heavy weight had been lifted from her shoulders, and sheer joy lit her being, remnants of the egg's shared feelings.

"How does he do that?" She had to know. Eve knew several psychic demons, but she, like her brothers, had been born with other talents. Telepathy wasn't one of them.

Ranton studied her, his intensity unsettling. Hunger had settled over his expressionless features, making him seem the ultimate predator. Yet he still hadn't changed into his true dragon form, and she felt that omission more a warning to beware.

"Jentaron is my future king."

Oh shit. Her brothers had really grabbed the wrong dragon.

"Nothing to say, Eve?" Ranton took a step toward her, and she had to force herself not to back away. She knew better than to show fear to a vicious predator. After all, she'd been standing up to her father for years.

She cleared her throat, aware the scent of him drifted closer, inviting her to step in his direction. "So royal dragons can share thoughts?"

"Some can." He stepped closer. "My little king likes you, Eve. And if he could see, I could definitely understand why. Your human flesh does you justice." He caught a strand of her hair. "Such soft, dark silk. And such bright blue eyes. A heady combination, especially in conjunction with your fire."

She swallowed, hard. "I, ah, I wonder that you aren't in your normal form. I thought dragons hated humans."

"Some do. But I've found them exceptionally suitable for my needs."

Don't ask. Don't ask. "Needs?"

He smiled, a predator's grin having successfully captured its prey. "Sex, Eve. A human performs the sexual act with great pleasure. Dragons are violent, functioning with a basic need to procreate. But in this form, the carnality of mating is intense." He closed the distance between them. "The pleasure extreme. Surely you've found that to be the case in your work."

"I'm not a succubus. Let's get that straight." She tried to step back, pride bedamned, and found her way blocked by a wall. How did that get there? "I've had occasional sex with humans, but only in order to sway them one way or the other. I hate to break it to you, Ranton, but humans overrate sex."

"Oh?" He toyed with the neckline of her T-shirt, causing flutters of want to course through her blood.

"Hands off." She slapped at his hand, and he caught it and held it above her head, pinned to the wall. "Ranton, I—"

"—will tell me everything I wish to know about yourself, and about the thieves that stole dragon property."

"Property?" She sucked in a breath when his fingers caressed the swell of her breasts. Pure, erotic fire burned at his fingertips. "Jentaron is a life, not a property."

"Semantics." He shrugged. "What should you, a demon, care for dragon young?" His eyes narrowed into hard emeralds and she gasped when his fingers grazed her nipples. "Tell me, Eve, what does my charge see in you?"

"I don't know."

He trapped her free hand pushing at his chest and added it to the one above her head. His large palm easily held both her wrists in place against the wall.

"Perhaps I see what held Jentaron in thrall," he murmured and nuzzled her neck.

Eve wanted to run, fast and far. The incredible eroticism of his every touch should have been enough to warn her away. But the feelings engendered by the happy little egg sitting so near, as well as the unfamiliar tingles in her own heart, made her wonder what kind of dark spell this dragon weaved over her.

Ranton licked at her neck before nipping her, marking her, and her knees buckled. Her panties felt more than wet, her nipples pebbled into knots of need, and her womb ached for...Ranton.

None of it made any sense, but when she felt his knuckle brushing against the inside of her thigh, she instinctively spread her legs to grant him better access.

"That's it, Eve." The heat of his breath only added to his allure. "You're hot, wet, and you smell incredible. Maybe that's what captured little Jentaron. Your *heavenly* scent."

"Not funny." She tried to quell the moan building in her throat...and failed.

"Was that a moan I heard? From a demon no less?" Ranton chuckled. His hands left her and she heard his zipper rasp. He shifted his hips and she felt something hard, hot and heavy brush against her cloth covered belly. "Tell me, Eve, why you couldn't leave the egg. Why didn't you flee when you saw me? Are you as innocent in this deception as you say?"

She barely made sense of his words, her physical needs overtaking common sense, too focused on regenerating the pleasure of his touch.

Taking him by surprise, she fused her mouth to his. Hard lips met hers, and she gave no quarter as she snaked her tongue into his mouth, capturing his attention as she baited the dragon, tempting the beast.

He tasted like chocolate, a pleasant surprise that stilled her actions, giving him that spare second to take charge. And take charge he did. He groaned into her mouth, pressing his body firmly into hers as he thrust his tongue into her mouth, stabbing again and again with wanton accuracy.

“Fuck,” he muttered as he licked into her mouth. And she felt what he didn’t say. She was lost to the feelings he provoked, and to the helpless response of her body as she surrendered fully to a creature more enemy than friend.

Chapter Three

Ranton hadn't expected the devastation of her taste, or he would have tried to prevent the connection growing between them. Her scent, the touch of her flesh upon his, of her soft lips against his mouth, made him want to devour her whole. By the embers, he'd never tasted such temptation before, and he highly doubted her claim that she was not a succubus.

She moaned and arched her taut breasts against his chest. His body stiffened, actually froze in desperate need, and he cursed them both as he stripped off his clothing. Her eyes widened as she stared at him, her gaze lingering on his seeping cock. By human standards he was large, and eyeing her slim frame, he knew the fit would be tight. His cock began throbbing, needing to thrust inside her.

"Too many clothes," he growled and sliced them from her body before she could protest. He thought it telling she hadn't done more than stare at him since he'd released her hands. Then again...he greedily absorbed her silken perfection, the creamy white breasts and belly now revealed. Her nipples softly accented her flesh, not a bright red, but a dusky rose, sultry and sweet. Wide areolas dared him to take a bite and he did so with pleasure.

The movement put his entire body in touch with hers, and he ached at holding back.

She squirmed against him and fisted her hands in his hair. "Do it again," she breathed, her eyes bathed in demon flame.

Grinning at the slight female with such strength, he bit her other breast and laved it with his tongue. Unable to help himself, he sought

the hot core of her with his hand, hissing with delight when he found her wet and unbearably warm.

"You're wet, Eve. Wet for me." He growled against her breast, teasing the knotty nipples with a burst of warm breath and a raspy tongue. She writhed and moaned, her breasts delightfully responsive. "Tell me what you want."

No. Tell me who stole the egg. I should demand that.

She shivered and raked her nails over his scalp, pressing against his temples with rigid little fingers. Jolts of pain added to the tumult of sensation jarring his body, and he hardened like stone.

"Tell me where you want my cock." He lifted her into his arms and she wrapped her legs around his waist, putting her slit directly against that part of him so eager to join her. "In your pussy, Eve?" He slid through her cleft and she sucked in a deep breath.

He lifted from her breasts, forcing her to release her grip on his hair. Staring down into her face, he watched her slumberous eyes narrow further. Her lips parted, and her soft breath fanned his face, an invitation plain as day.

Rubbing his length against her, he gritted his teeth against the welcome feeling of her cream. His balls drew tight, and he wanted nothing more than to shove himself inside her and ride her until she cried out his name.

"Tell me, Eve. Do I fuck your pussy?" He withdrew his assault to position himself lower. "Or maybe your ass? You like it fat and hot in your tight hole?"

She moaned when he prodded her anus, her body slick with need. He pushed harder and she squirmed. Damn, she was tight. He had to force himself to hold back.

"Maybe I just want to suck you with my mouth," she gasped, daring him to respond.

"Oh? Your mouth, hmm?" He shoved her ankles from his waist and pushed her to her knees. Excitement flashed through him, stirring his predatory senses as he took this particular prey to ground. "Suck me

then, Eve. I'm going to fuck that mouth, and you're going to swallow my every last drop."

She panted, her features flushed as she stared at his cock.

Not giving her a chance to refuse, he threaded his hands through her hair and pulled her forward. But the little minx took the choice from him. She gripped his shaft firmly, pumping him as she inched her slick lips over his crown. Teasing him, taunting him, she maintained eye contact as she took him deeper and deeper into her throat.

He was panting with raw need by the time she had him balls deep, and her hands massaging his ass only added to the hunger burning bright.

"All of it," he growled, aware he'd lost any sense of control. Nothing mattered now but feeling the release she dangled before him. "Fucking take it."

He thrust in and out, deliberately rough. The demon took all of him, raking her nails down his thighs and her teeth along his shaft. The erotic pain mixed with pleasure and he spurted a few drops before he could hold back.

She groaned, swallowing the small shot of come, and prodded him for more. Her fingers fondled his balls, running along the crease toward his anus. He couldn't help fucking her harder, immensely pleased that a woman who looked so fragile could give as good as he normally did.

"Fuck, Eve," he moaned, ramming with a ferocity that surprised even him. She shoved a finger in his ass and he nearly unloaded.

Her eyes twinkled up at him, those glowing orbs of blue passion erased every thought from his mind but fucking Eve into oblivion.

"You want it, little demon?" he said thickly. She added another finger, stretching his rectum, and he lost it. "You've got it."

He spewed into her mouth, lost in the sensation of her fingers stroking his ass, of her mouth and tongue sucking and swallowing his seed in heaping amounts. Never had his orgasm been so intense, or so large. But Eve, his demon thief, took from him what he'd never expected to give.

His control.

Something within him shattered, and he could only stare down at her, nonplussed that such a deceptively small package could wield such immense danger.

She released him from her mouth and wiped at a small dribble of come on her lower lip. She caught the bead and sucked it off her finger, and his shaft stirred when it should have been wrung dry.

“Oh no.” He noted her high color, the jitter of her breasts as she strove to command her own passion. “Don’t hide from me, Eve. I fucked your pretty mouth, and now I’m going to eat you up, as all beasts do to pretty little girls.”

He grinned, his teeth sharp with the need to bite something.

The fear he would have seen in anyone else showed in Eve as arousal, and he felt as if fate had stepped forward and handed him his future with a cherry on top.

Without another word, he scooped Eve into his arms and tossed her onto the bed. Following her down, he spread her thighs wide, anchoring them with his hands, and proceeded to show Eve what a dragon’s tongue could really do.

Eve’s eyes rolled back into her head as Ranton licked her from her clit to her asshole with a raspy tongue that had all the earmarks of a pleasure toy specially built for her. As if tasting his addicting flavor wasn’t enough, she now had to submit to sexual torture. But what a way to go...

“Ranton, ah, yes,” she hissed when he pressed that tongue against her burgeoning clit. He licked and pushed, and was anything but gentle—setting her *on fire*. A thick finger shoved deep inside her. He added teeth, smart little nips that made the blood rush from every other part of her body to pool between her thighs.

He held her legs apart and hard enough to leave bruises. And dear hell, she relished the small pain. His finger pushed so deep she felt a jolt all the way to her soul.

"There it is," he murmured, and she felt him smile against her pussy, his lips brushing against her naked flesh. "So sexy, Eve. Clean and smooth, just the way I like them."

She opened her mouth to rejoin, but could only manage a gasp and his name when his tongue snaked its way through her vagina.

"That's it. Feel me inside you, where I'm going to fuck you soon enough, baby. Soon enough, and then some more. You've unleashed the dragon, Eve, in more ways than one." He laughed softly, but his breath felt like fire against her heated sex, and the eroticism of their startling similarities shook her.

He bore down, his attention centered on her channel and the cream flowing like water from within. He lapped her up and moaned against her folds, his vibrating tongue against her clit like demonic torture. Never had she felt like this with anyone. And that a dragon made her lose her control only added to his allure. Worry, lust and frustrated desire mixed, building upon each other until her nerves stretched so tight she wanted to burst.

"Come, Eve. Come over my tongue. Give me what I need."

She felt the end coming, so close, almost there...

"*Now.*" He clamped down on her clitoris and she exploded, screaming his name over and over as she flooded his mouth with come. He licked her, swallowing it all, and as her nerves screamed, he suddenly mounted her and thrust deep.

He touched the very heart of her womb and continued to push. In and out, pummeling with wild thrusts, he sank deeper and deeper while her orgasm multiplied. Dizzy and confused at how she could still be coming yet spiraling toward another, multiple orgasm, she lay under his mastery and urged him for more.

Alternately snarling and groaning, Ranton fucked her like a demon incubus and came hard, saturating her with dragon seed. She felt his come trickle down her ass and into the bed beneath, and still he shuddered as he unloaded within her. For her part, her body eagerly accepted him, clenching around him to milk every last drop.

Minutes or hours later, when she could finally catch her breath, she saw him staring down at her, their bodies still joined.

Incredulity and suspicion dotted the complete satisfaction in his green and white spotted glare. And much as she should have felt insulted that he thought she'd been playing some trick, she felt too tired to do more than smirk at him.

"Demon."

"Dragon."

"Witch."

"Bastard." She yawned, breaking the mood, and saw him try to hide a smile.

"Might as well rest," he said, withdrawing from her at last. But he held her tightly in place when she would have rolled to the side. "Right here, by my heart where I can track you." He yanked her over his chest and held her fast with his massive arms. "You, my little demon, have a lot more answering to do than you've done. And more surrendering to do as well."

Completely worn out, her huff turned into a sigh. Drifting into sleep, she caught the slight press of his lips on her head before exhaustion overwhelmed her.

* * *

"Damn you to hell, Daniel," Duncan snarled before smashing his fist into the angel's face, putting him down, hard.

James, the devil take him, didn't look nearly so arrogant now, sandwiched between Annua's open-handed slaps and Zephon's powerful blows. Duncan wanted to slay something, and debated the merits of carving up an angel or his obnoxious brother. They didn't have time for this fighting, not with Evie at the hands of Ranton, a sadistic dragon bold enough to lead a legion of his kind. A creature that fierce wouldn't think twice about hurting their sister, especially if she was anywhere near that egg when he found her.

Though Ranton could do little more than crush her human form, the punishment would be painful for Eve. She'd return to the lower realm a spirit of herself, and need to wait for another human to possess. Thankfully, Duncan, James and Eve had been born human, to Bethany Sinclair, now long dead and sadly, gone to heaven. They had retained their forms for the last four hundred years. Unless they suffered a true human death, their spiritual essence maintained their physical forms. So until someone actually killed them in the Ordinary, they could maintain their human forms, well, forever.

But in fights like these, or with dragons like Ranton, the possibility of losing their physical selves grew strong.

Duncan sneered and shot Uriel into the nearest dumpster with a ball of blue flame. Pleased to hear the angel's echoed curses from inside the metal, Duncan stepped over several angels groaning on the stained tarmac. He fisted his hands on his hips and watched as James' captors pummeled his midsection.

James glared at him between groans. "A little help here?" he rasped.

Duncan shrugged. "I don't know. Did you have any other smart-assed remarks needing said? Or can we find Evie now?"

James flushed but remained silent, and Duncan grabbed Annua by his long red hair and flung him skyward. Not willing to call Michael's wrath, the angel kept his wings hidden and tolerated the rough landing. James, in the meantime, took Zephon by the throat and shoved him down into a pool of what looked and smelled suspiciously like urine.

"Nice place you picked to have a fight, Zephon."

"May the Seraphim grant you their tender affection." Zephon's tone was cold enough to freeze the sun, and Duncan couldn't help grinning.

"Maybe if you flyboys would stop whining so much about redemption, you'd remember how to fight and maybe recognize the beginning of a sucker punch."

"Asshole."

James chuckled and clutched his stomach. "Not that it hasn't been fun, Zephon, because it has. But we have pressing matters to attend to."

“What? One dragon egg not enough? Or were you thinking to seduce that group in the corner of the bar?” Uriel said as he stood in the dumpster. He flicked a rotten banana peel from his shoulder, and Duncan cursed himself for not bringing his phone with him. A picture of the fastidious angel in filth would have been too precious for words.

“Not following.”

“You remember, the forbidden innocents sitting inside the bar? The redhead and the blonds.” Uriel smiled, his teeth too fucking white for comfort. “The trio is mine. The male’s an apprentice, but feel free to break more rules. You’ve already tainted innocence with the egg, so why not interfere with an apprentice angel, eh?” Uriel sneered. “With any luck, judgment will follow swiftly on the wings of your whole damned family.”

Shrugging, Duncan took James by the arm and hurried him toward their parked car along the main drag. “I wouldn’t be too sure about your apprentice. He gave James his number.”

Shoving his brother in the car and ignoring his hiss of pain, Duncan shot their Mercedes down the street in a hurry.

“I didn’t get his number...yet...but the lie was worth it. Did you see the look on Uriel’s face?” James smiled around a bruised jaw.

“You should have kept your big mouth shut.”

“Give over, Duncan. The angels had it coming.”

“Sure they did. But not at Evie’s expense. You know what Ranton’s going to do to her.”

James frowned, rubbing his tender ribs. “You think she’d let a dragon fuck her?”

“*What?*”

“What do you mean, what? Ranton’s about as male as they come, and hell, Evie may be our sister, but you’d have to be blind not to see how she affects the opposite sex.”

"Just because you're always thinking with your dick doesn't mean the ruler of the Legion is. Did it occur to you he might find just as much pleasure in torturing her?"

James snorted. "Sexually maybe. But I can't see Evie laying down to a dragon."

"Not willingly."

Duncan and James shared a look, and Duncan sped faster toward the park where they'd left the egg.

After a few moments of terse silence, James groaned.

"What? Your ribs?"

"No. Just thinking about what Dad's going to have to say about all this."

Duncan couldn't help squirming in his seat. Their father held firm to some rules, and number one was to always consider family first and foremost. They'd already put Eve in danger with a stupid prank. And rule number two, to keep a low profile while working, had gone by the wayside if the angels knew they'd stolen the egg. Shit, Carmaron probably had an inkling that the angels were indeed innocent. Maybe once he and James found Evie, they'd do best to work some damage control.

"You have a point," Duncan conceded. "It sounded like fun at the time, but maybe that was the liquor talking."

"The rum or the tequila?"

Duncan groaned. "I can't believe we stole one of Carmaron's eggs. Teban has a sense of humor, yes, but he only agreed to our scheme because you two are friends. And weren't you supposed to hold the egg in *your* possession at all times?"

"Oh, yeah."

"That egg is his brother or sister, if you think about it. And if he finds out we left it alone, never mind that nothing could have penetrated that flame around it but one of us, he's going to seriously flip. We should have just fucked with Ranton. That he would definitely have approved of."

“Too late now.”

“Yeah, too late for us. Let’s just hope Evie’s steered clear of the scaly bastard.”

Chapter Four

Pressure woke Eve, that and a steady thrumming in her lower body. She blinked to find herself on her belly, hands prodding at her ass and thighs, spreading her wide.

“What—” She hissed at the sudden fire streaking through her bottom. Pushing up on her elbows, she soon found herself on her hands and knees as Ranton pushed himself inside *her ass*.

“That’s it,” he encouraged, his voice raspy. “But push out, *sassa*, and this taking will be easier.”

“What the hell are you doing?” She groaned, unable to resist doing as he said. As she did, he slid further inside, the discomfort of his size fading under the pleasure of his touch. He stroked her flank with his callused palms, then rubbed circles on her belly before his fingers sought the moist heat of her clit.

“That’s what I wanted,” he rasped and began playing with the hardening nub. He pushed his cock deeper and deeper still, until his balls rested against her thighs. “Oh yeah, that’s it.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because I have to,” he growled and pulled out halfway before slamming deep again. “Because you remain unmarked here, and that’s unacceptable.”

She didn’t understand, but soon found herself not caring as he took control of her body. The feel of his thighs pressed against the back of hers, of his balls slapping against her as he rode her with a mastery that declared his skills as a lover, shook her to the core. Every touch, every caress, sent waves of desire through her body.

His fingers plucked and teased her clit until she wanted to come from that alone. But the rocking of his pelvis, the fullness inside her ass only added to the tension begging for release.

And that scared her. She should have sensed him long before he put himself in her ass. She should have woken and taken control, handling *him* instead of moaning in surrender as he fucked her *again*.

A loud crack scattered her thoughts and she cried out at the slap on her right butt cheek.

“Stop thinking and feel,” he rumbled. “Feel the sting of that slap, feel the length of my cock as I ram it into your sweet ass. And feel the mark of ownership, both mine and his.” She looked over her shoulder and saw him nod toward the egg beside the bed.

The little egg quivered with ecstasy, his shell glowing with bright blue and green spots of color, intermittent with sparks of red and gold.

“I don’t understand.”

Ranton groaned and gripped her hips tight with both hands. “You will soon enough.”

She wanted to argue, but feeling, a symphony of sound, scent and emotion, flooded her with need. The egg’s boundless love rolled through her as Ranton cried out and came, and soon she followed, her body clenching his tightly, her core weeping with the need for fulfillment.

“More,” Ranton ordered, and thrust again, pushing her into another orgasm.

Dragonsong filled the room. Ranton continued thrusting, and she couldn’t stop coming. When he finally ceased, leaning over Eve with his larger frame, his weight pinned her in place.

“Fuck me,” he breathed and rolled off her, taking her with him.

She’d fight him in a minute, as soon as she caught her breath and pushed that harmony from her head. Glaring at the little egg, she gradually realized less of a ringing in her ear as the baby dragon muted his song.

"Don't chastise him too harshly. Jentaron's in love." Humor laced Ranton's words, and she quickly glanced back at him.

His lips twisted in mocking smile, his eyes soft with repletion. Eve stared, enraptured with the look of a satisfied dragon. Despite his human appearance, Ranton looked completely beastly to her, and incredibly attractive.

"How can an egg be in love?"

"How can a dragon love a demon?"

"*What?*" Ranton was in love with her? Her heart wanted to race out of her chest. Dear hell, but she thought she might be feeling the same—

"Jentaron's in love with you—a demon. How that's possible, I don't know."

Oh, right. Jentaron. She lay there trying to gather her thoughts while Ranton left the bed. He returned with a damp rag and surprised her by tending to the mess he'd made. His tenderness contrasted sharply with his fierce taking of her ass, and the differences made her wish, for just a moment, that he'd been the one declaring his love.

She ignored any sense of disappointment. "Look, I was supposed to bring him back. I've done that, and a lot more. Now it's time for me to go."

She shifted toward the side of the bed and found herself flattened by several hundred pounds of hulking muscle.

"You don't leave until I say you can leave," he said quietly, his eyes narrowed and intimidating in the extreme. "You're in dragon territory now, Eve. That makes you mine."

"Yours?" she scoffed. "Please. I haven't tried to seriously hurt you because I know you were only protecting Jentaron. But you've taken advantage of the fact—*twice*—and now I have to go. I have a job to do, and lazing around with a beast in the lower realm is not getting it done."

"Your job. What is it, exactly? Tell me."

Another order. She glared up at him. "No."

His brows rose, but instead of looking irritated, he looked amused. "You don't like orders, do you?"

"What gave you that idea, genius?"

His lip curled up in a snarly grin, and she had to convince herself not to notice how cute he looked, especially with those sharp teeth exposed.

"Such a smart mouth. But what soft, ripe lips."

Before she could move, he kissed her. A breath-stealing fusing of the mouths that made her arch up into him.

"That's better." His chest rumbled in what sounded like a purr. "Much better. I wonder that I haven't tried a demon before now. Yes, *sassa*, you're my first demon lover."

"I admit you're my first bout of dragon sex, and needless to say, you're my last."

"It pleases me to hear you say that."

"Well, whoopee for you. I meant that you're too domineering, too arrogant, and too damned big for me. Now get off before I turn nasty. And what the hell does *sassa* mean?"

He shook his head, his soft hair dragging over her shoulders. Funny, but she never would have pegged an overgrown lizard to feel so soft. His hair and skin felt like satin, and she couldn't help rubbing the pads of her fingers over his forearms as she tried to free herself.

"I like nasty." Ranton leaned close to her face and inhaled, closing his eyes. "Oh, Eve. You smell delicious. Warm female, cool demon, and spicy arousal."

She didn't need to look down to see his cock hardening. "What, are you in perpetual heat?" Her loins pooled with want, her cream mixing with the dragon seed still saturating her womb and now her ass.

Ranton merely glanced at the egg again and smiled. "*Sassa* means 'dragon with a demon's temper'. It's often used as a term of affection."

She swallowed hard. "Oh." What did a body say to that? She suddenly felt nervous, especially when his eyes narrowed with satisfaction. "I really do have work to do."

“Work?”

Since he didn't seem to want to let her go, she sighed and told him—but only because *she* decided to talk. “I'm a demon with an important job. Oh sure, succubi and war demons all have their place. But it's my job to help keep the world in balance. Obviously I'm not the only one who does it, but I play an important role in the grand scheme of things.”

Ranton eased off of her and rolled to his side, up on one elbow. His eyes remained hard while he listened. “Go on.”

“You know the Ethereals take care of humanity. It's our purpose, really.”

Far from seeming disgusted with talk of the humans, Ranton looked intrigued.

“Not that you dragons seem to care overmuch, but if the humans go unchecked, they throw the universe off balance. The middle realm is actually quite important. But its occupants have no idea what they're doing. My brothers and I sway those teetering on the brink.”

“Brink of what?”

“The brink of Decision. That fine line that separates the souls belonging in heaven and those belonging in hell. And the angels are always trying to one-up us.” She grimaced. She still had a bone to pick with Daniel about her last sway. Stupid angel. “The fact of the matter is, both sides of the Ethereal were created to keep order. I can't force a human to decide, nor can I sway one once his or her course is set.” *James should really be here listening to this.* “But I can insert myself into a human's life who's in the middle of Decision. We do it all the time when they reach a certain age without having decided the course of their future.”

“And the dragons? Why do the Ethereal not bother themselves with us?” Ranton rubbed her shoulder with small, light circles, making her stomach do flip-flops.

“Because you and those in your sect refused us many, many years ago. And there's some question as to whether or not you possess souls. For some reason no one clearly understands, the dragons, blood elves

and havoc remain immune to angel and demon interference. I think it's because you live in our realm."

"Whose realm?" he asked softly, his fingers traveling along the slope of her breast to capture a nipple.

She swallowed but refused to back down. "*Our* realm. You might not like it, Ranton, but the demons were here way before the first dragon was even born." She grinned when he frowned. *Finally. Gotcha.* "Legend has it that the first dragon was actually a demon who later changed."

"That's ridiculous." He opened his mouth to say more, but his eyes widened in surprise instead.

"What?" She looked at the egg now mottled with blue. "Did Jentaron say something?"

Ranton gave her a most curious look but said nothing.

"You know, normally I'd hang around and badger you until I get my answers. But I really do have work to do." She thought of her father's reaction when she failed to sway her humans. "And there are consequences if I don't perform."

His fingers on her breast stilled. "What consequences?"

"Asael, my boss, would not be pleased."

"Asael," he murmured in thought. "I know this name. An angel once, now fallen to reign among the demons in the lower region. He's a major demon, and a monster of some skill. My mother was quite taken with him at one time."

Yeah, that was her father. A real heartbreaker. Literally.

"Well, if you know his reputation, then you know he's not someone you want on your bad side. I have a certain number of souls to sway in a given work period. And if I don't meet my quota, I end up on his shit list."

"Hmm." He looked introspective, and she took the time to study him as he'd studied her.

Naked, Ranton appeared the very essence of male personified. Broad shoulders, slim hips and long, powerful legs made her want to lick him from head to toe. And then there was the impressive flesh between his

thighs, the velvety sack under a long, semi-hard shaft. A pearl of cream clung to his tip and she wanted to lick him, to taste what she'd had only minutes ago.

"Tell me, Eve. Are you any good at your job?"

"The best," she said without hesitation. "I've never met a male I couldn't sway."

"Never, Eve?" He chuckled, surprising, then irritating her.

Without giving him time to prepare, she knocked him onto his back and straddled his waist. "Never, Ranton." She licked her lips, not surprised when his gaze focused there and his cock stirred under her sex, trapped by her position. "Why don't I show you?"

This time I'm in control. And do I have a few surprises for you.

Ranton sucked in his breath when Eve fused her mouth to his. By the embers, his little demon knew how to kiss. She sucked on his lower lip and bit him, actually drawing blood. Then she licked the small spot, warming him with demon flame, and took possession of his mouth. He found himself hugging her to him without remembering having lifted his arms.

She squirmed over his cock, her pussy wet and hot, and much as he tried, he couldn't penetrate her without her help. But his frustration faded under the onslaught of sensation in his mouth.

Eve filled him with blue fire, her breath an aphrodisiac. She tasted both sweet and spicy, both hot and cold, and smelled like *citreine*, a scent the dragons were partial to moreso than chocolate. Her tongue stroked his and swept the cavern of his mouth. She licked his elongating teeth, which grew long and sharp when he was impassioned, and neatly avoided getting bitten.

"Sassa," he murmured when she left his mouth for his ear.

She nuzzled his neck, the warmth of her breath exciting and stimulating. He felt hard enough to break her in half were she human. Her tongue snaked into his ear, and he bucked against her, needing to thrust hard right now.

“I’m going to ride you, Ranton,” she whispered as she settled over him, her pussy’s cream coating his shaft. “And you come only when *I* give the word.”

Strangely, her dominance excited him. Normally the one holding the power, Ranton had never been held in thrall by anyone or anything. Not the queen or the dragon prince, his brother Teban. Even Jentaron, soon his king, would never *command* his obedience. Ranton would give it because he loved Jentaron, because he had made the decision to honor the new king.

Eve challenged Ranton. She made him think twice about telling her what to do, even though he knew he could dominate her. And her ability to make him question himself intrigued him on so many levels.

Her tongue plunged into his ear as she shifted over him, taking his cock deep.

“Yes, yes,” he moaned, oblivious to her manipulations. Fuck, his little *sassa* was so good. Her heat called to his, made him want to fill her with his come, to mark her everywhere and claim her as his. Elemental, driving need pushed him to raw carnality.

She sat up, bringing him fully inside of her, and her eyes sparkled like sapphires. Staring into her knowing grin, he gripped her hips and increased their pace, slamming her on top of him over and over again.

“You want to come inside me, don’t you, dragon?” she murmured, cupping her breasts and flicking her nipples. “You want to fuck me until you’re spent.”

“Hmm.” He couldn’t think, could only stare as she toyed with *his* breasts, *his* pert nipples. The call of ownership descended, and uncaring that the female he would impress into his being was in fact demon, he pulled her closer, his eyes burning with the need to join them as one.

But Eve leaned forward, breaking eye contact, and sucked on his nipple. Jolted by the erotic kiss, he jerked under her, in thrall to her sensual power. She kissed and caressed, pinching his other nipple while stimulating him into a fury of arousal.

"Yes, you want to fuck. You want me, don't you, Ranton?" she murmured, her words echoing strangely in his chamber.

"I do," he answered honestly, uncaring about anything but the end to his hunger.

"But I won't let you come, not yet," she teased, easing off him before he could protest.

She replaced her pussy with her hand and pumped him, circling the base of his cock with a hard pull when he would have climaxed. Cursing in frustration, he reached for her and saw nothing but a blur. She was there. He felt her touch. But suddenly he couldn't see her, could only feel.

"Quit playing, Eve." Anger grew, anger and frustration. His cock needed to release, and damn it all, he couldn't finish. Not when he had her pussy so close, her ass just a breath away.

She reappeared with a smirk and a kiss. Before he could reprimand her, she'd turned around and had her dripping pussy in his face, her mouth over his cock.

He took full advantage, licking her hard while fucking her mouth.

So damned good. More. He felt a flutter of love from Jentaron, his little brother feeding off Ranton's sexual energy with softer, needier emotion. And Ranton suddenly felt a softening in his heart as well.

Eve made him feel things. Around her he was more than the leader of the Legion, but a male in his prime. A dragon to conquer even the most stubborn of females. If only she'd let him.

To have met an equal after living so many years in command over the dragons... He wanted to come, to fill her mouth the way she filled his. Eve shuddered and sucked harder on his cock, to which he added his fingers with his mouth to make her climax. He shoved his fingers in deep, two that stretched and angled for her G-spot, taking her to bliss while he ate her sweet little clit.

But still he couldn't come. And it didn't make sense. Her mouth, her body around him smelled of ecstasy, and he needed to join her.

“Want to come, don’t you?” she rasped, letting his cock fall from her lips. “Spill it, let me watch you spew.” She wrapped her hands around his shaft and rubbed his head against her lips. “*Come now.*”

He couldn’t help himself. He sucked harder on her clit and came, shooting into the air. He wasn’t sure where his seed landed, but the utter rapture of release, of tasting Eve’s pussy while his come left his body, made him dizzy.

He continued to come, rosy jets of semen landing everywhere while he buried his mouth against Eve. And without understanding how, he lost consciousness.

Chapter Five

Eve knew she had little time before the big guy woke. Yet she was rubber-kneed, trying her best to overcome the weakness flooding her limbs. Holy hell, but Ranton had taken a lot of effort to put under, and she hadn't anticipated multiple orgasms while doing so.

She used his sheets to clean herself, aware she was dripping with her own juices as much as his seed all over her mouth and chest.

Licking her lips, she tasted him again, and found, to her horror, the need to put him inside her again. *Completely freaking nuts.*

With an apologetic glance at Jentaron, she readied to leave...and couldn't.

She hurried to his side and put her lips over the solid blue spot at the top of the egg. "Good-bye, Jentaron." Dragonsong filled the room and her eyes filled. "I love you, too." Glancing back at Ranton's still form, she raced back to him and kissed him on the lips. *And I love you, as wacko as that may be.*

Leaving a protesting egg and an unconscious dragon behind, she tried to recall the many twists and turns they'd made, aware her nudity, and the fact that she was a demon, would draw more attention than she'd want to handle. But she had to return home in order to finish her current sways.

Dragons and demons didn't mix. Ranton led the Legion. Eve helped right the balance of souls. How would the two ever come together save in the bedroom?

A tear slid down one cheek and she dashed it away, mortified she might be crying for a lout like Ranton. Good night, but the male was

arrogant, autocratic and too damned big. He'd taken her ass without even asking, as if he owned it. Her butt heated with remembrance and she quickened her stride. Who knew a dragon could be so tender, and so roughly exciting, when making love?

Having sex, having sex, she corrected, worried when her mind refused to equate the correlation. Damn it, she'd felt the connection, much as she needed to avoid it. No, she had to return home, save her brothers' collective asses before Carmaron, or worse, her father, took a bite out of them.

A sudden roar shook her, and she realized she was running out of time. The beast had obviously awoken and didn't sound at all pleased that she'd escaped.

Sudden pain slammed through her temple before she was lifted in large claws like a rag doll.

"Hmm, what is this? A bluefire demon that smells like my brother?"

She blinked up at a large snout, blood-red eyes spotted with gold, and a green-scaled face. The great beast looked as if he were grinning, but she couldn't be sure. Perhaps that expression was one he used before eating?

"I'm Eve, and I've come to return—"

"Eve? Why didn't you say so?" She dropped twenty feet to the ground and screeched, not at all comforted that he held her now in human arms instead of the dragon's claw from before. "I'm Teban, a friend of James'."

"Great. Look, I'd love to stay and chat, but if I don't get out of here soon, Ranton is going to be all over me."

"All over and inside you, I'd say," Teban said with a grin. "Such a tasty little morsel. No wonder James never introduced us."

"Yeah. And speaking of James, I really have to get back. He and Duncan are probably worried about me."

"That brings up a good point."

She studied Teban as he spoke, noting the differences between him and Ranton. They looked very much alike in human form. Both dark

haired and golden of body, Teban was taller yet leaner, his face almost wolfish with a mischievous glint sparking his eyes. He wore nothing but the human skin he was in and looked equally impressive as his cock rose in appreciation of her naked state.

"I'd take you in a heartbeat, but you're already marked. More's the pity."

"Marked? Forget it. I really have to get back."

"I'm afraid you can't. Not yet. Ranton's in a fury, and if he tracks you to the Ordinary, we'll have a major problem."

"You don't seem to understand. Asael gave me a job to do, and if I don't do it, his wrath will fall from me onto you. Now stall your brother, mislead him, whatever. But let me go before hell literally falls in on your head."

"Ah, I see your point." He paused, staring down at her and as he realized he held her in his arms, he quickly let her go and stepped away. "I have to say, Eve, you have the most luscious body."

She flushed, not used to any but her sways and occasional lovers seeing her thus.

"Thanks, I think."

"I'm going to take you back, but you have to promise not to tell anyone who helped you."

"My lips are sealed."

He swallowed visibly. "Let me get you some clothes." He pulled her behind him through a part of the rock wall around her that was in fact a door. A large space lit by flame illuminated a comfortable room. Animal hides littered the floor, as did large, soft cushions in green and gold. Glittering necklaces, baubles and coins were scattered throughout the room, even on the posts of his large bed.

"What is it with you guys? Does every dragon down here have a mammoth bed?"

"Only those of us who prefer comfort and pleasure over crude rutting."

“Ah.”

She threw on the oversized shirt he gave her that reached mid-thigh, and waited while he donned black slacks and shoes and a green silk polo. He pointed to a second door away from the one they’d entered.

“Shall we go?”

“Uh, yeah.” But before they left, she paused. “You didn’t ask any questions, Teban. Almost like you knew why I was down here.”

He chuckled. “Your brothers told me all about it. I let them take the egg, knowing James would watch it. And since they only did it to teach you a lesson...”

“What lesson?” She could feel her eyes heating.

“Oh ho, evil Evie, as James likes to say. You really have the most beautiful fire. So blue.”

“Teban,” she warned, needing to leave, but needing to hear evidence of her brothers’ perfidy more.

“It was just a joke, Eve. Except Ranton’s involved now, and in case you missed it, he doesn’t have the best sense of humor.” Another roar shook the walls. “See what I mean? Anyway, James and Duncan told me how you got yourself in trouble trying to save a run-down elementary school from destruction a few months ago. Threatening the new owner of the lot, in public no less, violated several demonic rules, no?”

She scowled. “No one would have paid any attention to it if the angels had kept their snotty noses out of the mess.”

“I, for one, liked the fact that you made that bruiser piss his pants. Hey, a little demon fire never hurt anybody, right? But you made all the major headlines. Rumor has it you earned some time in the pit for it, too.”

Eve shuddered. She didn’t want to relive the torture her father had put her through. Even for a demon, some things, like falling forever through the air covered in spiders and scorpions that liked to bite and sting, could be more scary than hell itself. And her father still had yet to forgive her for that, though she thought it more likely he’d been scared of

the repercussions on her had the archangels taken notice. So he'd been extremely firm making a point...she liked to think.

She shook off the past. "So, you're saying James and Duncan tricked me into trying to save a dragon's egg that wasn't in any danger at all?"

"That's about it." Teban beamed. "Ready to go?"

"But what about the egg, I mean, Jentaron? Is he really okay?"

Teban's smile froze. "What did you say?"

"Jentaron. Will he be okay? He was out of his nest for some time."

"But James had him."

She snorted. "Not when he was in the bar making eyes at a stupid blonde. Make that blonds." The minute she said it, she wanted to retract her statement. Teban suddenly looked more like Ranton than she liked. Flames danced in his eyes.

"James left the egg alone?"

"But nestled in our demon fire. Honestly, only he, Duncan or myself could have retrieved him."

The flame in his eyes faded at that. "And you know his name, the name of our new king."

"Uh, yeah."

"How?"

"How what? I knew the egg was a *he* because he told me. But Ranton told me Jentaron's name."

Teban stared, and then he grinned, his mouth so wide he looked to split his face. "This is just priceless. Promise me to hold off your announcement until I'm there. I wouldn't want to miss Carmaron's face when you tell her."

"Tell her my brother's stole the egg?"

"No, definitely not. Never mention that again. And whatever you do, don't tell Ranton about James or Duncan. Now let's get out of here before my little brother finds us."

Before she could ask Teban any more questions, he had her out the door and darting straight up into the air, at speeds that made Ranton's descent into the lower realm look like slow motion.

Ranton had followed her scent until the trail suddenly ended. Odd as it seemed, his *sassa* had vanished. He roared in frustration, his wrath making the rock walls crumble, but he didn't care. That little demon had bested him. *Him*, the ruler of the Legion. And to add insult to injury, she'd left him before he could finish their bond.

The pressing need to find her fueled his fury, and he stomped around the corridors breathing fire and threatening any and all he met for information. But no one had seen her.

He passed another mass of red and black dragons, ignoring their questions as to why he remained in human form. Then he stopped. Teban must have heard his cries, yet his brother had yet to show his face.

Retracing his steps, he found Teban's room and barged in unannounced. The scent of Eve hit him, so strongly he wanted to kill his own brother. The only thing keeping him somewhat sane was the absence of Teban's scent marker, and the clamoring roar of Carmaron.

Shit. She must have learned of Jentaron's disappearance.

"Ranton, to me now."

Eve drew further away, yet the queen called. *Fuck*. He was going to seriously paddle his demon's ass, not to mention fuck her senseless, when he found her again. And he didn't even want to think about Teban, lest his rage fly out of hand. Teban had a lot to answer for, thanks to Jentaron's helpful information. No wonder the thieves had been successful in stealing the egg. They'd had his brother's help.

Ranton quickly shredded his human clothing as he transformed into his beast. Thick black scales covered his body, and he breathed fire, inhaling the comfortable aroma of methane and sulfur that lingered under the scent of Eve's touch still clinging to his body.

He flew down several passages, knocking several of his brethren over in his haste to reach an angry-sounding queen.

Entering her chamber guarded by two of his legion, he nodded at them and entered.

"Where have you been?" Carmaron shrieked in greeting. "One of my eggs has been stolen, by an Ethereal, no less."

Ranton did his best not to roll his eyes. For all that he outmuscled and outweighed his mother, she could be a ferocious beast when riled.

"I have Jentaron. He's safely nesting in my chamber."

The terror in her eyes softened and she sniffed, fat red tears streaking down her gold face. "Jentaron? Then he's ready to hatch?"

Ranton allowed himself to smile, pleased beyond measure with his new brother. "Yes. He's ready." Just waiting for a witch of a demon to return so he can sit against her bare breasts, skin to skin, as he grows.

"Then he was never taken in the first place? You had him?" She looked suspicious, but nowhere near the raving dragon he'd heard screeching through the walls.

"Yes. And the rumor about angels or demons taking him was just that." *Oh, Eve, you owe me for this. And you are dearly going to pay.*

"Why, then, are we at war?"

"Not at war. In training. The Legion grows stale battling with tired demons and the blood elves. And the havoc, those monstrous carnivores, are too unstable to engage. Hell, rumor has it they eat their own. We needed a bit of new blood, and the angels provided that relief."

She snorted with amusement. "Good thinking. Uriel in particular can be extremely vexing. He had the nerve to try to sway one of my young a few centuries ago. Can you believe that?"

"No, Mother."

She shuffled toward him on tired legs, and he noted not for the first time how much she'd aged. Though dragons lived a long time, Carmaron had outlived the oldest by a thousand years at least. Her once golden skin now flaked with white, and her scales' luminescence had faded.

Though she'd birthed over ten thousand young, only Ferna, Lier, Teban and Ranton had she kept as her own. And with Ferna and Lier having died years before Teban had been born, she only had two sons now to call hers. When she passed, Jentaron would have to find a queen to carry on the dragon line. Yes, it was time for his brother, the king, to come into the world. If only the stubborn little egg would ignore his need for Eve.

For some odd reason, Jentaron had taken an instant liking to the demon, and didn't want to come into the world without her by his side. Not that Ranton could blame him. But the egg seemed to want her for an altogether, less platonic reason.

Most dragons only had sex to ease the ache of rage. Those anointed breeders did so to procreate, and were only allowed copulation with the queen or one of her approved broodings. But a few, like Ranton, *liked* the sexual act. He'd tried it in the human form on a lark when he'd reached his teens, and had found, to his surprise, that he liked it. Hell, he more than liked it. With Eve, he craved it.

Departing from his mother with a revered bow, Ranton left with all intention to find Eve. In less time than it had taken to mark her as his, she'd crawled under his skin and refused to leave. He loved the smell of her. Thoughts of her luscious, creamy body made him instantly hard. And the thought of not having her at his side made him want to kill something to ease that unrelenting ache.

What worried him more than anything was the fact that his need for Eve went beyond the physical. How could a dragon ache for a demon? It made no sense. Yes, they both shared a love for things dark and hot. Their world in the lower realm was comprised of black earth, hot, humid recesses of underground lairs and open fields of scorched vegetation. Beautiful in a barren kind of way, yet filled with life. Eve could appreciate a dragon's existence. Yet she had a calling to walk among the humans, a practice banned by Carmaron several centuries ago. Too many of their kind had been killed by the humans—by the very creatures the Ethereal catered to day in and day out.

For his part, Ranton had never much cared either way about the mortals above ground. Looked on as food by some of his kind, the humans had always instilled in him a curiosity. But he'd found a new respect for them when he'd discovered human sexuality.

He hardened and found it awkward to walk as his dick dragged along the ground. Irritated that he had little control over his body, he rose high and flew through the wide corridors toward the main entrance/exit to the catacombs when he heard Jentaron.

Need to break free. Time to rise.

"Damn." Another distraction to keep him from Eve. Yet this one he would cherish, the birth of his brother into his keeping, into Guardian claws.

He turned around and flew back into his chamber, lighting every one of the torches in his room with dragon fire. Then he sat in wait, whiling the hours it took to finally watch his brother peck through the egg into a whole new life.

He could still remember his own birthing, entering to find Teban waiting on him, the large green dragon's eyes full of love and welcome. A fitting contrast to Carmaron's constant harping and incessant screeching. A wonderful queen and breeder, she was, however, a terrible mother. But for all her faults, Carmaron admitted her failings. And it was with no small gratitude that Ranton thanked her for allowing his brother to raise him.

Jentaron would be his to raise, his to protect. Carmaron had chosen Ranton for that duty, yes, but Jentaron, in the end, had made the final decision. A royal egg, the new king, Jentaron had abilities that would sustain the dragons through the next several millennia.

As the minutes ticked by, Ranton became more and more aware of Jentaron's frantic need to be near Eve.

Eve. Want my demon.

Ranton frowned at that, still not sure how to face what was coming all too soon. Jentaron had called to Eve. The king had chosen Eve, a demon, to help introduce him to the world. At first Ranton had thought

Eve's mention of demons as the dragon's forefathers as nonsense, but Jentaron had immediately agreed. The little egg had begun singing softly to Ranton, telling him in no uncertain terms that Eve belonged to Ranton, and more, to Jentaron. But Ranton had a feeling his definition of "belonging" and his baby brother's were two different things.

Not sure what to make of Jentaron's feelings, Ranton blew a comforting breath over his brother and focused instead on the changes coming his way. Once Jentaron was born, his duty as commander of the Legion would be split. He would still train the dragon army, but when the time for battle came, his duty would be first and foremost to protect the king. As Guardian, it fell to Ranton to defend his charge, with his life if need be.

He would miss the rush of leading his dragons to battle, but found great satisfaction that he would help mold the future of his kind. Planning took his mind off Eve for a while, and as the hours passed, he fell into an easy rhythm, nudging his brother every so often to stimulate his need to break free from his boundary.

Jentaron continued to cry about Eve, but Ranton tuned him out. Had he not, he might have done something extremely stupid...like taking his birthing brother with him to find the evil woman.

Ranton couldn't help a small smile at how completely she'd manipulated him. Though still pissed she'd knocked him flat on his ass, he felt pride that she'd been able to fool him, the Legion's own general. And what a way to go.

She'd said she had power, but he'd been able to control her fairly easily, at least physically. Now he understood her success rate with her sways. Frowning, he wasn't sure how he felt about her having sex with humans. Clinically, it was her job, to push the humans one way or the other into the Decision. But now that he'd claimed her, she belonged to him.

He glanced at Jentaron, who screeched and fluttered within his shell. Eve belonged to Ranton...and to Jentaron. How that would play out remained a mystery, and that worried him. Ranton had bonded so

quickly to Eve, and so fully, he wasn't sure he could share her with another, even with another dragon. The thought of Teban anywhere near Eve still made him see red.

Jentaron cried out and the egg popped, distracting him. He blew a soft breath of fire over the sudden cold penetrating the heat within the egg, and his brother settled a bit.

Eve. Want my sassa...

"She's not here, now, brother. Come out and we'll find her together."

No, want sassa.

Ranton frowned. *Sassa* was a concept only an adult should understand. He'd told Eve it was a term of affection, and it was. But it was also more than that. *Sassa*—dragon with a demon's temper, keeper of dark flame, conjurer of desire. Most often used in sexual terms, and Jentaron spoke of her as if Eve would belong to him in *that* way. Ranton's blood boiled with jealousy.

He wouldn't tolerate sharing.

My sassa.

"No," Ranton growled. "She's mine, you little hatchling. Now stop playing and come on out. And if you want to see her again, you'll abide by my command."

Jentaron sulked but entered the world with one more break of his shell. He glittered, still stained with dragon fire, but looked almost...blue. Ranton stared, incredulous, at the first blue dragon born in over fifteen thousand years. Blue, just like the color of Eve's shining eyes. Ranton grimaced, sensing prophetic doom. But as he stared at his new king, he couldn't help the joy building within his being.

Cradling the tiny dragon in his claws, Ranton puffed a burst of Guardian flame over the hatchling, marking him as under Ranton's protection. Jentaron chirped and fluttered his paper-thin blue wings that began to shine with silvery veins. Then he belched, a small hiss of gas that sparked off the hatchling's claw striking stone.

Jentaron nuzzled his snout along Ranton's, then surprised Ranton by leaping out of his claws to the ground. He watched, bemused, as his

brother matured incredibly fast. Almost like a...demon. He had to step back as Jentaron took up more and more space, until the hatchling suddenly grew to a few feet shy of Ranton.

“Crap, that really hurts.” Jentaron roared his displeasure, but continued to communicate telepathically. He flapped his wings and flexed his fragile claws. *“Now show me how you turn human so we can collect Eve.”*

Shaking his head at his brother’s one-track mind, Ranton did as asked. His own maturation into a large, fully grown male had taken a year, a full ten years faster than most dragons. His brother, apparently, didn’t intend to wait on nature.

Jentaron shifted slowly into a human-shaped body. He looked more like Ranton than Teban. But where both Ranton and Teban were dark, Jentaron had white-blond hair. His eyes, too, were different. Dark blue with silver flecks, decidedly not human.

“You’ll have to wear dark glasses if we go out in public.” Ranton nodded up.

“When we go out. When Eve works above ground, one of us has to be with her at all times.”

“Excuse me? One of *us*? Little brother, king you may be, but Eve is mine.”

“Technically.” Jentaron waved away his concern and tried walking on unsteady legs. “This is so awkward. How do they move about without hind legs? And no wings or tail for balance?”

Ranton snorted. “Yes, but they have many other attributes that more than make up for it.”

“I know. Why do you think I matured so quickly?” He grinned, and Ranton saw himself in the gesture. Pride sparked, and love suddenly overwhelmed him. Ah, so this was the Guardian’s Bond. After several emotion-packed moments, the imprint began to fade. Ranton took a deep breath, not so quick to deny Jentaron’s desires. Love for his brother shone brightly, yet love for his demon, his *sassa*, could not be refuted.

“Jentaron, Eve—”

"Came when I called." Jentaron spoke in a husky voice. "She's yours, Ranton. I claimed her *for* you, so relax. I'm not about stealing her. But a part of Eve is mine as well. I love her," he said quietly, staring into Ranton's troubled gaze. "She's my Guardian as well, brother. Yes," he emphasized, noting Ranton's surprise. "The love I have for her is deep, and different from what I feel for you."

"She's a strong demon, and an even stronger woman. You've sensed her inner fire. She's perfect for you, Ranton, and she'll fulfill her purpose to me and to our sect in more ways than you can know." He forestalled Ranton's questions with an upheld hand. "She's mine too, and I'll say no more about it. But you can blame yourself for this." They both stared down at Jentaron's growing erection. "If your mind hadn't been so strong, I might have been spared this physical hunger. But you've it bad for little Evil Evie." Jentaron grinned. "By the embers, Ranton, you're a horny bastard, aren't you?"

Ranton chuckled, then sighed. The Guardian's Bond had taken away much of his jealousy toward Jentaron. But he still felt the need to own Eve. He needed to cement their bond, and to make sure she knew who was truly in charge of their new family. Jentaron might rule the dragons, but Ranton would rule the roost.

He sighed, watching his brother try to push his penis down. "It doesn't work that way."

"How the hell do you deal with this gnawing hunger?" Jentaron cursed, one of Ranton's favorites. "I need to fuck our *sassa*, and soon, before my brain explodes."

It figured his little brother would be a huge pain in his ass. Ranton grinned wryly. And if he wasn't mistaken, Jentaron would soon be a huge pain in Eve's as well.

Chapter Six

Eve stared at the human jacking off while she watched with murmurs of encouragement. Before Ranton, she'd found the sight entertaining if a bit lacking in creativity. Now she just wanted him to finish before going home to his wife and three kids. Yeah, George had been easy. Hell would be waiting for this jerk with open arms.

"Thanks, George," she whispered throatily, pleased when he sucked in his breath and did another line of coke. He toppled into his Decision, and she had a brief glimpse of him several years down the road, homeless and desperate while he stole from others to fill his filthy habit. *We'll be seeing you in the Abyss in another thirteen years.*

She picked up her light jacket and left him breathing hard, slamming the door behind her. *What the hell is wrong with me?* Normally buzzing with joy after turning a sway, she found her recent encounter sorely lacking. She rubbed her arms, slightly chilled in the stifled hallway that had to be at least ninety degrees since the air-conditioning had gone out hours ago.

In the catacombs she'd been oppressed with heat, and with a glowering dragon so hot he'd melted her heart.

"Oh hell, I must have it bad. Melted my heart? That is so fucking trippy."

She kicked at a moldy can of something and wondered if Ranton missed her half as much as she missed him. His bold stare, his dominant touch, the tender look in his dragon eyes after watching her come... For all that he'd pushed her around, Ranton had made her feel like she belonged. He'd possessed her, body and soul, and she still couldn't understand how he'd done it.

Sure, he'd fucked her senseless. And she readily admired the fact he could even do that. Maybe that was the attraction. That she'd finally met a male, not a relation, who could manipulate *her*. And his strength. Her sex tingled as she thought about his rippling muscles. The sight of those broad wings, of those thick thighs bunching as he prepared to leap.

She sighed. And his cock felt so damned good. So long and thick inside her. So perfectly right. Power and incredible sex was so...incredibly sexy. She flushed, hoping she didn't look as sappy as she felt.

Now she understood how some of her sways must have felt after sex with her. Utterly spellbound.

Yet it was more than the physical with Ranton. He sneered, he demanded, and he pushed until she surrendered. And he carried her protectively against him, against comfortable flesh when he could have covered himself in sharp scales. The affection he showed Jentaron seemed completely opposite what she would have expected from a dragon.

She knew enough about their species to know Carmaron was a dangerous female, to her own kind as well as to outsiders. Most dragon raised their young to be fierce, proud creatures bent on rejecting any and all but their own kind. And only the strong survived. The dragons possessed intelligence, and as much primitive reason as their ancestors, the drac demons.

But that primitive need to possess, to conquer and keep, turned her on like nothing ever had. To be held in arms strong enough to crush her, by a beast considerate enough to care for her needs before his own, ruined any resistance she might have wanted to have. Her eyes welled and she blinked hard, reminding herself she had no right to a dragon.

Different worlds. He burned and killed. She turned and swayed. He dwelt in the physical; she focused on souls. His kind had been banished from the Ordinary years ago. Her kind dwelled in both the lower *and* the middle realm. How could she sway souls from the lower realm? And how

could he live in his natural form in the Ordinary where dragons were anything but?

She glumly turned the corner and screamed when Teban bumped into her, Duncan and James hard on his heels. “Dear hell, Teban. Don’t *do* that.”

“Where the hell have you been? I told you to wait for me at the bar and bam, you disappear on me. And that was yesterday.” Teban glared disdainfully around him at the peeling paper and flea-infested carpet of the rundown hotel. The air of desperation and unsated hunger clung to the walls, definitely out of place for a giant male dressed in Armani slacks and Gucci shoes.

“Evie,” Duncan breathed. “We were so worried about you.”

“Oh?” She glared at him and James, doing a double-take when she noted James’ swollen face. “What the hell happened to you?”

“Evie, I am deeply, deeply sorry.” James grabbed her elbow and dragged her down the corridor toward the steps. Duncan took her other arm and Teban brought up the rear.

“Why do I feel like I’m being led to an execution?”

Duncan’s eyes darkened, and she stopped in her tracks.

“What’s going on?”

“Asael commanded us to bring you back, right before Teban showed up with the ‘good’ news that he’d found you.”

“Great.”

“Don’t worry, Evie,” James said. “I’m going to take full responsibility for this. It was all just a joke. We would have gotten lucky with the trio in the bar, and you would have learned a valuable lesson.”

“A lesson we should have followed—not to mess with what doesn’t concern the demon world,” Duncan finished. “But James screwed up. He planned on involving Ranton, but failed to tell me about it, and I told Teban what was going on instead. The egg was never in any danger.”

“No, because James was going to watch it twenty-four/seven, right James?” Teban asked softly.

James looked nervous, and the predatory gleam in Teban's eyes intensified. "Right, Teban. Right. But what I was trying to say was that I'm sorry, Eve. I had no idea Ranton would get to you first." He paused. "He didn't, ah, hurt you, did he?"

Duncan's eyes brightened, a neon blue filled with fire. "Because if he did, dragon or not, he's dead."

Teban shook his head but James stopped him with a look. "Eve?" he pressed.

"No, he didn't hurt me." *He made me come so hard it makes me wet to think about. He made me desire him, to the point that I'm pining for a dragon when I should be focused on my job.* She sighed. "He was very understanding about the whole thing." *And so freakin' scary looking that I fell in love with the beast.*

"Understanding?" Teban looked incredulous.

"Oh, well." James coughed. "Then I guess we should say congratulations before we see Dad."

"Congratulations?"

Teban grinned. "I told them that you're now officially dragon property."

"Property?"

"Hell, Eve. You knew the sex and name of a royal dragon before he was hatched. That's almost as good as a royal claiming, by Jentaron, mind you. But that won't happen because Ranton marked you. And if he marked you, he's keeping you. It's only a matter of time before he finds you again."

James glanced cautiously around them. "Uh, Eve, if it's all the same to you, I'd rather not draw more attention than we already have. We need to go home now."

She stared at the three males looking so hopeful. What bullshit. As if she had any choice in the matter. Her brothers wanted her to go home, to settle with Asael. Which she could appreciate. And honestly, she didn't want another scandal in the Ordinary centered around her. She'd been

gone two days, and she imagined Ranton's fury at having been bested by a female demon had to be extreme.

Though unnerved, she had to smile. What a picture that would make, Ranton in a snit. "Okay, boys. Let's go see Dad."

When Teban moved to join them, she stopped.

"You're coming with us into the Abyss?"

Teban shrugged. "Why not? Besides, I'd like to be there when Ranton tries to explain himself. I can't decide who'll be more fun to watch. Asael or Carmaron?"

"You're a sick bastard, Teban." Duncan shook his head, a smirk on his face.

"So I've been told."

"I'm not following." Eve heard them, but didn't understand. Ranton would try to explain himself? Explain what, exactly, that whole marking thing? Funny, she didn't see anything different in her appearance. And Teban, a dragon, voluntarily asked to join them in demon country?

"Trust me, Evie. When the shit hits the fan, no matter where you are, you'll be right in the middle of it." Trust James to be so succinct.

"Aren't I always?"

* * *

Ranton growled. Jentaron was turning into the little brother from hell, which wouldn't have been so bad if they hadn't been forced to enter said region. Like most of the lower realm, hell, or the Abyss, as the locals called it, was dark and hot. Personally, he liked it. But the denizens of the Abyss weren't so welcoming to anyone not demonic.

He glanced at the dark red horizon streaked with orange. He had to give it to the demons. The catacombs his kind lived within didn't hint at anything resembling the middle realm. They lit their way using fire, and when the mood struck, they ventured above ground into the humans' world to view the sun and the stars.

But down here, the demons mirrored the Ordinary. A black orb hung suspended in the sky—the miles of open space between the cracked plates upon which they stood and the ceiling of earth and rock above them. Gray-brown rocks streaked with blue and purple mineral dotted the landscape, providing a surprisingly beautiful palette set against the blood-red sky.

Doomed humans grimaced as they passed, led in formation by whip-wielding demons and pleasure-seeking imps. In the distance several demons farmed magic from the land, dropping the stuff into large barrels which would be transported throughout the demon's realm, readied to barter with those needing precious *mana*.

"Tell me again where we're going?"

Damn, Ranton was getting a headache. "If you'd stop whining, we'd probably be there by now."

"Asael? Is that his name?"

"Yes. That's the major demon pulling Eve's strings. Now relax and follow my lead. I have enough to deal with trying to find Eve and protect you from these idiots, let alone yourself."

Jentaron grinned. "Testy. Been too long since you've seen any action, hmm?"

They traveled in human form, to better fit in with those in the Abyss. No wings, no scales, and human attire—shredded cloth barely covering their bodies, like the other souls caught in hell. Problem was, the mortal form made Ranton's urges and sexual needs that much more pronounced. He walked with a constant hard-on, Eve's scent emblazoned on his brain.

"State your purpose here, *dragons*," a uniformed demon spoke from behind them.

They turned to find a faun wearing a green-skinned vest. Hoping he didn't recognize one of his kind over the demon's chest, Ranton sniffed and scented only lizard hide. The demon's tone, however, needed adjusting.

Ranton released his wings and flexed the sharpened appendages, ripping through the ratty T-shirt he'd sported, and rose in height to his normal seven feet, grunting as he did so. "Ah. That smaller form was killing me."

Jentaron sighed and grew as well. "Me too. I guess we're no longer trying to blend in?"

Shaking the faun by the neck, Ranton growled and leaned close. "Where do I find Asael?" He shot fire through his eyes, lighting the faun's beard afire, and the demon quickly told them where to go.

Tossing him several feet away, Ranton slapped his hands together and took to the air. Waiting for his brother, he watched with pride as Jentaron joined him.

"Let's get Eve."

"Our *sassa*."

Ranton cursed under his breath and straightened his unruly cock beneath his trousers. "My *sassa*, damn it."

"Eventually." Jentaron's mouth kicked into a grin, and they sped toward the flaming hill surrounded by shrieking wraiths.

Eve stared at her father's disapproving glare, thankful that, for once, it wasn't directed her way.

"You let your sister take the fall for your antics? Your *younger* sister?"

Duncan remained silent, but James tried to explain himself. "It was a mistake. We were trying to find her when—"

"It was as much my fault as his," Duncan muttered.

Teban stood out of the way in the shadows, not as comfortable in the light of her father's hall. But hell, no one actually liked the light except for Eve, her brothers and her father. Since falling from heaven, Asael maintained a perpetual glow, as well as an otherworldly presence, proclaiming his Descent to all. Fallen angels made the most ferocious

demons, because they alone in the lower realm knew what it was to face the abject horrors of His wrath.

"Now hold on a minute. You two stole a dragon's egg, trying to teach your sister a lesson. But you blamed it on the angels?" He stroked his smooth face, the perfection of his features blinding at first glance. Teban, she noted, had yet to take his gaze from Asael. "That I commend. But your job is not to educate your sister. She is as she's meant to be. A bit soft-hearted, true, but pure of heart."

Eve grinned. Apparently, her father had finally forgiven her for the elementary school fiasco.

"That said, you two need to stop using Eve to break the rules. Use a little creativity, sons, and figure out a way to do it without her. Hell and damn. You want an innocent piece of ass, take it the way I took your mother. Find your own loopholes. Do I need to do everything for you?"

James and Duncan glanced away, embarrassed. Teban snickered. A mistake.

Asael's eyes shot to Teban, assessing. "And Carmaron went along with this idiotic plan? Come here, little dragon, or should I say, dragon prince. Into the light, if you will."

Trust her father to call Teban little. The dragon had arrived in human form, but she'd seen him as a beast. And "little" didn't describe him, in either form.

"Uh, not exactly. Mother's getting older, so I take charge of most of the day-to-day in the catacombs. But I will say I was misled about the situation." Teban glared at James, who started to speak, then saw their father looking at him and shut up.

"I see. Well, then." Asael glanced down as if in thought, but Eve caught the smirk he tried to hide. "On to justice for all. Duncan, you owe Uriel ten days of service. Ten days with that angel will seem like fifty, and as much as I loathe Uriel, I admire his ingenuity when it comes to punishment. But try to use the time to scout the enemy, if you still have your eyes and ears when he releases you."

Duncan groaned.

“James, you’re Teban’s to do with as he will. Ten days of service he owes you, prince. Ten days of service you’ll receive.”

Teban’s smile widened, and his teeth elongated past his lips. “Thank you, Asael.”

“Try not to scar him overmuch. He is my son, and I hold some fondness for him.”

“*Father.*”

“You’d rather the pit?”

James looked at Eve, who shuddered.

“No pit. She’s not at fault here,” Ranton thundered as he entered her father’s main chamber from above, accompanied by another dragon. None of the crude buildings in the Abyss sported ceilings, and Eve had always thought her father partial to the sky in deference to his time spent in the upper realm.

Ranton settled quickly, black scales covering his body, a flaming sword in his hands. The dragon beside him looked like his twin, save he had dark blue eyes and blond hair. Very, very odd.

“Ah, the new dragon king.” Asael rose to greet the dragons. He slapped the blond on the back and nodded admiringly at Ranton’s sword. “General, how nice to see you again. I understand that you already know my daughter.”

Ranton glanced at Eve, and she was taken aback at the sheer hunger in his gaze. As he stared, the hunger relented to show his anger, which he quickly masked. Her heart raced, and her pussy flooded. Only Ranton could make her both scared and aroused at the same time, the monstrous beast. Oh, shit. She was in for it now.

Her father glanced from her to Ranton and back again, and sat on his throne, his fingers steepled below his chin. Mischief, and if she wasn’t mistaken, a spark of satisfaction, danced in his black eyes.

“She’s mine,” Ranton barked, not even trying to persuade her father of anything.

“She is,” the blond dragon agreed. “I called and she came.”

Her father's eyes narrowed. "You did?"

"He did?" James and Duncan said as one.

"By the damned," Eve breathed, finally realizing why the stranger looked like Ranton. "Jentaron?"

"Hello, Eve," he said, his voice decidedly seductive.

She blinked and glanced at Ranton, who glared between her and his brother.

"But, you were *an egg* a few days ago."

"Things change."

She couldn't stop staring, and heard Ranton growl. "This is your charge?" She laughed. "You must really have your hands full."

"You have no idea." Ranton's sword blazed. "But I think there's been some misunderstanding. You belong to me."

Asael stood and everyone quieted. He studied Ranton, and she knew what her father saw. A spirit so strong neither he nor the angels could touch it. And a fierceness, a hunger to rival the demons. "So you would take her punishment, then, since her delay was, in fact, your fault?"

"If you would live long enough to give it, yes," Ranton said softly, the threat hanging in the humid air.

Her father stared, unblinking, and soon laughed. But no one spoke, not sure if his laughter meant good tidings or bad. "I like you, Ranton. Full of piss and vinegar, and not a little fire. You want my daughter, hmm? What of Eve's wants? Does she know what being yours will entail?"

Eve stared, openmouthed, at her father. He planned to just hand her over, no explanations needed? And what of Ranton? She was to become "his"? His what? His wife, his mate, his *property*? The last had her glaring and she took a few steps toward the domineering dragon.

"Yes, Ranton, what exactly does being *yours* entail?"

Jentaron smirked and took a step back. "I missed you, Eve."

Ranton breathed fire as he strode toward her. Before he deigned to explain, he kissed her so hard she could barely breathe. "Sassa, you will

come home with me. We'll live here in the lower region, in the catacombs, and I'll allow you to complete the work of the Ethereals, with some stipulations, of course."

She sputtered, incredulous at his arrogance. "You, you'll allow me—"

"Excellent." Her father beamed. "Make sure to beat her at least twice a week, and if she refuses to see reason, just drop her from the sky once or twice."

"Father."

"Yes, dear. I love you too. But remember, we have work to do. Joining the dragons helps them more than it helps us. So you owe me one, Jentaron. And one day I'll collect."

"Of course you will." Jentaron bowed his head in respect, though his tone was wry.

"But I haven't said I agree." Eve wondered if she made a noise, for everyone seemed to be talking around her. Mating, moving, belonging? So confusing, so why was her heart pounding with...hope?

"The agreement was made for you." Asael hugged her to him and kissed her forehead tenderly. "Make sure to visit often, Eve. And I want one of the fauns to help see to the first of your many birthings."

Now Ranton looked as stunned as she felt. "Birthings? I'm a warrior, not a breeder."

"And she's a demon, not a dragon. Of course you'll breed. And won't that be a battle, to see who wields the Nailiim."

"The what?"

Teban whistled. "The Nailiim. The offspring of dragon and demon. Totally forbidden by the archangel Michael thousands of years ago, today thought more myth than real. Well, this should be fun."

Her father grinned, and Jentaron nodded. "Now I see. Very shrewd, Asael. But rest assured, the hatchlings of dragon blood will remain with my sect."

"And yet those young will breed a new line, and so on and so forth, thinning the hold on your blood, hmm? Then we'll see, won't we?"

“Wait a minute here.” Eve’s head was spinning. “Hatchlings? I’m a demon, a measure of balance. I don’t breed young.”

“I know, dear. But you will.” Asael sat again and waved to them. “Now this has been enlightening, but I have souls to steal and punishments to mete. Duncan, James, serve out your sentences. Oh, and Duncan, I will be checking with Uriel, so don’t try to cheat me out of justice. And try to be discreet when gathering information, okay?”

Duncan swore and disappeared in the blink of an eye.

“You think you’re getting off lightly, don’t you, James?” Her father laughed, and Eve knew James was in for it. For three hundred years she’d sat by her father’s knee. His punishments were swift but fair, and the devil knew James deserved more than his share of retribution for all that he’d put her through. “I know more about Teban than he knows about himself. Good luck.”

Teban frowned at her father as he transformed into his beast. Not quite as large as Ranton, Teban nevertheless intimidated with his sharp teeth, fiery breath and glittering green scales. Once turned, his eyes glowed with anticipation, and Eve wondered just what Teban had in mind for her brother, his “friend”.

James nodded with deference to Asael, but glared and batted away the claw Teban held out to him. Instead he surrounded himself with blue flame and gracefully mounted Teban’s ridged back, waiting with a glum expression, nestled between the gray-green wings.

“A pleasure, as always, Asael.” Teban rumbled and turned to Ranton. “I’ll see you two at home. And welcome to the world, little brother.” He padded to Jentaron and blew fire over the younger male’s body.

Jentaron smiled, his grin making Eve’s heart race. Damn it all. He looked so much like Ranton, but with blue-gray eyes and blond hair. And that grin made her impossibly wet. He patted Teban on the head, then turned his attention back to Eve. An unnatural hunger burned in his dragon eyes, and she took a step back.

“Oh no, *sassa*. We have some things to discuss at home.” Ranton smiled through his teeth and placed his sword at his back. “Asael, until we meet again.”

“Good luck, Ranton. You’re going to need it. And to you, young king. Blessings of the damned upon your line.”

Jentaron nodded. “Thank you, Asael. I’ll be seeing you soon, I’m sure. A few years at most before the first of the young arrive.”

Asael smiled back. “Exactly.”

Eve sputtered, but could say no more as Ranton caught her in his arms and took to the sky. The glitter in his eyes and the speed in his wings told her one thing.

There would be hell to pay.

Chapter Seven

"If you think that macho display of speed scared me, think again." Standing in Ranton's brightly lit room, Eve glared at Ranton and locked her hands on her hips. Scared, ha. She'd been petrified. But no way in hell would she let him know how much she hated that stomach-in-the-throat maneuver he seemed to have perfected every time she'd flown with him.

"But Eve, we don't want you scared, do we Ranton?" Jentaron said, studying her as if he'd never seen a female before.

Then again, perhaps he hadn't.

"Speak for yourself." Fire darted from Ranton's eyes. "This little demon owes me for what she pulled."

For what, screwing his brains out? Eve couldn't help a smirk, and knew she'd made a huge mistake when Ranton's skin began to scale over. Inky darts of color washed over his hands and forearms, and his pupils flamed inside jet-black eyes.

Ranton grabbed her by the shoulders and flame arched over her face. The dragon fire felt more like a caress than a blow, however, and she found herself becoming aroused in the presence of Ranton's rage.

"I want to know what you did to me, exactly. Did you put a spell on me, little demon? And did you really think you could run far enough away that I'd never find you?"

"Yes, Eve," Jentaron added, approaching her from behind. His breath kissed her neck, and she jerked at the sensation of feeling trapped. Angling a look over her shoulder, she swallowed hard. Jentaron's eyes blazed, blue and silver bands of light that looked more demon than

dragon. "What exactly did you do to Ranton? Because whatever it was had a definite impact on me as well. I felt a burst of energy just as big brother lost consciousness."

Ranton growled at the reminder and pulled Eve closer, so that she could feel his thick erection prodding her belly. "Why don't you show me again just what you did? And don't worry, this time I'll stop you before I black out."

Ranton glanced over her head, his expression both tense and approving.

"Look, Ranton. I don't know why you think you're the one giving orders around here, but you have to understand—"

She sucked in a breath when Jentaron's lips found the racing pace of her jugular. He sucked, lightly at first, then harder, leaving a mark. And his touch arched lightning through her body.

Staring at Ranton, she saw his mirrored surprise, as well as an evil grin, darkening his face.

"Payback's a bitch, Eve. And you owe us both."

"You left me to hatch alone, Evie," Jentaron murmured and pressed into her backside. He groaned and rubbed against her. "And my hungers have only gotten worse. You have to ease me, Eve. I command it."

Ranton nodded. "And as his Guardian, I can compel you to do so."

Eve blinked, totally turned-on, and totally perplexed. "You want me to fuck your brother?"

"To teach him, instruct him in the ways of human sexuality, and relieve his aches. Love him, Eve, as you do me," he said softly.

Tears welled, confusing her. Her body was on fire, and her emotions jumbled about, desire and love melding within. "I..." She didn't know what to say.

"Show us, Eve. Show us your love," Jentaron whispered, and turned her mouth to his kiss.

Though at an awkward angle, Jentaron's kiss soon had her lost to everything but his unique scent, and the burning pitch of desire.

Whereas Ranton's touch commanded her acceptance, made it impossible to refuse, Jentaron's was lighter, more hesitant. And as she understood his newness to sexuality, she also understood he was different than Ranton. Less domineering, gentler. Yet in no way less potent.

"That's it, Jentaron," Ranton murmured, ripping through Eve's clothing with what she imagined a sharp claw. "Take her mouth, love her and own her."

She wanted to deny this talk of ownership, but Jentaron surprised her by plunging his tongue into her mouth. She could feel his erection pressing against her ass, and as the kiss deepened, wasn't surprised when he began pushing against her.

"By the embers, Eve," Jentaron rasped as he left her mouth, trailing kisses down her neck. "I need you so much."

"Easy, brother." Ranton cupped Eve's breasts in his large hands, surprising her that she hadn't felt her clothes fall off. "You've yet to enjoy the taste of her breasts."

Jentaron moved so quickly she had barely blinked before he stood before her.

"So beautiful." His eyes filled, and she glanced from him to Ranton, taken aback at the loving expression in Ranton's gaze as he stared at her.

This was more than possession, more than ownership. Ranton looked at her as if he...loved her.

He smiled, meeting her questioning gaze. "You're mine, Eve. Mine to protect, mine to love, mine to keep. And you're Jentaron's as well." They noted Jentaron's fascination with her body. He had yet to take his eyes from her. "You are his Guardian, like me. You answered his call, and it's now your duty to see to our new king."

She swallowed. "See to him?"

Jentaron took her breast in his mouth and she moaned, the pull of his lips shooting to her womb.

"That's it, Eve. Feel the pleasure, take the offering. You're ours now. Say it."

Ranton moved behind her and ran his hands over her back and around to her belly. Stroking her ribs with feather-light touches, he surprised her with the speed at which he suddenly penetrated her slick channel with his fingers, and she closed her eyes in helpless surrender.

“Say it.”

His thumb rubbed her clit while he thrust his digits inside her, and Jentaron continued his loving exploration of her breasts with enthusiasm, bringing her closer and closer to orgasm. Dear hell, but she couldn't help the affection, the love, from spilling over her.

“I'm yours.” She opened her eyes to see Jentaron's lit with a fierce hunger.

“Yes, ours.” He kissed her again, and before she knew it, she returned his kiss, teaching him how to angle his mouth, how to stroke her tongue with his own, turning his hunger into nearly unquenchable desperation. His body temperature escalated, and she wondered that she didn't feel the burn. But Ranton made it nearly impossible to think.

“Down, Eve,” Ranton growled. “On your knees.”

He pushed her down as she moved, and she knelt on the hard stone, stimulated by the cold on her hands and knees in contrast to the fiery heat of her lovers. She felt Ranton between her thighs, and tingled when he pushed her legs further apart to settle between them. Jentaron, however, remained on his feet and stared down at her, his cock just slightly higher than her head.

Pre-come glittered at his tip, and she saw the tightness of his sack, the veins prominent on his thick shaft. Jentaron's chest rose and fell, his breathing loud as he stared at Eve on her knees, his brother preparing to fuck her.

“I'll never forget this moment,” he said, love in his eyes. “You are so beautiful to me, Eve, so loving. My Guardians,” Jentaron sighed. He glanced at Ranton, and she could tell they spoke without words.

When Jentaron left her to walk toward the bed, she watched, anticipation making her wetter and wetter. Ranton played with his cock

between her cheeks, and she remembered everything about their last anal play.

“Oh, Eve,” Ranton whispered. “You’re going to love this so much you’ll beg for more. And this is only just beginning. You owe me, love.”

“Payback,” she breathed, more than eager to settle the score. She wanted Ranton with every beat of her racing heart, and every drop of her heating blood. The demon wanted the dragon, wanted to feel possessed, owned. And Ranton, damn him, knew it.

He rumbled with dark laughter, nudging his cock further into her hole. The heat of him stole her composure, and she angled away, wanting him in her pussy more than her ass. She ached for him, and he meant to prolong her agony.

Jentaron returned quickly, and knelt on two thick pillows he carried.

“What—”

His cock soon met her lips. On the pillows, he aligned perfectly with her mouth, and without saying a word, he pushed for entry, his gaze gone completely silver.

She opened her mouth and accepted him, taking him inch by inch until he was seated fully inside her.

“Eve,” he groaned and pulled out, only to slide back in. “That’s so good.”

Jentaron clenched her hair and began fucking her mouth. Her clit throbbed at his taste, and she unconsciously shoved her ass back toward Ranton. He penetrated her more, and his thickness hurt. But even the pain felt better than the emptiness in her womb. She wanted him to fill her, to be one with her. And her utter need made it impossible for her to succumb to pleasure without him.

She moaned and tried again, failing to capture Ranton between her legs.

“That’s good, Eve. Need me, *sassa*. Need me forever,” Ranton said thickly and repositioned himself lower. His shaft slid into her with ease, her channel wet and welcoming as he stretched her walls.

"Mmm," she managed around Jentaron's cock. *So good. Give me more, Ranton, Jentaron, more.*

As if he'd heard her, Jentaron grew longer, his size stunning Eve despite her ability to automatically accept him. The demon within her hungered, and Jentaron meant to feed her.

"I can't hold back," he groaned. "Eve, take me."

She pressed harder with her tongue, and raked her teeth lightly along the underside of his shaft. Jentaron cried out and shot, quaking as he filled her mouth with sweet come.

On and on he pulsed, while Ranton fucked her from behind. Jentaron finally stopped and withdrew from her mouth. Ranton continued to pound into her, grunting with pleasure, and she felt her rise toward climax as he hit that spot within her that made her bones melt.

Jentaron leaned down to kiss her. He murmured her name and stroked her hair. He was so gentle, so reverential, and determined to make her crazy with lust. His scent stirred her ardor anew, and when he reached down to fondle her breasts, she rammed back into Ranton's thrusts with a ferocity that increased Ranton's aggression.

"Fuck, Eve. You're killing me," he rasped, his hands clenching her ass so hard he'd leave bruises. The feel of his balls slapping her pussy as he pummeled her made her moan, and his cock felt like pure, dark ecstasy as he took her higher and higher into the perfection of rapture.

Jentaron pinched her nipples and trailed his kisses along her cheek to her ear.

"When Ranton's done, I'm going to fuck you again. I want your ass, Eve, that perfect, round white ass." He thrust his tongue in her ear and she saw stars.

Just as Ranton roared his release, she found hers. Sparks of color lit the blackness suddenly all around her. Her breath froze, her body seized, and pure fire lit her from head to toe, centering in her womb. Ranton's seed dripped down her legs as he came and continued to thrust, until finally, she'd milked all of him.

"Eve," he sighed, and leaned forward to hug her. "Mine."

"Mine," Jentaron agreed, stroking the tears from her cheeks.

"You've both got it wrong," Eve said hoarsely. "Demons rule the lower realm. Therefore, you're both mine."

Jentaron chuckled, but Ranton growled in warning.

"Don't worry, brother. I'm sure we can make Eve see the error of her ways. After all, she was right before. We're all really demons at heart, aren't we?" His eyes blazed, and communication passed between brothers.

Ranton withdrew and came to face her as Jentaron took his place behind her. He chuckled at her face. "Such starry eyes, *sassa*. I think we're wearing her down, Jentaron. But Eve, you still owe me from before."

She glanced down only to see his cock rise again, and her eyes widened. But before she could ask him what he meant her to do, Jentaron slid his cock into her dripping pussy.

"Oh, that is good, Ranton," he said, his voice amazed. "I wish that I—" he paused. "But I won't. Your seed will breed true in Eve. Mine is meant for another."

Eve suddenly understood what he meant when he withdrew and pushed his fingers deep in her pussy. He slid them up and began pushing slowly into her ass.

"No, Jentaron," she protested, his thick fingers stretching her.

"Yes, Eve," Ranton said, amused. "Don't worry, I'll guide him. He won't hurt you...much." His eyes twinkled, and she saw the love shining bright in the sparkles of green and white glowing there.

"You're going to get yours," she breathed hard, harder when Jentaron groaned and replaced his fingers with his cock. "See if you don't find yourself ass-fucked one of these days."

Ranton raised a brow and began stroking himself. He sat in front of her and lay back on the pillows, one hand behind his head and the other on his cock.

"She feels incredible, doesn't she?" he asked his brother.

Jentaron groaned but said nothing, focused on Eve.

"I don't understand how you two make me feel this," she panted, shaking as her body coiled, readying to spring again into climax. "No human or demon ever has."

"Good," Ranton said, his breathing choppy. "Because you were meant for me." He stared over her shoulder and sighed. "For us. Until my king takes a queen. So make sure you teach him right." His eyes glittered. "Now show him how sorry you can be, for having taken advantage of your mate." He glanced down to his huge erection.

"Mate?" she cried, as Jentaron thrust harder into her ass. Good night, she hoped he wasn't planning to grow as large as he had in her mouth. The thought of it made her groan, and she heard him laugh.

"Don't worry, *sassa*. I want only to bring you pleasure as well."

Fire suddenly burned at her clit, a blaze of pleasure that lit her entire body. And she realized Jentaron had somehow spelled her. The pull of Ranton's cock had her lowering her arms and head to his groin as he spread his thighs around her.

At his taste, she shuddered. So male, so incredibly powerful. And her scent lay subtly over his, showing her they were in fact one. She began sucking him, taking him deeper and deeper as Jentaron rammed into her. The exquisite sensation of belonging took her over, and she groaned as she began coming, her thighs wet with bliss.

Jentaron cried out and tensed as he filled her ass, his seed hot as it hit her hole and slid down her thighs.

Ranton bucked as her lips and tongue teased him, taunting him as she controlled his orgasm.

"More, Eve. Suck the head, take me deeper," he groaned, threading his fingers through her hair. He held her, fucking her mouth with surer strokes. "By the fire, I'm coming, *sassa*. Swallow me, love. Take my marker," he hissed as he shot, arching off the floor into her mouth.

Groans filled the air, the scent of love overwhelming as Eve experienced yet another orgasm.

Jentaron and Ranton remained inside her until she'd wrung them dry, then withdrew and cuddled her between them on the cold, hard floor.

"Mmm," she murmured, wanting to protest the cold. But she hadn't the energy to do more than snuggle into her lovers.

Lovers. Ranton and Jentaron, dragons of flame, rulers of power. The love she felt for them both astounded her. Ranton's was pure, dark and decidedly sexual. Jentaron's was filled with desire as well, yet tempered with the need to protect, and to guide. So young, yet so strong already. He answered that need within her to serve and defend, and she sighed at the perfection of her place in life.

"I'm still not sure how we're going to work this out, Eve," Ranton murmured.

"Oh, I've got some ideas." Jentaron chuckled and spooned Eve, hugging her waist. He caressed her skin, his touch comforting. "I love you, *sassa*." He swallowed loudly and continued. "And Ranton, I just wanted to tell you how much I love you as well. You are my brother, my teacher, my Guardian. And I know how difficult it is to share that which you treasure above all else. I'll never take you for granted."

Eve leaned back to look at Ranton's face, and wasn't surprised to see her gruff dragon getting all teary-eyed.

"You're young, but with a knowledge that far surpasses anything I might have imagined. You'll make a fine king, Jentaron. Eve and I wouldn't let you be anything else." He cleared his throat and glanced down at Eve, his heart in his eyes. "And I love you, *sassa*, completely. Both of you, with every flame of my fire." He blinked several times, ridding himself of tears. "Now if we're done with this sentimental crap, let's move to the bed. This frail human form is decidedly uncomfortable on cold rock."

Eve grinned, and had to be carried by Jentaron to the bed. Her legs wouldn't hold her. Once there, she turned to Jentaron, curious.

"So what are these ideas about my future?" she wanted to know.

Moments later, Eve could only stare at him in shock. Angels in the lower realm? Blood elves with souls? Demons and dragons and Nailiim coexisting in the dragon stronghold? Life was about to become much more complicated down here. Chaotic, unruly, and quite possibly more dangerous than life in the Ordinary.

Eve laughed out loud at the thought and smiled at her lovers. She couldn't have been happier.

* * *

Duncan controlled his rage, only barely, learning Uriel had stripped another sway from under his command, effectively stealing another soul for heaven. Damn his father to heaven for putting him through this shit. It ate at his being to watch the angels take souls that should have belonged in hell.

"Thank you, Duncan, for enabling me to save another poor soul from eternal damnation. You know, you'd make a fine angel," Uriel said kindly, pissing Duncan off even more. "You're more like your father than you know—at least, more like the Asael I knew in the upper realm."

"Fuck you." Duncan would have lunged at Uriel for the insult, save for the golden silk binding his wrists and ankles that forced him to remain upright in the middle of the room. Funny thing, he couldn't see what the bindings were tied to, and he imagined he looked like a puppet strung in the air. Fucking angel magic. The glowing brilliance of Uriel's room didn't help either. Marble lined the floor, the walls a pale cream and covered in artwork showcasing the world's judgment, saved by heaven's angels.

"Fuck me? But I thought you preferred females." Uriel shrugged, then began to undress. First his trousers, then his long tunic.

The move made Duncan tense, and he tugged harder at the Ethereal ropes holding him tight. "Keep away, asshole, or I'll break the promise I made my father and roast you alive."

"Alive, dead, you're forgetting who you are. Who we are, demon." Uriel grinned, then stood proud and naked before Duncan, his skin so white it was nearly blinding. Duncan had to look away and froze when he felt cool hands on his naked skin.

"Don't worry, Duncan. I wouldn't soil my palms touching a demon." Uriel smirked. "But my apprentices like to work on your kind, to better understand what they're up against."

Duncan gritted his teeth when he saw two dark-haired females petting him. Unbidden, his dick rose, though he wanted none of their angelic touch.

"There we are," Uriel grinned and lay back on his feathered bed to watch. "A demon's pleasure has its own beauty. Let them ease you with the purity of their touch."

Duncan sweated at the effort not to respond to the beautiful women stroking his skin. At least humans encouraged lusts, engaged in the carnality demons breathed like air.

But the angels...their touch hurt, the goodness, the light of their thoughts left pinpricks of pain in their wake. And unlike James, Duncan had never been one to mix pleasure and pain. Yet still his cock rose, and he glared over at Uriel. An angelic spell, no doubt.

"Oh, and Duncan, congratulations on your sister's nuptials."

Duncan stared. "What?"

"Eve made her ties to Ranton official yesterday. Seems she's also taken on the role of Guardian to the dragon's new king, Jentaron."

Duncan nodded, pleased his sister had found such a powerful place in the lower realm. But as Guardian to the dragon king, how would she fulfill her duties to the Ethereal?

"Oh, and Asael sent another message. Eve is going to be occupied watching over the dragons and their cousins, the blood elves. Apparently, there's been a shift in the balance, and some of those in the lower and middle realm, before thought untouchable, actually aren't." Uriel grinned, his handsome features stirring the females to increase their

caressing. Now their hands wandered over Duncan's body with a carnal edge, and he strained at his fetters.

"Asael told me to tell you that you and your brother will soon have a new partner to keep order. But in the meantime, I'm to wring every ounce of apology from you that I can."

One of the angels wrapped her hand around Duncan's cock, and he shook from the force of his desire. The perversion of Uriel's minions should have made him sick, at the very least, impotent. But for some unknown reason, he found the angels' touch arousing.

"Sorry yet?"

"When I get free from these, you're going to pay for this." Duncan felt his eyes burn, and knew Uriel saw it as well, for his grin faded.

Uriel rose from the bed, his arousal obvious. "You shouldn't make threats when in the arms of your enemy." He leaned close, his body nearly brushing Duncan's, and Duncan couldn't help the flinch of alarm as he leaned back as far as his restraints would allow.

Uriel laughed and rubbed a finger along Duncan's cheek, the ache scarring him deep. "So pretty for a demon. Behave, Duncan, or I'll let Sara do what she's been begging me for since she laid eyes on you."

Sara, the apprentice with deep, brown eyes, stared hungrily at his cock. Damnation, Uriel wasn't suggesting...

He howled with a mix of rage and pain, and a stunning depth of sexual desire, as Sara took him deep in her mouth.

Uriel sighed. "Ah, the bliss of enlightenment. These ten days won't last long enough, Duncan."

About the Author

Marie Harte is an avid reader who loves all things paranormal and futuristic. Reading romances since she was twelve, she fell in love with the warmth of first passion and knew writing was her calling.

Twenty-three years later, the Marine Corps, a foray through Information Technology, a husband and four kids, and her dream has finally come true. Marie lives in Georgia with her family and loves hearing from readers.

To read more about Marie, visit Marie at www.marieharte.com and <http://marieharte.blogspot.com>.

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Talons

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Talons: Kiss Me Deadly

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Death is a collective—an unkindness of supernatural ravens with the power to take the form of men and to decide which humans live and which humans die with a mere touch.

When Khail lays his fatal touch on his next victim and she doesn't die, he's faced with a human immune to his deadly power who has seen him shift form—and he's able to have physical contact with a woman for the first time in centuries.

Falling for a shapeshifting messenger of Death wasn't on Bridget Sawyer's agenda, but things are about to get even more complicated. The Unkind is determined to claim her.

Talons: King of Prey

© 2006 Mandy M. Roth

In a place where realms combine and portals open passages to the unknown, a prophecy speaks of fertility being restored to his people through the taking of King Kabril's mate.

The prophecy neglects to mention she lacks something vital to his kind—wings. Kabril, King of the Buteos Regalis has no interest in taking a human mate. His kind believes humans are dirty, vile creatures who rely on machines to lift them into the air. The last place he wants to go in search of his mate is Earth, but he's left no choice.

Never did he expect to find love on a planet with one moon, people who lack wings and a stubborn vixen who makes his heart soar. When he does, he fears the truth about

who and what he truly is will steal it away. Little does he know his enemies fully intend on doing the taking.

Talons: Firebird

© 2006 Jaycee Clark

Legend has it firebirds bring both good fortune and destruction, Reen has become an expert at both...

Reen is an expert at destruction and annihilation. She's a Hunter, an elite, one of their best assassins, she's also a legendary firebird—a creature of lore. Staker, a member of the Falcon order, is her soul mate from a bloody past she desperately tries to forget, but one that haunts her every moment. The two are thrown together in a desperate search for missing women.

The Collector is a man who loves the hunt, preying on the unusual, on the special—all to keep these women for his own

use. The Collector favors shifters, the rarer the better. He traps them, keeps them, and turns them into his own private collectables.

Staker doesn't want Reen to be a part of this dangerous mission, but she has other plans. Unfortunately, so does the Collector...

Talons: Caged Desire

© 2006 Sydney Somers

He's trapped...she's suspicious—to earn his freedom all he has to do is win her trust.

Locked in a cage for almost fifty years ago, Logan has had nothing but time to plot his revenge on those who wrongfully condemned him to spend eternity in the deepest

regions of a South American rainforest. But with one look at the alluring vampire who holds his freedom in her hands, revenge becomes the farthest thing from his mind.

Eve Blake is puzzled by the wooden crate delivered to her door. Even stranger is the large golden eagle inside. It doesn't take her long to realize the majestic creature is far more than he appears. Finding a man in the cage previously containing the feathered animal gives Eve every reason to suspect the shifter was locked away for a reason.

Can she trust him when he promises not to harm her if she releases him? Or will her decision cost both of them more than they bargained for?

Talons: Seize the Hunter

© 2006 Michelle M Pillow

Fate is giving her the one man she'd never want for her very own.

Princess Ari of the planet Falconia knows it's her time to marry and has picked out several suitable men in her mind—none of which are Falcoan Army Commander, Rurik of the Fifth. The man tormented her as a child, causing her untold humiliations. But there is really no need to worry about such a match. Shifters cannot rule and Rurik is a natural born falcon shifter.

Trusting destiny, Ari sips from the Marriage Chalice, sealing her future. But things don't go as planned. It would seem fate is giving her to the man she despises. How can she find happiness with the one man she could never want for her very own?

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