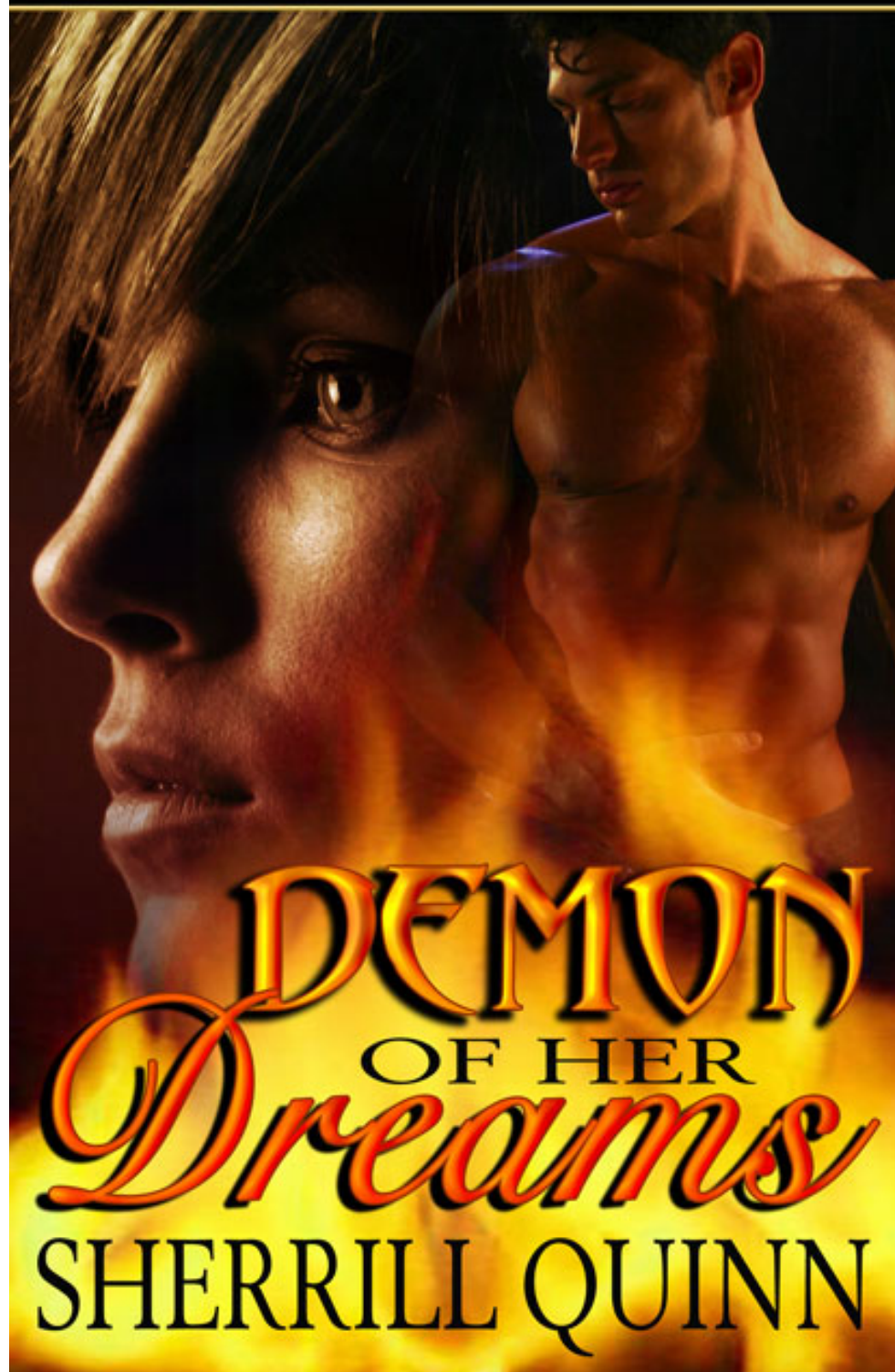


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Demon of Her Dreams

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DEMON OF HER DREAMS

Sherrill Quinn

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Chapter One

Lucifer sat in the opulent conference room and watched the fur fly. Literally. The CEO of the Faerie Division ripped out another handful of hair from the head of the Executive President of the Shape Shifters Department and flung it the length of the long table.

The werecat yowled in pain and reached toward the faerie queen with hands morphing into sharp-taloned claws.

“You need to get control of your furry there, Bub.”

Lucifer glanced at the lavender-eyed being on his left. “You know I hate that name.” Whoever had come up with the nickname Beelzebub—which his colleagues insisted on shortening to “Bub”—should be tossed into a lake of fire. And he just happened to know where a really big one was.

Ah well, there were other things to worry about these days. There usually were. Motioning toward his subordinate, he shrugged. “He got himself into this mess—I want to see if he can get out of it.” He watched the two combatants for a moment, shaking his head when the faerie managed to rip another chunk of hair off the werecat. Lucifer turned his gaze to the man in white at the head of the table. “Besides, the Big Guy there can stop it anytime He wants to.”

“And maybe He’s waiting to see how you handle it, did you ever think of that? Maybe He’s testing your management ability?” Lavender eyes narrowed, Gabriel shifted on his stool and unfurled his wings in a wide stretch. As they settled behind his back once more, he muttered, “Our Great King’s power may be unlimited, but His patience is not.”

Lucifer settled more deeply into his padded leather chair. One upside to being cast out of Heaven—and losing his wings in the process—was that he usually didn't have to put up with all this melodrama. He could stay below and govern his grim domain.

Though he must admit, he did miss flying through the heavens with only clouds beneath him.

Irritated at the reminder of his own stupidity millennia ago, Lucifer pushed to his feet and slammed his hands onto the table. The loud *crack* garnered him the attention he sought. "You," he pointed to his *former* Executive President, "go back to the Demon Division. We'll discuss this later." When the werecat hesitated, Lucifer brought up one hand and, calling forth the fire that burned in his soul, bounced a glowing ball of flame in his palm. "Go!"

The shape shifter winced and gave a low bow, his eyes never leaving the fiery sphere in Lucifer's hand. Once the werecat had left the room, Lucifer looked at the faerie queen. "And you," he drawled, clenching his fist, sending the fire back inside his body, "need to lighten up and learn how to take a joke."

The red-haired beauty pouted and flounced back to her seat. She tucked a long strand of curly hair behind one pointed ear. "I know how to take a bleedin' joke," she muttered, her sultry brogue reflecting her heritage amidst the rolling green hills of Ireland. "What he said wasn't funny."

"Aw, come on, Tatiana. It was kinda funny, even you have to admit that." Lucifer sat down and leaned back in his chair.

She crossed her arms, an action that plumped her cleavage. All the males in the room—well, all but one—leaned forward for a better look. A sensuous smile broke across her face. Picking up a pen, she rubbed her fingers up and down its length while she traced her bottom lip with the tip of her tongue. Her deep blue eyes sparkled with feminine power.

Until she looked at Lucifer. Then the smile left her face and she slapped the pen onto the table. Her eyes darkened with annoyance. “‘How many faeries does it take to change a light bulb’ is funny?”

Trying to hold back a chuckle, he ended up snorting, which only made her scowl. “Hell, yes, it’s funny,” he said. “‘Just one if you get him plugged in right’ is a damned fine punch line.”

“We’re not bloody light bulbs,” she shouted, jumping to her feet. In a fit of temper, she picked up her pen and threw it at him.

He dodged it with a laugh.

“Enough!” The deep voice boomed, making the gold-framed pictures on the wall rattle.

Silence reigned as everyone’s attention turned toward the head of the table. Tatiana slowly sat down, her attitude as subdued as everyone else’s. “Your pardon, my King.”

“Thank you.” Yahweh leaned back in his chair, steeping his fingers beneath his chin. “If we can get back to business...” His steely gaze fixed on Lucifer. “I believe we were about to receive your progress report on the Brotherhood.”

Lucifer nodded and stood. For months they’d been aware that all of their efforts—both good and bad—were being undermined. His son Urian had allegedly gone rogue to try to find out who, and why. Over the last six months, he’d managed to find the group—they called themselves the Brotherhood of the Red Claw—and was very close to discovering who the leader was.

This upset in the balance between good and evil had to be stopped, and soon, or there would be utter bedlam. And while that would make chaos demons quite happy, everyone else realized there *had* to be stability or life as they all knew it would end.

Lucifer inclined his head respectfully toward his boss then spoke to the other gathered executives. “My operative has moved into one level outside the inner circle. He’ll be attending a meeting within the hour to find out what his next assignment is.

Our hope is, if he's successful with this job, he'll be admitted to the inner sanctum. Then we can finally determine who's behind the Brotherhood of the Red Claw."

"Whom did you assign to infiltrate the Brotherhood?" Gabriel leaned forward on his short stool, propping his elbows on the gold-inlayed mahogany surface of the gleaming conference table.

"My son Urian." Lucifer sat down and rolled his chair closer to the table. "He's very thorough. A true professional."

Tatiana crossed her legs and swung one foot idly. "Isn't he an incubus?" Her eyes sparked with sexual interest.

Randy lot, these faeries, always looking for some action.

Lucifer nodded. "The best," he boasted. "And he's smart too. If he can't break this ring apart, no one can."

"I hope you're right. You've spoken highly of him before but, of course, that could merely be your father's pride talking." Yahweh pushed to his feet, a signal that the meeting was at an end.

Out of respect, everyone around the table also stood, waiting for the official dismissal.

"I could put a stop to this very easily," Yahweh said. "But I want all of my creatures to operate under free will. That's extremely important to me. To take away free will would be to destroy the very thing I love about you all." His gaze went from one being to the other until he'd traversed the entire group. "Free will means choices, and with choices come consequences."

Lucifer knew what the Big Guy was up to—reminding them that they all had jobs to do and they had to live with the decisions they made.

"And know this—no matter what choice you make, I will still love you." Yahweh's gaze cut to Lucifer. "Even when you disappoint me."

Lucifer tried not to squirm. He was thousands of years old yet still felt like a child in the presence of the Almighty. Why he'd ever thought he could take the throne... Well, he'd been young and full of himself.

Eventually the Great King might forgive him.

In the meantime, Lucifer would do his job overseeing the Demon Division to the best of his abilities. He superstitiously crossed his fingers, wishing good luck to his son.

As they were dismissed, he caught Tatiana's eye. One of her eyelids slid down in a slow wink and a smile tilted her full lips. She never did stay angry at him for long. He walked toward her, anticipation lightening his steps.

Maybe there was time for a bit of diversion before he went back to Hell.

* * * * *

Urian Vakidis settled into a seat in the back and watched as beings of every description filed into the room. This was the meeting of the Brotherhood where the assignments would be handed out—he hoped someone would make mention of the top dog who was doing the handing. After all, that was what he was here to discover.

He straightened his legs, crossing his ankles under the row in front of him, and stretched his arms across the backs of the chairs on either side of him. Maintaining an air of nonchalance, he gazed out over the crowded meeting room, making mental notes of which divisions of Sassy Devils were represented.

There were two werewolves over in a corner eyeing a leprechaun, who edged away from them nervously. A hairy, grayish-green chupacabra sat a few seats away from the wolves, chewing on what looked like a rib bone. Urian peered a little closer... Yep. Rib bone. Probably from some homeless guy no one would miss.

At the front of the room, just taking her seat, was a harpy, wearing some sort of diaphanous purple thing that barely covered...anything. When a sasquatch leaned toward her, a leer on its face, she snarled, showing two-inch canines. To drive home her point, she curled her claws toward the Bigfoot, showing off nails as sharp and pointed

as ice picks. The sasquatch backed off and, after fluffing her feathers a bit, the harpy settled into her seat.

Catching movement out of the corner of his eye, Urian glanced toward the right. Just coming into the room was a violet-haired pixie trailing glittering faerie dust in her wake. Her skin had that translucent quality many of the older faes had, indicating this one had probably been around a very long time indeed.

A lone vampire sat three chairs down and, as if feeling Urian's gaze on him, he turned his head.

Urian tilted his chin in greeting and looked away. Vampires were ordinarily solitary creatures, and for one of them to be a member of the Brotherhood—mingling with all these other beings—meant he had some major anger issues.

Issues Urian didn't have time to get tangled up with. All he wanted to do was prove to his father he could carry out this assignment successfully so he could go back to his real job as a sex demon.

There was nothing like it—easing into women's dreams, arousing them, feeding on that arousal. The psychic energy generated from sex was spectacular and he missed it. With one woman in particular.

Hailey. He remembered her clearly—sea blue eyes, high cheekbones and a dimple in her chin, all framed by short, dark hair. She'd been a sophomore in college when he'd first visited her dreams and he'd watched her grow into a lovely young woman over the years.

Damn, but he wanted to be back in her dreams, bringing her to a fever pitch, drawing out her arousal until she begged him to take her. It had been months. When he had allegedly defected to the Brotherhood, he'd heard that someone else had been assigned to her, a nightmare that had begun to terrorize her.

As soon as he'd heard it, he'd wondered if the nightmare was secretly working for the Brotherhood. Like vampires, nightmares were beings that preferred to be left alone but could prove to be valuable allies. Or formidable enemies.

And so here *he* was, sitting on this damned uncomfortable chair like a bump on an ogre's nose, playing at being a spy.

He leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees as he tried to unobtrusively ease the numbness out of his ass. A muscle flexed in his jaw. Lucifer was just trying to get back at him for his continued refusal to take on management responsibilities. The old devil just wouldn't accept that Urian liked his job. He had no desire to sit behind a desk.

He needed to be out in the field. Back in Hailey's dreams.

Get the job done and you're there, he reminded himself. Just get the fucking job done.

His gaze roamed over a group standing near the doorway. He raised his eyebrows as he realized one of them was a guardian angel. Well, he supposed the being was a *former* guardian angel, since he was part of this disenfranchised group of misfits.

Urian shook his head. When he'd woken up this morning, he sure didn't think he'd be in a room later on where a goody-two-shoes angel talked amiably with a satyr.

Nearly every subdivision in the Other realm was represented. This just might be worse than they'd thought – and they'd thought it was plenty bad.

Just then, a tall, big-busted blonde walked to the microphone stand at the front of the room. Her red dress was low on the top and short on the bottom, showing plenty of cleavage and long, long legs. She tapped on the microphone a few times. Leaning over, she said, "If I could have everyone's attention." She tucked her hair behind one pointy ear. "Please take a seat. The meeting will begin in just a few minutes." She gave them a wide smile before sauntering to one side of the room.

The vampire leaned toward Urian over the empty chairs between them. "It seems odd that an elf from the Santa Claus Division would be here, don't you think?" His lips turned down in a frown. "Any time I've come across one of them, they've been perennially, sickeningly happy – not to mention horny as hell – and not at all upset at being depicted as short little people with curly-toed shoes. Definitely not the sort to hobnob with the likes of us."

Urian glanced back at the blonde. He gestured toward her with his thumb. “*She’s a North Pole elf?*” While he knew they didn’t look the way human movies portrayed them, he hadn’t realized they could be so...so... “Wow.”

“Yep. Hard to believe, ain’t it?” The vampire leaned back in his chair and laced his fingers together on his lap. “But I guess old Kris Kringle isn’t running things to everyone’s liking. I heard not too long ago he put the president of his Delivery Division in charge of a new Mended Hearts Division.” The vampire gave an exaggerated shudder, his gaze going back to the blonde elf. “And the poor sap ended up with a wife out of the whole thing.”

“Mmm.” Urian straightened and put one arm along the back of the chair next to him. Now was a good a time to feel this guy out, find out why he was here. “So what brings you to the Brotherhood?”

The vampire’s head turned slowly. Irritated silver eyes met Urian’s with an unblinking stare. “That’s my business,” he said. “Not yours.”

Urian held up his hand in a gesture of surrender. “Hey, no need to get your fangs in a knot. Just making conversation here.”

That conversation ended as the blonde elf stepped up to the microphone once again. “Ladies and gentlemen, let’s get started.” She paused and waited until the noise of conversations died down and then, with a smile, she said, “Join me in a round of applause for our second-in-command, Ardon Kathë.”

As people obligingly clapped, a tall, slender man walked up to the blonde, giving her a kiss on the cheek as he pulled the microphone free from the stand. Dark hair hung sleekly down to his shoulders and equally dark eyes looked out over the crowd. A crimson-colored Robin-Hood-style cap balanced on top of his head. When he turned to one side and muttered a comment to a centaur standing close by, Urian saw the pointed tip of his ear.

“He’s of the Unseelie Court,” the vampire murmured, referring to the subdivision made up of dark and vengeful faeries. Apparently he was over his fit of pique. “One of those damned Red Caps. Devious bastards.”

Urian acknowledged his remark with the lift of an eyebrow and looked toward the front again.

“Our progress in undermining every step those poor fools at Sassy Devils take,” Kathë was saying, “has been more than we’d hoped for.” Applause and catcalls broke out in the room, making him pause. With a smile, he held up one hand and nodded. When there was relative quiet again, he went on. “But there’s so much more we have to do to attain our goal. Tomorrow is All Hallow’s Eve, a time when even the most grotesque of us may walk about freely. Stupid humans will think we’re merely wearing costumes.”

Raucous laughter echoed through the room.

Kathë held up a hand again, motioning for silence. “This time of year is the perfect time to put the next stage of our plan into place.” He made a sweeping motion with one long arm. “At each side of the room are my assistants, who will hand out your next assignments. When I call your name, please stand.”

Urian watched and listened as the members of the Brotherhood were given their new assignments. Finally, his name was called and he stood. A stubby little gnome waddled over and handed him a roll of parchment. Urian sat back down and carefully unfurled the paper. On it was written a name and five other words.

Hailey Kovac
Make her afraid to love.

Hailey!

It was as if his longing had conjured her name.

Urian would never admit to anyone that he missed Hailey, especially in this crowd. The Others weren’t supposed to get attached to their assignments. That’s all they were supposed to be—assignments. But Hailey had reached him on an elemental level,

reached into a soul he hadn't been aware he'd had, even as she remained oblivious to his existence outside the dream realm.

Somehow she'd come onto the radar of the Brotherhood, no doubt because someone from Sassy Devils had already been in her life in some form or another. It could have been something as simple as her guiding angel – what humans referred to as conscience – providing direction on a decision, to more active intervention from her guardian angel protecting her from harm.

He came to a realization that drove ice up his spine and started his heart ping-ponging in his chest.

This could very well be a test for *him*.

What if, unsure of his allegiance, the powers that be in the Brotherhood had assigned him to someone he'd been with before in order to gauge his dedication to the cause? He would be expected to carry out his assignment without question. To fail his task would be to put both their lives in jeopardy.

But how could he inhabit Hailey's dreams with the intention of terrorizing her when all he wanted to do was love her?

Chapter Two

Hailey Kovac shifted under the sheets, pulling the thick comforter up to her nose. The air in her room had that crisp, cool feel to it and she was toasty warm in her cozy bed. It was late—it had been nearly three a.m. when she'd finally tottered off to bed. She was so tired she couldn't keep her eyes open, but her brain was too wired to let her go to sleep. Her best friend's annual Halloween party was tomorrow night—no, *tonight*—and she still didn't have everything she needed. She had cupcakes to make, grapes to peel for the “feel the eyeballs” game and a variety of berries and melons to cut up for fresh fruit salad.

Plus, frankly, she was afraid to go to sleep. The nightmare was getting worse. Oh, it started out all right—started out very nice, as a matter of fact. It was a dream she'd had off and on since college. So real that she'd fallen in love with the man in her dreams, even though she had no idea what he looked like.

It always began with her in the arms of her lover, and seemed so real it was impossible to ignore. She could feel the strength of his muscles, the hair-roughened skin of his arms and legs, the thick pulse of his arousal against her thigh.

But for the last six months or so, it always went bad. His tender touch turned violent, his loving words hurtful. What made it seem worse was that she never saw his face. He remained nameless and faceless as he became more and more brutal, and invariably she would wake up in a cold sweat, tears wetting her cheeks, the sheets clenched in her fists.

She couldn't keep going through this. Her therapist said she obviously had issues her subconscious was trying to work through, but he had yet to uncover what those issues might be. Her family and friends thought she was losing her mind—especially

when she'd let it slip that she loved this anonymous man who haunted her dreams. She didn't want to believe she was crazy.

She tended to think it was stress. Or her subconscious telling her she wasn't worthy of tenderness. Which she didn't want to believe either.

As sleep inevitably crept up on her, her thoughts became muddled until she finally drifted off.

Hot kisses trailed up her spine to the nape of her neck, then back down again. Big, warm hands skimmed over her ass, making her arch into her lover's touch. His mouth hovered for a moment, warm breath gusting across her skin. Then he eased her buttocks apart and drew the tip of his tongue through the crevice between them.

He lingered at her anus, softly rimming the sensitive rosebud while his fingers stroked the skin between her anal opening and her vagina. She shivered, raising her ass, pressing into his gentle touch. After one last caress, her lover tenderly rolled her onto her back. His solid, warm bulk came down over her, driving her deeper into the mattress.

She'd missed him, missed this. Their bare skin rubbed together as arms and legs moved. Supporting his weight on his elbows, he mouthed kisses along her collarbone. His erection rested against the folds of her sex.

He smelled like soap and hot, sexy man. His skin was like warm silk under her hands—silk that covered hard muscles. As he kissed his way up her throat, she arched her neck. His low hum of approval rumbled against her and reverberated throughout her body.

Flames from a fire threw shadows on stone walls and made him look otherworldly as light and dark played with his superbly defined muscles. He lifted his head and stared down into her face. Sensual lips were parted, showing even, white teeth, and coal-black eyes stared at her with the flames reflected in their depths.

He brought his mouth down on hers gently, his tongue licking along the seam of her lips before slipping between them. He traced a pattern, twirling around her tongue, inviting her into his mouth as he withdrew.

Hailey gladly followed, moaning as his flavor became stronger, tartly sweet against her taste buds. When his mouth left hers, she moaned again, this time in disappointment. She tangled her fingers in his silky hair and tried to bring him back.

He chuckled and placed a warm kiss by her ear. As he lingered there, she shivered, tilting her head to grant him better access, deciding he was fine where he was after all. His moist breath wafted over her skin. He sucked on her earlobe then bit gently. When she bucked underneath him, he gave a soft laugh.

"You like that, I know. I remember everything," he murmured, "as if it were only yesterday since we were last together. Damn, but I've missed you."

He nuzzled the crook of her neck, drawing in a deep breath. "I've never forgotten your smell either. Like soft flowers and spicy cinnamon, all rolled into one." Her dream lover kissed a path down to her breasts and licked across the peaks. They stiffened instantly, hard and red, begging for more attention.

"Beautiful." His breath blew hotly over a wet tip just before he pulled it into his mouth. He suckled her strongly, the tugging motion zinging straight to her clit. Her pussy clenched with need. He rasped the pad of his thumb over the other nipple, making it harden even more.

Hailey rubbed her palms over his smooth, hard shoulders, slid her fingers into the silky hair at his nape. He murmured her name and moved his mouth to her other breast, settling in for a leisurely suckle. At the same time, he began tweaking the abandoned nipple with his fingers, tugging, lightly twisting and pinching. The rasp of his tongue and the pull of his fingers on her nipples lit all her nerve endings on fire.

Her clit swelled and pulsed as her arousal built. She moaned, her hands fisting in his hair. He shifted and slid one big hand between her thighs. Unable to do anything else, she spread her legs wider, opening herself farther to his touch.

He slipped his finger into her sheath. Lifting his head from her breast, he said, "You're so wet, so hot. I have to taste you."

She dropped her hands to the sheets, fingers curling to grip them with white-knuckled force.

With his mouth blazing flames on her skin, he slid down her torso. Blunt-tipped fingers spread her folds and the flat of his tongue swiped up her slit. He nibbled along the fleshy lips, sucking and licking at her until she pumped her hips against him, silently begging for more.

He drew his tongue through her sex, tracing every line, every crevice, teasing her. When her hands came up and grasped his head, trying to hold him where she wanted him, he gave her what she wanted.

He added a second finger, thrusting in and out while his mouth went back to her clit. Hailey moaned, grinding her pelvis against him. When he pulled his fingers from her channel, she muttered a protest then gasped as his tongue surged inside her.

He fucked her with his tongue, the tip flicking against the sensitive walls of her sheath. He groaned, the sound reverberating through her sex, ratcheting her arousal up another notch.

She tightened around him. With eyes closed, her entire being focused on his mouth, his tongue. His harsh breathing and her moans and sighs filled the room. The smell of sex permeated the air.

Her dream lover pulled his tongue from her and replaced it once again with his fingers. His mouth latched onto her swollen clit, and he started sucking her with hard, steady pulls while he thrust his fingers in and out.

She pumped her hips, meeting each stroke. Her core tightened, spilling more slick cream onto his hand. Closing her eyes, she gasped for breath and reached...reached...

And toppled over the edge with a cry.

Even as her body still quaked beneath him, he rolled up and over her. He rubbed his cock through her folds, slicking himself with her cream. A slow, wicked smile curved his lips and lust glittered in his dark eyes. His cock a solid wedge pushing at her entrance, he murmured, "Remember me, Hailey. Remember me."

Remember me. The voice echoed in her mind.

Hailey jerked awake and sat up in bed. Her first thought was, *Wow, what a dream!* Followed quickly by the realization that this was the first time her dream lover had a face she could clearly see.

Handsome, angular features with eyes so dark the irises and pupils seemed as one. Sleek black hair in long layers fell to his shoulders. Straight, slender nose and sensual lips. And dimples. She was a sucker for dimples.

As another realization hit her, she drew in a sharp breath. This was the first time in a long time that the dream hadn't turned ugly. She'd actually had an orgasm instead of being cowed into a shivering heap of fear.

With shaking hands, she raked her hair away from her face then leaned back against the headboard. Already the dream was fading from her mind like fog being burned away by the sun. But she wanted to hold onto his face, to remember what he looked like.

Oh God. Her dream lover had told her to remember him.

That was new too.

A sob broke from her throat. Maybe her family was right. Maybe she *was* losing her mind.

No! She refused to believe it.

The glowing readout from the bedside clock read six a.m. Throwing aside the covers, Hailey got out of bed and paced to the window. She pushed aside the curtain and stared across the backyard. Even though the sun had yet to come up, birds were

already chirping in the tree just beyond the glass. They seemed happy, the little blighters, but then they'd probably gotten more than a couple hours of sleep. Good thing she'd taken the day off work—she'd never have been able to function. As it was, she probably wouldn't get really revved up until the party.

"Wonder if people will notice if the cupcakes come from the bakery?" she muttered with a sigh. Just as she started to turn away, from the corner of her eye she caught movement in the darkness. She turned back to the window and squinted into the gloom. Her stomach tightened, her heart thumped as she peered through the glass.

There. By the life-size Frankenstein monster. Had something *moved*?

A bird flew by. Hailey jumped and squealed, one hand over her heart. Good God. Just because she had a few lawn ornaments of hobgoblins and ghosts didn't mean there were real ones out there. "You *are* nuts, girl. And you're talking to yourself. Again. They say that's a sure sign."

This time when she turned away, she kept going until she was down the hall and into the kitchen. She took the teakettle from the stove and shuffled to the sink, her thin socks not quite protecting her feet from the cold floor tiles.

Yawning, she returned the filled kettle to the stove and switched on the burner, then leaned on the counter, eyes closed, as she waited for the water to come to a boil. God, she hated this. How long had it been since she'd had a decent night's sleep?

Too long. And the dreams usually made her so jittery that she was a bundle of nerves all day, which left her too wired to fall asleep easily at night.

It was just a vicious cycle.

Except for last night.

She straightened and opened her eyes. While the bulk of the dream had faded almost as soon as she'd woken up, she still had a clear enough picture of *him*.

He was dark and handsome and so sensual it made her shiver.

But he was only a dream.

"Knock it off, Hailey." She reached over to the cabinet beside the window and pulled out a mug. Taking down the instant coffee, she spooned in some of the dark granules. "And stop talking to yourself or people will think you're crazy."

People already think you're crazy.

"Shut up." She huffed a sigh. Now she was answering herself too. She rubbed her fingers over her brows, trying to relieve the burgeoning headache. She had to start getting more sleep or she *would* go bonkers.

As soon as she had some breakfast and a shower, she'd get dressed and run the remaining errands. Because she had a Halloween party to go to tonight, dammit.

* * * * *

Six hours later, Hailey pulled into her driveway, still exhausted, but starting to feel more exhilarated as her excitement about the party grew. She climbed out of the car and went around to the trunk, popping it open with her remote. Eyeing the bags, she knew she'd have to make at least three trips into the house before she got all the supplies inside.

As usual, she'd gotten carried away and bought things she didn't need and probably would use just this once. But she loved Halloween. It, more than any other holiday, seemed to usher in the new under the veil of the old. Crisp air replaced hot summer breezes, leaves turned orange and red and yellow and TV stations played all the old scary movies she liked so much.

Which could explain why she'd been jumpier than usual — she'd been watching too many horror films. In one of the bags was her favorite, a movie with Christopher Lee as Dracula. She shivered in anticipation.

"Well, these aren't gonna carry themselves inside," she muttered and bent to haul out the first two bags. As luck would have it, she grabbed ones that had mostly plastic decorations in them, so the bags, while they were awkward to carry, were light enough for her to handle.

She was on her way back out to the car for the last time when a large shadow went overhead, blocking out the sun. Glancing up, she shaded her eyes with one hand. Clear blue sky, not a cloud in sight.

It hadn't been her imagination and it had been much too big to have been a bird. And had it been a low-flying plane, she would have heard it.

And there was nary a blue and red spandex suit with a big gold S on it in sight.

What the hell?

With uneasiness dogging her trail, she gathered the last two bags—full of crepe paper and other decorations—and went back into the house, locking the door behind her. As a woman living alone, most days she was very conscious about her safety. Now, with the hair on the back of her neck still standing at attention, she was doubly so. She had no idea what that shadow had been but somehow she had a feeling it wouldn't be good for her to find out.

She shook her head at her paranoia. "You need to start sleeping, Hay, or you're gonna be a guest at the funny farm, learning how to weave baskets and twiddling your thumbs and toes."

Leaving the two bags by the front door, she shrugged out of her jacket and draped it over the end of the sofa on her way to the kitchen. She glanced at her watch—twelve-thirty. She'd have a quick sandwich while she got to work on the grapes.

She'd just grabbed the peanut butter when a thud sounded on top of the house. Looking up at the ceiling, she set the jar down on the kitchen island and followed the repeated thumps that crossed the roof. When she reached the center of the living room, the sounds stopped.

She held her breath and listened. Her heart pounded, making the artery in her neck pulse. Reflexively, she put her hand over the side of her throat and took a hesitant step forward. From just outside the front door came a thud that sounded like a heavy rock had been tossed onto her walkway. Her gaze jerked toward the front door and the breath wheezed from her lungs as she waited for...what?

"It was nothing," she muttered, hoping she was right and not feeling quite so confident that she was. "It was probably nothing."

The door slammed open and bounced against the wall. She yelled and scuttled back a few steps.

Backlit by the sun, what seemed to be a stormy bulk of gray-hued stone filled the doorway then became clearer as the creature moved forward into her house.

Her mouth dropped open as her mind refused to accept what her senses were telling her.

The thing invading her home was at least eight feet tall, massively built and accompanied by the smell of damp earth. Barrel-chested with forearms the size of her thighs, it lumbered forward, each step shaking the foundation of the house. Soulless dark red eyes glittered and bat-like wings rose from its back to skim the ceiling.

Male or female, she couldn't tell. There were no obvious signs of gender.

Clawed hands curled and flexed at its sides as it strode toward her. Hailey blinked, trying to decipher exactly what it was she was seeing. For each step forward the creature took, she shuffled three backward. At her action, a smile stretched its grim mouth, showcasing an upper row of sharp, pointed teeth.

Finally her brain kicked into gear, giving her a clear signal. *Don't just stand there, stupid. Run!*

Chapter Three

Hailey was partway down the steps of the back porch when the thing busted through the rear door. As she sprinted into the yard, its lumbering footfalls pounded behind her, gaining rapidly. Then she heard a *whoosh* and the flapping of wings.

Really big wings.

Instinctively, she dropped to the ground and covered her head with her arms. Air ruffled her t-shirt as the creature's claws skimmed her. Holding back a sob, she jumped up and took off toward the wooded area that acted as a natural barrier between her and the houses on the street behind her.

Maybe she could lose the thing in the trees. After all, he'd have a hard time following her in there. At least, she hoped he would.

She glanced over her shoulder and saw the thing hurtling toward her, wings folded back and clawed hands and feet stretched forward like some vicious bird of prey. Crimson eyes seemed to glow as its wide mouth stretched in a hideous grin.

Hailey screamed and ducked, but not fast enough. Immense bird-like feet latched onto her shoulders, and the creature pulled her into the air. She screamed, clawing at the talons digging into her flesh, turning her own nails into weapons, scraping along the skin of its ankles.

It was like running her nails over solid, rough-hewn rock.

The creature flew straight up with slow, heavy flaps of its wings, taking her above the roof of her single-story home. She kept trying to loosen its hold. Tilting her head back, she looked up to meet its gaze.

A forked tongue flicked out and licked over its lips. "Nothing like a soft, but crunchy, female for lunch." Its voice rumbled through her like trains on the nearby tracks. "Wish I had some ketchup."

She struggled, jerking her body this way and that, grunting with the effort.

"Or is this a little piggy I've got?"

Clearly a comment about the noises she was making, which she ignored. "Let me go!"

"Nuh-uh." Its grip tightened.

She gasped at the pain and smacked at its unforgiving flesh.

"I got my orders," it went on. Now at least forty feet in the air, it turned and started to fly toward the west. She didn't know where it planned on taking her, but *anywhere* with this...this thing wasn't good for her.

She heard a roar like a sudden upswing of wind. Immediately following that, a deep voice bellowed, "Let her go!"

Hailey looked down into her backyard and gasped. It was *him*. Her dream lover.

Her captor gave a funny little jump, like it was startled, and a growl rumbled from above her. "You have no claims on her, incubus," it snarled in a voice that was gruff and guttural. The creature hovered in the air with steady, slow flaps of its wings.

Hailey couldn't take her gaze off the man standing below them. He was real! He was *real*?

Well, hell, why not? She was being carried away by a gargoyle, for crying out loud. Why wouldn't her dark dream lover be real?

At least she knew now she hadn't been imagining things, hadn't been losing her mind.

Going forward...who knew? This might stretch reality beyond the capacity of her little peabrain to accept.

"This one's mine," the winged creature snarled. "If you'd done your job..." It trailed off and tightened its talons, piercing her flesh as it flew higher still. Hailey cried out. She felt blood begin to drip down her arms, her back, and instinctively struggled. Then she realized that if she did get free, she'd plummet to the ground. Trying to ignore

the pain, she stilled, her breath coming in gasping cries, her heart pounding so fiercely she could feel the beat pulsing behind her eyes.

"Yeah, I'd be careful, little human," the stone-thing muttered. "You might survive the fall, but not without harm."

"Like you're not planning to hurt me anyway?" she asked, her voice coming out as wispy as smoke. Being carted away by a thing her senses were telling her was real – and her brain still refused to compute – terrified her. For God's sake, these things were supposed to be short and squat and attached to buildings. Not flying around terrorizing innocent women.

Repeating over and over *There are no such things as living, breathing gargoyles* wasn't doing a bit of good.

"Don't make me come up there after you, Chuck." The man's voice was impatient and carried in clear, harsh tones from the ground. "I'll chisel you a new ass if you don't let her go. And you know I can."

As talons dug even deeper, Hailey closed her eyes against another wave of pain. Then just as suddenly as she'd been grabbed, she was let go.

"Catch her if you can," she heard the gargoyle yell as he flew off.

As she hurtled toward the ground with sickening speed, her gasp turned to an ear-splitting scream. Before she could splat on the grass like a bug on a windshield, strong arms caught her. Her momentum carried them both to the ground.

She lay against a wide, warm chest covered by a pristine white t-shirt and fought to catch her breath. And her mind. "Th...that w...w...was..."

"A gargoyle," her rescuer finished for her.

"A gargoyle named Chuck," she muttered. She was trying very hard not to freak out, but her breathing was getting worse, not better. Hyperventilating wasn't an option, so she forced herself to begin taking slow belly breaths, exhaling through pursed lips.

“Actually, his name is Chukrabenoronomiseciton, but that’s a little too long to yell when time’s of the essence.” Humor laced his deep tones.

She couldn’t stop a smile and raised her head. Then reality slammed back into her with cold clarity. Never mind what had come before—for six months this...this man, or whatever he was, had been terrorizing her dreams. She shouldn’t be lying on top of him like a big lump. Drawing back her hand, she slapped his gorgeous, lust-inspiring face for all she was worth, then scrambled off him.

In her anger and lingering fear, she was awkward, slamming into his body with knees and elbows. She heard him grunt, then utter a moan when her knee went between his jeans-clad legs with hard force as she tried to get to her feet.

She stifled an instinctive apology for squashing his gonads. As he stood, shock as much as fear made her hold out her hands to ward him off. This man had been in her dreams for a decade. What the hell was he?

“What was that for?” he asked, rubbing over the red imprint of her hand on his lean cheek.

“You’ve been haunting my dreams!”

“Not lately.”

As if that made everything all right.

“When the dreams turned bad, that wasn’t me.” Though he held out his hands, he kept his distance. “I promise you, I’m not here to hurt you.” He took a hesitant step toward her, stopping when she backed away. His dark eyes shone with concern, his brow creased as he stared at her. “You’re hurt. And there’s not enough time to go into it right now, but you’re in danger because of me.”

She tried to ignore the throbbing in her shoulders. Blood dripped in slow rivulets down her arms. Hailey swallowed back her fear, determined to stand her ground. She had to know who this man was and how he’d been able to invade her dreams all these years. “How can I be in danger because of you? I don’t even know you.”

One dark eyebrow rose. "Don't play games, Hailey. You know me. Intimately. Although our last encounter ended somewhat abruptly when you woke up." Twinkling dark eyes held a look of mock reproach. "Regardless, I know *you*."

She stared at him. Her pulse raced as if she'd just finished a marathon and her body urged her to turn and run. But she decided to brazen it out. "You don't know anything about me. Well, except for..." She trailed off, biting her lip.

"Except for what makes you wild in bed?" he finished for her. He came closer, and this time she let him. If he'd meant to hurt her, why save her from the gargoyle? Named Chuck. Salvador Dali and melting clocks flitted into her mind and she resolutely pushed back her ill-timed sense of humor.

One big hand came up from his side, slowly, carefully, as if he was trying not to startle her. He cupped her jaw, his thumb sweeping over her lower lip, freeing it from the prison of her teeth.

He leaned over her, close enough so she got a whiff of his scent—something clean and crisp that made her want to get him sweaty. "But I know so much more than that," he murmured. "You're intelligent, loyal, brave—"

"Not all that brave," she muttered. "Did you hear me? I screamed like a girl."

His grin was slow and very carnal. "That's all right. I happen to like girls." He stiffened and looked around, nostrils flaring.

"What?" Hailey glanced around too but didn't see or hear anything out of the ordinary. A slight breeze ruffled the leaves on the trees, birds chirped, squirrels...squirreled. "What is it?"

"We need to get out of here. It won't be long before Chuck's back with reinforcements." He took her hands in his. "Trust me, Hailey. I *will* protect you. Plus we need to see to those." He nodded toward her shoulders. "As long as we get you healed right away, you should be fine, but gargoyles tend to perch wherever they want to and sometimes it's not a pleasant—or particularly clean—place." He drew in a breath. "Some of their favorite haunts are trash heaps."

“Okay. Ew. I don’t think I needed to know that.” She studied him, feeling deep down that she could trust him, but wondering if she *should*. In the end, though, what choice did she have? Hang around here and Chuck no doubt would return with some of his dirty, stinky, garbage-perching buddies.

Coming to a decision, she squared her shoulders, wincing when her torn and bruised flesh protested the movement. “All right. Let’s go.”

* * * * *

Urian kept hold of one of Hailey’s slender hands, thrilled to the soles of his feet to finally be able to touch her in real life. The dream plane could be startling with its reality, but still... Nothing in an alternate dimension could compare with the feel of her soft palm sliding against his or the warmth of her skin as he cradled her hand.

That she was willing to trust him spoke of her bravery. That she held some skepticism spoke to her intelligence. Just because she’d been frightened by the gargoyle – what human wouldn’t? – didn’t mean she wasn’t courageous.

And he was afraid, before this was over, that courage would be tested to the max.

He chanted the incantation that would open the portal to his home. The air swirled in front of them, then a gaping hole appeared, showing his living room on the other side. Holding tightly to Hailey’s hand, he urged her through the opening. Within seconds, they stood in his suite of rooms in what he liked to call the Hades Hotel.

“Okay. What just happened?” Her eyes were wide, her gaze darting around the room. “Where are we? H-how’d we get here?”

“We’re in my quarters in Hades. You’d probably call it Hell.” He kept his voice matter-of-fact, hoping to stave off her going into a full-blown panic attack. It seemed to work – other than quickened breathing and twin flags of color on her cheeks, she seemed to be dealing with the strangeness. Of course, she didn’t strike him as the type to get hysterical. “And we got here through an inter-dimensional portal.” He gently

squeezed her fingers. "The way it works is complicated and I can't say I completely understand it. I just know how to open one."

She nodded and drew her hand away.

Knowing she needed to put some distance between them so she could try to make some sense of all this, Urian reluctantly let go. Before she could ask, he said, "My name is Urian Vakidis, and I'm a sex demon. An incubus, to be exact."

"Well, that would explain those dreams," she muttered, red-faced.

An artery pounded in her throat, and he clenched his jaw against the urge to put his lips there.

A frown flitted between her brows. She crossed her arms in such a defensive posture it made his heart stutter. "What the hell were those nightmares about?" she demanded. Her voice cracked. "It seemed like you wanted to kill me."

"I told you, that wasn't me," he hastened to assure her. He wished he could pull her into his arms, knowing he could soothe her physically. Emotionally, mentally... Well, he'd never been that good at *talking*. He'd never had to be. His talents were purely physical. Or so he kept reminding his father whenever Lucifer nagged him to become a desk jockey. "I've been temporarily...reassigned. The only reason you'd be given a nightmare would be to undo anything I might have accomplished."

Things like making her believe in herself, in her sexuality. Things like making her believe in love.

Protective instincts he'd never been aware of before now clawed to the surface. If he wasn't careful, he'd end up locking her in the bedroom where no one else could get to her. At least there he knew she'd be safe.

Hmm. Not a bad idea, that.

She stared at him with a gaze full of anxiety and speculation. He was glad to see her fear had lessened. And as she took the time to really glance around, taking in the living

room furniture that didn't look all that different from what she was used to, he saw her start to relax.

She frowned and looked down at one shoulder. "My shoulders don't hurt anymore. Hey! My shirt's fixed too."

He grinned. "Portals act like a dry cleaner, if you will. Whatever goes through is cleaned, mended and pressed."

Her eyebrows lifted. "Well, I'm *impressed*." She poked at the material of her royal blue top. He loved the color on her, as it heightened the ocean hues of her eyes. She gave a delightful little grunt and looked up at him. "I'm glad too because this is my favorite shirt."

"Mine too."

One corner of her mouth curled up. Then she sobered. "You said earlier that I was in danger because of you."

Urian nodded. Motioning toward a dark gray sofa, he said, "Let's sit down and I'll explain."

He waited until she sat—perched was more like it—on the edge of the couch, then he took a seat and told her of his undercover work and how he'd been reassigned to her, only this time with instructions that would bring her harm. "I couldn't do it," he murmured, taking her hands in his. He stroked along her fingers and raised his gaze to hers. "Last night in the dream plane, once I had you in my arms again, had your sweet taste on my tongue, there was no way I could try to make you afraid of me."

He let go of her hands and raked his fingers through his hair. The last six months had been harder on him than he'd realized. Harder than he'd really been prepared to admit. He should have just done the damn job and tried to repair the damage later.

That's what was expected of him. That's what it would have taken to put a quicker end to the Brotherhood of the Red Claw.

But he couldn't do it. Not to Hailey.

Urian sighed. "Because I didn't do as I was told, the Brotherhood decided to use you to teach me a lesson."

"Hence Chuck." Her tone was dry, but her eyes no longer held the wild, disbelieving look they had earlier. She took a deep breath, then another, and leaned against the back of the sofa.

"Hmm." He shifted his position, facing her and taking her hands once again. He rubbed his thumbs over her soft skin. "You should be safe here—no one can enter my quarters without my permission."

"Only if they're too polite to break in," she muttered.

He shook his head. "No. We have a security system. The Others—anything nonhuman—can come and go in any of the hallways or general conference rooms, but not in private quarters. There's only one other person who can enter my suite whenever he wants to, just as I can go to his quarters via a portal at any time. Anyone else gets bombarded by focused microwaves."

She blinked. Her sultry lips parted, forming a small O. "You mean...they get *cooked*?"

He nodded. "From the inside out. What?" A slight smile curled his lips. "You think humans came up with the microwave oven? We've had the technology for centuries. When humans finally caught up, we...introduced the idea. We have to fund our operations, you know." Seeing the panic building in her eyes, he assured her, "You're perfectly safe, honey, since you came through a portal I opened. The system automatically recognizes you and gives you permission to enter unless I program it otherwise."

She didn't look entirely convinced.

"Trust me. You're safe."

She gave a short nod and took a breath, huffing it out in a loud sigh. Tears glazed her eyes and she blinked them back. "I'm trying, Urian. Really I am. But I've spent the last six months thinking maybe I was going nuts, and now, with all this..."

Urian tightened his fingers on hers. "Why would you think you're crazy, sweetheart?"

She shook her head. "The dreams were so real. And then when you, I mean he, turned violent... Well, my family thought I was on my way to a nervous breakdown. There for a while, I had to wonder myself." A quick laugh left her. "Wonder what they'd think if I went home and introduced you. 'Hey, Mom, Dad. This is Urian. He's the man I've been dreaming about for ten years. He's a sex demon'." Her tone was dry. She quirked her eyebrows. "They'd be thrilled. Don'tcha think?"

He smiled and shook his head. "At least you still have a sense of humor about it. That's saying something."

She raised her chin in a gesture of agreement. Her deep breath lifted her chest for a moment before she expelled the air in a slow exhale. "This is just so...and I'm so..."

"I know, it's a lot to take in." He rubbed his thumbs across the back of her hands, delighting in the silken texture of her skin. She was so different from him – female to his male, human to his demon – yet she was as familiar as if she were an extension of him.

Perhaps she was. Ten years was a long time to be in someone's dreams and not take in some part of her.

He brought her hand up and pressed a slow kiss in her palm. Her fingers curled over the spot. "Do you believe me, sweetheart? That I'm not here to hurt you?"

She stared at him. Through the confusion he saw in her eyes, he also saw the flare of desire. Her nod came quickly enough. "This all just feels so surreal."

"Like something out of a Salvador Dali painting, eh?" He squeezed her hands, appreciating her quick grin. "It's real, Hailey. You have to accept that."

Pulling one of her hands free, she reached up to cup his cheek. He closed his eyes at the tender touch and nuzzled her soft palm.

"I can't believe..." Slender fingers traced over his cheek, his chin, his lips. "I thought it was all in my head, you know. The dreams. It's hard to believe you're real too."

Urian opened his eyes. His tongue flicked out and licked across the pads of her fingers and he delighted in the lightly salty taste of her skin. "Yes, I'm real. And even though our encounters have been on the dream plane, they were real too, Hailey." He brought one hand up and covered hers where it rested on his cheek. Turning his head, he placed another kiss in her palm. His heart thudded behind his ribs. Holding her gaze, he murmured, "And they can be even more real. If you're interested."

Chapter Four

If she was interested.

Who was he kidding?

Last night's dream had been the first time in six months that she'd had a really solid orgasm. And that was *before* he'd had a chance to slide his thick cock inside her.

Well, no guts, no glory, she always said. Never one to just sit around and wait for something to happen, Hailey stood and pulled off her shirt. Her breasts were small enough to forego a bra, which she'd done. As her fingers went to the button at the waistband of her jeans, Urian scooted to the edge of the sofa and pulled her closer. When his mouth latched onto one of her nipples and he began to suckle her, she wrapped her hands around his head.

His hair cascaded over her fingers. His scalp was warm against her palms, his hair cool and silky in contrast. The strands were ink-black against her skin, the same black as the eyes that gazed up at her, heated lust and something else, something softer, in their depths.

The tugging of his mouth sent waves of heat through her body. As she became more and more enflamed, she closed her eyes. Her clit thumped in time with her increasing heartbeat and her womb throbbed with each pull on her nipple.

He moved to her other breast. His hands swept up her sides and cupped her. He thumbed across the wet, hard tip of one breast while his mouth nipped and licked at the other. He pulled away slightly. Thinking he was stopping, she opened her eyes and started to protest.

One look into his dark, needy eyes stopped her.

He slid a hand between her thighs and cupped her denim-covered pussy. "Take the rest of it off," he rasped, "and let me taste you here."

At the gritty, lustful tone, a shiver rolled up her spine. Without a word, Hailey toed off her shoes then shoved her jeans and panties down her legs. She stepped out of them and when she went to lift one leg to take off her socks, Urian groaned and stood, sweeping her into his arms.

Long strides carried him down a dimly lit hallway and into a bedroom. The focal point was the king-sized four-poster sitting square in the middle of the large room.

He placed her on the edge of the bed and went to his knees in front of her. Gentle hands removed her socks, rubbing her feet and calves before sliding up her inner thighs to the sheltered heart of her desire.

His broad shoulders nudged her legs farther apart. He leaned in, resting his cheek for a moment against her thigh. His indrawn breath was slow and long, making her shiver again and open herself more fully to him. Her pussy swelled, cream sliding from her core to coat the inner lips.

Drawing slightly away, he spread her glistening folds with his thumbs. "This is what I want," he murmured and dipped his head to her sex. His warm breath blew against her just before he swiped his tongue through her slit. He rumbled a groan that reverberated along her nerve endings.

Another lick and Hailey was doing some groaning of her own. Leaning on her elbows, she dropped her head back and closed her eyes, her every sense concentrated on his mouth and the wonderful sensations he created deep within her.

The clean scent of him was mixed with the smell of arousal—his and hers. He said something, but she couldn't hear over the rush of her pulse in her ears. His fingers lightly squeezed her labia while his tongue circled her opening, glided up to her clit, flicking it back and forth. He slid a long finger inside her, stroking in and out. Then he latched his mouth onto the small nub of her pleasure center.

Her entire body clenched and Hailey fell back onto the bed with a loud, low moan. His answering groan blasted against her drenched folds as he suckled her. Then he switched, thrusting his strong tongue into her sheath while his fingers rubbed her clit.

Heat gathered in her core and flared outward in heaving surges, echoing the thrusting rhythm of his tongue. She ground her pussy into his face, seeking more, trying to bring him deeper. He rubbed against her clit faster and harder. His tongue fucked into her, the tip flicking against her sensitive inner walls.

She swallowed. Her mouth opened and she panted with the building pressure. It was almost unbearable in its intensity. He seemed to realize it, for he gentled his touch, bringing his tongue up to lightly stroke through her slick folds. He avoided her clit, which throbbed and pulsed with need.

“Urian, stop teasing.” Her voice was husky with passion. An orgasm hovered on the edges, right there...almost close enough to reach out and grab.

“Good things come to those who wait.”

Indeed. “Two can play at this game,” she muttered, and reached out until she could stroke his erection through the heavy denim of his jeans.

“Not yet, you don’t.” He snagged her wrist and held it, grabbing her other hand when she reached for him once again. Keeping both her wrists in one big hand, he held them captive on her belly while he went back to feasting on her.

He flicked the tip of his tongue against her clit, back and forth, faster and faster. Her body wound tighter and tighter and, when he thrust his tongue into her sheath, her orgasm crashed over her. He released her hands and palmed her buttocks, lifting her more fully into his caress. She arched and cried out, shudders racking her as the roiling climax went on and on. Finally, with a moan, she collapsed on the bed.

And still Urian licked at her swollen flesh, the touch of his tongue light now, as if he was in no particular hurry and merely wanted to taste her.

That wasn’t enough. She wanted — she *needed* — his cock inside her. Now.

Hailey sat up, the movement dislodging him. If she weren’t so hot and bothered, she might have smiled at the disgruntled look on his face. He looked sulky, like someone whose hand had just been smacked for daring to sneak a cookie.

Leaning forward, she snaked her tongue across his mouth, tasting herself. When his lips parted, she drank down his sigh. "Let me return the favor," she murmured against his mouth.

Without a word, he got to his feet. Hailey stood too, skimming his t-shirt up and over his head as she did so. She paused a moment, admiring the play of muscles on his wide chest and rigid abdomen. Dark hair covered his pecs and feathered in a tantalizing trail over his belly only to disappear beneath the waistband of his jeans.

His erection was a thick bulge beneath his zipper. She couldn't wait to get it in her hands, in her mouth. In her pussy.

She went to her knees and untied his thick-soled black boots, drawing first one and then the other off, as well as his black socks. When her fingers went to his belt, he sucked in his breath, his stomach hollowing beneath her knuckles. She pressed a kiss to his tight, lean abdomen, the hair-roughened skin tickling her nose.

The rasp of his zipper being drawn down was loud in the stillness of the room; the only other sound was their harsh breathing. Even before the zipper tab was all the way down, his heavy cock sprang free, bobbing upward toward his belly. His foreskin slid back from a tip moist with pre-cum.

God, he was beautiful. Thick and long, with bulging veins and a fat head red with lust. Hard and so hot he was about to set her on fire. She brought him to her mouth and took him as deep as she could in one swoop.

His groan was loud. His hips punched forward, driving the head to the back of her throat. She gagged and pulled back, waving off his apology, and went down on him again. Cupping his lightly furred ball-sac in one hand, she kept the other wrapped around the base of his shaft, sliding it up to meet her descending mouth.

He was salty, but with an underlying flavor of sweetness. It was a taste she knew she could become addicted to.

Hailey licked around the tip of his cock, dipping into the weeping slit, drawing more of his essence into her mouth. She nibbled her way down the underside until she

reached his balls, drawn tight against the base of his cock. Flicking the tip of her tongue against them, much as he'd done to her clit, she ramped up his arousal with the light touch. Her own arousal spiraling ever higher, she tried to ignore the tightening of her body. Then she pulled one testicle into the heat of her mouth.

He arched so hard he dislodged her. Large hands wrapping around her upper arms saved her from being knocked onto her ass. Satisfied she wasn't going to fall, he let go, bringing his hands up to tangle his fingers in her hair. "More," he ordered.

She went back to his balls and took one in her mouth, working her tongue over the taut skin. Repeating the process with his other testicle, she lingered over him, giving him pleasure the way he'd done for her. His skin was salty here too, but not unpleasantly so. By the time she pulled away, his hips were surging, his fingers clenching in her hair.

Looking up the length of his torso to his face, she smiled in feminine triumph to see the agonized lust blazing on his features. His eyes were closed, the strong column of his throat rigid, tendons corded. His eyes opened and she saw red flecks dancing in the midnight darkness of his eyes. Holding his gaze, she touched the tip of her tongue to the drop of fluid that hovered at the tip of his cock.

His breath hissed out between clenched teeth. He watched as she savored the taste of him before reaching out her tongue once again. Taking him in one hand, she licked her way down the underside of his shaft, spending time on the flesh just beneath the crown, tapping the flattened tip of her tongue against him.

"Stop teasing," he growled. "Suck me."

A slow smile curved her lips and she did as he asked. She took him as deep as she could, sucking him like a lollipop, her cheeks hollowing as she pleased him this way. Her lips stretched almost painfully thin as his thick shaft invaded her mouth.

Arousal swelled her pussy, making her core throb with need. Amazing that by arousing him, she aroused herself as well.

Hailey let him fall from her mouth with a soft *pop* and went back to his balls. Precum slid from the head of his cock, and she scrubbed her thumb back and forth over the tip, spreading the viscous fluid around and around. When she went to take him back in her mouth, he moved his hands to her arms and dragged her up his body. He urged her onto the bed and made a place for himself between her legs. His heavy cock dragged through her slick folds.

"I don't think I'm ready for more of that just yet," he rasped, the red flecks in his eyes turning to flickering flames. "My lust runs too high. I need to be inside you when I come."

He nudged her opening with the broad head of his cock, slipping just the tip inside her. His fingers meshed with hers, holding her hands on the pillow beside her head. His hips bunched and he started working his thick length into her welcoming sheath. Inch by inch, he pushed his way in until his balls rested against the curve of her ass.

"God, you're so tight," he muttered through tightly clenched teeth. "So wet." He pulled slowly out of her until just the head of his cock rested inside her channel. Then, with one quick lunge, he drove his full length into her.

Hailey arched, a scream of ecstasy trapped in her throat. Urian didn't give her time to recover from having him so fully inside her, but immediately set a hard, driving rhythm that forced the breath out of her lungs with every thrust. Each downward stroke brought his pelvis slamming against her clit. Through it all, he held her gaze, his flaming eyes drilling into hers.

The room was silent but for their harsh breathing and the sound of flesh slapping against flesh. His cock felt huge as he shuttled in and out, faster and harder and deeper.

Tension coiled tight in her womb, his every thrust pushing her closer to the edge of oblivion. Her gaze locked on his and, unable to look away, she saw his eyes go completely crimson, his face tight and dark with lust.

The change in his features sent a thrill through her, a shot of fear mixed with a surge of feminine triumph that she was the one to make him look like that—a creature lost in lust.

He'd already had plenty of time to hurt her, if that was what he wanted to do. She wasn't afraid of him in that way, not now.

He leaned over her farther, the hair on his chest rubbing against her distended nipples, his pelvis hitting her clit with each sharp lunge of his hips. Dipping his head, he kissed her, his mouth bruising and hungry. "Your energy is incredible. Come with me," he growled, his voice raspy and deep. Then he nipped her lower lip. "Now."

That harsh, dark voice was all it took to send her over the edge. With a keening wail, she arched, her climax exploding through her. The shuddering convulsions went on and on. Dimly she heard his answering shout, felt his fingers tighten on hers, felt his cock harden even more inside her. Then his hot release jetted into her sheath and set off another round of spasms so strong she felt her entire pelvis clench down and darkness danced around the edge of her vision.

After what could have been mere minutes or hours, Hailey came to herself again. Urian was a dead weight on top of her, his cock still a hard, firm wedge inside her pussy. His face was turned into her neck, the stubble of his jaw a welcome abrasion against her skin.

She opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling while she tried to catch her breath. That was the most incredible sex she'd ever had and much better than what they'd ever shared in her dreams.

His breath wafted over her skin as he raised his head. His eyes were once more the coal-black she was used to.

She missed the flames of passion.

But feeling him flex within her, seeing his face darken with lust once more, she knew the flames would soon be licking at her again.

She'd discovered a few things about herself today. One, she wasn't crazy. Two, the physical closeness they'd just shared made her all the more certain that she was in love with this man.

Three, she must be a closet pyromaniac, because she definitely had a thing for fire.

Chapter Five

Hailey gradually became aware of a low buzzing sound. Rolling over, she swatted at the alarm clock on her bedside table. Her hand hit something soft and the buzzing continued, so she scooted farther over in the bed and tried again.

"You trying to tell me something?" a deep male voice rumbled. "I felt you smack me the first time."

She squeaked and rolled over, sitting up and dragging the sheet over her breasts. Her face flamed. "I forgot where I was."

Urian's grin was slow and lazy and showed the heated beginnings of renewed lust. "I figured that." His arms were folded beneath his head, the biceps bulging against the pillows. He had a slumberous, just-waking-up look in his eyes that was beginning to dissipate, replaced with passion.

What a delicious-looking man to wake up to. She leaned toward him, intending to plant a long, unhurried kiss on his sexy mouth.

The buzzing sound grew louder.

"What *is* that?" she asked, straightening up and tilting her head as she tried to figure it out.

"A meeting's been called." He rolled over and, hooking an arm and a leg across her body, drew her back down and into his arms. Burying his face in the crook of her neck, he lightly rubbed his cheek against her skin, his beard-roughened face tickling her. She felt the tip of his tongue skate over her throat, lingering beneath her ear. His morning erection was a heavy weight on her thigh.

They'd made love again and again through the hours since he'd brought her here. He'd left her only briefly to make his report and had returned almost immediately to take her again.

He had alternated between heartbreaking tenderness and breathtaking passion. Lust and something deeper had underlain his every touch. But while she hoped that “something deeper” was love, he hadn’t said the words. And she wasn’t sure enough of what the future held to divulge her own feelings.

Not yet.

His tongue traced a pattern on her skin. Shivering with awakening arousal, she drew in a hitching breath. “Are you supposed to go?”

“Mmm.” Before she could ask him if that was a yes or a no, he said, “From the sound of it, it’s important—it’s the level of the tone,” he explained. “Higher pitched means higher priority.” He nuzzled her chin. “I don’t want to leave you.”

Just then, a disembodied, tinny voice called out, “Urian Vakidis, report to the main conference room. Urian to the main conference room.”

“It sounds like they really want you.”

He sighed and tightened his arms around her. “Tough shit. I already made my report. Besides, I haven’t been here for six months—waiting another few hours won’t kill anyone.” Pressing kisses against her throat, he worked his way down to her breasts. He licked across one soft tip and it sprang to attention immediately. He rewarded her by circling her other nipple with his tongue, coaxing it to hardness as well. Her core tightened, spilling cream onto her labia. He pressed his hand between her legs, swirling his fingers through the folds of her sex. “I can’t get over how fast you respond to me,” he muttered against the tight bud of her breast.

“I think I’m addicted,” she whispered, bending her head to place a kiss against his hair.

His cock jerked against her thigh. He lifted his head and met her gaze. Crimson flecked the coal-black depths of his eyes. “Me too.”

Another deeper, irritated voice boomed, “Urian! Get your ass to the conference room.”

Urian jerked upright. Wincing, he ran a hand through his hair. “*Damn*. That’s Lucifer. I need to go.”

“Lucifer? As in Satan? Old Scratch? Beelzebub—the Lord of Flies?” Hailey’s eyes went wide as she tried to take it in. Being in Hell was one thing, but to actually hear the voice of the Devil over an intercom system...

“Yeah, but he really doesn’t like that name.”

“Which one?” She was back to living in a Salvador Dali painting.

“Beelzebub. Especially since people insist on shortening it to Bub. He *really* hates that.”

“But he’s okay with Old Scratch?” Hailey shook her head again. Feeling like she was wrapped up in fog, she muttered, “I’ll have to remember that.”

Urian rolled out of bed and grabbed up his clothes, sliding his legs into his jeans and pulling the t-shirt over his head. As he shoved his bare feet into his boots, he said, “Stay here, honey. You’ll be safe, but do *not* open that door for anyone but me.”

“I won’t.” She sat up and watched him. “What about you?”

He glanced at her. She was sorry to see his eyes once more their normal color. She liked seeing him with arousal turning his eyes a mix of crimson and black.

“What about me?” he asked.

“Will you be safe? You didn’t say anything about security measures outside your quarters.” She had no idea how they ran the safety program here in Hell, but she didn’t want to take any chances. Not now that she’d found Urian.

He shrugged, apparently unconcerned. It should have made her feel better, but it didn’t. “I don’t imagine they’d be brazen enough to try to snatch me from Hell itself,” he said. “My dad would have a fit.”

Hailey frowned. “Your dad? Your dad’s here too?” What was this, a family affair?

He grimaced and scrubbed the back of his neck with one hand. “Uh, yeah. I guess I haven’t told you yet.”

When he didn't go on, she asked, "Told me what?"

"About my father." He sat back down on the bed and ignored a third summons to the meeting. "He's Lucifer."

Hailey's frown deepened and she gave her head a little shake, sure she'd heard him wrong. When he nodded in affirmation, she repeated, "He's Lucifer." A bark of disbelieving laughter burst from her. "You're the son of the Devil."

He nodded. "But he's not as bad as he's been made out. Really. I think you'll like him."

Her lover was a sex demon and he thought she'd like his dad – the Devil.

Ai-ai-ai.

Once again the deep voice, very clearly irritated now, roared, "Vakidis! Ass. Conference room. Now!"

"I have to go." Urian leaned over and kissed her, a quick, hard smash of lips that gentled almost immediately. "Save my place." He rose from the bed and left the room.

Curious as to what the space outside his rooms looked like, Hailey jumped out of bed, wrapping the sheet around her, and ran barefoot down the hallway and into the living room just as he walked out the front door.

He turned and glanced at her. Shaking his head, he grinned as he watched her jam her feet into the legs of her jeans and pull them up. Pushing the sheet out of the way, she hurriedly fastened them, then grabbed up her top and dropped the sheet altogether so she could draw the t-shirt over her head.

"And here I was hoping to sit in the meeting with a picture in my mind of you naked in bed, waiting for me." He gave a loud sigh. "Guess I should've known you'd be too curious."

Hailey stuck her tongue out at him, laughing when he grinned again. He mouthed a kiss and turned away to start down the hall.

She peeked around the edge of the front door that had yet to close. She had an impression of stone walls with torches hung along one side. Apparently Urian had a corner suite, because the doorway where she stood was at the juncture of two corridors. The hallways stretched on for several hundred feet, with doors lining the rough-hewn passageway.

Urian turned for one last look and frowned. "Get back inside, Hailey."

"All right, all right." She started to close the door. A swirling eddy in the air caught her attention. Before she could form the words to ask what it was, a gaping hole appeared and inside the hole she could see a dark-haired man with a red cap on his head. Chuck the gargoyle stood beside him.

A fifth command for Urian to get to the conference room echoed along the corridor.

Chuck reached out toward him with one long, thick arm.

Hailey ran into the hallway. "Look out!" she yelled, pointing to the gargoyle behind him.

Urian twisted to look, but it was too late. Chuck latched onto his shoulder, digging his talons into Urian's flesh, staining the t-shirt with bright red blood. With a loud cackle of glee, the gargoyle pulled Urian through the portal and stuck out his tongue at Hailey.

Red Cap held out his palm and blew across it. She saw some sort of glittering powder surge toward Urian, making him choke and cough. Then his eyes rolled back in his head and he slumped in Chuck's hold.

They turned and walked away, dragging Urian between them. The portal started to close. Without giving it thought, Hailey drew in a deep breath and charged the diminishing hole. That she might not be able to do anything flitted through her mind. But if she had to claw and kick and bite, she'd get him away from them. Or die trying.

She couldn't let Urian be hurt — or worse! — because of her.

Someone shouted, “Wait!” and from the periphery, she saw a tall man who looked like an older version of Urian running toward her.

There wasn’t time to wait. She dove into the portal that was barely wide enough to fit her shoulders. Mere seconds later, she landed on her stomach in an empty warehouse, completely alone.

Getting to her feet, she absently brushed dust from her jeans and looked around. Banks of windows—all dirty and some cracked and broken—stretched up for three stories. Various hand tools lay forgotten on workbenches, and dirt and sawdust littered the floor. She didn’t know what she expected, but an abandoned building wasn’t it.

This was where the bad guys hung out?

And just where were they, anyway? She couldn’t be but a few seconds behind them—she was probably lucky she hadn’t landed on top of them, the way she’d charged through that portal at the last minute.

“Not the brightest bulb in the package, Hay,” she muttered. But what other choice had she had? As she looked around, she saw several doors that led off this large main room. She took a step forward. Her heart beat a hard rhythm behind her ribs, echoing in the pulse in her throat and the roar of blood in her ears. She was in over her head, but she couldn’t leave Urian behind.

Hopefully her lights wouldn’t get punched out before she could save him.

She stepped on something sharp. She winced and lifted her foot, inspecting the sole. A piece of glass stuck to the bottom of her foot—not piercing the skin, thankfully. She brushed it off and straightened, placing her foot more carefully this time.

Hearing the rumble of voices, she made her way to the nearest doorway, avoiding the debris that littered the floor. The door was propped open with a brick. Quietly and oh-so-carefully, she peered around the edge. Relief was instantaneous. She hadn’t lost them. There was Urian, his unconscious body being half-dragged and half-carried by the gargoyle. Red Cap was at his side, talking into a cell phone.

Any minute now she expected to hear the theme from the Twilight Zone. “Ladies and gentlemen,” she muttered under her breath, “you’re traveling through a dimension, not only of sight and sound, but of mind...”

Chuck started to turn around.

Hailey ducked out of sight, holding her breath. *Smooth move, Sherlock.*

“Wait a minute,” Chuck muttered. His voice was just as guttural as she remembered. She could picture him in her mind’s eye, his red eyes narrowed and searching, big claws digging into Urian’s body.

“Hang on,” she heard the other man say, no doubt to the person on the other end of the phone. “What is it, Chuck?”

“I thought I heard something.” Even speaking quietly, Chuck’s voice echoed in the narrow, high-ceilinged hallway. Urian groaned, and the gargoyle laughed. “Never mind. Must’ve been the ol’ incubus here.”

“Come on. Xerxes is waiting.” Red Cap sounded impatient and also a little afraid.

Interesting. And scary. There was someone else—or *something* else—that frightened the bad guys? She swallowed and hoped to God she didn’t meet up with him. Or her.

Or it.

Hailey waited until she heard their footsteps start up, then cautiously peeked around the edge of the doorway again. When they turned a corner, she opened the door, slipped into the hall and just as carefully pulled the door closed until it bumped up against the brick. Then she tiptoed down the corridor after them.

Reaching the hallway they’d turned down, she looked around the edge and saw a door swing shut. She ran forward, skirting past an old industrial-sized dumpster, then pressed her ear against the door.

She couldn’t hear a thing. *Dammit!*

Biting her lip, she grabbed the door handle and pressed down on the small lever with her thumb. She eased the door open a crack and peered in.

"Put him in the chair and strap him in," a male voice said. With her limited field of vision, Hailey couldn't see the speaker, but it didn't sound like Red Cap and it definitely wasn't Chuck. It must be the Xerxes that Red Cap had mentioned. "Where's the girl?"

"Wasn't time to get her," Chuck grumbled. "Lucifer was running toward us. Had to go."

"Yes, well, she won't stay in Hell forever. As soon as she's topside again, we'll get her," the first man said. There was a sound of flesh striking flesh. Then again. "He's still out cold. Just how much of the Darkling Dust did you give him?"

"Loads." Chuck laughed.

"I gave him the amount required for immediate unconsciousness, Xerxes. It should last only another thirty minutes at the most." That was Red Cap.

"Well, let's go discuss damage control and get the head of the Enforcers up to speed," Xerxes said. "We need to plan what to do with whatever information our spy here gave Lucifer."

Hailey realized they were headed her way. She turned in a circle, trying to figure out a place to hide, shaking her hands in a near panic. Her gaze lit upon the dumpster, and she barreled toward it. As quietly as she could, she hoisted up the lid, climbed in and eased the lid back down.

Then she waited. It was only a few seconds until she heard a door slam and the bad guys' voices as they walked toward her hiding place.

"I can only assume Urian has already made a full report," Xerxes growled. "As soon as we know for sure, take care of him. I want him out of the picture, once and for all."

"You got it." Red Cap sounded gleeful at the prospect of murdering her lover. From the direction of his voice she could tell the men, demons or whatever they were had passed her hiding place.

"I haven't worked this hard to have it all torn to pieces because some sex demon got lucky."

Hailey frowned. Luck had nothing to do with it. It was skill, pure and simple. Her Urian was as smart as they came.

She shook her head at herself. Here she was, squatting in a dumpster, unholy creatures separated from her by a not nearly thick enough layer of metal, and she was outraged that they were disparaging her boyfriend? *Now's not the time.*

"It's because of Sassy Devils that I lost credibility." Xerxes' voice was deep and harsh. "Undermining their efforts—making the Great King see how incredibly incompetent they all are—is my one chance at getting back into His good graces." There was a sound of something slamming into metal, and Hailey had an idea she knew what it was—Xerxes had just rammed his fist into the heavy door. "I want my old job back, dammit."

She heard a door squeak open and realized they were at the end of the hallway. She drew in a shaky breath of relief and then lost it at Red Cap's next words.

"The death of one of Lucifer's sons should shake things up at Sassy Devils, that's for sure."

Chapter Six

Urian drifted to awareness. He blinked, shaking his head to clear it of the haze that clung tenaciously. A scent of almonds and cloves lingered in his nostrils and his eyes refused to focus—the remnants of the Darkling Dust that Kathë had used on him.

The vampire at the meeting yesterday had been right. Kathë was a devious bastard.

Urian heard the snick of the door, then running footsteps. A blurred figure appeared before him, and he squinted. The subtle scent of flowers and the spice of cinnamon wafted to his nostrils just before he felt soft fingers stroke down his cheek.

“Urian?” Hailey knelt beside him. “Are you all right?”

He shook his head again and stared at her. Her face swam into focus. Pale cheeks and wide tear-filled eyes filled his vision. “I’m fine.” His voice came out raspy. He cleared the blockage from his throat and tried again. “I’m fine, sweetheart. Can you...?” He motioned with his head toward the restraints around his wrists.

“Oh. Yeah.” She unbuckled the restraints and stood when he did.

He was chagrined to realize he was still lightheaded, tottering slightly. Slender hands came out to steady him. He leaned into her until his head cleared once again. Then he drew away, putting his hands on her shoulders, and stared down into her beautiful face. “How in the hell did you get here?”

Her shoulders moved under his palms in a shrug. “I jumped through the portal before it closed.”

“You did *what*?” Brain fog clearing fast, he gave her a little shake. “What would you have done if they’d seen you come through? Do you have any idea what Chuck could do to you with just a twitch of one wrist?”

She scowled and knocked his hands away. "You're welcome, you big ass." Putting her hands on her hips, she started tapping one foot. "Don't think I haven't already figured out I'm in over my head. But is this really the time—or place—for this discussion? Shouldn't we just get out of here?" She rubbed a hand over her face. "You can yell at me all you want to later."

"Promise?" Giving a slight grin at her narrow-eyed look, Urian knew she was right. On both counts. He was an ass and they needed to go. His stomach clenched. If Xerxes and the others were to find her here...

Just as he began the chant to open a portal, the door to the room swung open.

Chuck stood there with Ardon Kathë, the second-in-command of the Brotherhood, and another male. This third being stood nearly eight feet tall and had crimson wings that stretched another couple of feet above his head.

An angel of retribution.

Urian's pulse sped up. This was...complicated. An angel of retribution was just under the archangels in the heavenly hierarchy.

The Brotherhood's grasp reached higher than any of them had suspected.

With a roar, Chuck sprinted forward, clawed hands outstretched. Kathë rushed toward them as well, his face dark with fury.

"Stay behind me," Urian told Hailey and met both creatures head-on. Fear for her safety and anger at the Brotherhood's meddling caused his adrenaline to surge, which increased his strength.

Even so, he was outmatched and he knew it. Dodging a blow from one of the gargoyle's enormous fists, he rolled head over heels and jumped back to his feet. But he didn't move fast enough to dodge Kathë's fist to his back, just above his right kidney. The hit knocked him down on one knee. He heard Hailey's cry of dismay and looked up at her.

She'd also drawn Kathë's attention. Even as Urian struggled to his feet, he saw the dark elf stalking toward Hailey.

God. Urian had to get her out of here, and now. "*Blahna prôtke morah!*" The words he uttered opened a portal directly to his father's rooms. "Go!" He threw up an arm to block another strike from Chuck. The blow from the stone creature broke his arm. Clenching his teeth against the pain, Urian shouted, "Get the hell back to Hell!"

"I can't leave you." Even as she said the words, she was backing toward the portal, away from the red-capped elf and the tall, winged creature moving toward her from opposite sides.

Urian's blood ran cold as he realized the gargoyle was keeping him occupied so the other two could get to Hailey. A fist to his jaw from Chuck sent him sprawling to the floor. His face felt numb, and blood dripped down his chin from a split lip. Another strike from the massive fist cleaved open his cheek and knocked him flat.

She had to get out of here or they were both dead. Better him than her. "Go now, Hailey."

He struggled to his feet. Chuck snarled and slammed his fist down, striking Urian on his right eyebrow. He heard the crunch of bone as it fractured, felt blood begin to stream over and into his eye.

Hailey screamed. Picking up an iron bar lying on the floor, she dodged past Kathë and headed straight toward Chuck. Swinging the bar like a baseball bat, she slammed the metal rod across the gargoyle's lower back.

Metal against unforgiving stone was the same as an unmovable object meeting an irresistible force. The iron bar snapped back and smacked Hailey on the shoulder, and she cried out.

Urian tried to get up and Chuck put one huge foot on his back, keeping him down.

"Behind you!" Urian struggled beneath the gargoyle's hold but couldn't break free. The more he tried, the harder Chuck stepped down, until Urian thought his back would break. Pain streaked through his entire body like flames fanned by a phantom hand.

Hailey ducked the outstretched arms of the angel. The movement brought her closer to Chuck. As the gargoyle also reached for her, Urian renewed his struggles. He couldn't hold back a cry of pain as bones along his spine splintered.

Spots danced along the edge of his vision. Urian knew it was only a matter of time before he blacked out. Agony streaked anew and he cried out again. The sound garnered Chuck's attention for a second or two, which was all the time Urian needed.

"Get out of here," he begged Hailey. The pain was so acute he could barely breathe. "For me. Go."

She must have realized how useless it was to keep fighting. She held his gaze for a split second, then turned and rammed the iron rod into the angel's stomach. The unexpected move caused the tall being to double over, giving her room to make it to the portal. Turning as she reached it, her gaze liquid with tears, she mouthed, "I love you," and stepped backward through the portal.

It closed behind her just as the angel reached out for her. The being swung around, the snarl on his face turning it from something unusually beautiful to something completely feral.

"I sent her directly to Lucifer's quarters. Go ahead," Urian muttered, shaking his head to try to get the blood out of his eyes, clenching his jaw against the pain. "Open another portal. Follow her."

"And get ourselves microwaved? You know we can't teleport directly to his suite." Kathë slammed his booted foot into Urian's side. "So I don't think so."

"Sending her away was a big mistake, my friend," Chuck muttered. He fisted his hands in Urian's t-shirt and pulled him to his feet, grinning at Urian's shout of pain. "Xerxes ain't happy now. And when our leader ain't happy, ain't nobody happy."

Xerxes? There was only one angel of retribution by that name that Urian knew of, and that was Xerxes Jasun. There'd been rumors that he'd defected, but nothing concrete had come to the fore other than that the angel was no longer working in the Angel Division.

So Jasun was the leader of the Brotherhood. From the look on his face, he was determined that Urian wouldn't have a chance to tell anyone what he'd discovered.

Urian kept his head up with an effort and blinked back the blood that dripped into his right eye. Knowing Hailey would be safe, he could accept whatever his fate might be.

* * * * *

As soon as the portal closed behind her, Hailey turned to get help from someone—*anyone*—and bumped into something hard and immovable. Hands came out to steady her and she looked up into the face of the man who'd been running toward her when she'd leapt through the portal the first time.

"Where's my son?" he growled, his hands tightening on her upper arms.

Her heart skipped a beat. This was Lucifer. Satan. The Devil. God's arch enemy. "Oh my God," she moaned. His face went out of focus and her eyelids fluttered.

"Oh for crying out loud." Lucifer swept her up in his arms and carried her over to a plush chair. He plopped her down in it and, with one hand at the back of her neck, bent her over so her head was between her knees. "Take slow, deep breaths," he muttered.

She did as he instructed. Her head cleared and she started to sit up. He pushed her back down. She tried again, with the same result. The force of his hand on the back of her neck kept her hunched over. "I'm all right," she croaked, her throat tight due to her scrunched position. "Let me up." Remembering who she was dealing with, she added, "Please."

The hand left her nape. As soon as she straightened, he squatted in front of her, hands on the arms of the chair, effectively trapping her there. His black gaze burned into hers. "Now tell me where Urian is."

"They have him." Before he could ask, she described his son's captors. "A gargoyle named Chuck-something-or-other, a tall man with a red cap on his head and an angel with red wings."

"An angel of retribution," he murmured. "That makes sense, since a red claw marks someone upon whom judgment is to be visited." One dark brow shot up. "Where."

It wasn't a question. She shook her head, holding up her hands in confusion. "I'm not sure. It was...like a warehouse or something. All I saw was one big room and the smaller one where they held Urian."

"My son had to have been the one to open a portal into my private chambers," Lucifer mused, "otherwise you would have been nuked." He looked at her, orange-red flames beginning to flicker in his eyes. "What words did he use? Exactly."

Hailey was transfixed by his gaze. Swallowing hard, she finally looked down then closed her eyes, trying to remember the words Urian had used to open the portal.

God, what were they?

"Sorry," she muttered, afraid Lucifer would be offended she'd used God's name in his presence.

"For what?"

She frowned and glanced at him. "For thinking about God."

He tilted his head back with a sigh, briefly closing his eyes. "I'm not omniscient," he muttered, looking at her again. "Your thoughts are your own."

"Oh." She mulled that over. "That's good to know."

"What words did he use?" The deep tones were harsh with impatience.

Closing her eyes once more, she went back over the scene in the warehouse, trying to make it go in slow motion so she could hear the exact phrase Urian had used. God, if she mucked this up... Urian would die.

"Bologna...no. Potluck...no." Hailey squeezed her eyes tighter, as if that would help, and ran the scene over and over in her mind. She had a hard time blocking out the memory of Urian, his body broken and bleeding.

All of a sudden the words came to her. Her eyes shot open and she jumped up, nearly knocking the Father of All Lies on his ass. He straightened as she chanted the words she'd heard Urian use. "Blondie prootkah morah!"

Nothing happened.

She stared up into the red-black eyes of Urian's father. "That's what he said to open the portal, I'm sure of it." She shook her head. "I'm almost sure of it. I thought maybe it would work..."

Lucifer was shaking his head, though a wry grin curled his lips. "You have it almost right." A long-fingered hand came out and cupped her chin, tilting her face up. "I can see now why my son is so enamored. I certainly understand why he was reluctant to come to the meeting earlier." He started to turn away but paused. "You *will* stay on this side of the portal this time," he said, his tone hard. "This won't take but a moment."

He held out one hand, and a ball of fire appeared, balanced on his palm. "You need to chant it backward," he told her, then intoned, "*Morah prôtke blahna.*" The air swirled, and a portal eased open, showing the room she had left only moments before. Lucifer gave her one last look. "Stay," he said and jumped through the opening.

"Stay," she muttered, crossing her arms over her chest. "Like I'm some kind of mutt."

But she stayed and she waited. And paced. And waited some more. And paced. She chewed on her thumbnail, hardly cognizant of her surroundings but aware enough to appreciate she was in the living room of *the Devil*.

As long as he brought Urian back safely, she'd have no problems with him. She hoped.

Finally, after what seemed like hours, but was in reality probably less than ten minutes, another portal opened. She took a few steps back, her heart pounding – what if it wasn't Urian and his father?

When they both stepped through, the relief made her knees weak. She saw how Lucifer had to support his son, saw the blood on Urian's face and staining his once-

white t-shirt and rushed over to them. "Oh God, Urian." She glanced at Lucifer with worry. "What else did they do to him?"

"Nothing that won't be fixed," Lucifer assured her. Before her eyes, Urian's wounds healed, his clothing was repaired to its original pristine condition and she remembered what he'd said about the portals.

Dry cleaners, indeed.

"But he still needs rest." Lucifer helped him into the bedroom and eased him down onto a wide bed.

Hailey sat by Urian's side and brushed silken hair away from his face. "I didn't want to leave you," she whispered. A tear slid down her cheek and she impatiently wiped it away. "But I thought I could get help for you, someone who could fight them better than me."

"You did exactly the right thing." Lucifer pressed his hand to the top of Urian's head. "I'll leave you in this young woman's most capable hands, my son. I have a report to make and it's one better done in person. While I know our Great King is already aware of what has just transpired, I still must tell him that one of his angels of retribution is leading the Brotherhood." He patted Hailey's shoulder, much like a doting father would, and said a few words. Another portal opened and he stepped through without a backward glance.

She blinked. This was all so surreal. These beings used magic to make portals to travel from place to place, yet they relied on what she thought of as human technology, like an intercom system, to communicate with each other.

"You look a bit shell-shocked," Urian murmured.

Hailey gave a short laugh. "I feel shell-shocked." She waved, a vague gesture that encompassed the room. "I've had sex with a demon—the son of Satan, no less—and just got a pat on the head from the Devil himself. Who, if I'm not mistaken, is on his way to talk to God." She shook her head. "I think I have a right to be a little shocked, don't you?"

"Absolutely." He studied her. "Can you take more?"

"More what?" She tilted her head to one side. "More shock?" At his nod, she said, "It depends on what it is."

"Just this. I love you." His dark gaze studied her closely.

Her breath hitched. The first flare of giddy joy sent a smile to her face. But reality soon smacked her upside the head and the smile faded. It would never work.

"What is it?" He pulled himself to a sitting position against the massive ironwork headboard.

"We're so different, Urian," she said with a sigh. "I'm human and...you're not. You're..." She trailed off.

"A demon," he finished. He took her hand in his and brought it to his mouth, pressing a kiss in the palm.

She quivered at the tender gesture.

"But I can—and *do*—love. That surely has to mean something."

"Of course it does," she rushed to assure him. "But...where would we live?" Standing, she paced a few feet away and glanced around the room. While the furnishings were opulent, the walls were stone. It was like being in a cave. "I just don't see myself giving up my house, my job, to live, well, in Hell."

A grin crooked his mouth. "You won't have to. I can live anywhere. Hell is just where I work."

She closed her eyes briefly, shaking her head. *Hell is just where I work*. She gave up and accepted the fact that she'd be living a Salvador Dali life from now on.

"We can make it work, sweetheart." Urian shifted until his legs hung over the edge of the bed, his feet on the floor. "Dad's been after me to take a management position for years. Since I don't see myself doing field work as an incubus anymore—"

"You got *that* right," she muttered with a frown, not liking for a minute the idea that he'd be visiting other women in their dreams and drawing on their sexual energy. Nope, this guy had better be a one-woman demon from now on.

He grinned again. "I'll sit behind a desk if that's what it takes to make us work." He waggled his eyebrows. "Besides, with my connections, just think of the Halloween parties you could throw."

"Speaking of that..." Hailey put one finger to her lips. "I have one to go to tonight, you know. Think your dad would come? He'd be the hit of the party. Would you ask him?"

"Maybe if *you* ask *me* nicely..." Urian waggled his eyebrows at her.

She laughed and threw her arms around his neck, knocking him back down onto the bed. They had things to work out—where they would live, how they would live—but she was confident they'd do it.

His lips touched hers, gently, almost reverently, and her worries faded. There would be bumps in the road, no doubt, but she was willing to face whatever the future held.

Epilogue

Lucifer waited for Yahweh's response to his report, trying to hide his impatience. After thousands of years of this, it got a little tiring to chase his tail, so to speak, when the Great King already knew what had happened.

Never mind all that nonsense about free will. Sometimes he thought Yahweh just liked to remind him of his place.

"And you have a problem with that?" the deep voice boomed.

"It's your prerogative, of course," Lucifer muttered, not directly answering the question. What would be the point, anyway? Yahweh already knew. "What do you want us to do?" Lucifer asked. "Now that we know who the leader of the Brotherhood is."

The need for revenge for what was done to his son was overpowering. He wanted to wrap his hands around Xerxes' throat and squeeze until his eyeballs popped out. He wanted to rip his wings off him feather by feather. He wanted to tear his balls off and stuff them—

"I'm glad to see you have such strong love for your son," Yahweh said.

The bond of fatherhood gave them commonality, at least for now.

"There may be hope for you yet." A smile widened the Big Guy's mouth. "But leave Xerxes to Gabriel. From this point forward, the Brotherhood will be handled by the Angel Division." He started to leave the room but paused at the door. "Your son did well, Lucifer. Perhaps he's ready for a management job, after all."

If nothing else, this situation would encourage Urian to make the choice that Lucifer had been nagging him to make. "My thoughts exactly."

"I know." Yahweh turned back to him. "Oh, I have something here for your future daughter-in-law." He held out his hand.

Lucifer walked forward and took the small vial of bluish-green fluid from him. As he held it, the liquid changed color to a bright pink, then slid into violet. He looked up. "Are you sure?"

Lucifer shook his head. Of course He was sure. Yahweh merely gave him a wink, then laughed and walked away.

Lucifer opened a portal to his son's quarters and transported there. His son and the girl were gone, but Urian had left a note for him. As he read the note, a smile widened his mouth. A Halloween costume party.

How novel.

And he knew exactly what character he'd go as.

* * * * *

Hailey had just come out of the bathroom, fixing her vampire makeup yet again—really, Urian had to stop kissing her long enough so she could impress people with her costume—when she heard a strangely familiar noise from her bedroom. The door popped open and a dark-haired man walked from the room. He was dressed completely in red—red shirt, tight red pants, red boots and a red cape. Even his skin was red. He held a pitchfork in one hand and smoothed the other over a pointed goatee.

He even had two small red horns protruding from his forehead.

She knew Urian was behind her even before he spoke. "Hi, Dad. Glad you could make it."

Hailey shook her head. "You came dressed as the Devil."

"What?" Lucifer raised his eyebrows.

She took out her fake fangs. "I said, you came dressed as the Devil."

"But of course." He came forward and put his arm around her shoulders. "Great costume," he commented. "I can't have my son and future daughter-in-law put to

shame over a Halloween party.” He urged her forward and they followed Urian back to the living room. “Just point me where you want me and I’ll show you what a Halloween party’s all about.”

“Um...” A little shaken by him referring to her as his future daughter-in-law, she looked to Urian for help. If his father started poking her friends in the ass with that pitchfork she was going to have a lot of unhappy people on her hands. And Urian was going to have one unhappy vampire on *his* hands.

“He’ll behave,” Urian told her. “Won’t you?” He looked at Lucifer with one dark brow raised.

The father imitated the son. “Of course. But what’s a party without a little mayhem?” He turned started to walk away but paused. Digging into his front pocket, he pulled out a glass vial the length of his palm and handed it to Urian. Then he walked toward a trio of blondes. “I think I’ll just start over here.”

Hailey started after him, one hand outstretched, reaching for his cape. Urian snagged her from behind, wrapping both arms around her waist. She settled against him, her hands lightly gripping his wrists. She wasn’t so sure inviting him was a good idea, even if it was *her* idea.

“Let him be, sweetheart. He’s Lucifer—the life of the party.” Urian rocked against her, driving his growing erection against her buttocks. He pressed his mouth against her neck. “I’ve never made it with a vampire before.”

“You haven’t?” She leaned her head back against his shoulder and rubbed her ass against the hard wedge of his cock. “With as long as you’ve been around?”

“Humans give off the purest sex energy...well, after the Fae.” His mouth branded a line up her neck and lingered beneath her ear. “But I’m a one-woman demon from now on.” He moved his hands to her hips and spun her around. Flecks of fire danced in the depths of his dark eyes. “You’re the only one for me. Forever, if you’ll have me that long.”

"Forever?" She stared at him. "That's not possible, is it? Oh, I'll give you whatever time I have left, but I'm sure you won't be interested once my boobs are hanging to my knees and my teeth have all fallen out, while you're still a young, handsome studmuffin." She pushed back the despair that threatened at her words. As lighthearted as she tried to make them, they still burned like acid.

He grinned even as he shook his head. "But it doesn't have to be that way, sweetheart. Remember the Greek gods? They were human beings once. Until they got hold of some ambrosia."

Hailey could only gawk. "Greek gods?" she squawked. When one of her friends glanced her way, she toned it down. "The Greek gods are real too?"

He grimaced. "We don't talk about them too much. They got a little uppity and were banished. My point is," he said, talking over her curious sputters, "there *is* a way."

She glanced over her shoulder at Lucifer, who stood with each arm around a blonde and leaned in to whisper something in a third woman's ear. "Does he..."

"No."

Looking back at Urian, she saw him look up at the ceiling. She glanced up as well but saw nothing. Her eyebrows dipping, she looked back at him. His gaze once more went up.

She finally got it. "You mean...God?"

He grinned at the whispered awe in her tone. "Don't worry. He's done it before. I mean, since the Greeks."

"Who?" When he started to respond, she waved him off. "On second thought, don't tell me. I don't think I can take it right now." Her curiosity, however, was too strong. "Okay, maybe just one name."

"Does Marie Antoinette ring any bells?"

Her mouth opened in shock. "No way! Really?"

Urian grinned. "She hooked up with a resurrection demon. Which is why she still has her head." He opened his hand. Holding the vial his father had given him between forefinger and thumb, he said, "All you have to do is drink this, and you'll be as immortal as me." She must have looked doubtful, for he added, "No side effects, I promise. Trust me. Trust Him."

She took the vial and uncorked it. The liquid inside continually changed color, chasing through the rainbow. With one last look at Urian, she upended the tube and drank the fluid down. Moving the vial away from her mouth, she licked her lips. "Mmm. Tastes like mango."

His mouth covered hers, his tongue sweeping into her mouth. Drawing away, he murmured, "And you taste like heaven."

And as he proceeded to ruin her Halloween makeup again, Hailey found she didn't care. She'd just been given forever with the demon of her dreams.

About the Author

Sherrill Quinn grew up in Northeast Ohio on the southern edge of the snow belt. After sloshing through too many winters of ice and snow, she moved to southern Arizona where she's lived since 2000. After twenty years building a career in Human Resources, she went back to her early love of writing and started a second career in erotic romance in early 2005.

Sherrill welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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