

The book cover features a romantic illustration of a man and a woman in a close embrace, nearly kissing. The man is shirtless, and the woman is wearing a dark, low-cut top. The background is a deep red, decorated with golden swirls, snowflakes, and glowing particles, creating a festive holiday atmosphere. The publisher's name is at the top, the title and author's name are in the center, and the promotional text is at the bottom.

SAMHAIN publishing

Demon's Desire

Kim Knox

Holiday eBook Freebie

Make one New Year's resolution...and run with it *grin *

Demon's Desire

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Chilled December air swirled around her bare limbs and Lise Hansen cursed her scrap of a party dress. Varik Thayer had ruined another party and her New Year's Eve one at that. Varik, the bodyguard her too-rich father insisted shadow her because of *his* paranoia had become a blight on her social life. Trust her father to think that the only thing that could protect his daughter was a bloody demon.

Lise wrapped her arms around her body and continued her fast pace home down the empty side street. Her impossibly high heels clicked against the pavement, her feet burning, her calves aching from the stupid shoes. Frustration balled in her stomach, warming her against the cold.

She'd slipped out from her friend's party before the clocks had struck midnight, ignoring Varik's low, stern warning not to try to evade him. Spending any more time with him and she would've had to make a scene. Lise gritted her teeth. She could imagine the press having a fine time with shots of her slapping her bodyguard. Hell, maybe she should have. Maybe it was time she stopped being her father's obedient daughter, the one that never caused a scandal and affected his companies' share prices.

Her orders were always to behave in an appropriate manner. Lise snorted. "All right, New Year resolution: be *in*appropriate."

Something light touched the tip of her nose and Lise looked up. Brief flurries of snow whipped through the pale wash of the streetlamps and fluttered over the slate roofs of Victorian townhouses. A smile tugged at her mouth and with it a little piece of her anger broke away.

"You *like* snow?"

The deep, male voice behind her gave Lise a start, panicked adrenalin firing through her before she recognised it as belonging to Varik. Yes, he could even sour her simple joy in snow...and bring out the wasp in her. "Too cold for you? Would you melt? My father has a chalet in St Anton's. We should go. If you dislike snow, you'll loathe skiing."

His warm, completely irritating chuckle swept around her, driving the chill from the air. "Did you try the demanding princess routine with your other guards? Aggravated them into requesting reassignment to get away from you." She heard the smile in his voice and ignored the kick to her gut. Everything about Varik Thayer infuriated her.

“That won’t work with me.”

His coat dropped over her shoulders, the body-heated material burning against her icy skin. Heavy hands gripped her shoulders for an all-too-brief second. She shivered and fought the temptation to sink her arms into the sleeves. His scent wove through her, deep into her lungs, its intriguing mix of unknown spices a firm part of her life for six weeks.

“Why did you leave the party?”

Lise snorted and gave in to pushing her arms into the sleeves of his jacket anyway. She resumed her fast pace. Let him trail her. And it wasn’t as if he didn’t know why she’d left...and why her whole party season had been wrecked. Him. He’d soured every event. “Because you hung over me like some glowering monster and drove everyone away. As always.”

“Your father’s orders are that no man is to behave inappropriately towards you.”

Lise gritted her teeth. She hated this aspect of Varik, his calm professionalism, the hint of censure in his voice. That irked her more than anything. “It’s New Year’s Eve. You’re *supposed* to be inappropriate. I made a resolution to *be* inappropriate.”

She stopped and turned to glare at him, finding his face calm, but that glimmer of amusement still flickered in his coal-dark eyes. Shadows hung behind him and for a moment she would imagine the vast wings his kind were rumoured to have.

Her chest hollowed and she stopped herself from taking a nervous step back.

It was little wonder that none of the men at her friend’s New Year bash had come within ten feet of her. Varik looked like a human male, but he had a lithe hardness to him, a tangible strength and power that kicked her heart into a faster beat. A hint of a smile curved his mouth. And there was the dangerous hint of the predator lurking just under his skin, the one that had her stomach tight with nerves she didn’t want to explain.

Angered at herself, heat flared through her flesh and she cursed him. He knew how mad he made her. Lise was sure he secretly—and sometimes not so secretly—revelled in it. She lifted her chin. “All right, why don’t we do a deal? You’re a demon. And if I know my father, a high-ranking one. You can do deals, can’t you?”

Varik tilted his head and his sudden, intense focus on her tightened her gut. His prolonged silence had her nerves straining. “I’m listening.”

Lise almost blinked. Her question had come out of nowhere, born of her frustration and had no proper thought behind it. She cursed. What did she offer a

demon? Her father paid for demon protection for his senior executives and her, wards for his companies and the odd illegal hex for his rivals...but she'd never had much interest in magic.

She pushed at her memory. Demons were like long-tongued magpies and liked to collect shiny things, worked for humans to accumulate those baubles. Or so the rumours went.

"Would you like something bought for you?" Her gaze skirted over him. Varik was always immaculately dressed, though now melting dots of snow stained his smooth white shirt. He looked strange without his jacket... Lise pushed that distracting thought down. "I have access to my father's wealth. You stop playing bodyguard for the night and I'll give you whatever you want."

Something flashed in his dark eyes, almost a searing flare of fire, but then it was gone. Still, her skin prickled. He'd changed. The bodyguard, professional, wary had faded back and now she talked with the demon Varik.

"Whatever I want?"

The softness in his voice ran unease through her body and her fingers curled into fists. She had the sudden, stark reminder that she really was bargaining with a demon. "Within reason." Lise swallowed, her mouth dry. "My father is wealthier than Croesus, but there's a limit to the money I can access."

"You set the deal, Lise." He took a step closer and she willed herself not to turn and run. "I stop being your bodyguard for the night and you'll give me whatever I want." His predatory smile had her heart pounding. "You should have chosen your words much more carefully."

"What do you...?" Her words trailed away as his finger traced light over her lips.

"I want you. I always have."

Lise stared at him, stunned. "Me?" The word was little more than a squeak. He had to mean her soul. Did demons collect souls? Damn, she should've paid more attention to her otherworld history at school. "What use is my soul to you?"

Varik laughed and his...possessiveness...sank into her skin. "Who wants souls anymore?" His shark-bright smile had her belly in a tight knot and her breaths short. "Flesh is where the fun is."

"Flesh..." What he wanted hit her. It made no sense. She'd been rude, snotty, the all round jumped up little heir to a vast fortune, all in a bid to get him to resign like her other bodyguards because she wanted her own life, her freedom. A fist

tightened around her heart. Did he want his revenge now? "You want to," she waved a hand at him, at herself, "with me?"

He stood so close, the heat from his body warmed her, easing through the thin silk of her shift dress. "Don't deny you haven't wondered about what I'd be like. What we'd be like together. How I'd taste." Embers light his dark eyes and his voice dropped to a soft, compelling whisper. "Wondered about me in my true form."

The dark caress of his words teased her skin and swept unexpected need down through her flesh. Lise wanted to step away from him, but she couldn't. Something held her, kept her as his fingers tangled in her piled hair. She fought to put power, anger into her voice. "I have never *once* thought about you that...that way!"

"You haven't inherited your father's ability to twist the truth, Lise." His mouth hovered over hers, the sweet heat of his breath brushing her cold skin. Her heart clenched and she fisted her hands into his shirt, feeling the incredible warmth of his body through the smooth cotton. "Tell me you don't want to seal this bargain and I will honour your wish."

She should be sensible and grab at his offer...but the press of her body into his, his intoxicating scent, the thought of getting hot and sweaty and *naked* with him overrode all sense. Everything ached in her to close the short distance and taste his lips, tease the tip of her tongue against his. She closed her eyes, wanting to deny the truth. Yet, she couldn't. Her need for Varik had hidden under weeks of irrational anger. And that anger had opened her to him.

With her eyes still tightly closed and her heart hammering, her tongue traced his bottom lip. Varik hissed and a rush of warm air beat around her. Dark shadow thickened, forcing Lise to open her eyes. Wings, vast, beautiful blocked the streetlamp, its glow edging the glossy black feathers in a soft gold.

Lise sucked in a nervous breath and Varik's palm pressed against her waist, sliding down over the soft silk to her hip. His wings shrouded them in a soft rush of sound, long feathers folding in the gentlest caress against her spine.

Varik sighed and his hand on her hip teased the silk up, his fingers soon finding bare skin. "My brothers said you were delicious," he murmured against her mouth. "They ached for a taste of your skin; a taste of all of you. But they couldn't. I didn't allow it." His first kiss, light, exploring and the heat of his curious tongue had her head spinning. She couldn't help the little moan that escaped her. "Not what you expected from a demon?"

"No." But she didn't care. Need pulsed through her body, a hot liquid ache

growing tight in her belly. With the hindrance of her conscientious bodyguards, she hadn't had sex in too long a time. His words punctured her dazed brain. "Your brothers?"

Varik's fingers traced lazy patterns against her cheek, teasing between the cleft. Her thong simply...dissolved...and she gasped. The cover of his wings pushed his face into shadow, but she could still make out the gleam of his sharp smile and his ember-lit eyes. "Demon magic," he murmured. His fingers dipped into her flesh, teasing little touches that fired under her skin. "Your former guards. They were lower members of my clan, hand picked by me."

"Picked by you?" Focusing on the question faded as his fingers chased down from her hair, lingered tantalisingly over her breast, then dropped lower to curve around her backside. Varik lifted her with an easy strength and she yelped, grabbing at his shoulders, her legs wrapping around his hips. It brought her mouth level with his. "What for?"

"Carl Hansen's daughter." He shifted his hips, bringing her into intimate contact with his erection. He groaned and his fingers dug into her flesh. "Rumours of you intrigued me."

"Why?"

"Beautiful. Rich. Heiress. Three words to entice a demon."

She couldn't help the smile. "So shallow." But it faded as his clever, clever fingers teased her damp flesh again, finding her clitoris and sparking hot need. Yes, and now there was far too much talking. With a low moan, she met Varik's mouth.

His tongue stroked deep and possessive and Lise forgot about his schemes. Didn't care, as his palm slid under the silk of her dress to chase her spine and exposed her skin to the tantalising brush of his wings. Lise arched into him, her fingers threading through the thickness of his hair, driving her mouth hard against his. Fire chased through her veins and she couldn't deny herself more of him. Her bargain had been for the night. She didn't intend to waste a second.

The smooth heat of his cock pushing against her wet flesh broke her mouth from his. Their clothes had evaporated and the press of her breasts into the hardness of his chest, her hot, naked skin against his filled her with the need to sink down on him, ride him. "More demon magic?" Her question was little more than a gasp.

"Yes." Varik's growl had her flesh tight and the first flickers of orgasm shortened her breaths. "Let me have you, Lise."

The head of his cock teased her, had her aching, desperate. "We're in the street..."

"My wings mask us. No one can see." His mouth found her shoulder, nipping at her bare skin. "You taste..." The cool brush of his long flight feathers against her burning spine elicited a moan and her thighs tightened, pushing her hard against his cock. Heat surged and the brief, brief flare of ecstasy forced a groan.

Varik muttered harsh words in an unknown language. "You want me?"

"You're asking?" Lise sank down, the tightness of her body fighting him, her fingers biting into his muscled back. She groaned at the first thrust of his hips and found his mouth again, their tongues, teeth, lips clashing in a wild kiss.

His wings wrapped tight around them, a soft blanket holding her, pressing her to the incredible heat of his body, down feathers brushing against her too sensitive skin. Lise clung to him as he stroked hard, deep into her body and his mouth devoured hers. Stars danced behind her crushed eyelids and her spine arched, fire and need rising in a tight vortex up, up, until...

A surge of white heat smashed over her, her release tearing through her flesh in a fierce rush. Varik swallowed her strangled cry as he continued to thrust into her trembling, damp body. He pulled his mouth free and buried his face in her neck. He stroked into her faster, harder and his mouth nipped, bit at her skin, the little points of pleasure-pain sending scorching aftershocks into her flesh.

Lise's body flared with his as he came, his long, low growl vibrating through her, his arms, wings crushing her to him. She felt his smile against her skin and it echoed her own. Varik pulled in a deep breath and pushed it out again in soft laughter.

"Delicious, indeed," he murmured.

His arms eased their ferocious hold and Lise breathed easier. She pressed absent, dazed kisses along his collarbone. He tasted of spice, a hint of cedar and something quite bitter that pricked her tongue. She closed her eyes and buried her face in his neck, breathing him in. What had she just done? She almost snorted. She'd obviously just had sex, with her bodyguard, in the street.

The muffled sound of bells and people spilling out onto the streets to sing 'Auld Lang Syne' with drunken enthusiasm pulled a heavy sigh from her. Her fun with her demon was over. She'd sealed the bargain and bought time away from him. Time she suddenly didn't want.

Lise placed a final kiss on his mouth, trying not to linger, to tease the chaste kiss

into something deeper. She gave him a quick, bright smile. "A very inappropriate start to the new year."

"Very." Cool air spiralled over her legs, spine and Varik eased from her body. He stroked a warm hand over bare thigh, pushing her down from his hip. "And time we dressed."

Lise expected the icy touch of the pavement on her bare feet, but her heels clicked against the stone and her silk dress dropped down over her thighs in a soft rush. Varik's jacket hung heavy across her shoulders. He'd even replaced her thong.

The warmth and protection of Varik's wings drew back and for a moment, the streetlight washed pale light over his perfection. The lithe hardness of his naked body contrasted with the delicate beauty of his incredible wings. Lise held back a sigh and watched as a swift rush of cool magic replaced his clothes.

Varik tilted his head. "Should we return to Anabella's party?"

He was honouring her deal and she should grab at the chance of a free night away from him. Her stomach tightened. She didn't want to walk away from him...but she had to. Lise glanced back to the main road and watched a line of drunken people dancing, their laughter too shrill. "I'll go home."

She turned and began a quick walk down the street to her home. Her warmed breath puffed out into the cold air and the rapid click of her heels echoed over the silent road. It took her mind off the sour taste of regret filling her thoughts...but not for long. Snowflakes drifted, some of sticking and melting against her shoulders and she let out a slow sigh. She'd strained her relationship with him...and now that he'd had what he wanted—namely her—would he reassign himself?

It surprised her when Varik fell into step beside her. "Aren't there some demon parties for you to go to?" she asked.

He gave her one of his wry smiles and her stomach did a dangerous little flip-flop. "Nothing pressing."

No, she couldn't become attached to him, everything about it was wrong. "But you're off duty right now."

"Yes, thank you for that."

Lise's gaze narrowed on him. "So why are you following me." She waved a hand to the end of the exclusive street. "I live about ten doors along. I'm quite safe." Varik's soft laughter had her stopping and glaring at him. "What?"

“You have no idea what deal you made, have you?”

“I gave you what you wanted for this night.”

His finger stroked her jaw and she shivered, his warm touch heating her icy skin. “No. You gave me so much more than that, Lise Hansen.” He pulled a gentle kiss from her mouth. “*‘You stop playing bodyguard for the night and I’ll give you whatever you want.’* At night, I’m no longer your bodyguard and so the code of protection doesn’t bind me. The code that says I must not touch you.” He smiled. “With demons, Lise, you must learn to pin down every word. I’ve been generous. *‘Whatever I want’* could open you up to anything I desire.” His smile became something dark, dangerous and her heart squeezed. She tried not to think about where his demon nature could lead her. “But what I want, and have always wanted, is you.”

She gave him a sharp smile. “For my money.”

“Maybe.” He teased a loose strand of her hair behind her ear. Leaning close, his lips brushed her skin. “Maybe not. We shall see.”

Lise shivered, trying to deny the tingle coursing down her neck. She stepped back from him. What did Varik want from her? “So you planned for your...brothers...to irritate me so I would break this code of protection? Do a deal with you?”

His eyes held hers, the edge of fire burning in their darkness. “In the end, do you object?”

Lise didn’t know what she thought as conflicting emotion had her nerves straining. He was yet someone else trying to manipulate her life, but... She stared up and watched the flurries of snow fall towards her. As always, it lifted her heart and for the first time in too long, she felt peaceful, happy. And, strange as it was, that had a lot to do with the demon silently watching her.

She’d made a New Year’s resolution to be inappropriate. What could be more inappropriate—and incredibly right—than starting a relationship with Varik? Her breath steamed as she turned to look at him. “No, I don’t object,” she said and a smile curved her mouth. “Of course, I’ll need to hammer out more of those fine details. I have to pin down every word.”

Varik frowned but his eyes gleamed. “Really?”

Lise put out her hand, and Varik enclosed it in his, lacing his fingers through hers. She gave a squeeze and smirked at him. “Maybe I’ll just pin *you* down instead.”

“More of your plan to be shocking this year?”

She lifted an eyebrow and turned his words back on him. “Do *you* object?”

“To you shocking me? Not at all.” Varik tugged her forward and set a steady pace down the street. He flicked a glance at her and the dark promise in his eyes had her flesh tight. “And you only have three hundred and sixty five nights left in which to do it.”

Lise grinned at him and walked faster. “I love New Year resolutions.”

Author Biography

When I write as Kim Knox, I explore my love of history and myths and take great pleasure in mixing the essence of past events into fantasy, along with the essential a mix of magic and sex. I also write science fiction romance, pushing out into the future with effortlessly sexy men and the women who can't resist them.

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