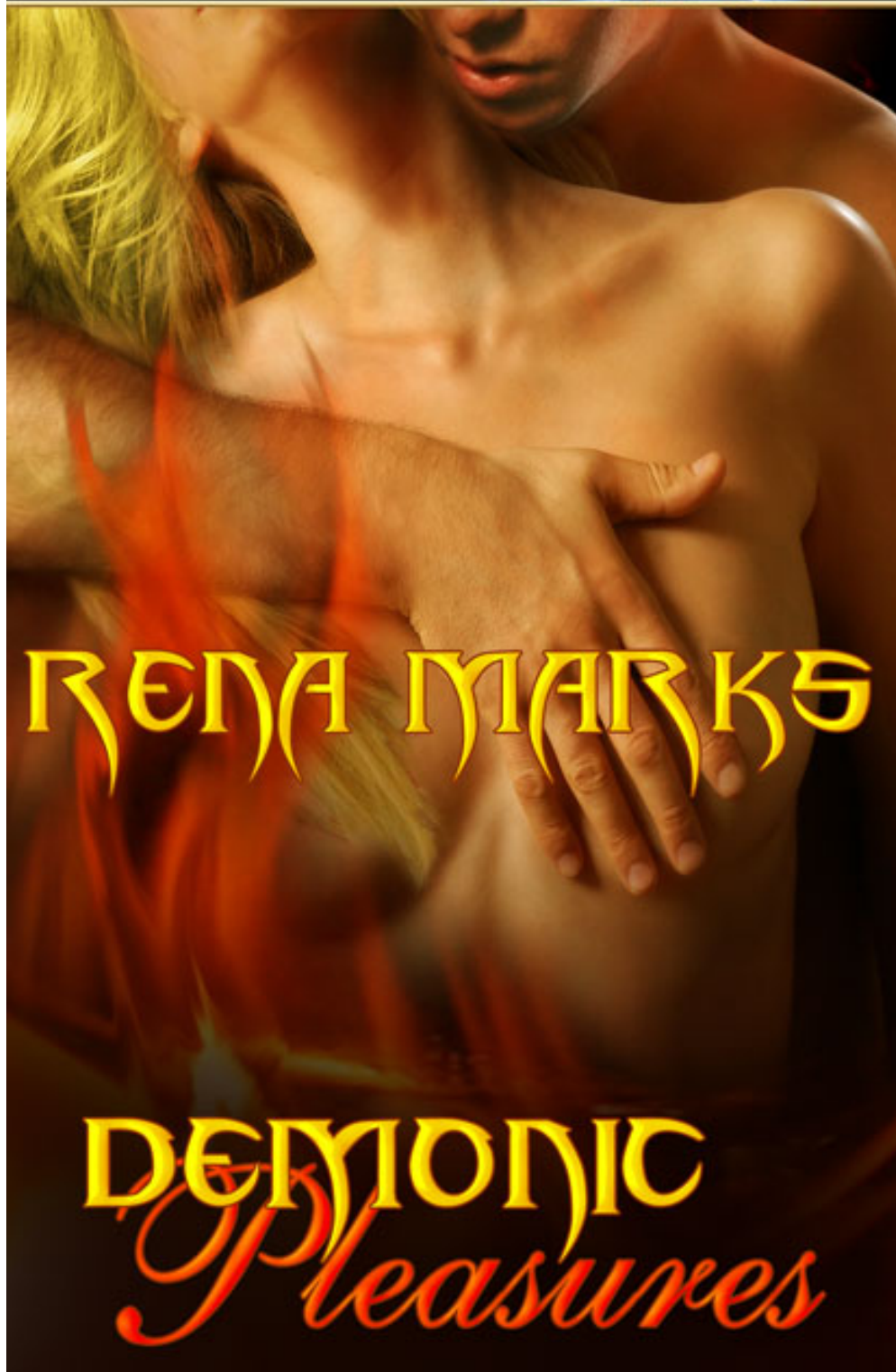


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



RENA MARKS

DEMONIC
Pleasures

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Demonic Pleasures

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DEMONIC PLEASURES

Rena Marks

Dedication

To Laura, who's not into vampires.

Trademarks Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Barbie: Mattel, Inc.

Glossary

Luciefyore (Loosh fyoree) – The demon dimension

Luciekynokus (Loosh Kyin ah kiss) – A prestigious all-girl demon school

Yanka (yanka) – Title of respect for a teacher used before their actual name

Horntréau (horn tré) – A demon race. Jenesi (Keara) is the last of the line and she's diluted with human blood.

Natalya Hershkle (Hersh lee) – Full-blooded demon known as The Huntress, appointed to rule Luciefyore for Keara who wanted to live in the Earth dimension.

Prologue

Natalya was on her back, legs wrapped tightly around the hips of the human male who was thrusting deep into her.

"I'm coming," he muttered, voice husky.

She smiled. "Mmm. Fuck me harder, lover."

It tossed him over the edge, his hips bucking wildly into her as his climax hit, spewing hot semen from the tip of his cock.

He collapsed onto the luscious woman, her sexy breasts pushing into his chest.

Natalya somehow reminded him of Keara. She was blonde while Keara was midnight but each had large blue eyes and even larger perfect breasts. Round sweet globes tipped with rosy pink nipples. Hard nipples, always poking stiffly. For him.

Sweet pussies, swollen and hot and wet, shaved smooth underneath.

He'd met Natalya in a bar tonight and she sought him out above all others. It did his ego good to be so wanted. Especially after his wife left him and Keara refused to take him back.

When Dean looked up again, Natalya had horns.

"What the fuck?"

He tried to pull his dick from her but it was gripped tightly within her passage. And then it began to burn, as if her juices were acidic.

Again and again he tried to pull out, to no avail. All his panicked mind could think of was washing off his cock.

"You're welcome, Keara," Natalya said to no one in particular but looking into Dean's eyes. "You'll be impotent with anyone but me," she told him. "And soon, you'll be headed for our dimension, won't you, sweetie? By the way, *I'm The Huntress.*"

Chapter One

The Punishment

Natalya Hershkle had a hard time not staring at her image ever since she'd been dehorned.

Not that she always wore her horns but knowing they were gone made her feel as naked as a newborn. Exposed. Maybe even vulnerable. Which was not acceptable for the recent ruler of Luciefyiore.

She sat in the quiet coffee shop waiting to meet Keara, the original bitch from hell. Technically, her boss. As the demon queen, Keara had appointed her as ruler. But Natalya shouldn't have chosen the small seat by the window because her eyes kept straying to her own reflection.

"Well, well, who's the human sitting alone in a coffee shop? Oh, sorry, didn't recognize you."

Natalya whipped her head from the glass to see Keara, huge with a human mixed-breed brat in her belly. "Cow."

"Cow with horns, baby," was the queen's response.

Natalya mumbled under her breath, low enough that Keara couldn't actually hear.

"You know, Talya, they had to dehorn you. It's the only way your power could be reversed."

"So I got a little carried away..."

Keara snapped. "A little carried away? You have a powerful gift. To cause impotence with any male who mates with you. You took over all of Luciefyiore."

"It was the tiniest fantasy..."

Keara looked incredulous. "Fantasy? That every man in our dimension could worship only you?"

“Well, geez.” Natalya squirmed uncomfortably. “It’s not like I ask you about your hidden desires.”

“How the hell is Luciefyore supposed to continue if everyone is impotent? What happens to the demon dimension when no one is able to breed? It becomes a world of lesbians?”

Natalya shrugged sullenly. It wasn’t something she’d actually thought about. “I don’t know. It’s not like I meant to do it.”

“I guess we could have just invited a bunch of humans in to make us a half-breed community.”

That got Natalya’s attention. She turned horrified eyes to Keara. “You’re kidding, right? That’s disgusting.”

Keara cleared her throat. “Need I remind you your queen’s a half-breed?”

“That’s different. You were at least raised with us.”

The queen’s voice was still somewhat cold. “My child is mixed-breed.”

“And I’m sure it’ll be cute, even all toothless with a round head,” Natalya patronized.

Keara’s eyes glowed slightly, a bluish tint that was always unnerving. “I want you to serve your time and clear up your mess quickly. I have to rule Luciefyore during your banishment to Earth and I don’t want to be stuck there long enough that my child is born there. Got it?”

Carrying the little parasite obviously made her crabby.

“So I don’t have a set amount of time here?”

“You’re banished to this dimension until you cause unselfish love without the use of demonic powers. Learn quickly. You can stay in our house since Caleb and I will be cleaning up your mess in Luciefyore.”

“Thank you,” Natalya murmured meekly, for she had no other choice in the matter.

“Here’s the key. Caleb’s waiting, we’re heading straight there.”

Natalya walked the short distance toward Keara's house. She passed the train station and looked with interest at the scrambling humans hauling suitcases to and fro.

Lord, they were ugly. It was rare to find a handsome human, only then were they trainable. To service her demonic pleasures, of course.

The consequences of punishment—to be stripped of one's horns—was humiliating enough. Like going naked in public. Not to mention dangerous, since one's power originated from their horns. But to be banished to hell, er, Earth until she could earn passage back by causing unselfish love? Bah, nearly impossible. The scrambling humans were so unattractive, wimpy with no inner powers. No sexy horns, making their heads look like round volleyballs sitting on their shoulders.

And the babies! They were horrifying—toothless, with their huge heads and...ick, bald. No demon babies were ever born bald. They usually had a head full of hair the length of their bodies. A personal comfort blanket. Not those humans.

It would take her powers to get the ugly creatures to fall in love but she had none without her horns, dammit.

It's not like she meant to cause every man out there to become hers. She wasn't stupid, after all. She just bored easily and lost track of how many she had in her harem. On top of it all, Keara had quite a lot of nerve to threaten her. Being so humanly pregnant—which was disgusting on its own for in their dimension demons hatched from eggs—but the high and mighty Miss didn't want her precious mixed-breed born in Luciefyore.

The good news was Natalya would be held in awe when she returned to Luciefyore. Demons had always thought of the Earth dimension as hell. She would be considered much more powerful for sustaining such a torturous banishment here.

She scanned the street before her. What little humans looked desperate for love? An older woman sat on a bench, handbag beside her. She was as ugly as a stump and

looked as though she hadn't been laid in decades. Hell, she probably couldn't even hold her bladder. Natalya sat down next to her.

The old shrew grabbed her bag protectively and scooted farther down the bench.

Natalya sighed and moved closer to her. "Old woman, you look like you need a man."

"Hmmp. You look like you need one yourself, hussy."

Natalya inspected her nails magnanimously. "These males are beneath me. However, at your age I'm sure you're not as picky."

"Well, I don't need me no man, see? What do I need some old geezer for? They can't cook, they can't clean and I don't want some old fart trying to stuff his dirty old dough into me. I got me my pride, you know."

"Did you just say his dirty old dough? Is that what I think it means?"

"You got it, sister. Now scoot, you're getting on my nerves."

"You don't have many friends, do you?"

"I don't need me no friends. Bunch of users. Get lost."

"Shrew."

"Slut."

With that, the old hunchback rose from the bench, leaving a trail of garlic mist in her wake.

"How the hell am I supposed to help the stupid creatures if they don't know they need help?" Natalya murmured under her breath. "And if they don't brush their teeth?"

"Excuse me?"

"Oh, nothing." She turned her head to the masculine voice and felt her mouth drop open.

Maybe the old shrew was right. She could use a man. And there was a truly amazing one right before her. He very nearly reminded her of a demon. His eyes were

brown with a golden tint that hinted at a glow should he get sexually aroused, his jaw was hair-roughened and she lowered her eyes to check out the swell in the tight jeans he wore.

Very acceptable.

She returned her gaze to his face, where he stood watching her with an almost amused smile. "Are you finished checking out my goods?"

For once in her life, Natalya Hershkle, Ruler of Luciefyiore and the queen's right hand, was almost embarrassed. Heat came to her face and her palms actually dampened. It was the strangeness of this dimension. Had to be. Why else would she feel like throwing up in front of a totally fine man?

Hu-man, she corrected herself. A disgusting breed only fit to service her as a sex slave. Well, along with any other man of any breed, her own dimension or this one.

"You have a very nice package," she told him with her nose in the air. "I'm curious as to what it contains. If I cared to stay here long enough, I'd find out. However, I'm staying with a...friend and don't know my number, so I can't give it to you."

"I didn't exactly ask for your number, princess."

"Of course not. But you would have," she assured. "However, I don't have time for a dalliance. I'm on a mission."

He raised his brows a fraction of an inch. Then cleared his throat. "Okay then. I'll leave you to your mission. Good luck to you."

"Thank you." She waved her hand airily. "Off you go." She then searched out more humans.

Problem was, should she look for the desperate ones? Ones that looked horny? The ugly ones? Would they be lonely? There were so many questions and no one to give her the answers. Besides, the strange yellow of the Earth's sun was fading so she'd best find Keara's house.

For back at home, things shifted at night. It wouldn't do to be caught in a strange place when it happened here.

Good thing she left. Since she was walking, it took longer than she could have imagined. She remembered the huge house, of course. Oddly enough, it looked much like her own back in Luciefyore.

She inserted the key into the lock and yawned. The door pushed open softly. It seemed eerily quiet at first and she realized she'd never been in a completely empty house.

Ever.

Not when she had so many studs to service her. There was always one or two hanging around and lately, well lately there had been many more than that awaiting their turn for her bed. More like fifteen or twenty.

Her house had gotten a bit crowded, that's for sure. By this same time back home, she probably would have had at least five or six orgasms and would be sitting down for dinner. Handfed.

Tonight she was tired from the dimensional hurling and guess what? She didn't have to eat dinner if she didn't want to. There'd be no one there to coax her to keep her strength up. To offer to prepare the finest delicacies.

She entered the master suite. It made the most sense to bunk there, since she'd been banished with nothing but the clothes on her back. She'd need to borrow Keara's. She stripped her own clothing from her body and slipped a soft, sheer nightgown over her head. Hell, it wouldn't fit Keara for a while anyway.

The cow.

She'd have to explore the house for a guest bathroom to find an extra toothbrush. She walked down the hallway from the double doors of the bedroom.

Jere couldn't believe his eyes. A blonde goddess, slinking half naked in a whisper of see-through fabric. He could see the pink of her stiff nipples poking through. And farther below, her puffy labia were clearly outlined.

He instantly hardened. His cock rose slowly to full attention at the sight of those luscious lips. She was riffling through a bathroom drawer and he followed quietly. She had the curviest ass he'd ever seen, like an upside down heart extending from her tiny waist. Smooth golden skin. Everywhere.

She must sunbathe completely nude. His heart raced as he wondered if she was tanned even lower.

Her pussy.

Wondered if she'd ever spread her legs on a beach, shaven smooth and let the sun kiss her nether lips. Felt them swell with the warmth of the sun's rays.

Dammit, he was horny. As usual. It was a curse he lived with daily.

"You! What are you doing here?" Instead of sounding panicked, she was annoyed. After all, she was The Huntress. Men were her snacks.

He leaned against the door frame, arms crossed. Watching her as though he had a right to.

"I'm checking out *your* goods now. Fair's fair."

"How'd you get in? Did you follow me?" It was at this moment that she missed those horns. They'd rise about now, strengthening her with an infusion of power the human could only wonder about.

He simply raised an eyebrow. "Follow you? Hardly. This is my...cousin's house. I arrived earlier and got the key from Keara's dad, Demitris."

Wow, this was hunky Caleb's cousin? The guy from the train station with the acceptable package? Speaking of his package, how did the man walk? Just like earlier,

he had a huge bulge in his jeans. But this time, he stared just as eagerly at her body. As he should, she was a beautiful woman. Fit for worship.

“How many inches do you have?”

He blinked. “Excuse me?”

“Your size. How big? It’s always so disappointing to get someone naked and see no reason to continue.”

“You’re kidding,” he said incredulously.

She looked puzzled. “Of course not. That’s never happened? You both get naked and see what a man calls average and it’s smaller than the length of your hand. I know, I know, size isn’t *supposed* to matter but it does, don’t you think? Sometimes a woman just needs to be filled.”

“You’re not from around here, are you?”

“No. Why?”

“You are absolutely the oddest woman I’ve ever met.”

“Why?”

“You’re standing here half naked, talking to me about my cock and don’t feel the slightest embarrassment.”

“I’m beautiful. Why should I be embarrassed?”

“You have no modesty.”

“Is that bad? Wait a minute. Are you trying to distract me from the question I asked you? How big you are?”

“No! I mean, I’m not comfortable measuring it for a complete stranger.”

“We wouldn’t be strangers after the act,” she assured him.

“I am not,” he growled, “measuring my cock.”

This woman completely baffled him. It was obvious she was a loon, yet she knew Caleb and Keara well enough to stay in their house. And crazy as she was, she turned him on like nobody's business.

It was beyond the constant state of arousal he always lived in. She was magnetic and demanding. Not at all what he was used to or even wanted.

Only what he craved.

"Fine, little human." She walked right past him as if he wasn't there.

"What do you mean by little?" he called out as she walked down the hall, completely missing out on the word *human*.

"You know exactly what I mean. Below average. Not worthy of me, Ruler of Luciefyore."

Jere felt sucker punched. Socked in the gut. His breath left his body before he snapped to his senses and followed her into the master bedroom.

"You're from the demon realm?"

"I rule in Keara's stead. While she follows her Earth destiny. Please, be gone. I'll need my beauty rest."

The woman certainly did think she was a queen.

"Princess, you're half naked and I can't decide if we should talk or do other things. Either way you fascinate me."

"Like I said, you're not worthy of my attentions."

He looked mildly irritated. "I'm not smaller than average."

"I still do not want you."

Obviously she believed he was a lesser man and didn't care to find out otherwise. He stepped toward her and watched her take a step away.

He stepped forward again, a stealthy hunter stalking his prey. She watched him with those icy blue eyes, the coloring of an angel yet the cunning of a demon. He was an inch from her, his breath mingling with hers.

One finger trailed over the thin material of her nightgown and traced the lightest circle around her nipple. It stiffened and reached for him as she hissed air deep into her lungs.

"Someday before I return, I'll allow you to please me," she whispered, her lips parted and moist.

There was silence for the briefest moment before he spoke. "One day, I'll allow *you.*"

And he was gone.

Chapter Two

The Suffering

Her eyes snapped open immediately. How the hell did anyone sleep with the Earth sun rising so damn early? And it was bright, not at all like the pale shade of the sun back home.

She was as uncomfortable as a train wreck. Her eyes watered from the light, her body was sore from the long walk yesterday and she felt painfully odd.

What was wrong? It was the strangest feeling, yearning and incomplete. Aching. Surprise hit her as she realized what was wrong.

She was unsatisfied.

She couldn't remember ever being unsatisfied. Not in her entire life. She groaned and tried to drown out the light with a pillow over her face. Nothing helped. Her swollen labia rubbed between her legs, so she reached out and grabbed a pair of lace panties and pulled them up, making a mental note to herself. Never go to bed without undies. Too sensual apparently, for a girl wakes up in the mood.

Sleep was elusive.

Her body had a mind of its own, her passage was silky and wet and she kept imagining a hunky man sliding his thick cock into her. Girth. There was nothing like girth.

Not just any man either. The one in the same house.

He'd make a fantastic lover, she was sure of it. He was strong and virile and at this moment, she could imagine kneeling before him, worshipping the length of his cock. Running her tongue along the underside. Sucking delicately on the head.

She flung off the wisp of panties and kicked them under the sheets.

He'd have a tiny bit of moisture at the hole of his cock. She'd lick it up, it'd be sweet like tasty honey.

She spread her legs, bending at the knees so everything was wide open. Her clit was swollen and hard under her finger.

He'd groan and begin to move his hips. She'd suck everything, his balls, his cock, until he'd beg her to let him come down her throat.

The more she swirled her fingers, the more juice she gathered, until they were soaked. She brought one up to her mouth and licked. The sheer eroticism of the act seized her body. She bucked her hips and came, rolling waves of lust just as strong as if someone trainable sucked at her cunt.

She panted for breath and enjoyed the tiny aftershocks that rolled through her body. Slowly she began to relax and clasped the pillow back over her eyes to drown out the dreadful morning light.

She lay quiet, trying to fall asleep again. For ten whole minutes.

And then the strange smell hit her. Gagging, she scrambled from the bed to head from her room to follow the ghastly odor.

The sexy human male she'd just fantasized about was clad in loose pajama bottoms and nothing else. He stood at the stove with a sizzling skillet, which emitted a foul stench that migrated throughout the entire house.

"Breakfast?" he asked.

"What the hell do you people eat?"

He grinned. "I know, I remember when Keara first came here. She'd wake up cranky too. Vegetarians, huh? This is bacon and eggs, princess. Get used to it. A man likes his meat."

"Bacon? And eggs? Like cannibals?"

"Cannibals?" He truly looked puzzled. "I don't follow."

She shook her head to clear it.

“Oh, you mean because of demon eggs?” He grinned again. “We eat chicken eggs here.”

“That’s right,” she mumbled under her breath. “I forget. You give birth to repulsive little parasites instead of hatching your young. And bacon? Is that the disgusting smell?”

He sniffed the air. “Disgusting? That smell makes your stomach growl.”

She covered her mouth with her hand. The thought of it made her want to dry heave. “What is it? More flesh?”

“Yup. Pig.”

Her eyes widened in disbelief. “Pig? The little pink creatures? You eat them?”

“So will you.”

“No way. I’ll starve first. They’re ugly. And pink.”

“Suit yourself, prima donna.”

The bastard turned his back to her and continued sizzling the smelly pink and white strips on the stove.

“What is your name and how long will you be in this residence?” she asked in her haughtiest voice.

“Jere Rousseau. I’m staying until Keara returns. She doesn’t want her father unprotected while she’s gone, so Caleb called me over to stay.”

Keara’s father? The ex-right hand of Enishka, the banished demon lord? The man had enough power to rule their dimension if he wanted. “Why in the world would Keara be worried about Demitris? He has the strength of an army.”

Jere shrugged. “Pregnancy hormones. That protective maternal gene kicks in.”

“Well, you can’t stay in the same house as me. Especially with those horrible odors you emit. You must leave.”

“Nope.”

“No? What do you mean?”

“Demitris gave me the key to stay here. Here I’ll remain.”

“Clearly, he didn’t know I was arriving when he gave you that key.”

“Maybe not. But why should I be inconvenienced? After all, I’m family.” The bastard gave another grin and slowly lowered his eyes to her exposed body.

As if.

Yet her traitorous flesh heated from the inside out. Nerve endings tingled, forgetting they’d had a very recent release.

However, Natalya Hershkle would not be ruled. Certainly not by a mortal.

“I’m not into humans,” she retorted and spun on her heel. Straight to her room, where she hurriedly showered and headed out to find the house of Demitris and Elizabeth.

Searching while not having horns was a problem. How did one do anything in this dimension without them? She had to lower herself to find the posh hotel where she’d stayed at once before when sent to this dimension. Enishka had a minion who owned the hotel. Through his help she’d be able to find Demitris’ home.

She didn’t walk this time. A taxi dropped her off at the hotel. She was sure Keara wouldn’t mind her using one of the little plastic cards in her office and signing her name carefully. *Keara Van Trump.*

Natalya walked to the front desk. “Hi,” she said brightly to the acne-covered kid who stood there. “Dave in?”

“He’s busy.”

Fine, she could wait a few minutes. She was patient.

A child scuttled past her. “Twick or tweek,” she hollered. “I’m practicing for Hollerween.”

Natalya pulled away enough so the chocolatey little fingers couldn’t touch her. And then she noticed them.

“Hey, little girl, you have *horns.*”

"My mommy bought me them."

"Where?"

"They're clip-ons, see?"

Barrettes. The stumpy little human wore barrettes clasped into her rat's nest.

"I really need those," Natalya murmured.

"Whatcha got?"

Natalya raised an imperious eyebrow. "You wish to trade something?"

"Yup."

"What is it you want?"

"I like your watch."

"Done." It was Keara's anyway. She unclasped the watch and handed it over.

The negotiations were quick. A pudgy hand unsnapped *one* barrette and handed it over. Natalya stared after the child in amazement. "The other?" she reminded.

"Oh, you want the two of them? What else you got then?"

"Why you little..."

"Mom!" the child screamed.

The tiniest little wave of a finger and the dirty child looked wide-eyed in amazement back at her. The spots where Natalya's horns once were actually tingled. She wondered if she had enough residual power for the smallest scare. "I could make your hair curl, little girl."

Instead of looking frightened, the child replied slyly. "I like curls."

"You do?"

Nodding, a little hand reached out to twist her own lock of hair, winding it around a fat finger. Talya concentrated on the scalp tingle and beneath the kid's touch, her hair spiraled into ringlets.

“Woa! Lady. Amazing. My name’s Karah. It’s been a pleasure doing bizzy-ness with you.” The other barrette was quickly handed over.

“Whatever.” Impatient now, Natalya headed back to the acne-covered desk clerk. “Okay,” she snapped. “I’m sure Dave’s not busy anymore.”

“Yeah,” he started, “but you can’t just walk in there—”

“Too late,” she tossed over her shoulder with a sweep of her blonde hair. She opened the door and walked through, closing it firmly behind her.

“Hi, Dave.”

His face paled in the presence of The Huntress. Of course, he didn’t know her horns were gone, he would just assume they were hidden. He also had no idea she hadn’t been sent by Enishka this time. Enishka was too vain to let his human minions know he’d been banished from Luciefyore.

“Wh-what can I do for you?”

“I need to find someone. A man, of course.” She grinned, the sexy smile that had no humor. And watched as he swallowed.

The phone on his desk began to shrill as if it were angry. It rang continuously while the idiot stared. “Go ahead,” she encouraged. “Take your phone call.”

He warily lifted the receiver as Talya fought the urge to laugh. Who did he think would be on the other side? Enishka himself?

She wandered around his office while he tried to act normally with his conversation. Behind him was a small hallway nook, complete with a mirror.

Natalya clipped her barrettes into her hair.

It was just like the old days. Although she knew the horns weren’t real, looking at them made her feel as if she still had all her powers. Sure it was an optical illusion but damn. She looked good. She stood a little bit straighter.

When she turned the corner to face Dave again, his eyes widened with fear. She fought the urge to laugh.

He hung up the phone.

"I need your help," she said.

"Anything, Huntress."

It was amazing what accessories accomplished in this world.

* * * * *

The taxi cab dropped her off at the house of Demitris. Natalya walked up the front steps. She knocked politely at the door, then bowed to one knee, waiting for the acknowledgement when it opened.

"Natalya?"

She raised her head. "Master."

"Not any longer. I'm human in this dimension. Well, as human as I can be." Demitris grinned at his own joke. In this dimension, he masked his true face to others but she saw his demon form.

"You'll always be my master."

"No, my dear. Anyway, come on in. Are those horns?"

She'd forgotten about the stumpy human's play toys. "Oh, um, yes."

"I thought my daughter said you'd been dehorned?"

"Well, yes," she squirmed. And then reached up to unsnap one.

Demitris stared, round eyed. "I don't want to know."

"It's best if you don't."

Once, she wouldn't have cared. Now she almost felt ashamed of herself. Fake horns, bartered for with a human child. The shame bordered on disgust that she got the shaft with the child. Practically a little con artist.

The little trampling.

Yes, almost felt ashamed of herself. This dimension had her all screwed up. She was aghast that she, *The Huntress*, would feel shame over anything.

How she longed to go home where the title still fit. Maybe at home, she'd be allowed to have horns. Surely there was some sort of magic spell to do it.

"What can I do for you, Natalya?" Demitris asked as he showed her inside.

"I seem to have inherited a problem. Keara left me her key during my banishment."

"Yes?" He gestured to a small seating area and she sat politely, taking care to cross her legs.

"To stay in her house. But it's inhabited by a human. A human is staying in Keara and Caleb's house. With me."

Realization dawned in his eyes. "Jere. I'm sorry, Natalya. But it is a rather large house, is it not?"

"Yes, it's a large house. It's still inconvenient."

"I'm sure it is, my dear. But Jere needs to stay there. There's a reason but I can't share it with you. Let's say he's in hiding and will be found in my home."

"Hiding? From what?"

"I really can't say. If you find it that abhorrent to stay in the same house as him, you are welcome to move into our guest room. But trust me, he's a good man. Honest and honorable."

Talya thought about it but Demitris' wife was a full-blooded human also. She'd just be trading one of them in for another.

"No," she sighed. "That's fine. I won't put you out. I'll deal with him myself."

* * * * *

Who was she really? The woman stirred him beyond belief. It wouldn't take long to wander through her stuff, to search for clues to the real her.

Jere slipped into her bedroom, as quiet as a mouse, aware that she wasn't home but still stealthy from years of habit. Faint scents of Keara and Caleb lingered but more powerful was the aroma of her.

Hot-blooded demon ruler, Natalya.

Innocence and lust. Sweet and sinful. Tenderness and passion.

His extra senses picked up the exact spot where she lay in the king-sized bed last night. The sweet aroma of her sexy skin lingered. Along with something else.

Her lacy panties. Scented with the rich smell of desire.

They'd been wet, creamed from her body. She'd flung them off sometime during the night. Wait, they were too wet. Was it this morning? His imagination ran wild. Did she separate her slim thighs and touch her slit with her long fingers? Did she moan as she spread her labia, found her clit and massaged herself to orgasm? Was it his face she pictured?

His cock was as hard as a rock. He released the snap of his jeans and felt his erection kiss the air. It was swollen purple with need and he gripped it tightly with one hand as he clenched her panties with the other.

Lace drenched with her essence.

His hand pumped the strength of his sensitive cock and pre-cum dripped from the tiny hole at the tip. He imagined her sweet mouth there, lapping the droplets of juice while her fingers spread apart her pussy for his view.

Did she lie on this bed last night with her nether lips flushed and excited, rolling her hips as she imagined him thrusting deep into her?

His hand stroked faster and with his other one, he cupped her panties around his tight balls. Knowing her intimate flesh had been against the very fabric excited him beyond belief.

Excited him even more to bring her wisp of panties up to inhale deeply.

His cock ached as he pumped harder. He was so close and her panties were rich with feminine desire. He needed his release, a massive rolling orgasm to satisfy his needs, if only for the moment.

His heart raced and he threw his head back and growled. His orgasm started deep in his balls and jerked free in great streams of cum.

* * * * *

Natalya slammed the front door, still irritated beyond belief. She went straight down the hallway to her room.

Something was different. Dammit, she felt like an amputee might, as though she could reach out with a missing limb. In this case, a vital limb. Her horns. They would have ascended about now and she would have found what was different.

But they were gone. Useless. She had nothing but the barrettes, a child's toy. This time tucked into her purse.

Nothing was amiss. Everything was exactly the way she'd left it earlier that morning.

Except for the scrap of black lace panties on top of her bed. Those had been under the covers.

Even without her horns, she knew. She knew who'd been in her room and what he'd been doing.

Her bedroom door slammed behind her as she headed down the hall screaming his name. He opened his door as she reached it.

"Yes?" he said casually. Eyes hard.

"You were in my room," she accused.

"Yes," he agreed.

It threw her for a loop. "What? You aren't going to deny it?"

"Why should I?"

"Because you have no business invading my territory."

"But you invaded mine. I was in the house first, remember?"

If she'd had horns, they would have extended about now. As it was, the best she could do was grit her teeth.

"Stay out of my room." At her commanding tone, he raised an eyebrow. "Please," she said sarcastically, knowing he'd insist on the word. Then she thought about it. "Why were you in there, anyway?"

He took a step closer to her, so close she could feel the heat radiate from his body. Smell the faint aftershave on his skin.

She wondered how that warm skin would feel bare against hers.

He leaned his face close to hers, almost touching her cheek but not quite. "I wanted to learn about you."

How she longed to stretch her neck and encourage him to kiss the outstretched tendon. Her voice was breathless when she replied. "What did you find out?"

"That you brought yourself to climax while you thought about me."

There was dead silence after his statement. For the briefest moment.

"You are somewhat pleasurable to masturbate to," she returned. No sense in denying it.

"Glad I could help out, honey." There it was. The tiniest tip of his tongue, tracing along her sensitive earlobe.

"Still, the pleasure was all mine," she reminded. And then thought about it. "Or was it yours also?" Her voice practically purred with pleasure. "Did you grow hard thinking about it? Did you touch yourself in return?"

"How could I not? With your scent there in the bed and with the image of your body nearly naked each time I've seen you."

"Did you rub yourself to completion, Jere?"

"With hard, sure strokes, sweetheart. Your scent in my nose."

She knew exactly what he was talking about. "You sniffed my panties?"

"The next time, I'll have my face pressed against your pussy, not a wisp of worthless fabric."

"Tell me more."

"I'll lick along the seam of your lips, over and over until you separate them for me."

The thought made her shiver. "Don't you have a girlfriend?"

"No."

"Amazingly built human like yourself? I find that hard to believe."

"Believe it. I'm single. What about you?"

"Me? I'm, well... I guess you could say... Well, I have a few men back at home. On Luciefiore."

"But not one is your boyfriend?"

Natalya squirmed. "Not exactly. They were my...servants."

"Servants? I asked if you were single and you tell me you have servants?"

"They were there to service my needs," she said meaningfully.

"Oh."

For the second time in her life, Natalya Hershkle felt ashamed of herself. "I prefer to be single," she told him. "I do. For if I weren't, my option would be Enishka, the demon lord."

"The same one that had Demitris and Elizabeth banished? Keara's first husband?"

Natalya nodded. "The one and only. So back to you, why are you single?"

She almost regretted the question when he stepped away from her. Taking his warmth with him.

"I guess you could say I've been a little bitter since my fiancée left me."

"Why'd she leave you?"

"I was sentenced to do time."

"Do time? What is that?"

“I was a convicted felon, princess.”

“Really?” So much made sense, the hardened look in his eye. The mistrust. Like a puppy that had been kicked from early on.

“Do you want her still?” she whispered.

“No.”

But if the fiancée hadn't left him, he wouldn't be bitter. And alone.

And some odd little hidden part of her wanted him to be happy. She reached out to his face and ran her thumb alongside his hair-roughened jaw. Traced the line to his lips. Smoothed his lower lip that jutted out slightly.

Felt it move as he whispered against her. “I thought you didn't want a human. That I don't turn you on.”

She sighed. “You turned me on from day one, Jere. Let's just go with the flow, have some fun. Okay?”

He brought his mouth closer to hers and she tasted him. Finally.

Their tongues meshed, slid alongside one another, alternating between seeking pleasure and tasting and giving satisfaction in return.

“What do you like?” she asked. He'd never know that she, Natalya Hershkle, had never asked a man that before. She was to be pleased, she'd never given it. Not in the past.

But she wanted to with him.

For once, she wanted to make someone else happy.

“I'd like you to do whatever you want, baby.”

Chapter Three

Sensual Pleasures

Well, if that wasn't opening up a whole lot of options. She lifted his shirt and ran her fingers over the warmth of his skin. Upward, until she reached his nipples. Small and flat.

She tried to undo his waistband. Her fingers were unpracticed.

"Having trouble?" he asked, a hint of amusement in his voice.

"You know, I don't think I've ever undressed anyone," she said, wonderment in her voice. Now that she thought about it, her minions serviced her already naked. According to her demands.

He unfastened his own button deftly. The smallest little movement. Pushed his jeans down his hips and over muscular thighs.

She took his hands and led him to his bed. He allowed her to push him onto his back and she feasted on the scene spread before her.

He was a luscious specimen. Smooth skin pulled taut over muscles. Perfect color, tanned to a toasted almond. She leaned over and licked a line from his navel up to his breastbone.

Saw the hardness in his boxers swell.

She used her tongue to taste a nipple and he shivered beneath her lick. She inserted a finger into the waistband of his boxers, lifted and let his rock-hard erection burst out.

It stood swollen and proud, veins protruding through the silky skin. Soon, very soon, that thick piece of male flesh would be plunging into her, hard and fast.

With one fingertip, she traced a vein. Followed it as far as she could and then traced the seam at his head. A small amount of moisture leaked from the tip, she swirled it over the engorged head.

His balls were quite satisfactory. Large and heavy, they should slap against her sensitive flesh nicely when he rode her.

She leaned between his spread legs and sucked one of his testicles into her mouth. She rolled the delicate sac with her tongue, vaguely hearing him hiss with pleasure.

Wrapping both hands around his massive rod, she licked the head of his cock. Twisting her hands up and down his length, she slowly sucked his head into her mouth, creating a vacuum.

“Holy shit,” he gasped.

She took his entire length in and then slowly let it back out. He began to buck his hips. She alternated between deep-throating him and sucking the head of his cock. He felt like concrete encased in warm silk and she knew he wouldn’t last long. He was engorged, so hard he’d shatter.

Hey, while he was this hard, she might as well see what it felt like deep inside her.

She quickly pulled off her panties and hiked her skirt up around her waist. Before he even looked up to see what she was doing, she impaled herself on him.

It was good.

Thick and completely filling. She began to ride him, up and down, wantonly. When he raised his head to look at her, she spread her lips for his view.

Saw the lust drift over his face when he watched his cock disappear into her hot pink sheath.

“I’m gonna come,” he warned.

She climbed off him and he made a small sound of protest. It stopped when she began to lick his cock clean of her juices.

“I can’t take this,” he said, flipping her onto her back and trapping her.

He sought out her lips, thrusting his tongue into her mouth as if he craved her taste.

“Mmm,” he growled.

“Like that?” she whispered, fully aware what taste lingered. The combination of them both.

But Jere was done with speech. His mouth locked to hers again, searching for something unfathomable in her soul.

He inserted a finger into her soaked pussy, feeling the heat that emanated from deep inside.

She moaned. If he knew how wonderful his plunging finger felt, he’d be impossible to deal with.

Soon she was filled with three fingers. In and out, stroking her sheath, widening her entrance, stretching her wonderfully. One thumb reached upward to press against her clitoris.

She was going wild. She was panting uncontrollably, making goddawful little grunting noises.

Yet she couldn’t help herself.

She wanted that huge, thick cock to replace those talented fingers. She was squirming, bucking her hips.

“Jere, give me more,” she demanded.

“Princess.”

Demands didn’t seem to work with this odd human male. How else was she to make it known what she wanted, craved?

Oh. The one little word she used earlier, albeit sarcastically.

“Please,” she begged. “Slide your cock in me.”

He gently bit the side of her neck and pulled his fingers out of her sheath to grip his swollen member at the base. He teased her with it, not doing anything more than rubbing the head of his cock against her lips. “Like it?” he asked, smearing her wetness up and down her swollen labia, which parted eagerly as if they wanted to swallow him.

She quickly swung her hips back against him, forcing the huge head of his cock in a mere couple of inches. Both groaned at the instant pleasure.

“Naughty girl,” he whispered against her throat. And then rammed in, right to the hilt. Slowly he pulled out, only to thrust in again. Again and again he rocked, filling her then releasing.

She clenched her vaginal muscles around him, gripping him tightly as he tried to pull out.

“You’re so tight,” he said, his voice strangled.

“Kegels,” she informed him. “Faithfully.”

He stared at her blankly for a second but then thankfully continued his passionate rhythm. Faster and faster he plunged, until she just couldn’t take it.

Her world exploded with him locked deeply within her. He ejaculated into her, still moving and groaning into her throat.

He was heavy and sweaty lying over her, catching his breath. But it felt good. She rubbed his lower back, massaging gently. He was warmth and strength.

She yawned against his neck.

Sometime later she woke up wrapped in his arms. He said something to which she mumbled a reply.

He left her curled up in bed, exhausted. She was vaguely aware of him pressing a kiss to her temple and of water running in the background.

Hours later, she awoke to darkness in the house. After a long hot shower in which water beat down upon sore muscles, she smiled into the mirror as she blow dried her hair. She felt good. Better than she usually did after sex. Why was that? It had been a while. And Jere was amazing. It must have been a fluke that they meshed so well.

He was, after all, human.

Normally that would have been fine. It wasn’t like humans didn’t service her. But that was the key.

Humans serviced *her*.

She'd never cared whether they reached their enjoyment or not. With Jere, she wanted to give him the utmost pleasure. What made him different?

It was this strange dimension that made her feel guilty for bartering with a sneaky little child. Made her feel guilty for having a harem. Made her feel guilty for thinking humans were beneath her. It had to be.

The mirror that she peered into wasn't quite right. It was growing dim inside. Natalya blinked to clear her eyes.

Her image was beginning to shift and distort. A hole was swirling in the center, like a beam of light.

The council.

The circle grew until it became the mirror and Natalya raised her hand out to touch it. The force pulled her into the swirling vortex, into another dimension.

A golden, glittering dimension. As usual, when the councilmembers met for business, they sat around a long table, all dressed in white robes with golden accents. The last time she'd been before them, it was to explain why there had been no eggs hatched in Luciefyore recently.

She still clung to the excuse that she wasn't aware of how big her harem had grown.

The bastards in charge had dehorned her to reverse the power of impotence over the males she'd acquired since her rule in Luciefyore. She still kept her original minions but like old toys they no longer held her interest. Especially since she was banished from home.

"Natalya Hershkle."

Natalya walked forth, stopping before the table where they all looked at her with their expressionless faces.

"How do you fare with your banishment?"

“Well, I haven’t been able to cause true love yet.” If her voice was a tad sarcastic, she sure didn’t mind. “Of course, my power’s been taken and it’s been but one day on Earth.”

“We have a small problem that was unforeseen. Enishka has heard of the predicament and has demanded a hearing. He claims his wife Keara should be the one to rule Luciefyore instead of appointing you. Unfortunately, with the harm you caused the demon realm, his case is strong.”

“His *ex-wife* doesn’t want to rule. That’s why she appointed me in her stead.”

“Technically, only a blood relative can rule long-term. With your mistake, he’s now pushing that issue, claiming you were appointed and your reign can’t last forever.”

“So what am I to do?”

“You have less time than originally thought. If you do not cause love for your lesson, your powers will not be returned. But you will be.”

“Returned to the demon realm? I thought I was banished to Earth?”

“You will be returned to Luciefyore as a helpless demon. No horns, no power.”

“You can’t do that!” Her voice was desperate but still the emotionless bastards showed nothing. Surely they remembered a time centuries ago when a demon had been stripped from his powers. He may as well have been road kill.

There was a reason why the boundaries between Luciefyore and Earth were sealed. Those without defenses would be slaughtered by the more powerful beings. Humans or dehorned demons.

“The only thing you will have are your minions that had already been called. Although freed, they can protect you.”

“My minions? That is all that protects me from certain death?” Her voice was harsh but what alternative did she have? They may as well send a bolt of lightning to strike her out easily instead of the slow painful torture she’d be exposed to later.

“You still have time for the original agreement. Cause true love to regain your horns and with them, your powers upon your earlier return.”

“How?” she snapped. “There’s even more pressure now with a shorter time frame!” She stepped toward the table and an electrical impulse shocked her from the foot up.

The burn tingled her toes, traveled up her leg, growing hotter as it rose.

Still, she refused to remove her foot from the invisible trigger.

It hit her midsection, then her chest. She was on fire, burning inside, her head felt like it would combust. She took one step backward to jerk from the trigger.

And fell screaming into the whirling black vortex that opened to swallow her whole.

When she awoke, she was in bed.

Near the bed, Jere sat in a chair, watching her. “You’re awake.”

“Yeah,” she said, slightly groggy.

“I was worried. You’ve been out for a while but Demitris was over and checked you, he said it was just a state of stasis.”

“How long was I out?”

“Three days.”

“What?”

“I couldn’t find you for the longest time. I thought you stepped out somewhere. I was getting worried and checked your room one more time and heard you moan on the bathroom floor. You weren’t there before, I’d swear to it. I picked you up and carried you to bed.”

“I had just showered and a portal opened through the mirror,” she said as the memories came rushing back to her. “I now know the consequences of my failure.”

She wasn't even sure if she could discuss it. The idea of the return home while powerless was too much to comprehend. She was a sitting duck, a piece of meat thrown to a pack of hungry humans.

The council may as well paint her pink and attach a corkscrew tail for the savages here to eat for breakfast with their *eggs*.

She was so happy with Jere recently. Well, it had been three days but to her it felt like a few hours earlier.

He stroked her bangs back from her forehead. "Go on. What happened?"

"I-I'll have to return home without my power. Enishka is challenging my ruling because of my mistake. And things look good for him."

"How can he have any challenges while he's banished?"

She shrugged. "He's still the rightful lord, born to the throne. Keara rules by default, as his wife and Demitris' daughter. She appointed me as ruler but I called too much attention to the legalities of doing it and gave him a way to challenge by my own actions."

"You didn't mean to cause a problem."

"No, I didn't mean to. But I did. And it can't be undone."

It felt good to admit that. She realized it was the first time she admitted to making a horrible mistake. She'd abused her power.

Jere's hand was rubbing the top of her temple, just beyond the hairline. Where her horns had been. It was comforting. She relaxed instead of cringing in embarrassment like she once would have. "Jere, I... My power is the ability to cause impotence in any male who shares my bed. I got a little carried away with the size of my serviceable harem and Luciefyore wasn't breeding. There weren't any available males left. The council had to take away my horns to reverse the power."

"Okay, so it can't be undone," he said. "That doesn't mean you can't fix things. Right the wrong. No, it won't be the same as before but it can be better than it is now."

“How can I right the wrongs?”

“Well, you said yourself they dehorned you to fix the, um, male impotence problem, right? Soon Luciefyore will be breeding again. They sent you here to learn about unselfish love. Sounds to me like you’re learning, you just need to prove it. You would have anyway, you just have less time.”

“Less time is an understatement. There were so many things I wanted to do that I never had time for. Now there’s no time.”

“What did you want to do?”

His hand over her sensitive dehorned area was feeling wondrous. Comforting and encouraging, causing her to spill her innermost feelings. Something she never would have done. “I wanted to visit places in this dimension. That gambling place in the heart of Hell.”

“Heart of Hell?”

“Where it’s so hot and dry? With all the colorful lights? Las Vargas.”

“You mean Las Vegas.” He said it with a small grin but she didn’t even care. As long as he kept rubbing those tender spots on her head, all was good.

“But,” she continued, “what do I know? I wasn’t even aware of the mess I was making in Luciefyore. It didn’t matter then, now – something’s different.”

“What’s different?”

“I don’t know. I think it’s this place. I’m out of my element in this dimension. I’m confused and I don’t know what the hell I’m doing or where I’m going. I want to go home, Jere. The original plan, not this new one I was dealt. That’s all.”

“How do you get home, Talya?”

“I have to give humans unselfish love. But without my powers. It’s impossible, I tell you. I’ve never felt like this, out of control. It’s a dizzying, spinning feeling.” Distress flooded her voice.

To her surprise, he climbed onto the bed with her, sitting against the headboard. He held her and stroked her shoulder, now kissing her head near the temples where the horns had been. "It'll come. I promise. I have an idea. You have at least a week, right? You can cause true love anywhere. Let's make the most of it. Go see things. Your Vargas."

She almost smiled. "You want to take me to this Vegas? Why?"

"Sin City, baby. You and I, we'll let loose. Have fun. Who knows where we'll end up in a week's time?"

She was missing something. "Where will *you* be in a week's time?"

"I'm not sure. I'm on the run but it's only a matter of time before they catch up with me. Keara thought she could bail me out but the return to Luciefyiore was unexpected. That's why I'm hiding out here until she gets back."

"On the run? What does that mean?"

"From the authorities, baby. I'm a con." His voice was bitter and it tugged unknown feelings from her. It was the strangest dimension, all these odd feelings like aching hearts. Guilt. Acknowledgement.

"My Luciefyiore screw-up affected a lot," she murmured, as if she was just realizing it.

"That's the thing with actions, baby. With every action, there's consequence. Like ripples across water."

"It's not fair that my life affected yours."

"More than you realize," he said with another kiss to her head. "Now we need to get you up and showered and fed so we can start our trip. You want me to watch you shower since the bathroom was the portal to that last incident?"

She knew the council wouldn't be summoning again but hell. The easy human just offered to watch her shower.

With those clear glass doors, polished all sparkly to a high shine.

Temptation was so great in this land. Natalya managed to squeeze a tiny tear from the corner of one eye. "I'd love that. You're so good to me."

He wiped her cheek tenderly where it glistened. "No problem," he muttered in a husky tone.

She strode quickly to the bathroom, glancing back at him to make sure he followed. Her gown she dropped without a second thought as she bent over to adjust the shower spray. Behind her, she heard the sound when he gulped.

Innocently, she glanced at him over her shoulder.

His eyes were glued to the hidden shadows between her legs as she bent over. Her swollen labia, which she knew protruded for his pleasure.

She stepped in and let the water run in rivulets over her body. Across her breasts. Down her nipples, which hardened against the spray.

He stood propped against the wall, arms crossed. Lids heavy while he watched her.

She gathered soap and sudsed her body. Across smooth skin, over sweet spots. Tender, loving.

Still he watched.

She lifted a leg to soap it better.

He licked his lips.

She ran a soapy finger through her slit, watching his face through heavy-lidded eyes.

His breathing had slowed, becoming sure and steady. Aroused. "Are you teasing me?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, completely honest. "Care to join me? I'm slick inside."

Sure enough, her fingers were deep inside her body, slowly twisting in and out.

Jere stood, methodically stripping his own clothing, exposing his taut skin and a strong cock.

No sooner had he stepped into the glass shower with her than her soft fingers wrapped around his width. He groaned, searching for her mouth with his.

A slender arm pulled him close to her while her other hand stroked him with a rhythm that equaled his own. He ached to be inside her again.

Lifting her body onto his, she wrapped her legs around him. His erection found her opening and they locked.

She exhaled, lowering her forehead onto his shoulder. They paused for a moment, enjoying the sensation of him deep within her.

She began to roll her hips, grinding against him.

“You feel good,” he muttered.

“So do you,” she agreed as the water pelted his back. She hardly felt the cool of the tiles where her heated back pressed as he fucked her, slowly and surely.

His hands gripped her hips possessively as he inched his cock in and out, ever so slowly, letting her feel every single movement.

When they were breathing heavily, he pulled his body from hers and set her on her feet. He turned her away from him so she faced the built-in seat of the shower. With a hand on her back, he gently pushed her down.

She splayed out both palms on the bench. He caressed the curves of her rounded bottom, then reached up and ran his hand over the indentation of her waist, up along her spine, between her shoulder blades.

Back down he traced down her spine. Slowly, to the cleft of her buttocks. Ever more slowly, he trailed through her cheeks and dipped into her swollen labia while she moaned.

He spread her wide open and slid back inside her hot sheath. Filling her up, moving gently, driving her crazy and forcing her to push back against him, wriggling in circular motions.

She was moving faster, reaching for her climax, driving him insane and never even knowing it.

Deeper and deeper he thrust, also moving faster as she moaned and panted. When she begged for more speed, he fucked her hard, jerking her hips back against him so her breasts jiggled with the effort, until she shattered into a million pieces around his cock.

Only then did he allow himself to come.

Chapter Four

Whispers from the Past

Jere was curled against her, watching her while she slept. Here and there she'd whimper, soft little sounds so unlike her strong character. She amazed him, this gorgeous creature from another dimension. So adaptable, to come to a foreign place determined to fit in. To be stripped of one's defenses and tossed into another land.

What could she be dreaming that distressed her so?

When she was upset earlier, he'd caressed her temples where her horns should be. She'd instantly relaxed, practically purring at his touch. Maybe she needed it again. He reached out but as soon as he connected with her dehorned spots, a spark zipped through his fingertips.

He was drifting in slow motion, moving so carefully he felt drugged. Pulled through a thickness that was a mixture of heavy air and unscented smoke.

Maybe he was dreaming.

The smoke curled into images he could watch. She was having dinner alone at a long table when a gong sounded. She glanced up at the door, keeping her face deliberately blank to mask her concern.

The gong blasted again, echoing throughout her large house. Sounding angry in the somber silence.

Still she sat, chewing her food slowly.

The heavy wooden doors crashed open, smashed by uniformed demons. Splintered wood stuck out at odd angles.

Natalya never moved as the officers drew their weapons and approached her. Something wasn't right.

All the officers were feminine. Not a single man.

“Natalya Hershkle. You are under arrest. You are to come quietly and compliantly at once.”

“I get a twenty-four-hour summons,” she said calmly.

One of the officers snickered. Another put on gloves. “Who says?” she said rudely.

Natalya leaned back.

The three officers stepped in.

“Whoa, ladies, wait a minute,” Jere said.

No one listened to him. Either he was invisible or he was dreaming. If it was a dream, was he invading Natalya’s? Still, he had to speak. “You gotta be kidding me. Three against one?”

Natalya stood quickly and two of the officers grabbed her arms. Natalya’s horns shimmered, a pearlescent hue almost. And then her eyes glowed, a fluorescent blue that looked as dangerous as hell.

“Bitch,” one woman snarled. “You knew I was going with Jessel.”

“Not my fault you couldn’t keep him.”

The officer grabbed her stick and struck. Or tried to but it never connected. Instead, Natalya ducked and took her out with a well-aimed kick to her thigh. The officer dropped like a rock.

Everyone else moved in at once.

Jere grabbed for one of the attacking women but his arms fell right through her, like he was some sort of ghost.

Watch and listen.

See but don’t touch.

The message was loud and clear.

But Natalya was The Huntress. Three puny demonettes couldn’t take her down. She was holding her own against the trained officers. Despite his fear, he felt a glimmer of pride.

One officer, the first one who struck her, was on the floor, moaning with a broken back. Although he'd obviously missed the action, he was still so proud. The other two were bruised and battered when two more approached through the shattered door.

"What's going on?" someone said, grabbing her stick.

"She resisted arrest."

"You didn't call for backup?"

"It was too fast," the officer tried to explain through a swollen lip. As if she hadn't watched her broken friend throw the first punch.

"We have orders that she'll be dehorned by the council," one of the new officers said, a gleam in her eye.

"No way," Natalya spat.

"Shouldn't be resisting arrest," she laughed while her two partners held Natasha down to her knees. She pulled out a miniature sledgehammer while her two partners wrestled Natasha still.

He was frustrated, unable to help. He grabbed and grabbed the officers, to no avail.

One, two, three cracks with the sledgehammer and a sickening scream tore through his gut, leaving him with the urge to retch while her horns were broken from her head. One heartwrenching scream of fury was all she had time to give before Natalya lay unconscious from the blows.

While she was out, she was dragged into the back of a van. He climbed in, wondering how long he could stay and watch the dream or memory, whatever it was. Not even sure he wanted to see but knowing he couldn't leave her alone.

She was locked in solitary confinement. "Protection," the crooked female officers laughed. Jere sat with her in the confinement cell for hours while her face swelled and her body bruised from the beating. She lay unconscious the whole time.

He'd never laid a hand on a female before but he wanted to tear the demon cops apart limb from limb. He could see the pain etched in Natalya's eyes, feel every lump across her beautiful face.

She definitely had twenty-four hours before the hearing. The officers just made sure she was locked up for them.

Hurt. And humiliated. For what reason, he had no idea.

He had no idea how the dream fast forwarded but she was back at home now. He sat on her bed, watching her.

She was to be banished to Earth. Dazed from the hearing outcome, she sat listlessly in her vanity chair before her mirror at bedtime that night. Simple pajamas, white and blue. A silky tank top with pants. The bruises had faded from her face, showing the passing of time, but the shadows in her eyes remained.

And she still stared at her broken horns. The bare spots on her head were a sensitive subject.

She wore her hair in a new style. Straight now, bangs dropping across to cover the missing protrusions. He could kick himself for touching the scars. Massaging her spots, calling attention to what she lacked.

"Your Essence?" A man stood behind her. He was young and buff, a male cover model who wore black leather pants and nothing else. He looked at Natalya longingly, staring at her like he had a right to.

Jere wanted to rip the man's head from his body, demon or not.

"Yes?" she answered.

"May I share your bed tonight?"

Her voice was nonchalant. "You're not next on the list."

She had a list?

"But I love you," he began.

"I know. But you had last night."

“See, that’s the thing. Last night was a short night –”

“Short night? What are you talking about? How can one night be shorter than another?”

“Well, you were out late with the trial preparations. I didn’t get as long as Tobias did the night before.”

“No. You do not get dibs on another night until your name cycles through the list again.”

She looked frustrated as she brought her silver hairbrush up to stroke her hair.

“I’ll brush it for you.”

She sighed, handing the brush to him. As if she gave up.

He ran the brush through her silky strands slowly, like he relished each movement. He took a strand of hair and rubbed it between his fingers. “I’m sorry I wasn’t here when the police came for you.”

“You couldn’t have been.”

“It was Hazen, wasn’t it?”

Natalya’s expression never wavered. Her voice was slightly monotonous. “She was one.”

The brush paused in mid-stroke. “One?”

“There were a few others.”

He dropped to his knees before her. “Marry me, your Essence. Let me be the one to fertilize your eggs. Make you the permanent ruler of Luciefyore.”

She sighed and looked away from him. “It’s too late. I’m banished.”

“It can’t be permanent! Not when you have so many minions! We’d have to travel with you, we can’t live without you.”

Natalya was still expressionless. “We’ll see,” she said noncommittally. The poor bastard never noticed her lack of commitment and focused on what he wanted to hear.

“Shall I concentrate on the travel?”

“Sure,” she said and watched as he left the room.

As soon as the door shut, her face fell. She looked exhausted. She rose and headed for the bed, where she crawled across to lie down in a fetal curl. Jere sat next to her, caressing her forehead, brushing her bangs back, trying not to notice they never moved.

“Hang strong,” he whispered.

Her door opened behind her and she clenched her eyes shut as a look of disgust crossed her face at the intrusion.

“Your Essence?”

She never answered, feigning sleep until the door shut again.

That was a different man from the one before. Could he also be after a turn with her?

Jere felt white-hot rage. Then surprise. It was pure jealousy.

But she’d turned him away. That meant something. She’d turned the last two away, because she could have had the leather-pants who brushed her hair.

Not many women would turn down a specimen like that.

He ran his hand over her hair, down the side of her cheek. He knew she couldn’t feel him but he couldn’t resist the sexy blonde in the thin pajamas, which outlined every curve she had.

To his surprise, she turned over onto her back, staring at the ceiling thoughtfully. He trailed a finger from her forehead, down the bridge of her nose and across the pucker of lips.

The pink tip of her tongue licked her lips.

Down her chin he stroked, over her throat, along her collarbone.

She arched her back, the smallest movement. Thrusting her pointed nipples into the air.

Could she feel him?

He cupped one breast fully. She reached out with both hands to finger the lace at the bottom edge of her top.

Surprised, he withdrew his hand and watched as she lifted the silk of her tank top over her head. Nude from the waist up, she lay again, flat on her back.

He touched the peak of her breast. One finger was all he used as he pressed the pink nipple in gently.

She moaned and turned her head to the side, stretching the slim length of neck as if she wanted a love bite.

How he wished to oblige.

Instead, he consoled himself with opening his mouth over her erect nipple, imagining she could feel the heat of his suck.

She made the tiniest little noise. Pleasure.

He flattened his tongue and laved her entire breast, wide fat licks, and watched her hand disappear into her pajama bottoms. How he wished he could see her glistening juices coating her fingers. Gently, he stroked her abdomen. One line, across the area where her waistband sat against her skin. Trying to convey a mental thought to her to pull off the rest of her clothes.

He watched as she lifted her hips and skimmed the waistband over her curves, down her thighs and across sexy pink-polished toes.

She was amazing, glowing polished skin in the height of arousal. Plump lips, above and below.

He leaned down between her long legs. Softly he stroked her inner thighs until she opened wide.

She was hot-blooded, ready for a man to plunge in for the ultimate satisfaction. She was slippery, wet, and when she brought her knees apart and up to her chest, her lips parted.

He blew hot breath over the glistening pussy spread before him.

She moaned loudly and smeared her juice up over her clit.

He was as hard as a rock. He ground his bulge into the mattress as he lay on his stomach between her luscious thighs.

She spread apart her labia with one hand while the other massaged her clitoris. He watched every movement, every expression across her face, watched as she began to sensuously roll her hips to a tune only she could hear.

He couldn't help himself. He released his cock and stroked it with his own hand. He pressed his face against her pussy, imagining he could smell, taste, anything.

He pretended it was her hand bringing his greedy cock pleasure.

He could hear though. He listened to the noises she made, the sounds of gratification, the gasps of enjoyment.

He rose onto his knees and rubbed his cock right above her mons. When he came, he could lose his seed on her body.

Or he could try to fuck her.

He halted mid-stroke when the idea crossed his mind. Was it possible? He grasped his penis at the base and led it to her lips, nudging inside.

He felt warmth.

She halted her movements, an odd wonderment crossing her features.

He pushed inside and felt her grip him welcomingly.

Yes! He could feel her tighten around him.

She shuddered and he just knew it was over the sensation of his cock widening her sheath, stroking gently, in and out.

She began to massage her clit in tune to his thrusts, round and round, as he moved deeper then withdrew. Her eyes were closed when he leaned down in a push-up position and kissed her lips.

They opened and stared right through him to the ceiling above. When they fluttered shut again, he leaned down again.

She kissed back.

He bucked his hips, reaching as far and deep as he could, pushing in a rhythm that moved faster and harder.

She was vocal when she came, clenching her internal muscles and moaning her pleasure while her body rolled through waves of pleasure.

“Fuck,” he muttered and reached his own orgasm within her.

To his surprise, he didn’t awaken after his climax. He rolled onto the bed next to her, where she curled into a fetal position and slept. Just like in real life, he watched her drift off.

Next came the actual hearing with the council. In the morning she dressed, sending away countless male servants who offered to help her. To his supreme satisfaction.

The councilmembers were glitter and gold, wrapped in white robes like Greek gods. Sitting around a long table with expressionless faces, which made them look even more judgmental.

Natalya wore a bright red strapless gown. Skin tight. Jere took note of the demon audience in the swamp. They were all male, so at least she didn’t have to contend with the crooked female cops in any way.

The council was speaking. “You must marry.”

“I will not,” Natalya returned.

The man blinked, obviously not used to refusal.

“Excuse me?”

“Forcing me to marry sets females back like...like some Earthling. Why not just take away our right to vote along with it?”

“You must head the dimension. Becoming a leader in fertility shows your mistake in causing a halt in reproduction.”

“It’s my body...my choice. I’ve not intended to reproduce, or I would have borne Enishka’s little lizard-like offspring.”

“Unfortunately, when we make mistakes of this magnitude, we don’t always have the same choices we had before.”

She raised her chin and said, “But I am Natalya Hershkle. I make my own destiny with my choices.”

“So you have,” the man murmured. “Your punishment is doled out lightly due to Keara Van Trump speaking on your behalf. You are to relinquish all holds on your minions and spend a banishment period on the Earth dimension to live life as a human. Humans are born to learn lessons, which is your own fate. You will learn and cause true love, a selfless love before you can return to Luciefyore. Do you accept your punishment?”

“I do not.”

The head of the council actually sighed. “It’s for the best, Natalya. Fighting it is a waste of time and effort.”

“Best for whom?”

“Best for the dimension. You are regrettably dehorned, your powers reversed. You have the option of earning your powers back if you can learn the lessons needed. Go to Earth, cause unselfish true love. It is a simple enough banishment.”

There was silence at the standoff. Natalya glanced shrewdly at the faces around the table. “I’ll accept my banishment on one condition. My minions are to be cared for.”

There was a pregnant pause, following by the clicking of someone’s fingernail tapping thoughtfully on the table.

“Minions are usually killed or die off when separated from their head demon.”

“Yes, they are. They have no protection. But I will willingly accept all punishment should my small request be granted.”

There was one small movement of the councilmember’s head. A slight acknowledgement. “They will be allowed to return to their previous jobs and relationships.”

“No. They will be allowed to return to whatever they wish. They’ve earned the right. They’re set free. That’s my only condition.”

The council as a whole sat completely still. “You will accept all punishment we dole?”

“As long as my condition is met.”

“Done.”

Lightning struck across the sky that had darkened within the last few minutes. Storm clouds rolled, threatening to release fat droplets of fresh rain.

One wave of his hand and her dress was replaced with a flowing skirt and loose top. The outfit Jere’d first seen her in at the train station.

“Keara has agreed to rule in your banishment. You will seek her on Earth and remain there until we summon you.”

“Agreed.”

The white-robed councilman looked off to her side. Stared straight at him, as if he knew he was there. “You have a lot to learn.”

An eerie feeling hit the pit of Jere’s stomach, remaining with him long after he woke.

But the blonde princess lay in his arms, now sleeping peacefully.

Chapter Five

Entanglements

“Come on, Jere,” she coaxed, eyes crinkling at the corners. “I’ll be returning soon. I’d like to get married once, in the strange Earth custom.” She grinned. “We both know I’ll never be able to wear white back at home.”

Las Vegas was an experience worth attending with this blue-eyed vixen. She’d squealed in delight when the plane hit turbulence, causing several passengers to reach for the barf bags.

Now she’d noticed a wedding in a tiny mock chapel. Performed by Elvis, of all people. To her, marriage was just a ritual. She didn’t seem to realize they’d legally become husband and wife.

“Getting married by Elvis is really tacky,” he said.

“I think it’s fascinating.” She leaned in, her eyes aglow with happiness. “To be married by a well-known rock star long dead, reincarnated over and over. He’s famous! Wearing white instead of black. All three of us. It’s so ridiculous to wear such an atrocious color! And I just love that jumpsuit he wears, with the big collar.”

Jere wasn’t sure he wanted to share with her that it wasn’t really Elvis. She was so excited. Could she really believe he kept showing up in Elvis bodies all over Las Vegas? And did they really dress in black at demon weddings?

“Black is for funerals,” he muttered.

“Perhaps why the tradition was started for weddings,” she returned impishly before she turned on her heel.

He literally pulled her back from marching into the front doors of the building. “We’d be tied together, princess. Bound to each other and no one else.”

“Well, I haven’t been with anyone else here on Earth since you. You got any other prospects?”

“Um, no.” That wasn’t the point, dammit, but her reasoning was exhausting to argue with.

“Then I see no cause why you should not be my Earth husband. My other choice is that old geezer drinking from the paper sack over there. He’s been watching me awhile and if he’s willing...”

What harm could it do? So they got married, she returned to the Hell dimension, he either became free or was incarcerated, they’d be no different.

Except he could watch the excitement rise in her eyes during the ceremony. See the flush that covered her ivory complexion when the sweep of flaxen hair swished from her face.

The same flush that matched her nipples in the heat of arousal.

She stepped toward him and pulled him to her with her fingers in his front belt loops. She lifted her lips toward him.

“Please? Marry me.”

How could any guy refuse? He gave his answer by bending down to touch her lips with his.

And knew everything would be fine when her small fingers entwined with his.

She was like a small child during their ceremony. She ran up to Elvis, eyes large in her face. “We wish to get married,” she announced.

“Well now, little lady. It just so happens I got a free slot open.” He rolled his hips for effect.

Jere fought the urge to roll his eyes.

Natalya mimicked the hip movement. Although stiff, Jere had to admit it looked a lot better on her than on the unnaturally dyed, black-haired man standing before them.

"Mercy," Elvis said.

"Mercy," she repeated faithfully.

"Will you marry us or not?" Jere grumbled.

"Well now, son, you need a witness. See if there's anyone available outside."

Natalya rushed off to the chapel doors again, dragging the drunk from outside. Her other suitor, who busily complained in a nasal falsetto.

"Hush," she snapped at him. "I'll buy you a new bottle when it's done. But I want you to sniffle and cry a lot."

"That's gonna be easy, considering someone's gonna grab my brand new bottle you left out there."

"There was barely anything in it!" she snapped.

"So? I just bought it. It's still brand new. Empty or full, don't matter."

"You are very obnoxious," she told him. "And I may know of the perfect mate for you. As soon as we get her bladder condition taken care of. Course, you stink too. You may not mind each other."

Jere winced.

"Dearly beloved," Elvis intoned, shaking his leg.

Natalya concentrated on everything Elvis said. As if she memorized the lines, word for word. His movements, everything.

But then she gave Jere her full attention, gazing at him with her beautiful blue eyes, and said, "I do."

He felt a pull somewhere in the vicinity of his chest.

When Elvis performed his rendition of *Love Me Tender*, she swayed in time to the music, closing her eyes for better feeling. Even the drunk swayed and when he began to sing also, Jere knew it was time to leave.

They walked out of the chapel with arms around each other. "Now what?" she said excitedly.

“Kind of hard to top that,” he said dryly.

“Ahh but you’ll be topping me later, won’t you, husband?” she winked.

“Naughty girl.”

“I like this husband and wife thing. I like *you* as my husband,” she said.

He was too surprised to tell her he liked it too.

“I know what comes next, my bride,” he said as he pulled her to him.

She inhaled deeply and he watched her eyes darken with the beginning of arousal.

“What?” she asked coquettishly.

“We come together as man and wife.”

“You mean—

“Yes.”

She was actually quiet. Reserved. This different anticipation was intriguing, to say the least.

They took their time getting back to the room. But before the door was even shut, arms and legs tangled as various clothing was flung from each other. Between kisses and caresses, they managed not to pop buttons or rip material. Barely.

When they were naked, he picked her up and tossed her onto the soft mattress, where he pounced between the thighs she spread eagerly.

“I’ve been wanting to eat this pussy,” he muttered, spreading her lips with his thumbs.

“And I’ve been wanting you to,” she whispered, raising her hips. He looked his fill before dipping his head to lick into the tender pink flesh that opened before him like a wild orchid.

She squirmed.

He used his tongue to find every fold and when she was glistening wet he pointed it and delved inside her entrance.

She arched like a cat. "More," she demanded, making him smile against her intimate parts.

He sucked her swollen clit into his mouth and released it with a pop. She wriggled against the mattress, not sure if she wanted to be up or down.

Somehow her feet had found their way onto his shoulders and her knees dropped wide open. He cupped her sweet ass into his hands and brought her up to his mouth, where she then swung her legs over his shoulders.

"I love that your pussy is bald," he said. He tongued her bare perineum from her clit down but concentrated lower. Gently he sucked her entire swollen labia into his mouth and inserted a finger gently into his lover's sheath.

"Oh," she moaned. "Slow down, Jere. I'll come right in your mouth."

He plunged his finger in and out, stretching the taut rim of her anus.

"Next time you'll take my cock here," he warned.

She convulsed, bearing down on his finger as her orgasm hit in full force.

"Oh, oh, oh," she gasped and her vagina quivered in his mouth. She bucked her hips helplessly.

He moved away to stare at the open treasure before him. Her pussy was wet and glistening, swollen and flushed.

It would grip his cock nicely, a warm velvet glove wrapped around him fully.

"Turn over," he muttered.

She did as he asked and he plunged into her slick sheath. She was so hot internally, she set his dick on fire.

Quickly he plunged in and saw her hand disappear to massage her clitoris.

She was going to give herself a second orgasm immediately following the first.

He nudged her legs wider apart so she was splayed to his view. Her puckered little ass was so much temptation. He gently circled it with the same finger that had plundered it earlier and then delved into the tight little button.

She clenched hard and fingered herself at record speed, pushing back against his hand.

“Deeper,” she moaned and he let his finger slide in. All the way.

“Tell me you want me to fuck this sweet ass,” he said.

Before she could agree, his world exploded.

He was barely aware of her screaming out her release but was afraid the entire hotel heard. Their breathing was harsh in the silent room and surprisingly the hallway just beyond the door sounded silent also. Unlike earlier when a gaggle of voices could be heard.

She turned onto her back and laughed. “Think they’re all listening?”

“I think you stunned them into silence,” he said, a grin on his face. He had a sweet breast under his cheek, the scent of satisfied female against his nostril. Life was good.

“I’m wide awake,” she announced.

He bit back a groan. “Princess, we flew hundreds of miles. Walked endlessly. Got married. Had incredible sex. I’m exhausted.”

She bit back a disgusted, “Humans.” Instead, she caressed the back of his head where it lay on her breast. His calm, even breathing told her when he was out.

But she was still wide awake. It was the excitement of the city. Jere slept soundly, she could slide out from beneath him and wander the casinos, looking to accomplish love.

Earth wasn’t so bad. Maybe she could get herself banished here permanently. *After* she caused true love and got her horns back, of course.

Carefully she wriggled out from beneath him. He curled against the spot she left on the pillow and she tenderly smoothed out his brow before she kissed it.

She stood in a corner, watching the humans intermix. She was back to the chore of trying to match the unluckies with the uglies.

She'd spotted a man earlier who was missing his front teeth. There was a cross-eyed woman directly ahead of her who might be interested. At least one of her eyes was focused on him. However, how would she get them together?

She tapped her finger on the wall as she thought out a plan.

"Drink, miss?" a waiter asked as he approached her.

"Sure."

"What would you like?"

Did it matter? Human alcohol didn't affect her metabolism one whit. "Whatever. Surprise me."

The waiter turned and then she noticed his odd dress. She called out, "Wait."

He turned back to her.

"What is this Hollowthing?"

The man stared at her incredulously. "You mean Halloween, lady?"

"Yes."

"I guess you're not from around here?"

"No."

"We dress up to celebrate. Lots of costume parties around here tonight. Huge prizes for the most elaborate, the most creative, you get the picture."

"What are you?"

Again, he looked at her as if she had her horns. "Bill. Want to be my Monica?"

"What would that entail?"

He grinned slowly, wriggling a thick brown phallus between his lips. "I have this cigar, see..."

No one noticed when the waiter walked away rather stiffly and missing the *cigar* just a few minutes later.

Jere awoke with a start. She was gone. A dangerous demon on the loose. Oh, not a danger to others of course but to herself. He sprang from the bed and threaded his fingers through his dark hair, mussing it to a carefree look

He had to find her.

He practically ran down to the elevator and tapped his foot impatiently as he waited for it to whisk him to the smoke-filled casino. When the doors at last sprang open, he looked quickly around to see what trouble she could have caused.

A toothless man grinned at a cross-eyed woman who sat in his lap, fingers inching up her leg. She looked familiar. Then it dawned on him. The airport. She'd traveled alone on the plane here. He watched in disgust. Easy targets, if only Talya had noticed them. Obviously there was someone for everyone. His new bride could have brought those two together for a quick and easy love. Instead they found each other on their own. She lost out on an effortless ticket back home.

Where she'd be safe. For what would she do on her own when he was found and carted off to prison?

"Hurry, we have to get to the roof," the woman giggled as his fingers tickled. "That blonde is doing a 'dance naked under the moon' skit."

No way.

It had to be a different blonde. Still, his heart raced as much as his feet pounded as he ran back the elevators and punched the button for the roof.

The roof was quiet with just the breathing of ooh's and aah's muttered every now and then.

"Natalya Hershkle!" His voice sounded harsh and overly loud.

"Rousseau. We are married," she reminded, her voice carrying in the quiet.

He saw red.

His wife created a spectacle on the roof of the hotel. Under the full moon, she danced naked. Not a stitch on...except for a child's demon horn barrettes.

“What the —”

“Shhh,” the man next to him said, without removing his eyes from Jere’s wife. “Don’t make a sound. We don’t want to stop the show.”

“This isn’t a show,” Jere growled.

He wanted to throw her over his shoulder and carry her away. Wait, he couldn’t. That would expose her entire backside to the voyeuristic world.

He wanted to turn her over his knee and give her the spanking she deserved. Hell, that would probably turn on the perverts who had their eyes glued to her exquisite curves.

There was a whole lot he wanted to do but in the end he chose to just walk over to her.

“Hi, sweetheart,” she said brightly. “Want to get naked and dance?”

“No,” he said through gritted teeth. “Why would I want to get naked?”

“It’s Halloween. It’s an Earth tradition,” she informed him.

“No, it’s not.”

“Well, almost Halloween. And I know it’s supposed to be witches,” she continued as if she didn’t hear him. “But witches worship demons and I’m a demon.” She twirled leisurely, on her toes. “So I dance.”

“You’ll walk slowly out of here with me before you attract cops,” he snapped.

Alarm filled her eyes as she remembered he was a wanted man. For once his naughty little demon did as he directed and followed him. He grabbed her hand as he led her from the roof, blocking her view as much as he could from the gawking stares.

“Boo!” sounded a voice from one of the crowd.

“Hush,” said a female voice. “We might miss the next part of the show. I love Vegas, all the free shows they don’t tell you about. I wonder what act comes next?”

“Are we coming up to the roof tomorrow?” asked another voice as they disappeared through the doors

"Where's your clothes?" he hissed as he stripped out of his t-shirt and pulled it quickly over her head.

She had the nerve to look at him like he was ignorant. "Where we had sex. Didn't you see them? We flung them off from one end of the room to the other."

His patience at an end, he grabbed her hand again and hauled her as quickly as he could back to the elevator.

Of course, this was Vegas. There was a crowd of older people in the elevator when the doors opened. The old women fanned themselves as they tutted over the shapely expanse of Talya's lean, bronzed legs poking through the bottom of his shirt.

The old men fanned themselves when they noticed the stiff nipples poking through the cotton fabric.

Jere growled, his eyes felt like they'd pop out of his head. Finally, they reached their floor and he pushed her out first, blocking the view of her shapely ass as he strode behind her.

"Did you see how those old women leered at your naked chest?" she whispered furiously.

He did the only thing he could. Groan.

He pulled her into the room and plopped into the tiny chair, holding her bare ass to his lap. He closed his eyes as he thought about how to burst her bubble without hurting her.

"What's wrong, Jere?"

He sighed. "Here's the thing about being my wife." Tenderly, his finger encircled a nipple through the thin cotton of the shirt. "The only one that sees you naked is me."

She genuinely looked surprised. "Oh. Well, that wasn't in the rule book, was it?"

"Marriage not such a good idea?"

“Not that,” she amended hastily. “You did tell me I’d be bound to only you. I just didn’t understand all the ramifications. I wander around naked quite a lot. I am beautiful.”

“Yes, you are,” he agreed solemnly. “So beautiful I get jealous easily when others look at you.”

“You do?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Oh. Wait. Does this jealousy feel like anger? Crabbiness? Pre-menstrual syndrome?”

“You got it,” he muttered.

“Is that how I felt when the old mummified females in the elevator stared at your chest?”

A small bubble of joy threatened to grow and explode in his heart. “Yeah. That’s it.”

“Oh. That didn’t feel good at all.”

“Exactly.”

She curled her head into the crook of his neck, silently lost in her thoughts. His finger still swirled gently over her nipple.

It was some time before she spoke again. “Jere.”

“Mmm?”

“Will you help me find humans? To make them fall in love?”

“I saw a couple earlier. I knew she flew here alone, she was on the plane with us.”

Natalya sat up excitedly. “Was she googly-eyed? Like a bug? Her name was Cathy. I remember her telling the airline attendant when she threw up into the bag.”

“Yeah. Bug-eyed. She found a balding toothless guy. I saw him with his hand on her thigh. There’s someone for everyone.”

“Exactly!” she said excitedly. “A lid for every pot.”

"Except they did it on their own, princess. You missed out."

"Pooh. What are the chances? I noticed them too but I didn't think the slut would move in on him that quickly. Who else would want him?"

"Never underestimate humans, my dear."

"Apparently." She still sounded crabby. "Have you ever been married before me?"

There was quite a pause before his answer. "No."

"Really?"

"I came close," he admitted.

"You did?" Surprised, she lifted her head to look into his eyes. She couldn't imagine the thought, Jere bound with another woman instead of her.

"She left me. Remember? The fiancée I told you about."

"Why did she leave?"

"I'm headed to prison. When I was convicted, Kelly ran off." His voice was harsh. He still loved this silly human female who smashed his heart.

Idiot woman. How could she toss him aside?

"Hey," Jere said. "Is it getting hot in here?"

The air was thickening, making it harder to breathe.

"Not so soon," Natalya moaned, rising from his lap and making him follow. "They can't want me back already! It hasn't been that long."

Sure enough, a swirling vortex started on the floor before them, air hissing as the suction steadily grew, creating a dark spot in the carpet.

"Don't go," Jere said, pulling her tightly against him.

"I have to. I don't belong in this dimension. If I don't step in willingly when it wants me, it'll grow enough to suck me through. A much more painful way to go. Imagine human abortion, Jere. Sometimes a vortex grows strong enough to suck limbs from a struggling demon."

When the swirling vortex opened, she kissed Jere goodbye. And stepped through.

Chapter Six

Enrichments

But before the spinning clouds of thickened air stopped, Jere jumped in after her. Air sucked from his lungs and consciousness was nearly yanked from him. When the pain stopped pulling at his limbs, he studied where he was. For the first time ever, he looked around at Luciefyore.

It was so different from Earth. The horizon wasn't blue but a reddish orange. Up ahead, the sky darkened to the crimson of semi-dried blood.

And then the sulfurous smell hit his senses, an acrid odor that signaled a swampy marsh.

Trees grew close together, obscuring the slight glow from the sky. It screened the view, the slim limbs and vines twisting like overgrown fingers and mixing with shadows for a mysterious effect. Mud thickened the ground beneath his feet, causing each step to sink with his weight.

He must have landed in a different spot from where Natalya had, for she was nowhere to be found. The only place she could be headed for was deeper into the swamp. It seemed to beckon, as if the trees swayed to no breeze.

In the far-off distance he could hear distinct voices, if not conversations, so he followed his natural instincts and tracked them.

Natalya stood on a raised platform before a gold table where white-robed people sat. He remembered this committee of people from her dream before Las Vegas. Caleb and Keara stood on another circle platform near her. A hearing of some sort.

"Natalya Hershkle, Huntress of Luciefyore, you are on trial for the near downfall of Luciefyore. How do you plead?"

“I am not guilty. Impotence has been reversed in our dimension, making the ‘downfall’ non-existent at this point.”

“Written arguments against you say it will be quite a while before males are mated, eggs are fertilized and children hatched. Making the near downfall a very real threat.”

“The slower timing serves to make the demon seeds we do have more cherished. The way children should be. Now about returning my powers...”

“Not negotiable. You’re on trial brought by the ex-ruler of Luciefyiore, Enishka. Not on your own trial regarding your punishment.”

Slowly, Keara left Caleb’s side. She moved to the platform with Natalya, showing a unique unity between the two women that not only enhanced their differences but pointed to their unusual similarities. She spoke with authority and her voice rang through the swamp. “We all know Enishka is bringing forth charges for his own benefit. It has nothing to do with the welfare of our dimension.”

Jere stayed silent, hidden behind a tree. The golden table was quiet, the faces of the white-robed men and women unresponsive. Still, even with their lack of emotion, the council of gods were a blond, beautiful race of people. It was amazing how much Caleb resembled them, now that he was aware of Caleb’s lineage. He had learned that much from Demitris.

“Enishka has the right to bring her to trial. We are not here to decide on the fate of her powers,” the council reiterated.

Before Jere realized it, he left his hidden spot behind the tree. “How can you point the finger at her without talking directly to the accuser?”

Natalya looked up at the voice she knew so well. Jere. He was here. How had he gotten into Luciefyiore? He must have jumped into the vortex. Insane human, what was he thinking, insisting that Enishka be brought here? This wasn’t some sort of macho fist fight, Enishka could turn a human’s organs inside out with one look, even from his remote location.

And would if he knew she was the least bit attracted to him.

While there were laws to protect innocent humans, Jere gave up his rights by willingly stepping foot in their dimension. Once Keara had been attacked by Enishka but had been saved by Protection Fairies, for she was human and had been forced into the dimension.

Jere hadn't been forced in.

Although helpless humans had no idea, they were assigned the protection by the ancient Greek council. Jere had unknowingly given up that right.

With one signal of his hand, the head of the council had swamp demons surround Jere. He was bound with his hands behind his back before he was brought forward.

"Enishka is kept banished for a reason, Jere Rousseau." The head of the council's voice rang out. No one bothered to ask how the man knew his name.

"Then how can he be allowed to bring charges against her?"

"His charges are valid."

"How do we know that? We have no choice but to take your word for it."

A silence hushed over the swamp. No one ever questioned them. The head of the council gave one look to a smallish demon with faint skin imprints, like tattoos in diamond shapes. He was a meek and mild creature, only four feet tall. The timid little snake demon's eyes rounded before he closed them and began to chant. It was impossible to make out the hissing sounds he made but they grew louder and more intense. Eventually he raised his arms and one of the three moons – the center one now known as the one that kept Enishka prisoner – slowly began to gravitate across the sky.

The shadows on the surface created by the hills and craters began to swirl, dancing through the smoke as though it were a giant theatrical screen.

Suddenly, the harsh demon face of Enishka appeared, his anger a tangible force that reached through the dimensions. Sweat poured from his brow and his face was red with heat, horns fully extended.

“How dare you?” he screamed. “I am not an underling to be beckoned whenever you wish!”

The white-robed councilmember raised one hand. “Hush.”

“I will not!” the demon lord screeched in his grating voice. His small, close-set eyes scanned the perimeter of what used to be his swamp, focusing on Keara and Natalya standing side by side.

Natalya, helpless without her horns.

His eyes glowed red, twin laser beams of light aimed directly at them.

Natalya went down like a flash.

Pain ripped instantly through her midsection, white hot licks of torture, tearing through her organs and knocking the air from her lungs. She screamed long and hard and everyone stared in disbelief at the sight of The Huntress down for the count.

The agony! She twisted on the ground, her insides searing and binding, vaguely aware of another commotion. Jere, at the side of the council’s table, raising all kinds of hell while being held back by several robed members. Of Keara, trying desperately to stoop but her hugely swollen belly a hindrance. Of Caleb, pulling Keara out of harm’s way of Natalya’s wildly spasming arms and legs to avoid accidentally being hit.

And then the pain cooled, as magically as if ice-water washed in and throughout her body. It was wiped away in a frozen swish and the frenzied shouts and noises in the swamp went still as everyone present watched. The lasers of Enishka’s red glow were countered by Keara’s own blue. Steadily her force pushed against his until her glow pressed right in his face.

His movements jerked, panicked, as if he knew that should he stop her blue light would blast into his eyes. And yet he couldn’t keep from directing her away. Her strength far outreached his in her anger.

He tried to raise his palms helplessly in surrender but Keara was too far gone. Rage strode over her features and her eyes glowed electric blue. Then she reached out and took Natalya's hand, clasping their fingers together.

A bright purplish blue slammed into the demon lord's face, shining too brightly for anyone to watch without permanent scarring to their own vision, then exploding like smoke while he screamed piteously.

Ironically, the white-robed councilmember sighed dramatically. "I thought I said to hush." He raised a hand and swept it through the air. The scream was silenced instantaneously. The swamp was deadly quiet as everyone waited for the smoke on the moon to clear enough to see what Keara's unknown power had done.

Enishka's head was down, chin to chest. When he raised his frozen face, the sight was horrific.

His eyes were no longer centered in his face. Raw, reddened skin melted over where the sockets should have been. Now his eyes were on the sides of his face, near his temples, effectively preventing him from focusing his red laser gaze on anyone again.

His breath came in harsh pants and his mouth moved as though speaking until he realized there was no voice emitting from his throat. He closed his lips and felt the smooth section of face where his eyes had been. Eventually his fingers trailed to the sides of his head where he felt his tightly closed eyelids. Removing his hands, he opened his eyes. Slowly he took a step and turned to the right so his left eye focused dead ahead.

He stared at the swamp and everyone looked back at him, some demons in shock, some with horror. The faces of the council were as neutral as always.

The two bitches from hell were cold and unfeeling. One dark and one light but both evil and rotted inside. The way women could be.

One of the councilmembers released the stupid human male who reached Natalya's side, cradling her in his arms and rocking her gently. Idiot man, besotted with her. She'd probably rendered him impotent with anyone else so he'd worship her fully.

The head of the council who had struck him speechless spoke first. "What did you do to Natalya?"

At last. Retaliation.

Despite his pain, Enishka felt a slow grin move across his face, knowing they could only see one side of his mouth curve. His voice was unhurried as he tested it from the release of the power the councilmember used on him. "Burned out her eggs. She'll never be able to breed now. She'll no longer be fit for the throne, no one will marry an infertile demon. It's a fit punishment for the one who caused a halt in the reproduction of our dimension."

"Fool," Natalya hissed. "I've already married."

The smile vanished from Enishka's face. "Who?" he demanded. "Surely not the human with you now? The marriage isn't valid in Luciefyore, no more than mine and Keara's was when she returned to Hell on Earth."

"On the contrary," the head of the council spoke. "That is why we summoned you. You have some explaining to do."

"I don't have to answer to anyone."

"Oh but you will." Another wave of his hand and Enishka's left eye stared unwaveringly while he was forced to speak.

"Tell me about how you hunted for a human infant to purchase."

Enishka clammed up. It was so long ago, before laws were enacted by the meddling Greek council. But the words were dragged from him. He spoke clearly and succinctly, each word pulled against his will. "I hunted decades to find two human souls that were pure."

"How?"

“Complete purity comes from suffering. I made sure of the suffering of Elizabeth’s ancestors. Her grandparents were highly intelligent, very advanced for their time. It took a lot of manipulation but I talked them into treating their daughter Victoria indifferently so her own soul would mature faster and stronger. In the meantime, I found a human male in the same boat and brought the two together. They both needed love and saving and created a baby from that desperation. My Elizabeth.”

“How did you obtain her?”

“The grandparents sold her to me. I slaughtered Roman, Victoria’s love, while she was pregnant and unmarried. The grandparents had the right to do what they wished with the child. Victoria died from a broken heart during the birthing of Elizabeth.”

“Why would her grandparents sell you the infant? What offer did you make?”

Enishka paused as he continued to fight against telling. The councilmember raised his hand slightly and the words poured freely from his mouth like a spew of vomit.

“I gave them royalty. Made them the king and queen of their country. And offered another child. A different child.”

Not this part. Never this part. Fight the goddamn power that sucks the truth from my numbing brain.

“What do you mean?” rang the authoritative voice.

The bastard head of the council knew, he just wanted to force him to grovel with the tale. “They were highly intelligent and advanced for humans. They wanted to continue their now royal bloodlines with another species. I replaced their granddaughter with a demon seed.”

There were gasps all about Luciefiore. For once, the monotonous voice of the council was outraged, showing emotion that had never before occurred. “You allowed a demon to be raised on Earth? Do you even know where the child is at this point?”

Did they really believe he never thought it through? “I’m not stupid. I gave them a sickly child who wouldn’t live to adulthood.”

“You gave them a child who made it through his teens. Who made it until after he bred there.”

Enishka felt sick. He knew he looked shocked with his lips hanging open and tongue protruding. Could it be possible?

“You gave them one from Demitris’ line.”

Enishka didn’t answer, for he didn’t need to.

“That is why Demitris turned on you. A member was missing from his family line and he knew you had something to do with it. He knew of your plans to spawn with Elizabeth and destroyed them. Enishka, meet Jere Rousseau. Mixed-breed descendant of that infant egg you traded to Elizabeth’s grandparents. Keara’s blood cousin. Now Natalya’s husband. It appears we have found additional rulers of Luciefyore that rank higher than you.”

Heads in the swamp swiveled to the man, to whom they’d all thought was just a human cradling The Huntress. Now that it was pointed out, he did have an amber glow to his eyes. As they watched, his horns slowly protruded in sync with theirs. A common occurrence during stressful situations.

Natalya stared at her human husband with a white face, the blood drained. She stared until the shock became too much for her. Her eyes rolled back into her head as she fainted dead away. Could it be the bitch had no idea?

The councilmember continued on. “You have broken the highest law set upon Luciefyore. To allow a demon to reside in the Earth realm without knowing of his heritage. If it hadn’t been for Demitris finding him, all hell could have broken out in both dimensions from the imbalance of his hormonal rages. While you are already banished from Luciefyore, I strip from you the title demon lord. You have no further rights to protect the dimension and cannot call charges against future rulers. Keara ruled as your queen and appointed Natalya ruler. Now her husband Jere shall reign as the highest-ranking blood relative.”

“Noooo!” Enishka screamed. All the plotting and planning he’d gone through was for naught? The bitches still got their way? Keara would stay on her precious Earth and allow Natalya to rule with her new husband, who conveniently enough was one of them? And a blood relation, which bypassed any power he had left with his damned banishment to a moon dimension?

He was the demon lord. The rightful blood ruler.

“It’s not fucking fair!” He screamed again as the moon that held him prisoner moved away.

* * * * *

Natalya Hershkle awoke in her own bed. Slowly she remembered the horrendous scene yesterday.

She wasn’t alone. A demon was with her, though without her horns she shouldn’t have been able to sense her.

Keara moved into her line of vision. “Feeling okay?” Her voice was neutral, as if she knew any softness would be interpreted as pity.

“Why shouldn’t I be?”

Keara shrugged. “You won’t be able to breed.”

“I’m not the maternal type. Especially to little mixed-breeds. That’s your specialty, not mine.”

Keara sighed. “Now it comes out. How do you feel about being married to a mixed-breed?”

Talya clenched her fists into the sheets. “I should have been told. He knew, dammit. He tricked me.”

“Yes, he knew. But telling you wasn’t a choice he had. We can’t help the way we were born, Talya.”

“So my marriage is legal in both dimensions now, isn’t it? In his and in mine. I’m tied to him.”

Keara nodded.

"Please leave. I just need to be alone. To think. For a long time."

"Caleb and I are heading back to the material dimension. We'll take Jere with us. Give you some time."

Talya turned her back to her queen. "Please do."

"Just remember one thing, Talya," Keara said softly. "Jere's appointed to the throne. He's the ruler of Luciefyore, not you. You're still banished to Earth."

The door clicked shut behind her with a finality that rang in Natalya's ears.

There was arguing in the hallway and before she knew it, her husband burst through the door. "I'm not going back without talking to you."

"I don't feel like talking, Jere."

"You're my wife. I'm not leaving you here alone."

"You tricked me, dammit. You should have told me you were a mixed-breed."

"Why would that matter?"

"Our marriage is valid everywhere. Here, there, everywhere."

"It was valid before. You're my wife, Talya."

"It was valid in *your* dimension," she said coldly.

Dead silence met her statement.

"Why was it okay in my dimension but in yours it angers you?"

"That's exactly why. It's *my* dimension. I ruled it. I was going to figure a way to rule again. I need some time to think. Please leave with Keara and Caleb. They'll take you back to Earth."

"Will you come back to me?" Jere asked.

Natalya closed her eyes to the hurt in his voice. "I don't know."

"I thought there was something you felt for me, Talya. Maybe not love, not like I love you, but something was growing. You married me. It was your idea."

He loved her? Her? She hardened her heart. He was a mistake. With both his parentage and with her.

“I married you just to say I did. Just to have the experience. I’ll never again be on Earth. I have no love for anyone, much less a mixed-breed.”

She barely was aware of his sucked-in breath. While she lied, what choice did she have? She may have had previous experience ruling but no demon powers left.

She was worthless.

Yes, he could protect her but she didn’t even have anything to offer in return. No strengths. She couldn’t even protect herself. In addition, her eggs had been burnt out.

Yep, she was pretty worthless. He couldn’t be allowed to exist on false hope.

She gritted her teeth and struck to hurt. “If I’m with you, it’ll simply be to rule Luciefiore again.”

“In that case, I’ll have to turn you down, wife. You may be experienced at ruling but I am the rightful heir.”

Rage filled Natalya’s soul. She wanted to spit, to scratch. To render him impotent. But she had nothing left, no powers. She was helpless as a baby. As a human.

“Get out,” she snapped. “I could never love you. You’re disgusting, a creature caught between two worlds. The worst characteristics of both.”

Jere clenched his jaw, as though he might say something he’d regret. Before he could react further, he spun on his heel and left.

Keara returned.

“What have you done?” she asked.

“Here to defend your blood relation?”

“Have you learned any lessons at all, Talya? I’ve been patient with you but I’m tired. And you’re screwing up everything.”

“Lessons? Of course I’ve learned lessons. But I need time to correct my mistakes and *that* just keeps getting yanked from me.”

"You can't do things on your own. You need help."

"I don't need anyone."

"You're the same little girl who swore that all through grade school. Do you really believe it?"

"Where is this going, Jenesi?"

Obviously Natalya was upset, for it wasn't often that she forgot Keara's name change. "Oh wait. I know. It's about everyone trying to get me to accept a mixed-breed husband."

"You accepted him on your own terms, Talya. I didn't ask you to marry my cousin."

"I accepted him under false pretenses."

"Why? Why does it matter?"

"Do you really want to know, dammit? You. You are the only half-breed I ever knew and you scared me shitless. You burned down our school with your rage. Innocents lost their lives."

"What's done is done. I can't undo it but I paid my debt. I was banished to hell."

"We all thought Earth was hell but it isn't really so bad, is it?"

"Depends on who you ask. I think Jere has a different opinion. Do you know anything about his childhood? Your own husband? Are you aware of his mother's desertion because her own child 'scared' her? The old inherited family power, firestarting. I knew about my ability, although I hid it from Enishka. But Jere never knew he was half demon until my father found him recently and explained a lot. Do you know he's been abandoned by every single person he's known?"

Natalya didn't want to appear selfish or callous by not knowing intimate details about her own husband. "I know his fiancée left him when he was convicted."

“After aborting a child they created. She couldn’t raise a baby whose father was a prison embarrassment. Never mind she knew he was innocent. She left with the man responsible for sending him to prison.”

“Fine. Your cousin had a tough life. You had a tough childhood—”

“But you had an awful time growing up too, didn’t you? I didn’t understand at the time we were children but your father was third in command. Directly under mine. The half-breed’s father. Where does your prejudice stem from? The fact that your father was infatuated with my human mother also? But he was a married man, whereas my father was not?”

A switch deep inside Natalya shut down. This was something no one ever knew before now. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yes, you do. I was different from the other demon children. Never tested. I have powers no one ever knew about. And while my immature mind couldn’t comprehend what those thoughts and emotions your parents emitted meant, my adult mind does. Now I understand why your mother allowed and encouraged you to take your anger out on me. In her head, she felt it was revenge against my mother. But my mother never wanted your father’s attentions. She was as innocent as yours. As you. As me. We were all just victims of circumstance.”

“Quite the philosopher, you’ve become,” Natalya sneered.

“Enough to know how badly you strike when you hurt.”

It was getting to be too much. “Go to hell, Keara.”

“Been there and back, baby. But you’re living through yours and not doing so well at it. So I’m gonna help you.”

“I didn’t ask for your help.”

“You get help before you continue to hurt everyone around you. Before you screw up both worlds, instead of just one.”

“Then wipe me out, dammit. I know you can. I’m useless, I can’t rule Luciefyore and I can’t get myself out of the damned Earth dimension. Just strike me dead.”

Natalya rose from the bed but a sick wave of dizziness swam over her head. She dropped to the ground, spent.

There was a long bout of silence while Keara studied her. An uncanny silence. “That would be too easy, to give up, wouldn’t it? I never thought The Huntress would take the easy road.”

“Do it, damn you. I know you still have powers inside you that Enishka didn’t get. We all saw you rearrange his face.”

“I’ll show you some power, little sister. But be careful what you wish for.”

Chapter Seven

Hints from the Future

Keara wasn't joking.

The air thickened and began to choke Natalya. More than once while she struggled to breathe, she wondered if Keara was killing her, if at last she faced death. She was barely aware of Keara's disappearance but as the smoky fog cleared she found she was alone, zapped outdoors.

A different outdoors. It was nighttime here. She was on her hands and knees and the ground was sandy beneath her palms.

Damn Keara. What had she done to her? The fog lifted enough for her to see she was in a playground. One lone little boy sat on the merry-go-round.

In the distance, sirens wailed. Natalya rose and made her way toward the boy. He ignored her, so she sat on the still toy beside him.

"What are you doing?"

"Nuthin. I didn't do it." The child's lower lip overlapped his upper, a tiny little pout that tugged strangely at her heart. His light brown hair was tousled, tossed with gold. Surely it would darken as he aged. His amber eyes reminded her of Jere. Of maybe what their child might have looked like.

"What didn't you do, little one?"

"I didn't mean to make the fire."

Fire?

The old fear surfaced, one from ages ago. Keara had set their all-girl school on fire. She'd been teased and tortured all through her childhood and one day she just lost it.

Natalya didn't really know it was her at the time. But through her jealousy, she had pointed the finger at Jenesi, as Keara was called back then, and had her banished to

Earth. But the horrors of that fire remained with her still. The screams, the terror, the...smells. Burnt hair, burnt skin, melted plastic.

Still, she tried to make it past her own fears to soothe the sniffling child who tugged at her heart.

"I'm sure you didn't mean to make it. What were you doing? Playing with matches?"

He shook his head emphatically. And then held his eyes downcast.

Talya reached out and placed a hand on his shoulder. The child unexpectedly tossed himself against her, sobbing into her as he clung tightly.

"Shhh," she crooned, smoothing his hair. "It's okay, little guy. Talk to me. Tell me what's wrong."

"I-I wasn't playing with matches, or n-n-nuthin'," he sobbed. "I was just mad and I didn't mean to."

Alarm began to grow in Natalya's midsection. The exact same dread from all those years ago. She had pretended to hate Jenesi back then but the plain truth of the matter was, Jenesi terrified her. It was easier to admit now that she'd voiced it to Keara during their argument but she had never been around a human, they were evil creatures from another dimension. Why one was allowed to live in their realm and attend their school was beyond her. She may be the closest thing she had to a friend now but Keara was hideous as Jenesi when they were children. A bizarre oddity. A scary-looking human, the first she'd ever seen.

"There's something wrong with me," he cried. "I'm not like the other kids. I can't be like them."

"Why not?"

In his distress, his horns were beginning to protrude. She felt an answering call in hers and they slowly rose, inch by inch, in sync with his.

In hers? Her horns should be gone. Obviously she was dreaming.

Oh but it felt so good. She'd missed them dreadfully now that she no longer had them. Hers had been utterly beautiful, shimmery tusks of pearlescent silver that glistened through the platinum crown of her hair. Just as they were now.

This dream had allowed all those feelings to return. She wanted to reach up and run her fingers along the smooth ivory. But she had a child to tend to.

Who the child was and why they were both in this dream was beyond her.

"I don't see any difference between you and the other kids."

He stopped crying long enough to look up. "You don't? Whoa." His eyes grew large at the sight of her extended horns.

"Yes, dumbstruck, aren't you?" Talya smirked. "You aren't the first little man to have that reaction, trust me. I do believe they are the most beautiful in the world."

"I've never seen..."

"Yeah, yeah. I know, little guy. Now tell me about how you started the fire."

His bottom lip quivered again. "I just got hot. A lot. Inside my eyes. And this time it burned."

Those little fingers of fear tingled again. His tiny little face reminded her of Jenesi.

And then realization struck.

This child was Jere. Like his relation Keara, he caused fires.

She wasn't dreaming. *This* wasn't a dream. She was tossed back in time to the Earth dimension. Damn Keara. That original bitch from Hell.

"What, lady?" he asked, his little voice quivering. "Do I scare you too? My mommy left 'cause I scared her. I'm so sorry, I don't mean to be bad. When I grow up, I'm gonna have lots of kids. Good kids. I'll love them. Not kids like me."

Talya gathered the little boy up in her arms, cuddling his adorable innocence and inhaling the silky sweet softness of his hair. This tiny child thought he was pure human and had probably never noticed the extensions when his horns protruded, if they ever had before tonight. Surely it would be hard to control them without any other demon

around to transmit pheromones. He hadn't been impressed with the beauty of her horns, he was impressed by the "magic trick".

She was ashamed of her vanity.

"You're pretty," he said shyly.

Talya couldn't resist a small dig. "You'll love me very much in twenty-five years or so. Ask me to marry you, over and over. Don't forget, okay?"

He nodded solemnly.

A niggling thought hit Natalya suddenly. She'd lost everything in her dimension, her leadership, her horns, her life. Her husband.

She'd tossed him aside heartlessly. Stupidly.

But she could do something for Jere. He wouldn't have to grow up a criminal this time, not if she could help him.

"Hey, little guy. Would you like me to visit you? A lot? We could be friends."

He nodded again. Then admitted shyly, "I don't have no friends."

Regret hit Talya. He was so like Keara, it was like reliving their own youth. A child stuck in the wrong dimension, picked on by others. Never belonging, caught between two worlds. Keara had been lucky with her banishment but Jere? He was punished by his own dimension by being labeled a criminal. By becoming a social outcast by time spent in juvenile detentions and jails.

Unless she intervened.

This time around, she could give Jere a better life. A wife who loved him. Maybe even rescue that aborted child. Just because her eggs were destroyed didn't mean Jere shouldn't have children.

"I'll be your friend, okay? And I'll tell you stories, lots of them about my world. My land."

"Are you a fairy princess?"

Talya tried not to grimace. How dreary. “Better. I was the exalted ruler of my entire dimension, Luciefyore. Come on, say it with me. Lesson number one. Loosh-fee-yor-ee.”

The child repeated it slowly and Talya gave him a pat on the head.

“By the way, little guy. Bet I can guess your name.”

He giggled. “Nuh-uh. No one has the same name as me.”

“Let’s see. It rhymes with bear. Are you Jere?”

His eyes widened and his mouth opened. “Whoa.”

“Yeah,” she agreed. “Whoa, indeed.”

“Are you magic, lady?”

“Yes, little guy. By the way, you can call me...Tally. Now, before I tell you a story, I want you to remember something. If policemen come and ask you about the fire, I want you to tell them you *were* playing with a lighter but you got scared and threw it away. You don’t remember where.”

“But that’s lying. I wasn’t.”

“It’s a white lie, Jere. A white lie is something that keeps something worse from happening. Like when a fat lady asks you if she smells and you say no so her feelings won’t get hurt. It doesn’t hurt you but it makes the fat lady feel better. See?”

The child nodded. “And I just hold my breaths.”

“Uh, yeah. So remember, you were playing with a lighter and got scared of the fire, so you ran and threw it away, okay?”

“Kay.”

But Talya was exhausted. Her body began pulling away and she didn’t have the strength or energy to fight it

“Tally?” he asked. “You’re getting lighter. I can see through you.”

“Uh-huh, sweetie. I have to go back to my world. But you remember what I told you.”

“Will you come back to me?”

Such a loaded question. Much like the one the adult asked her earlier today. Of course, she couldn't tell the child they were married. “Yes, sweetie. Someday, I don't know when. I'll try hard to make it soon, okay?”

The last image she had was of the child's tear-stained cheeks as he bravely watched her fade away.

To Natalya Hershkle, the child faded to nothing, not her. She was still on the Earthling playground, though it was years and years later.

The equipment had changed. Trees had matured. The weather was warmer. And there was a spot in her heart that changed too.

Also warmer.

A tiny little portion that missed Jere already. The child, the grownup. Just...Jere.

* * * * *

After time skipped ahead on the playground, she made her way to Keara's house. That much didn't change, at least. She'd curled up in her bed, wondering what time or where she would be later. Closing her exhausted eyes, she let herself drift.

It wasn't as hard to wake up this time. She was getting used to this dimension. She lay in bed, wondering what the day would bring.

She woke up in Keara's house. On Earth.

Still missing her husband. That tiniest grain of knowledge hit her suddenly. Acceptance.

She accepted the fact that Jere was her husband instead of resenting that she was tied to him in both dimensions. Too bad she'd accepted it too late. He would never believe that she wasn't just after his throne at this point. It was her own fault.

Unless...maybe Keara and Caleb were here. They'd come back to Earth to keep Jere away from her while she recovered. Maybe since Keara zapped her here instead of leaving her in Luciefyore, they were still present also.

She sprang from bed and caught herself when she swayed. Still weak. Dots swam before her eyes. As soon as she could walk without keeling over, she made her way to the bedroom door and flung it open.

“Hello?”

The big old house sounded empty. It felt empty.

“Anyone here?”

There was no response. She shuffled her feet slowly, searching every room in the house. There was no sign of anyone.

She made her way back to the master bedroom where she’d awoken. Into the bathroom where a portal had once opened in the mirror and sucked her through.

It felt like so long ago, when it wasn’t. Not really.

She stared at her reflection in the mirror. She’d lost weight. Her eyes were too large for her face, as if they silently begged for a portal to open and swallow her. None came.

So how would she re-visit the child she’d promised to watch over?

She took her time showering as she tried to think up a solution to her dilemma. She blow dried her hair and dressed in Keara’s clothing before it dawned on her.

She raced to the kitchen where a calendar sat on the fridge. She glanced at the digital kitchen clock that showed the date. Today was it. The day.

All Hallow’s Eve.

This day she could access power from her own dimension. Surely Keara would have old texts of human witchcraft in this dimension. Witches worshipped demons and what was she?

Why, she was a demon, dammit. The best of the best. Full-blooded. And she wouldn’t allow anyone, not the council, not Enishka, not Keara, no one would keep her from her task.

Fixing Jere’s life.

Searching for hours but refusing to give up, she finally found the texts in the most unlikely place. Not the huge library of the house. Not the laptop computer that sat in the office. Not even the office itself.

She found them in Keara's nightstand.

Musty old smelly books, you could almost feel the dampness under your fingers as you thumbed through the pages. There was the information she needed. The midnight hour was the window between portals. She'd have to be up for hours still.

Just as well, it would give her enough time to study the spells and search for the supplies she'd need. She paused, quickly skimming through the listing of ingredients.

Geez. Where the hell would she find demon blood in this dimension?

Oh. Yeah.

The second hardest ingredient. An old woman's urine. Okay, fine. She could prick her own finger for the blood but urine? Eeww, the stench. And what constituted old? She herself was a woman but it definitely said *old* woman.

Briefly she considered Keara.

Scratch that, the pregnancy hormones would probably screw up the delicate spell. If she could even find a way to contact Keara. Natalya clicked her nails against the desk impatiently.

Had she ever had friends? Surely she had an old woman friend. Somewhere.

The answer came to her like a lightbulb switched on in her brain.

She *did* know of an old woman. The old shrew with the weak bladder at the train station.

She didn't have long left. She hurried as quickly as she could to the bench where she'd originally met the old biddy. Surprisingly, the old woman sat in the station just as before. Was she here again, or still? Did the crazy old bat live here, on a bench?

Natalya sat next to her. "I need urine."

"You yearn for what? Speak English, weirdo."

“Urine, old woman. U-R-I-N-E.”

“Piss? You want me to pee in a cup? If you don’t get outta here, I’m gonna scream for the cops.”

Natalya rolled her eyes at the threat. With the way the shrew wheezed, there was no way she could suck in enough air for a belch, much less a scream.

“I don’t have a lot of time, old mummy. Pish, or whatever the word was, in a cup for me and I’ll grant you a small wish when I use the urine to conjure a spell at midnight.”

“Spell, did you say? Witch, are you? That explains a lot.”

Natalya raised her nose higher into the air. “Witch? No. I am a demon, not a squirrelly, naked dancer.” Forget about that brief moment in Vegas. There was another spell for that—*What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.*

“But you can still access a spell, freako?”

“I can. For one cup of pish, I will do one small wish. What do you want?”

“We-ell,” she droned, “I have been thinking about some male companionship ever since you came hassling me last. I could probably use a boy-toy or two. Like I said, I don’t want no dirty old dough being stuffed into me like a floppy sausage, I want it firm and hard. *Young.*”

Ugh. “That’s disgusting. How young?”

The old one leaned over and whispered an age into Natalya’s ear, blowing a garlicky stench through her soul. She fought the urge to vomit.

“For that, I may need *two* cups of urine, shrew. Want to take a shot at a larger number? Something legal, perhaps?”

The old biddy ended up going into the coffee shop for a cup. Natalya kept looking at Keara’s watch on her wrist, a new one since her skirmish with the evil, now-curly-headed Earth child previously. It was getting close. Fifteen minutes to go and still no pish.

She finally arrived.

"It's about time," Natalya snapped.

"Hold onto your panties, tramp, I can't go yet."

"What? How do you know you can't go?"

"I don't feel the need."

"Apparently you go at unexpected times, 'cause you always reek."

"Do not."

"Do too."

"Well, anyways, I ain't got nothin' in me yet."

"Geez, I only have fifteen minutes to do the spell," Talya hissed. "Go drink something and bring me back a warm *full* cup, woman!"

"You're awful uppity, you know that?" the old shrew said. "Give me a dollar to buy a pop." She held her hand out, muttering something about a cheapskate as she walked back into the station.

She finally returned at ten minutes before midnight. With a full cup.

Natalya wanted to grab the cup but thinking about its contents, very slowly reached for it instead.

"It ain't a bomb," the old woman said.

"Oh hush. I need to concentrate and you're driving me nuts."

"Hmmp," the old bag muttered. "Uppity little slut."

Talya rolled her eyes as she centered her ingredients around her. The book open in her lap, she began to chant the strange words on the pages.

"It's a full moon. You're not gonna get weird and dance naked, are ya?"

"No," snapped an exasperated Talya. "Those are witches. I told you, I'm a demon."

She continued to chant until it was time for the blood. She took the sharpened claw of the rabbit's foot and pricked her finger. A drop welled to the surface.

“Hey, your blood is blue. That’s nasty.”

She tried to tune out the old biddy because, quite frankly, she was getting on her nerves.

“When do I get to make my wish? It’s my pee, you know.”

Concentrate. Ignore her. Pronounce each syllable directly and succinctly.

She began to feel lightheaded and then the words took on a life of their own, spewing from her lips faster and faster. She was vaguely aware she didn’t even have to look at the book anymore.

“Do I wish yet? Do I say it out loud, or in my head?”

She ignored her. The chanting was automatic, vague, whispered words that had no meaning. Exactly like...time.

Things were morphing, images blurring right before her. Scenes all around, like watching a soap opera, bits and pieces being rewound and blended together in spots that shouldn’t be.

There she was. Not long ago. Enjoying an oily massage from the last demon she’d added to her harem. At the time she justified she had a busy and stressful job. After all, she was the ruler of Luciefyore. Adding a massage therapist to her list of minions was completely necessary.

And he had the most amazing *horns*.

More images swirled. But something caught her eye.

Focusing in on the view, she watched as Jere opened his door to a redheaded woman, his face growing hard at something she said.

Wait. This was important.

She focused on ignoring the old, urine-soaked woman who still whined in front of her and tried to be one with the illusion before her. It worked.

Instantly she was right there with them and she could hear the words they spoke.

“I’m so sorry, sweetheart. I just woke up and realized it’s not gonna work.”

“You don’t just wake up one day with that thought in your head, Kelly.”

“I did. You’re a great man. For someone else. I think I just don’t love you anymore. I mean, I love you. But I’m not *in* love with you.”

What the hell did that mean?

And by the look on Jere’s face, he was just as stumped. He was completely white, his hands clenched into fists as he fought for control.

“*Now do I make my wish?*” The voice broke in, yanking her concentration, pulling her to where Jere and Kelly became transparent images again.

Natalya opened her eyes to see old stinky about an inch from her face.

“Interrupt me again and I’ll curse you with a string of unclean men. Syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes. You name it, you’ll have it rotting within you.”

“Hmmp!”

Closing her eyes, she watched the dots of lights swirl behind her eyelids. Sure enough, they began to morph into shapes. Faster this time, slide shows being forwarded.

Time forwarded to show him approaching her apartment later, raising his hand to knock and then stopping. He reached for a key in his pocket and used it to unlock the door.

Talya jumped in right along with him.

The living room showed dim lighting. Slight indentations on the sofa. Two glasses of wine on the coffee table.

Jere cut his eyes to a back hallway where the bedroom must have been. Talya’s stomach felt sick, wondering if there was some way to avoid what was imminent. He walked steadily down the small hall, to a bedroom door where definite noises were coming from. He reached for the door handle.

Talya reached out to put her hand on top of his. To stop him. He didn’t want to do this. She didn’t want him to go through this.

Jere paused. His face looked uncertain.

And then Natalya realized it already happened. So instead of stopping him from turning that handle, she kept her hand on his and gave him strength. Helped him turn the knob, push open the door.

Kelly rode.

Long red waves of hair flowed down a shapely, feminine back. His hair-ridden legs stuck out from underneath her.

Shocked at the noise, she turned and looked over her shoulder at the same time her lover looked up.

“Jere,” they both said in unison, mutual expressions of shock on their faces.

The scene ended.

But in her time, everything solid around her had faded, the trees, the bench, the old woman. The ammonia stench that wafted from the old bat.

Replacing it was...

Chapter Eight

Learning to Love

Jere as a young man. Now as solid as the world once was. Alone and filled with rage. He'd just caught his fiancée, who'd broken things off with him yesterday, in bed with another.

Such a cliché, you wouldn't think it would hurt. But reality bites, sometimes hard enough to draw blood

His voice was bitter and resentful as he stared at her. "You haven't visited me in a long time," he accused. "I thought I was a crazy kid. That I made you up. An imaginary friend who told me lying was okay."

"Visitation is not in my control. I had to find my own way back and I can't control when or where I pop in! Besides, I'm changing the future by visiting you. Originally you didn't meet me until you were an adult, now you remember meeting me when you were seven."

"So why are you changing things? What's happened in the future and how do I know you?"

"I can't share that with you, Jere. I don't know the rules. I don't know how this all works."

"Why are you here this time?"

"To repair some patterns that shouldn't be. Some things I can fix but nature has a way of correcting those changes. Originally your fiancée left you for another reason, I've fixed that and now she's left you anyway. I'm thinking you probably need to accept that it's meant to be. I know it hurts but unanswered prayers are best."

"What do you know?" he sneered. "You don't look like a preacher. Are you even married?"

“Actually, I am.”

As soon as she said it, she wanted to take it back. What would she do if he asked her for her husband’s name? She withheld too much information and he would get suspicious. She gave too much and it would arouse more future paths criss-crossing.

But how she longed to reach out and hold him. His heart was breaking with the loss of his fiancée. She wanted to embrace him to her breast, to assure him he would find love again someday.

With her.

She wanted to tell him that she hadn’t appreciated his love but how she would beg anyone and anything for it now.

“So Kelly’s left me in every situation, huh?”

Talya grinned. “Pretty much. And your last one was much worse. Trust me, you were a loser then.”

It brought a smile to his lips, if not his eyes. Those remained damaged, hurt by tragedy.

Her smile vanished as she reached out and tentatively stroked his cheek. He looked lost. Much like the child she’d just left behind.

“I miss you so much,” she admitted, the gut-wrenching words torn from her.

He looked surprised. Of course, he didn’t know the relationship between them was more than what he knew of now, in this time and place.

Slowly she brought his head to hers and touched his lips with her mouth. It felt the same as it had earlier in her own time – a much-missed kiss with her husband.

Familiarity and a rush of heat.

He felt the spark too, he must have. He opened his mouth on his own, deftly met her tongue. Passion flared, grew with each breath, with each swirl of tongues.

The very air around her thickened, rushed at her as though she controlled it. But it was too much, she couldn't manage it, it wasn't the passion erupting through her soul, it was *her* being ripped from time.

Again.

No. She dug in her heels and refused to let go. It wasn't a portal, it couldn't rip her through. She wanted to be here with Jere, she missed him dreadfully.

Her fingers began to unbutton his shirt but they were clumsy and unpracticed. She ripped the two halves apart, buttons scattering everywhere.

It was so worth it. His chest was magnificent. Perfect. She bent to press her lips against it.

He cupped the back of her head, bringing her face back up to his for more kisses. She unsnapped his jeans, hearing the button as it popped free. She was getting better at it. But she couldn't tell him that he chuckled at her first attempt at it, could she? For technically, that hadn't yet happened.

Her kisses became frantic. She was afraid she'd get pulled away. He was sensing her need or dulling the pain of his fiancée, whichever worked. In either case, their tongues twined and she couldn't get close enough to him. He thumbed her hipbones, rubbing erotically through the sundress she wore.

"You always go around without panties?" he asked.

She smiled. "Only when I time travel."

If only he knew he'd seen her more often naked than clothed.

Their lips meshed again and somehow he twisted her skirt up around her waist without her even being aware of it. He cupped her mound with his hand and the heat poured from his palm.

It had been so long. Lightly his touch skimmed along her swollen labia, feeling the smooth skin.

Then his finger parted her nether lips, dipping inside to feel how wet she was. He began to thrust his fingers in and out, stretching her entrance. She was melting inside, she could feel the honey gather just from his kisses alone.

She moaned, a girlish gasp escaping when he reached deep inside.

It was a wordless coming together but yet he magically seemed to know which spots to hit.

He cupped his hands under her buttocks and lifted her body onto him. She wrapped her legs around his hips, dress still pulled up to her waist.

Mouth still locked to hers, he carried her into his bedroom and sat on the bed. She was splayed open to his view and he looked his fill when he leaned back and spread her labia open with his thumbs.

She was squirming against his touch. She popped a breast out of the top of her elastic shirred dress and pulled him down to her nipple. He sucked it eagerly, frantically even, as if they'd run out of time at any given moment. His fingers were continually playing with her swollen lips, spreading slick moisture over and around her clitoris.

She unwrapped her legs and slowly moved from his lap. She tugged a little on his jeans and his heavy cock burst out from the top. She moved in and licked leisurely, long and wide. She nearly swallowed his cock, she was so eager to have it in her mouth. He groaned when he hit the back of her throat, before she pulled up and sank down again. Over and over, while he gripped the sheets and thrust upward with his hips.

Weakly, he pushed her away with a hand to her shoulder. He stood, swinging long legs off the bed, and pushed her face down on the mattress. Her legs were still on the floor, so she leaned over the edge of the bed. He whipped her dress to the middle of her back and caressed the curves of her shapely ass.

Suddenly he spread her cheeks wide and plunged in. Wet slickness slid from her sheath and coated his silky hardness. He pulled out, leaving just the swollen head of his

cock imbedded between her thickened lips, then thrust deeply inside again. His cock was so warm, heated first from her mouth, then by the silky cream of her pussy.

Her nether lips were swallowing him as he plunged in and out. He could feel she was ready to come by the tightening of her sheath, gripping him mercilessly as he fought to pull out.

She moaned long and hard and then came, rippling internal muscles rolling along his stiff cock. She wriggled her ass against him and he couldn't hold out. His cock emptied itself, spurting cum deep inside her.

He collapsed onto her, both of their chests heaving. He curled her onto her side, pulling her into him with a strong muscled arm to her abdomen.

Now it started. The whistling of a breeze, the magnetic pull of invisible air. She wanted to fight it but knew it was wrong.

She didn't belong. She was in a time and place that wasn't real for her form. She needed just a little longer, a little comfort with the man she missed so dreadfully.

She turned to him, wanting to speak.

Wanting to tell him how much she loved him.

But she was pulled from the place where she most wanted to be, her own husband's arms. Double damn, the spell wasn't strong enough. It was the old woman's pee, had to be.

Dimly she was aware of his calling out to her, it was almost enough to make her dig in her heels again and fight to stay.

But the name he called out was Tally. Not Natalya. Not Talya as he had known her. Tally, the name she'd given him this time around when she met him. As a child of seven.

Regretfully, she allowed her soul to slip into the vortex of time and let it yank her away. Because this one couldn't be the right pathway.

It was morning now and she awoke on the park bench. No sign of the stinky old woman.

Now that she was back in the future, she had to find out information about Jere. Was he in prison? Was he ruling Luciefyiore? How would she find out?

That was when it dawned on her. The only person to contact was Demitris.

It was a short walk across the street to find a yellow car to take her there.

As she had less than a week earlier, Natalya knocked and then kneeled at the front door of Demitris' home.

"Master," she said when he opened the door.

"Natalya? Come in, my dear." He stood aside to allow her in, then motioned for her to sit. "What are you doing here on Earth?"

She looked at him blankly for a moment. "Oh, this reality is altered. You don't realize I've been banished here, do you?"

Concern etched across his face. "Altered realities? What have you been playing with, Natalya?"

"Time travel. I don't have a lot of time, I'll give you a quick run-down. I'm here now to find out how the half-breed Jere is."

"Jere Rousseau? The man we discovered was Keara's cousin? How do you know him?"

"It's a long story, one that you used to know before I time-traveled and changed the future. Originally I was banished to Earth and he was here, healthy and fine. We married but he was made ruler of Luciefyiore instead of me and Keara zapped me through time. I decided to fix his life so he wouldn't get dumped by his fiancée when he went to prison and I just got back. I need to know how he is, if she married him, or if he's happy just ruling our dimension."

Demitris was quiet. "You're married to Jere?"

“Yes but I don’t know if it’s really happened now or not, since I changed things. In any case, I want to find out how he is.”

“Talya, he’s not ruling Luciefyore.”

“What? Nuts, I screwed things up somehow. What happened? I just explained to him that Kelly kept leaving him and maybe he should leave it at that. That was probably selfish of me, wasn’t it? I knew it but I was my usual bitchy self and ignored my own intuition.” Okay and maybe she shouldn’t have lost control and jumped his bones but hell, she was a naughty demon.

“Talya.”

“Yes?”

“Jere’s dead.”

The world dropped out from beneath her. She gripped the table, afraid to fall. “Excuse me?”

“He was sent to prison. Had a lot of fights and was stabbed. I’m sorry.”

Her knees were weak, quivering like gelatin. Surely there was some mistake. Her heart pounding, she asked, “You’re sure?”

“Very, my dear.”

“Did he know? That he was a half-breed? That was why he started fires and stuff?”

“Yeah, we found him after he was convicted and told him. But it was too late at that point, he was a hard and violent man. Definitely fit for prison. I’m having a hard time imagining you were married.”

“He wasn’t hard and violent before. Oh, a little bitter maybe but never violent. What did I do? I messed things up worse.”

She missed Jere. He couldn’t be gone.

She missed her husband, the friends they’d become before the Luciefyore mess. She wanted to turn to him now, to share her feelings with him. Tell him she didn’t know what to do, how she could fix his past without influencing his future.

Didn't even know how she would go back.

She dropped her head onto the table but just as quickly popped up again. "You have to find a way to get me back."

"Me? How can I do it?"

Natalya narrowed her eyes. "Apparently, there's a small bit of time-traveling in your genes. Keara's the one that sent me back the first time."

Demitris knew it was fruitless to deny it. Still, he sighed. "There's huge consequences in time travel."

"Don't I know it? But this isn't right. It wasn't supposed to happen this way. His life isn't supposed to be cut short."

They were at a standstill.

"I can't intervene, my dear."

"Please, master. This is wrong."

She knew he was weakening by the softening around his eyes. "If I do it, I'll only do it once."

"I know. But please, please don't leave him dead because of me."

"Do you love him?"

Natalya thought about it. "Yes. I do."

That was what tipped Demitris' choice. Because finally, The Huntress knew love. And as far as he knew, no matter what time or dimension, she never had. This might be worth the shot. Still, it was dangerous.

"There's always a price, Natalya. You might not return. You might cease to exist. Are you willing to give your life?"

"I would give anything to make things right."

Slowly, he nodded. "Be careful what you wish for."

The last thing Natalya thought of was, those must be the magic words in both he and Keara that unlocked the traveling power within them.

A fresh day, a new place. That was the next thought that hit her mind. A bright summery place on Earth, she came to standing in front of a window, looking out over a courtyard where well-dressed guests were arriving.

Keara had obviously been irritated with her when she'd originally sent her to the past, for the choking smoke was torture. She didn't have that same problem with Demitris and was as surprised as Jere when she morphed into his chambers pain-free.

"You! What are you doing here? Today of all days," he said.

It should have been a happy day. He looked amazing in his wedding clothes. But the bride was all wrong.

The bride was another woman. Jealousy flared but she quickly swallowed it for the greater good. After all, she'd screwed up the last trip. "I guess I finally fixed it, somehow."

"That's what you've been doing by visiting me for years? Fixing my life?"

"Yes. The first time I met you, you had just escaped from prison. Kelly had left you when you were sentenced. I fixed it but she left you again. I fixed that and it looks like the third time's the charm. You'll get married this time. Um, it is Kelly you're marrying, right?"

"Yeah."

She tried not to allow the swoosh of air to escape too loudly. But the relief was great. So far so good.

He would never remember what transpired between them last time. She'd fixed that.

"You'll be happy," she continued. "You deserve happiness."

"Why?"

The question puzzled her. "Why? Because you deserve it. You're an amazing man."

"What if I'm not? What if it's not meant to be?"

"Of course it is. You love Kelly, you always have. You were very bitter over your breakup when I met you."

"I'm not sure."

"What do you mean? Something's not right, you've always loved her."

"I never had doubts?"

Talya thought about it. She wasn't sure but she didn't want to influence him in any way either. Because last time she talked him out of marrying Kelly, she caused his death. "No, Jere. Not that I'm aware of," she said carefully.

"I feel sick."

She forced a laugh. "Pre-wedding jitters. It's nothing. Just nerves." Yet she didn't have them when she married him, did she? Was it a telling sign? A premonition?

"I've had three different people tell me I didn't have to go through with this."

Oh no. Others could see the problem? What was wrong now? Was it something she caused?

"And," he continued, "you have always been in the back of my mind. A childhood crush on a figment of my imagination. Always wondering, are you real or aren't you? Will you be back, or won't you? Should I marry her or wait for you?"

"I'm the reason you're wondering if you should marry? Oh, oh, that's not supposed to happen."

"Why not?"

"Well, you're supposed to get married."

"How do you know?"

Because you can have children with her and you can't with me. And that seven-year-old little boy wanted a child to love and never leave.

"I just do."

"If I'm meant to be with her, why am I unsure?"

"I don't know, Jere. Unless it's something I've done."

"What do you have to do with it?"

"Every time I go back into the past, I warp something new. I don't know how but maybe I've done something this time."

There was a soft knock on the door. Natalya slid stealthily behind the drapes of the window, years of experience as The Huntress taking control. While she couldn't be seen, she also couldn't see. But she could hear everything.

"Hey, man. How ya holding up?" said a male voice.

"I'm good. Why?"

"Just checking up. That's all."

There was quiet for a while before the stranger said, "You know, you don't have to go through with this, right?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you're not sure about things, it's not too late to call them off. It's never too late to call things off."

"Why would you think I'd want to stop the wedding?"

"I'm not saying that, Jere. I'm just saying take your time, be sure about things."

"We talked about this yesterday, Shawn. Everything's set. I can't disappoint her just because I'm unsure."

There was a big sigh. "Okay, fine. We'll be here for you no matter what."

She waited until she heard the door click shut before she emerged from behind the curtains.

When he turned to face her, his eyes were bleak.

Wordlessly, she held out her arms. He was between them in a heartbeat. It felt like she'd never hold him again, so she pressed in tight.

At this moment he was alive. He was well and he was hers. She was desperate, holding her emotions in check but so scared that she'd screw this up and wipe him out with the slightest mistake.

For wasn't she the queen of mistakes? It didn't matter who or what was involved, if there was something to screw up, she'd do it.

"I'm still not so sure I should be with her. She's all I know and something feels off."

"It's because I changed the pattern of things. Nothing that you know right now is as it should be. That's all you're sensing. Nothing else."

"What's my relationship with you?" he asked suddenly.

"I can't share that. The more you know, the more that might change the future. Again."

"You keep fixing it."

"I have to. I keep screwing it up. But, Jere, this is my last chance. I don't have any other options on how to travel, so I'm really worried. Please, trust me. Go through with the marriage."

"If I love her, why am I tempted by you?"

"I'm just new. A mystery. That's all. It's nothing."

"But I should be sure. In either case, I should know what I want."

"Trust me, you want her. You want your marriage to her."

"Then why do I feel like this?" he muttered harshly and ground his lips to hers.

She wasn't ready for it. There was no time to protest, no time to think about not enjoying what was offered to her. She liquefied, from deep in her belly, to trickle between her thighs.

"We shouldn't do this," she protested when she could pull away at last. It was a halfhearted attempt at best and they both knew it.

"If this is the last chance, then why not?" he whispered. "I'll be safely married, you'll go back to the future. All we'll have is our memories. Let's make them good."

He was the most sinful temptation she'd ever known. And she'd caused many to stray. A niggling little doubt still rooted in her brain, however. Was she making the future even worse for him? But what if this was it? Could she return to her own life without this last chance with the love of her life?

The one man she'd once tossed carelessly aside?

He tired of waiting for her to make up her mind. He moved in and kissed her. Long and deep and it made her melt. She felt the liquid gather deep inside her. His tongue swept her mouth, slowly at first and then faster as he sensed her need. He thrust into her, showing her with his mouth what it would be like when he sank into her with his cock.

She was a horny demon. There was no way she had any willpower to preach to him about marrying another within the hour. Her mind justified that Kelly would have him the rest of her life, she just got Jere this last time. One last time.

She broke from the sensuous kiss long enough to mutter, "Please. I'll get undressed, you just unzip and release your cock, okay?"

"Okay," he agreed, before locking his mouth to hers. "You're like a dream come true. You kiss just like I thought you would," he said between kisses. Together their hands worked to pull her clothes off, leaving her bare and tanned and smooth beneath his touch.

He sat her in the armchair, swinging both her legs over the arms. Then he slipped his hands under her butt, pulling her forward to the edge. His mouth dipped, tasting her as she gasped at the first pass of his tongue.

She was delicate and pink and ready for loving. Spread open waiting for his wet suck. He sucked her pussy into his mouth, rolling her swollen lips into his hot warmth as she squirmed, her hands gripping her inner thighs as if she could spread them further. He inserted a finger into her sheath as he sucked, feeling the liquid honey gather to welcome his wide cock.

"Jere," she moaned. "You're so good. You make me want to come so hard."

He looked up at her. "Do you want to come in my mouth, sweet?"

She nodded shakily, afraid to voice the words lest she explode then and there. His tongue playing against her clitoris, flicking over and over, massaging it with velvety softness.

Then he grabbed it between his thumb and forefinger, pinching gently, and pulled it into his mouth for a hard suck.

She exploded into a starburst of light, her entire midsection quaking with the force of her climax.

Her open pussy spasmed when he rose to his knees and inserted his long cock deep into her pussy.

It was an overload of sensation, the wondrous right feeling of him inserted where he should be.

He moved in and out, thrusting as hard as he wanted. She snaked a finger down to her clitoris and began to manipulate it into another orgasm now that she had a thick penis filling her.

Rhythmically she stroked as she thrust her hips to meet his movements, tightening her sheath around him with quick movements as she clenched her inner muscles.

He was breathing hard and she knew he fought his orgasm until she was ready again. So she let loose, pulling his mouth to hers while she climaxed around him.

He groaned, thrusting his own climax into her while he thrust his tongue into her mouth.

She loved this moment, after sex. When her body still had tremors of aftershocks, when his body was still locked deep in hers, slowly softening. He was on his knees, his head resting on her bare breasts.

It felt perfect. So right.

"I can't do it," he said, raising his head. "I can't marry her."

“Listen to me,” she said, cupping his cheek. “You have to. This is the last travel I get. I couldn’t bear it if I messed up again. You have to go through with the marriage to Kelly.”

Because I can never, ever give you the children you crave, my love.

He looked directly at her. Slowly he nodded, before clenching his eyes shut. “Okay.”

The door banged open to show the redheaded bride.

“What the hell’s the hold-up—” Kelly stopped and her eyes rounded with shock. “Oh you bastard,” she screamed.

Oh no. Not yet. Not now. Desperately, Talya tried to hold onto Jere but her body lightened, fading away, lighter and lighter, until she was gone.

Chapter Nine

Living Anew

She faded away, much like she had when Keara's power had worn off. But this time when she returned, it was to watch a scene replay while she stood by, invisible. As she stood there, her body was drawn to the bed, where a version of herself lay, talking to Keara. It was the scene when Enishka had burned out her eggs, before the first time she traveled.

"You get help before you continue to hurt everyone around you. Before you screw up both worlds, instead of just one," the now-Keara said.

"Then wipe me out, dammit. I know you can. I'm useless, I can't rule Luciefiore and I can't get myself out of the damned Earth dimension. Just strike me dead," she heard herself say.

She'd forgotten how much she meant it at the time. She certainly didn't feel that way anymore and wanted to stop the first time she said it.

Her invisible body and soul were being pulled into the bed, when it wanted to merge with itself. While she was being sucked to the past self, she watched herself rise from the bed. She slammed into herself, present and past colliding, all at once collapsing on weakened knees.

Just like the first time, she fell on the floor.

Although then she had no idea what caused her to weaken so to nearly faint.

There was a long bout of silence while Keara studied her. An uncanny silence. Did this Keara now know what was going on all this time? Both times? "That would be too easy, to give up, wouldn't it? I never thought The Huntress would take the easy road," she said.

“Do it, damn you. I know you still have powers inside you that Enishka didn’t get. We all saw you rearrange his face.” She fought against the words but apparently, she didn’t have control over changing what had been said previously.

“I’ll show you some power, little sister. But be careful what you wish for.”

She tried again. “Keara, wait!” she shouted, showing more strength than she had. Physically, she was slaughtered. Emotionally, she was exhausted. She’d forgotten how much pain she was in after the burning of her eggs, the brutal surgery and cauterizing she had taken from Enishka.

Keara looked expectantly at her.

Natalya didn’t have a clue how she’d explain that this scene already happened. “Jere. I want Jere,” she gasped, frustrated tears from the sting in her heart rolling down her cheeks.

She was barely aware of Keara leaving the room and Jere slipping back in but there he was, gathering her up into his arms while she sobbed like a weakling. A baby.

Like a human.

He was actually here. He was actually real. He carried her to a chair and rocked her gently, smoothing her hair, murmuring sweet words she couldn’t catch. How could she tell him how badly she missed him? How could she explain how close he was to being dead? She consoled herself with touching him constantly, her fingers on his forearm, his biceps. Her other hand slipped behind him and underneath his shirt to feel his back beneath her fingers.

“I don’t care,” she hiccupped. “I don’t care that you get to rule instead of me. I’m so sorry for the way I hurt you. But I couldn’t leave you stuck with me, a worthless demon, for a marriage that was just supposed to be a moment’s fun.”

“What’s this?” he said, brushing fruitlessly at the tears that ran down her cheeks like rivers. “Who would dare call my wife worthless?” His tone was gentle, as if he tried to tease but sensed her honesty. “I’ll always protect you, my love. I always have. You know that. You don’t need horns.”

"I'm worthless, Jere. My horns are gone, my eggs are gone and you know what? You've wanted kids since you were seven."

"Kid," he corrected. "Maybe I sobbed out that I wanted lots of kids when I was young, but as I got older, I just wanted one, someone I could love and who would love me unconditionally. Someone I would never leave, like my mother left me."

"I have nothing to offer you."

He lifted her chin. "Then what do I have to offer you? I'm just a half-breed, remember? Not full-blooded demon."

She looked appalled. "You have so much to offer. You're the rightful ruler of Luciefyore. You're the biggest catch of the dimension, who cares if you're half demon? You still have demon blood. You're still one of us."

"Then quit crying, princess. You and I are walking through that door, we're having dinner with the Van Trumps and we're sending them back to Earth early so we have time alone together."

"So everything is all right this time?"

"I don't know which time you're talking about," he laughed. "Come on."

Hand in hand, they were out the bedroom door before she even realized it. Noise came from farther down the hallway.

The house looked unfamiliar but oddly familiar too. Was it hers, or Keara's? Had she really realized how similar they were before? It was odd, one on Earth, one on Luciefyore but the same floor plans. The same color schemes. Who would have guessed it?

And then she caught on to what he said. "We're sending them home early so we can have naked time, right?"

He pulled her into him, bringing her pelvis right up against him. Letting her feel his need. "Yes, princess. You and me."

She met his kiss eagerly. This was it. This was the right path. Demitris did it. He'd corrected the broken trail she'd left in her wake.

She moaned softly when Jere's tongue invaded her mouth. She tasted him, he was exactly the same as she remembered.

"You let me talk you into marriage when you knew you were a mixed-breed," she murmured.

"Yes." His face was hard, showing no remorse.

"Why?"

"I wanted you to be mine in both worlds."

"Back then?"

"Yes, my love."

"I love you, Jere. So much. I didn't tell you before. I want to tell you now."

He smiled, as if he'd always known it. "As I love you. Talya. Just as I always have. It's you and me together forever, my naughty little demoness."

A voice interrupted. "Geez, not again. Mommy, why can't my Aunt Tally and Uncle Jere fight like normal people in Luciefyore instead of kissing all the time?"

Natalya almost fainted from the shock. There between Keara and Caleb stood a small child dressed in ruffles and lace. Blond and angelic with her blue eyes.

Wearing reddish horns the exact color of Jere's.

"Talya?" Jere asked, staring at her reaction. "You okay?"

But Talya was stuck staring at the child's features, the combination of genes between her husband and Keara and Caleb. The gene pool was a funny thing, toss in a relative and watch the sparks fly.

In any case, it was the child she could never have. The child who had none of her features whatsoever.

"Your aunt's not feeling well, sugar. Go get her a glass of water, will you?" Keara said softly.

“Come with daddy, babydoll,” Caleb said, scooping the child into his arms.

As soon as they left, Talya voiced what was stuck on her brain. “H-how? My eggs were still burned out by Enishka. Right? I can never rule again because I am infertile? Yet you have borne a child? My niece who looks remarkably like Jere?”

“Yes,” Keara said. “She does look like her uncle. She’s too young to rule Luciefyore, but someday she may choose to. You and Jere are her guardians here. She lives on Earth with Caleb and me, but she comes to you for her demonic training. No demon should ever have to deny their heritage.”

Jere pulled her back into his arms, resting his chin on her head. “You and I still rule Luciefyore as guardians for Randi.”

Natalya looked over at Keara, still slightly unsure. “What’s happening now? At this time?”

“Where were you left last, Talya?”

“The last thing I remember, I was banished to Earth. Couldn’t return to Luciefyore until I caused true love. But then I was to be returned to Luciefyore without my powers, dead meat.”

“I’m going to leave you two to catch up,” Jere murmured. “But everything will be fine, my love. Your memories of the last few years will return,” he said, kissing her forehead.

Both women watched him leave before Keara continued. “Okay. So you’re in Luciefyore now.”

“What?” Natalya scrambled to a window and threw open the curtains. Sure enough, the sky was overcast with a reddish hue so unlike the strange blue of the Earth dimension. “I’m back? How is that possible? And why do our houses look the same?”

Keara smiled. “We redecorated, you and I.” Then she grew serious. “You fulfilled your sentencing, Talya. You were to cause unselfish love without your powers. You were stripped of your horns to make sure you didn’t use them.”

"The love?"

"You corrected Jere's life over and over. Until you gave him the happiness you thought he deserved. Even with Kelly."

"He loved her."

"He loved you, silly."

"Later, maybe. But I didn't deserve it, Keara. That's why I fixed it with Kelly."

"It wasn't meant to be. But you unselfishly tried to give him what you thought he wanted. Who you thought he loved. It still wasn't meant to be, Talya. Kelly left him the third time when he called out your name on their wedding night. He missed you and knew it was wrong. She ran sobbing to the arms of a man she was having an affair with the whole time."

"So I'm still married to Jere?"

"Yes. And together you rule Luciefiore. Although you can't have any children, you never seemed like you wanted any. I'm actually envious of the freedom you and Jere enjoy." She sighed. "Caleb and Miranda and I visit here often, when she's not staying with you."

"Miranda?" Talya hadn't remembered the child's name.

"Auntie Tally!"

The miniature five-year-old Keara re-entered the room, riding piggyback on Jere's back. "I lost to the little monster," teased Jere. "Now Randi and I have to play Barbies. And some of them are missing their horns."

"They got losted," she said, giggling as he bounced her down the hallway. "Broken off, like my Auntie Tally's."

Natalya still stared after the two.

"I take it you've never seen Randi?" Keara asked gently.

"You were pregnant the last time I was here. So much is different now."

“You’ll get used to it. It’s as it should be.” Keara leaned in. “You know, your husband fought for your memories to be returned within a night of your return time travel, don’t you? That’s why he promised you everything would be fine.”

Natalya turned her full attention to her. “Why? What did he trade?”

“You’ll have to ask him.”

Natalya nodded, distracted by the image Jere made with Randi. He was so handsome, the man she loved. Even now, he would take care of her. She began to walk away. “Keara!” Natalya called out, turning suddenly. “Thank you for that last fix. That bit of information.”

“Thank you for the last fix you gave me once.” Keara winked. “Dean’s impotence.”

Natalya laughed. She’d never realized that Keara knew she’d gone after the human who had treated Keara so poorly. He’d been the first one in her Luciefyore harem.

“You girls are dangerous when you get together,” murmured a now familiar voice at her ear.

Her husband.

The strangeness wasn’t as shocking as it was earlier. But the butterflies floated deliciously in her belly. He cuddled her, an arm wrapped around her waist. His lips nibbled at her earlobe.

“Later. When everyone’s in bed,” he whispered, his palm splayed on her abdomen. Heat from the open palm radiated throughout her midsection.

Her husband.

The man she loved. The other half of her soul. No matter which race he was born, demon or human or mixed. The man meant for her.

Her husband.

She was starting to remember.

Memories were hitting her, like the snippets of a five-year dream. She kept calm, letting them wash through her as she stared out the picture window of her living room at the sundown.

The Earthlings called it a sunset.

At this time of the day, you could watch the changes in her dimension. Landmarks shifted and shadow creatures walked. No wonder the humans thought this dimension was hell.

While she watched, a tree morphed into a creature with the roughened features of a wooden man. He pulled his outstretched limbs from the sky and used his finger-leaves to help yank new legs from the suddenly soft, spongy ground. Slowly he walked from the yard, touching objects in wonderment, a trailing path of leaves falling behind him.

Talya almost laughed when she remembered how the humans spent countless, back-breaking hours in their yards. They'd die the first time a plant transformed into a creature and walked away.

Her husband appeared behind her. Warm hands wrapped her in his strength, pulling her back into him to whisper in her ear. "And you thought it was weird that we eat the ugly little pink creatures."

"I still think that's weird," she laughed, but stopped when a warm breath rolled across the side of her neck. He nibbled on her earlobe until she moaned, then slipped his hands under her shirt to feel her flat stomach. "Your hand's warm," she said, and caught her breath when he plunged it into the waistband of her pants. He cupped her mound, letting her feel the warmth of his palm there.

He let his middle finger dance against her clitoris, making the sensitive organ swell delightfully with his ministrations. She sighed.

"I love when you do that," he said.

"Do what?"

"Sigh, like I'm the only one in your world."

“You are. I don’t need anyone but you.”

“Exactly how I feel, princess. Now let’s get to bed so I can take your clothes off one by one.”

Talya pouted. “I wanted it with me sitting on the kitchen counter tonight.”

“Tomorrow night,” he promised. “Everyone’s gone tomorrow, we’ll have it on the stairs if we want.”

It was more of a race to their bedroom. No sooner had they shut the door when clothes were flung off. His finger was deep inside her, twisting wonderfully when she said, “Jere?”

“Hm?” he asked, her stiff nipple in his mouth.

“Lean back,” she whispered.

As always, he complied with her wishes.

Bending at the waist, she licked a trail from his bellybutton to where the head of his hard cock protruded upward. It was flushed with passion, veins trailing over the smooth surface. She heard his gasp as she engulfed the mushroom shape into the wetness of her mouth.

Jere reciprocated by licking his finger and reinserting it deep into her pussy.

She cupped his balls with her hand, massaging them gently as she moved her head up and down on his slick shaft. He mimicked her movements as he finger-fucked her.

“Oh Tally,” he groaned. “Sit on my face before you make me come.”

She released his rock-hard cock from her mouth, turned herself around and straddled his body. She watched his face as she moved up farther onto his chest. He was staring at the hidden delights of her cunt.

She decided to help him enjoy the view.

She spread the lips of her pussy so he would have a better glimpse inside, and he dug his fingers into her hips in his haste to scoot her closer to his mouth. She lowered her open sex onto his waiting mouth.

“Oh,” she muttered at the first sensation of his suck. “Yes, Jere. That’s it.”

He was sucking hard, as if he couldn’t get enough of the wet, juicy pussy over his face. Her slick juice flowed over his chin.

She was too close to coming, heat washed over the exposed, sensitive clitoris that he flicked with his tongue. She ground herself against him when he reached up to pull and twist her nipples. Suddenly, her climax ripped through her body.

She was so limp and quivery, she was scarcely aware of him laying her on her back and spreading her thighs. He plunged into her flooded pussy full-force, myriad expressions crossing his face as he entered.

Talya lifted her legs up over his shoulders and he began to fuck her fiercely, reaching deep inside as if they could become one. He was triggering another explosion within her, one that caught her breath in wonder.

“I’m coming again,” she breathed. “Faster, Jere. Fuck me harder.”

With her legs up like that, he looked down into her eyes. He fingered the rim of her ass before he dipped deliberately into the tiny hole.

“Ahh,” she screamed and watched the corded tendons pop out on his neck as his face contorted before his own orgasm exploded within her passage, flooding her with his cum.

Epilogue

October 30

The Rousseau family always spent the holidays on the Earth dimension with the Van Trumps. It was more fun there, especially with the wacky humans celebrating Halloween.

Together, they made their way up the well-worn path. Talya's feet slowed as they passed the train station.

"What is it?" Jere asked.

"So many memories here. It's where I first saw you, you know. Before I time-traveled the first time when you were seven."

An elderly woman wrapped in furs and dripping with diamonds pranced by in six-inch fuck-me pumps, her hand held tightly onto the leash of a full-sized white poodle.

"Is that...yes, it is!" Natalya said in wonderment as a man half her plastic-enhanced age strode up and caressed her derriere through the spandex. The old woman giggled as she puckered her shiny, glittered red lips and batted her mascara-thickened lashes.

A female tarantula.

"I missed my calling," Talya murmured. "I should have been a witch. That was one doozy of a spell. I even got rid of the urine stench."

About the Author

During my daytime job, I explore people of all types. At night, I love to read.

Why did I start writing? My favorite authors were all between books and I twiddled my thumbs until deciding, “Hey, I can do this for someone else out there who’s waiting for a new release too!” My favorite authors in no particular order include: Kim Harrison, Laurell K Hamilton, Jim Butcher, Charlaine Harris and Kelley Armstrong. So obviously, I cling to urban fantasy type work with one difference—I’m a romance author at heart. I must have my happy ending with Prince Charming. And no, it doesn’t matter if he has fangs. Or fur. As long as he’s naked, we’ll be just fine! Therefore, Ellora’s Cave seems a perfect fit for my work.

Join me for a few hours and get lost in my worlds! For now at night, I love to write!

Rena 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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