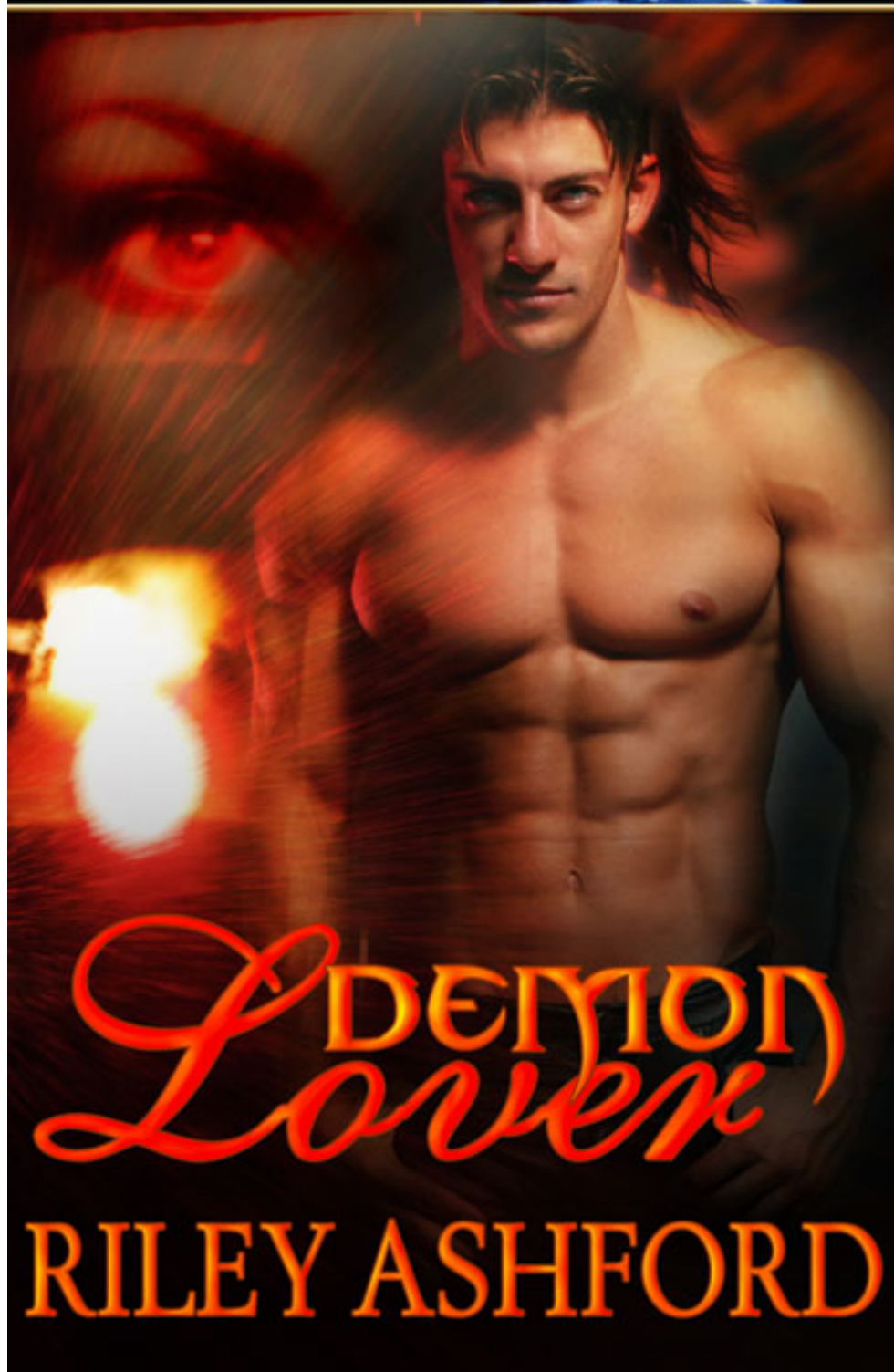


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Demon Lover

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# ***DEMON LOVER***

**Riley Ashford**

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*"The wretch, concentrated all in self,  
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,  
And, doubly dying, shall go down  
To the vile dust from whence he sprung,  
Unwept, unhonored, and unsung."*

—from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* by Sir Walter Scott

## Chapter One

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*My mother used to say that when life handed you lemons, you should make lemonade. But what do you do when life hands you demons? Make demonade?*

*She died when I was eight. Dad never told me what happened, even when I was old enough to understand. I had to read about it in his journals.*

*A demon killed her...killed her in the worst way. It possessed her. Used her like a puppet, made her flay at her own skin until she bled to death. Mom was smart and tough, though, and she wrote the demon's name in blood as she lay dying on the bathroom floor. Abatu.*

*That's how Dad got into demon-hunting. He was the only one who followed his wife's lead. The only one who loved her enough to know she'd never commit suicide. The Otherworld found him, helped him, and when the time was right, trained me.*

*You know what sucks? Demons don't die.*

*When they're not manifesting in some monstrous corporeal form, or body-napping humans and animals, they're just balls of energy. Dark energy. Demons have seriously bad mojo.*

*Most people get bummed out when faced with the knowledge that demons are eternal. What's the point of battling those evil assholes if they can't be killed?*

*Immortality doesn't mean they're immune from pain or imprisonment.*

*And that's what I specialize in.*

*When I take out a demon it doesn't puff into sulfurous smoke or melt into a puddle of brimstone goo. It goes into a special prison made with material made from Hell. Yeah, that's right, HELL.*

*I hate demons. My dad figured out how to confine those bastards. He figured out a lot of things. Abraham Mortis taught me every trick in the book and then some.*

*One day, I'll find the soul-sucking bastard that killed him.*

*Until then....demons beware.*

\* \* \* \* \*

"C'mon, Mags," said Damian in his silkiest tone. That dark-as-sin voice accented the wicked look in his jade-green eyes. "You know you want it."

"Fuck off, Damian."

"Such language!" he tsked in mock horror. "And in your own bedroom, too."

"Bet you've heard worse than that in *your* bedroom."

"And I bet you want to come over to find out, don't you? You want to hear me say naughty things."

Maggie grinned at him, twirling her moon scythes before sticking 'em in the hip holsters. Damian's eyes—and his lips, jaw, ears, and Goddess, everything else from his neck up—were freaking perfection, but his *body*, especially showcased in black leather vest, breeches and biker boots, was drool-inducing spectacular. He stood a couple of feet away, near her bed, watching her dress.

Her gaze drifted to the object in his left hand. "Stop trying to tempt me, you heartless bastard."

His grin widened and he shook the little rectangular box in her direction.

"No." Maggie pushed the jeweled knife into her thigh sheath and smoothed the sleek black line of her form-fitting pants. She was dressed head-to-toe in the cobalt material that her father had conceived and created. Regular clothes never held up under fire balls, sharp talons, and sulfur blasts. Before she'd discovered the experimental clothing in her father's lab, she'd walk away from demon fights practically naked.

"I like the new look, Mags. But I do miss your glorious locks."

"Thanks, sweets." Maggie wore her jet-black hair short and spiked. She'd learned the hard way that her "glorious locks" were just a weapon for her enemies. She didn't wear jewelry for the same reason. Anything that could be torn off or turned around to be used against her in hand-to-hand didn't belong on her person.

The weapons were another matter. None of them could be used against her. Forged from white-light metal crafted by the Goddess herself, the daggers, swords, throwing knives and energy shields could only be wielded by Maggie. Any demon or human who tried to hurt her with her own blades got a nasty surprise.

Finally outfitted for another night of demon-hunting, Maggie looked around her sparse bedroom. She liked neutral colors, the soothing tones of beiges and browns and creams. She liked clean lines, not clutter. The only object she allowed on top of her oak dresser was a framed photograph of her father.

"You really should think about adding a little color into your life, Mags. A few red pillows or an orange throw, maybe."

"Says the man who only dresses in black." She rolled her eyes. "D, if you try to redecorate my bedroom, I'll gut you."

"If you do such a terrible thing, darling, I won't give you *this*."

Maggie sashayed to him and didn't stop until they were hip-to-hip. She trailed her fingers across the bit of his chest that wasn't covered by his vest. His skin felt like warm silk. She shuddered as desire prickled through her. Lust bombs always exploded anytime Damian was near her. She leaned forward and kissed the base of his throat, felt the steady, unaffected pulse that beat there.

"Oh Damian," she breathed, lonely and sad and aching.



"Oh Mags." He tugged on her earlobe, the tip of his finger tickling the sensitive spot under her ear.

"I know, I *know*," she said. "We are who we are." Maggie breathed in his scent, the familiar sandalwood cologne, that delicious male essence. Then she backed up and smiled up at him. "Are you sure you're gay?"

He laughed. "You're the only female who could make me switch teams."

"I'm willing to give it a try, if you are."

"Shut up and take your present."

Maggie plucked the box out of his hand and opened it. Four champagne truffles from Godiva. The rich smell of expensive chocolate threaded through Damian's cologne. She licked her lips as she stared at her one true weakness. Plucking a round treat from the box, she glared at Damian. "You really are a heartless bastard."

\* \* \* \* \*

Six miserable hours later, a few minutes before dawn, Maggie stomped up the huge staircase of Damian's big-ass mansion. She was in a raw, fucking mood. Demon-hunting had been a goddamned bust. Not a single tip had panned out and none of her psychics had sensed any paranormal disturbances. It was too quiet. And that worried her. Sometimes the dark forces pulled back before unleashing some big, bad ugly into the world.

Shit, shit, shit.

Just as she reached Damian's bedroom door, Elise, who never seemed to age past a very lovely forty and served as Damian's assistant, secretary, housekeeper, and Goddess knew what else, glided into the hallway and touched Maggie on the shoulder. "Hello, warrior. How was hunting?"

"Sucked."

"Ah." Elise's gaze went the door. "Damian is entertaining."

Maggie's shoulders slumped. "I need to vent and cry and take a nap. And, damn it, I need a hug."

Elise's lips twitched, but the smile never quite formed. "Damian said that if you arrived in time I should invite you to watch him play. He likes this one."

"Second invitation, eh? That's rare."

"Yes." The older woman cupped Maggie's cheek, her eyes soft with sympathy. "It will never be possible for the two of you. His heart was lost long ago to another."

"And I'm not the right gender," said Maggie. "I get it already."

"Refreshment has been prepared. You know how to get to the room. Good night, dearest."

"G'night, Elise." Maggie slipped down the hall and went into the room that Damian kept for her, decorated in bright colors, of course. She crossed to the far wall and

pushed a camouflaged button. A door slid open and she ducked inside. The short passage led to a secret room. Though small in size, it was luxurious—from the twin-sized bed dressed in red silk to the table filled with desserts, sandwiches and bottles of chilled champagne. The bed faced the floor-to-ceiling window, which was a mere two feet from the footboard. The other side, the wall that faced Damian's bedroom, looked like a mirror. But on her side, it was glass. Unbreakable, even by her weapons. Damian knew a few immortals, too.

She and Damian would never be lovers. But he shared with her an intimacy he'd given to no other woman.

He let her watch him make love.

Damian was skillful and oh-so tender. Watching him bring another man to orgasm again and again... Goddess, it was mesmerizing and beautiful. And she would touch herself while she watched him touch his lover. She pretended her hands were his hands because it was as close as she would ever get to having Damian.

And it wasn't fucking enough.

A glance at the two men lounging on the bed told her they'd already been a few rounds. She pressed a red button that made the bedroom lights flicker. It was a signal that let him know that she was watching.

And waiting.

Maggie undressed, arranging her weapons on the hooks Damian had installed on the back wall. She grabbed a champagne bottle—rolled her eyes at the stack of sissy flutes Damian liked so much—and propped up the pillows. Then she settled onto the bed and slugged champagne, watching the two men.

No. Watched Damian. She didn't give a rat's ass about the fuck-boy *du jour*.

While D echoed her position on the bed, lying back on propped pillows, his newest toy crawled between his muscled thighs and sucked his yummy cock. He watched the mirror, his secret smile for her.

"And he's getting a great view of his boyfriend's ass," she muttered, tipping the bottle to her lips. Mmmm. Champagne tasted good. Bubbly and dry and a hint of sweet. She put it between her legs, laughed at the way its chill made her pussy flinch, and kept her gaze on Damian.

The guy working D's cock must've been really good. She'd never seen Damian get aroused so fast. His eyes rolled back and his fingers fisted in his lover's long blond hair.

"Yes," cried Damian, his hips pistoning. "Yes, baby. Yes!"

No wonder fuck-boy got a second invitation to Damian's bedroom. If there was one thing Damian liked, one thing any man liked, it was a blowjob done right.

Her own body tingled with arousal. She put the champagne bottle on the floor and let her hands wander over her body. Stroking her own flesh while pretending, wishing, Damian caressed her thighs, stomach, breasts.

Damian.

She heard D's guttural moans. His breathless gasps. And while she pushed fingers into her pussy...while she fondled her own clitoris...she watched Damian's face tighten, his body still, his cock shove deeply into his lover's mouth...

"I'm coming," he cried. "Oh God!"

Her orgasm trembled, and she moaned, "Damian..."

The wave hit her hard. Harder than it should given how little she'd pleased herself. Yet, she lay panting, watching sweat roll down her stomach, as come stained her thighs.

Damian and his boy toy got off the bed. D walked to the two-way and splayed himself against it.

"What the hell?" Maggie stared at the gorgeous chest of her best friend. She scooted off the bed and went to stand in front of Damian. "What are you doing, D? You never get this close to the mirror. You never let anyone take you this way."

Her gaze dragged down his muscled form. He was gorgeous. Perfect. His cock, though only half-hard, was still a delectable sight, even squished against the glass. She traced the veins, wishing like hell she was doing it on the real thing. Day-amn. She bet his lovers enjoyed getting that rod rammed up their ass. The same way she wanted to feel it ram into her pussy. Or hell, even her ass.

Desire rioted through her, clawed at her with urgent fingers. She shuddered and tried to rein it in. Yet, the dull throb claimed her pussy, snaked upward to make her breasts ache, her nipples tingle...made her want, made her need. She felt like a kid with her face pressed against the candy-store window gazing at the treats she could never have.

Damian looked into the mirror and winked, then turned his face so that his cheek pressed the two-way. He closed his eyes, his lips moving as if in prayer...then his body jerked violently.

Holy crap! The sudden movement startled the hell out of her. Heart pounding, she realized Maggie Mortis, big bad demon hunter, had nearly jumped out of her skin witnessing a guy get a cock plunged into his ass.

*You are so pathetic!* She sucked in a breath and moved away, but her gaze was irresistibly snared by the action taking place mere inches from her.

The mystery lover hadn't wasted any time plowing Damian. She watched D's body smack the glass as whoever-it-was went hard and heavy. Damian liked it, though. He liked it a lot because his cock went to full hard-on fast.

Foreboding sat low in her belly and argued with the thick lust slugging through her. Something was off. Wrong. This wasn't the usual wish-it-were-me shit she suffered from when she watched Damian play, either.

She couldn't see the face of the guy banging him. D was bigger, broader. Other than the bony pale fingers digging into D's hips, the dude was a ghost. She watched those

pallid digits wrap around D's cock and stroke. Damian's palms were flat against the glass – the most submissive she'd ever seen him.

Foreboding fluttered anew. She heard a deep, growling moan. The lover getting off? She thought about the way it felt to have a cock tremble in her ass canal, the jerking of it as come spurted. Her eyes closed. She hadn't had a lover in a long time. In months. Because of Damian. She couldn't remember the name of the last guy she'd fucked.

*All because I want a man who doesn't me.*

Damian was her Guardian. Had been for the last five years since her previous Otherworld contact had gotten eaten by a demon. Well, half-devoured. She'd gotten there too late to save the Guardian, but she'd put his killer into a white-light pain prism, the worst punishment she could give demons.

She wasn't one to let her guard down. Not since her father died when she was twenty and still learning the tricks and moves of a hunter. When Damian came into her life, she was enthralled. There was something so enigmatic, so magnificent about him. Somehow, she'd come to trust him. Rely on him. He was her best friend. He was damned near her only friend.

D's body smacked the two-way really hard.

Goddamn it!

She jerked back, sucking in a shocked breath. He'd done it again! Made her jump like a scared little girl. Annoyance flickered as her heart stuttered. Oh, she was so gonna whomp for him for making her fritz.

Damian groaned loudly. Her gaze dropped and she watched him come. His seed spurted onto the glass and fell like white raindrops onto the hand that had pleased him.

Two comes in a half hour? Not bad. Damian had serious staying power. D's face turned toward hers, his expression one of glazed joy, and he grinned. She grinned back, getting close to the glass again, spreading her fingers across the face she couldn't touch.

This time, when his body crashed against the two-way, she didn't freak.

Only after she saw Damian's eyes go wide, his face drain of color, his mouth open soundlessly did she realize something was wrong.

Damian lurched, screamed, and tried to throw off whatever held him. Too late. Too goddamned late. He remained against the mirror, his struggles weak and useless.

"Damian!" she yelled, punching the enchanted glass with her fists. "Baby, are you okay?"

The skin split sickeningly inches below his collarbone. Fleeshy, red chunks pushed out, fell wetly on the glass, on the floor. D's blood spurted everywhere. Fucking everywhere. She'd seen it before. A million times before. But she couldn't move. Couldn't breathe. Couldn't comprehend.

Then slowly, two scaly snow-white hands wormed through D's pectorals.

Goddess, no! No!

Yellowed claws emerged from Damian's mutilated chest and tapped the glass. "Maggie Mortis," crowed a melodic voice, "are you in there?"

The cruel laughter was like a slap, forcing her to wake up from her shocked stupor. Damian!

No time to dress. She'd kicked demon ass in the nude before. She scraped her moon scythes off the wall, grabbed her jeweled knife and the bag that held her crystal prisms.

He's not dead. He's not dead. He's not dead.

It took forever to get down the dusty little passage. An eternity to cross the bedroom and run down the hallway. An eon to throw open D's bedroom door.

The demon was gone.

It fucking killed her to do it, but training crowded out her panic. She spent two minutes checking the bedroom, making sure the demon wasn't hiding in a nook or cranny. But she knew by the empty feel of the air and the faint smell of sulfur that he'd bailed.

Maggie dropped her weapons and fell to her knees by Damian's ravished body. His eyes were open, but his gaze was past seeing anything. Those jade-green eyes would never see again. The copper smell of blood overpowered the lingering scents of Egyptian incense and vanilla spice candles. The warm sticky red coated his chest, his face, his hair. It filled her hands and splashed her thighs.

Grief slammed into her like a thousand-pound fist.

She gathered Damian into her arms, crooning and weeping and brushing his hair. She begged him to live. Begged the Goddess for mercy.

But the demon had already accomplished its mission.

It killed the only other man she had ever loved.

## Chapter Two

*Six months later...*

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*D left me all his shit. The mansion, money, his sweet Jaguar XLS, and even Elise. I have everything except him. But what else is new?*

*I moved my crap into the mansion, and all the rest of Dad's lab equipment and unfinished experiments, too. D and I built the über lab and its techno-cool security system almost a year ago. I hadn't cleared out the other storage facilities, which chapped D's ass to no end. I hope he's happy that I finally got everything into the lab...well, mostly. Dad told me to keep triple copies of his notes, samples of his experiments, blah, blah, blah...yeah, yeah, yeah. Got it, Dad.*

*Anyway, I can't bring myself to go down into the lab. Elise fetches the new prisms and stores the used ones. She brings me the journals and weapons and anything else I need. Going down there doesn't geek her out at all.*

*The mansion feels so damned empty. Why did D need this mausoleum? Blech. There's a lot of room here. Room for all kinds of stuff. Including secrets.*

*Including sorrow.*

*I miss Damian. His wicked grin. The way he teased me until I wanted to smack him. Elise and I talk about him a lot. Neither one of us can get over losing him.*

*But I don't want to. Not really.*

*Otherworld keeps trying to send me new Guardians and I keep telling them to fuck off. I don't give a damn about procedure. I don't want another death on my conscience. I don't want another person to worry about, to protect. It's hard enough keeping my own ass alive.*

*I've spent every waking moment tracking the demon that killed Damian. The asshole's name is Magnus and he's the right-hand man of Drak, who thinks he rules Hell or something. Chickenshit. I will find him and his goddamned minions and make them fucking suffer. Drak will wish he'd never fucked with me and mine.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Maggie followed the shadow that was following the mother and her toddler. It wasn't late yet, just past dusk, but this part of town was filled with empty buildings and empty people. Not a safe place any time of day for a mom and her kid. But Maggie wasn't worried about human crime.

The toddler was whining, obviously tired from walking and probably hungry too. The mom shushed and made saccharine promises, but it did no good. Calming the little boy was probably the reason she stopped too close to the shadow-filled alley.

The demon manifested in the blink of an eye, reaching thorny red hands toward the thin, doe-eyed woman.

"Down!" yelled Maggie.

Usually such a command didn't get much of a response, forcing Maggie to shove aside gaping idiots, but the woman grabbed her toddler and flattened to the sidewalk. Maggie leapt over them, her moon scythes already unsheathed.

She jabbed the monster in one meaty red shoulder then the other. Its skin sizzled from the cuts inflicted by the blessed weapons.

"Hungry!" it screamed. "Food!"

"Humans are not on the menu." She sheathed one scythe and took out a plastic container of salt from her weapons belt. The demon lunged and got a chest full of scythe for its effort. It reared back, shrieking in pain. Maggie scattered the salt on the grimy trash-infested ground and shouted, "*Steti!*"

The demon whined *way* worse than the toddler.

It was red-skinned, multi-horned, and had four yellow slitted eyes. Lower-level demon. Real low. Didn't do the speech thing well and usually just destroyed and killed without much of a goal.

"You are bound, demon, until I release you. Where is Magnus?"

"Food. Then tell."

"I don't negotiate, you piece of shit." Maggie withdrew a blue prism from the bag that hung at her waist. "You know what this is?"

The monster hissed and tried to lurch away. Its legs strained against the salt's power, its arms covered the ugly, leathery face.

"Electric shock. Not just any electricity, mind you. The lightning in this prism was created by Wiccans. It will be like acid on your flesh. It will keep you in agony forever." She bared her teeth in a malicious grin. "What do you say? Want to be tortured by light and love for all eternity?"

"Magnus gone. Drak angry."

"Like I care that asshole is upset. Where did Magnus go?"

"Another king. Big king. Drak angry."

Well, shit. That was probably as much as she'd get out this one. Maggie switched out the blue prism for a yellow one. The demon's four yellow eyes stared at the crystal, its snarling mouth opened to reveal several rows of jagged, black teeth. "No! Told you. *Told you!* Food! Hungry!"

"This prism holds no pain," said Maggie as she set the object at its feet. "You'll just hang out in a great big white space. Um...do you happen to have a book? Because you might get a tad bored. *Liberatio!*"

The demon sprang free and being stupid as well as inarticulate, stepped on the crystal. Maggie shouted, "*Carcer!*" And the demon turned into red smoke and was sucked into the pyramid.

\* \* \* \* \*

"You have a visitor," said Elise.

Maggie let Elise help her off with her leather jacket, even though doing so chafed at her. She knew the woman needed something to do, someone to care for, so Maggie sucked it up and let Elise be, well, Elise. She handed her three prisms. "Slim pickings tonight," she said, "and none of them knew Magnus' whereabouts. Or where I could find Abatu. Or what happened to my father."

"You'll find what you seek, Maggie. I'll put these in storage," said Elise. The prisms went into a containment unit that had been designed by her father. He hadn't lived long enough to see it built, but she and Damian had taken the blueprints and created it in the basement. There would never be enough prisms to capture all Hell's creatures. But she didn't have to get them all, just the ones moronic enough to venture into her territory.

"So where is today's Otherworld messenger?" asked Maggie, one booted foot on the staircase. "I guess I got enough left in me to kick one more ass."

Elise's almost-smile curved her lips. "He is not the usual Otherworld messenger. I put him in the main living room, but he's not there anymore."

"What?"

"I suspect he's been wandering the house for some time." Her gray eyes took in Maggie's pissed-off expression. "I'm afraid I lack the talent for kicking ass and taking names."

Maggie heaved out a tortured sigh. "So you didn't get his name?"

"He wasn't the talkative sort." Elise turned and floated away toward the kitchen. It was there, behind the titanium, triple-coded door, that lay the staircase to the basement, which held the containment unit and her father's experiments and notes.

"Great," she muttered as she stomped up the stairs. "I gotta chase around some asshole in my own house. Just let uninvited guests wander around at whim. That's dandy. Real fucking dandy."

As she hurried down the hall, she passed Damian's bedroom door. The day after he died, she and Elise had cleaned the room themselves, using old-fashioned soap-and-water for the blood, and a few purchased spells for the lingering negative energy. She'd also had a local priestess come in and charm the door. The secret room had been emptied and sealed.

No one had been in D's bedroom for six months.

Until now.



The door was opened wide, the lights on full. Sonofafuckingbitch! Maggie rushed inside, her fury on full boil, and almost pitched forward when she skidded to a sudden stop.

A man with long, raven-black hair knelt on the very spot where Damian had breathed his last. He was dressed in a white T-shirt, faded jeans, and black Converse hightops. He wore his hair loose, flowing. She'd only seen that kind of black, silky hair once before, worn that way by one man. He looked like...it couldn't be... Her heart soared. He'd come back. Somehow, some way...Damian had returned!

"Damian!" she cried and hurried across the few feet that separated them.

The man stood, whipped around, and glared at her with glacier-blue eyes. *He's not D.* Her soul howled in despair, but instinct kicked in and she grabbed her jeweled knife, pounced on him. In an instant, she'd brought him to the floor. She lay on top of him, her knee lodged on his family jewels and the knife at his neck.

Goddess Almighty. He looked like Damian. The same slope of the eyes, the same strong jaw, the same nose with a tiny crook in the middle. His eyes were an intense blue, the color of summer sky, and they swirled with amused resentment. The knife hovered against his throat, not quite touching.

"Who the fuck are you?"

"I'm not my brother," he said. "So you can stop wishing that I am."

His words stung. Then what he'd said filtered through. "D didn't have a brother. He didn't have anyone."

"That's not what I heard," said the stranger. "Damian had more than his share of men."

She hissed and pressed the blade against his throat. Rage throbbed through her, clouding her mind until she couldn't think straight.

"What's the matter?" he taunted. "Still pining for a man who didn't want you?"

One quick slice across the carotid artery and he'd bleed out. She'd watch him die and laugh while the light left his eyes. Goddamn it. "Tell me who you are or I'll kill you."

"I'm Damian's younger brother. My name is Raphael."

"Yeah, right. My Guardian has been dead for six months. Why are you just now showing up?"

His gaze flickered with what she thought was grief, but the emotion disappeared too quickly for her to be sure. "I was on an assignment. I didn't know what happened until yesterday."

"Bullshit." The blade dug in and a thin red line creased his skin. Satisfaction was thick in her belly as she watched the blood well. Then she noticed that the cut blackened, as if invisible flames licked the flesh.

Holy fucking shit.

"You can't be Damian's brother," she said, triumphant. "Because you're a demon."

The demon's human face looked carved from stone. He didn't flinch, didn't show an ounce of pain as Maggie pressed the blade deeper into his neck. "Do you mind? That hurts."

"Good."

"All right, sweetheart. I've had enough." Raphael wrapped his arms around Maggie and jumped to his feet. She was startled at the strength and power it took to execute such a move, but she wasn't rattled enough to drop the dagger.

He reared back his head and smacked it into her skull. Pain ricocheted in her head like a crazed metal sphere in a pinball machine. Then the unmerciful motherfucker dropped her on her ass, and the knife sailed through the air, spinning out of reach. Dazed, she glared up at him. "As soon as I stop seeing three of you, I'm going to fucking kill you."

"I look forward to it." He crossed his arms and stared at her with those cold blue eyes. "My name *is* Raphael. I *am* Damian's younger brother. The Otherworld sent me because you're such a stubborn bitch."

He withdrew a gold stone from his jean pocket and dropped it into her lap. It bore the mark of Meelena, the High Council Priestess in the Otherworld. No way in hell he'd gotten that token from anyone other than the Priestess. It melted in the grip of any evil creature. That it hadn't reacted to Raphael's touch meant that, demon or not, he was one of the good guys. *Sure. If he's so damned good, why did my dagger burn him?*

"Meelena called me a stubborn bitch? That's a new one." She rubbed her temples. "She wouldn't send a demon."

"I'm only half-demon. And Meelena didn't use that particular description." He grinned. "It's my interpretation of what she said. Bad shit is going down, Maggie. And you're gonna need help. You're gonna need me."

She rolled to her feet, retrieved her dagger and sheathed it. "I don't want another Guardian. So goodbye and fuck you."

"Sorry. You're stuck with me, *Mags*," said Raphael.

She stepped into his personal space and bared her teeth. "Don't call me Mags, you sonofabitch."

"Why? Does it remind you of Damian? He was such a tease, wasn't he? How many times did you masturbate while you fantasized about him screwing you?"

Maggie slapped him. The blow snapped his head back. Before he controlled his expression, she saw the shock, the anger. Well, fuck *him*. How dare he talk about Damian, about *her*, with that ugliness in his voice?

Silence stretched between them. She realized that waiting for an apology was like waiting for it to snow in Tahiti. Raphael didn't seem to be the kind who was sorry for anything he did. Goddamn him. He looked so much like Damian. Same broad shoulders, same loose-hipped walk, same muscled form. But there were differences. He

wasn't quite as tall. He was leaner, too, and the hair she thought raven-black was really dark brown.

He crossed the room, looked into the two-way, and tapped it. The mirror pinged. "I know what it's like to want something you can't have."

"What was between me and Damian is none of your business. Not ever. And if you say anything that shitty to me again, I'll stick you in a prism and pitch you out into the Atlantic Ocean."

He turned and leaned against the mirror. "Fair enough." His gaze flicked down and though the blood was gone, it was as if he saw it anyway. "Damian and I didn't see eye-to-eye on a lot of things, but I loved him."

Uncertainty shimmied through her. She and Damian had been close. Best friends. He'd been everything to her. But had she been everything to him? "Damian would've mentioned a brother. Especially a half-demon brother."

"There were a lot of things he didn't tell you, Maggie." He sighed, pushed away from the mirror and returned to stand in front of her. "He loved you, as much as it was possible for him to love anyone."

What the hell did that mean? "Of course he loved me," she snapped, resentful that Raphael tried to comfort her with those petty words. "Quit talking in circles, for Goddess' sake! Give me the lowdown then scamper off to Meelena and tell her that I refused you."

Some dark emotion flashed in his eyes. "I offer a bargain. I will stay for a month. What do you want in exchange?"

"Bartering? You really are a demon." She pursed her lips. "Tell me why you're half-demon and how you're related to Damian."

"Are my answers what you wish to trade for my thirty days?"

"Hell no."

"Fine. I will give you the information you want and grant another request, but I get to stay three months."

"Two months. That's probably all I can tolerate you." If Maggie let him hang around a while, it would satisfy Meelena and stop her from sending other Guardians. And it would mean finding out more about Damian. Whether or not it galled her, and it sure-as-shit did, if Raphael was D's brother then she wanted him to hang around.

"Agreed," said Raphael. He looked at the bed, nodded toward it. "Let's sit down and I'll give you the short version."

Maggie hesitated. It was difficult enough being in D's room, knowing that he'd never step foot in it again. But sitting on the bed, soaking in his essence, remembering the last time she'd seen him on it...no.

"It's just a piece of furniture," the demon offered in a tone that must've been his version of soothing. Hah. Sounded like he was chewing rocks. He took her hand and led her to the four-poster monstrosity. He sat down and patted the place next to him.

She sat, but damned if her heart didn't try climb up her throat. "All right. Give." *And hurry. I can't fucking stand this.*

"Damian's father died when he was two years old. Brain embolism. When he was four, our mother was seduced by a demon. From that union, I was born. She raised the two of us the best she could, but I was...different. Mom never realized that her one-night lover had been from Hell. And if she didn't know, how could she tell me? Or help me? Didn't matter, though. She died when I was ten and Damian was fifteen."

"How?"

"Car accident." A muscle in his jaw twitched. It took him a second to gather his composure.

Watching him, Maggie felt the first crack in her anger. Painful memories. Everyone had them. Even demons. "I'm sorry," she said. "Damian never talked about his family." Not once. It hurt to know that he hadn't confided in her. Why? She shared her burdens. She bitched until her voice went hoarse. She'd cried on his shoulder so many times, he'd gotten stain-resistant shirts.

"After Mom died, a man came to us. He was a Guardian assigned to watch our family. They'd traced the demon energy to our house. Figured out what had happened. Knew what I was. So they took us to the Otherworld. Trained Damian to be a Guardian."

"And you?"

He looked at her, his icy gaze fathomless. "They trained me to be something else." He released her hand and until he did, she'd forgotten that he still held it. "Satisfied?"

"For now."

"What is your second request?"

"Bring Damian back." She said it plaintively, knowing full well that interrupting a soul's death cycle was beyond the skill of any creature, demon or Goddess. It had been tried many times, but the results were unsatisfactory – in the worst way imaginable.

"You know what happens when such a thing is attempted. But that's not what you really want, is it?" His voice changed. It no longer sounded like smoke and whiskey; it was smoother, darker, like Godiva chocolate.

"Don't," she said, but the denial trembled on her lips.

"Don't what, Mags?" He tipped her chin with one finger and she watched, spellbound, as his eyes shifted color. His face realigned. His body filled out, stretched up.

And when he was done, she was looking at Damian.

## Chapter Three

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*Demons are beautiful liars. Some of them will kill in such a way that the dying don't even know that their lives are at an end.*

*When they steal human bodies, they keep their powers. They have an unerring ability to find your weakness, to cater to your most fervent desire until the time is right for them to strike.*

*I don't know what's worse, a demon who tries to rip off your head or one who tries to woo you.*

*You know that weird-assed movie...what was it called? Adaptation. Yeah. With Nicolas Cage. There's a line in it that Damian liked go around quoting.*

*"You are what you love, not what loves you."*

*I never got it. I never understand that he said it to me all the time because that's what he could give me.*

*All he could give me.*

\* \* \* \* \*

"It's the only way I can bring him back," said Raphael. "It's the only way I can give him to you."

"If you think I'm above fucking you so I can pretend you're Damian," said Maggie, "then you're wrong. I'll come on your cock and scream his name. I have no pride, demon. I have no honor."

"I've always wanted you, Mags," lied the creature with Damian's face. "I will take you any way that you'll have me. I don't have any pride or honor either."

"Well, damn. Aren't we a pair?" Maggie stood and stripped off her clothes and weapons. Damian watched her, his jade-green eyes filled with desire. For years, she'd yearned for him to look at her that way and now that he was, lust burbled through her. *He wants me. I don't care if it isn't true.*

"Let me undress you," she murmured.

He lay down while she tugged off his shoes and socks. Her fingers wandered around his toes, up his feet, tickling the ankles. She heard the snick of the buttons released on his jeans. Smiling, she rose and helped him pull off the denims.

"I never figured you for boxers," she said, "much less the kind with tiny hearts on 'em."

"They glow in the dark," he said, and made her laugh.

After the underwear and T-shirt came off, Maggie took her time looking at him. Goddess, he was gorgeous. She trailed her fingers over the muscles on his stomach, over the toned ridges, up, up, up to his pectorals. His flat brown nipples were hard and she flicked each one with a fingernail.

She touched him everywhere, memorizing the contours, the shape, the lines. Then she slid between his legs and cupped his balls. He tensed. Moaned. And grinning, she leaned down to kiss his cock.

His penis was warm, silky, and hard. Hard for her. Because of her. As the length of it slid between her lips, pleasure warbled in her belly. She closed her eyes and groaned. The sound vibrated on his cock, made him gasp. She wanted to tease him, bring him to peak without letting him go over. But she was too ravenous. This was a feast too long denied to a starving woman.

She sucked his big cock eagerly, quickly, took him all the way down her throat and back again, over and over until his hands fisted into her hair and he begged her for more. So yeah, *oh yeah*, she fucked him like crazy with her mouth, laved him with her tongue, squeezed his balls, and the whole time, she got hotter, wetter, hungrier.

"Maggie," he said, his voice quivering. "I'm going to come in your mouth, baby."

His hips thrust and she took the rough shove, swallowed that luscious cock as his seed spurted, hot and sticky, into her mouth. She drank from him, a cat licking cream, until his body went limp and his hands fell away from her tingling scalp.

"How long do you need to recover?" she asked, knowing she sounded desperate.

"I'm half-demon," he reminded her. "I don't need recovery time. Especially when I'm as horny for a woman as I am for you."

"That's damned fine news," she said. "Wait here." She rolled over and opened the nightstand's top drawer. She withdrew a tube of lubricant and a sparkly purple six-inch dildo with a wide base.

"What's that for?"

"I want it all," she said. "I want you in my pussy and in my ass. And since we don't have a third party and you don't have two cocks, this will have to do."

"Who says I don't have two cocks?"

He reached between his legs and grabbed his penis. As she watched, it split and formed two cocks, the new one was the exact size and shape as the original one behind it. Both were deliciously hard. *Goddess Almighty!* She tossed away the dildo and crawled toward him. "There sure are some perks to fucking you."

"Anything to please, Maggie. Anything for you."

That was so demon of him to say. He was kinda ruining the fantasy of her doing Damian. But just a little.

She handed him the tube, rounded her buttocks at him. He didn't need a map. He slid the tip into her anus and squeezed until the gel filled her ass. Then she turned, slid onto his stomach, and wiggled backward. "I need your help," she said.

"In a minute." His hands filled with her breasts. His thumbs flicked the peaks. They hardened, ached. He rose up and suckled the sensitive nubs until she moaned, sensual delight cascading from breasts to pussy.

"I'm good to go," she muttered, "you don't have to do that."

His teeth scraped her nipple, licked it, sucked it. He tortured the other one the same way.

"Goddess!" She reared up, panting. "I want you inside me. I want you to fuck me."

Her whole body quivered. Heat and light and need so intense it burned her from inside out. Damian sat up and cradled her on his lap. "You turn me on, Mags," said Damian's lips. "Nothing has ever turned me on like you."

What horrible, wonderful lie. "Just fuck me. Please!"

As she guided the top penis into her wet cunt, he pushed the back one into her anus. Gasping, she clutched at Damian's shoulders, and nearly came just from sensations of two cocks penetrating her.

It had been a long time since she'd had a man in her arms. She nearly wept at the joy of it. "I don't think I can move," she said, and she knew he heard the tears in her voice.

"Kiss me," he said. And without waiting for a response, he took her lips, plunged his tongue inside, and made the tears fall. She wept and kissed him back, attacking his mouth, sucking his tongue, biting his lips.

As their mouths mated, Damian slowly pumped his hips, pushing his cocks into her cunt, into her ass. Oh Goddess. She felt completely infiltrated, the sensations of hard flesh piercing soft flesh felt bawdy, strange, amazing.

He found a rhythm that both tormented and thrilled. The sound of their sweaty skin slapping, the ripe smell of sex, and *yes oh yes*, those plunging cocks drove her wild.

"It's damned near unbearable getting fucked this way," she managed to say.

"But you love it, don't you?" he asked wickedly.

"Damned right I do. *Ooooooh!*"

"That's right, baby. Let go."

His soft pleas thrummed like the beat of an ancient dream. Hot pleasure welled in her core, the warning before the quake.

"Damian," she moaned. "Oh Damian."

She looked at him, at the jade-green eyes, at the desire that filled them, and felt the orgasm rise like an ocean wave.

"Come for me, Mags," said the chocolate-smooth voice. "Because I'm going to come for you. You make me so hot, so hard."

He growled, the echoing black of a beast's roar, and slammed into her, filling her so well and so deep, she screamed at the delight of it. Then she felt the dual shudder of his cocks and the blast of come in cunt and in ass.

It was too much.

It wasn't enough.

"Damian!" she shouted as bliss exploded, swept her away on an erotic tide, and she floated...floated in water and sun and bittersweet joy. "I love you," she whispered as she returned to the arms of her fake Damian, "I'll always love you."

Maggie yelped when Raphael pushed her off. She bounced onto the bed, looking up at him with shocked eyes. "Hey! What the fuck!"

"Our bargain is complete," he said.

"I'm not done with you."

"With me? Or with Damian?"

"Why the hell do you care? You're getting off. What more do you want?"

"You."

The possession he infused into that single word made her heart turn over. Why would someone she didn't know say something like that? It didn't make sense. One fuck and the guy already felt jealous of his brother? Sheesh.

In the blink of an eye, he morphed into himself. Into the lean, blue-eyed, and pissed-off Raphael. He reached for the jeans and she leaned over, grabbed his wrist. "I said I'm not done with you."

"Listen to me, Maggie. I will not ever touch you again pretending to be my brother. You will never again call me Damian. And you will never, *ever* say that you love me unless you goddamned mean it."

His words left her wide-eyed and breathless. No one had ever spoken to her like that. She tried to find purchase, but there was nothing to hold on to, so she fell, scared witless, into emotions she dared not name.

"You want me to love you?" Damn it! He'd sucker-punched her and she couldn't get air into her lungs. "I don't even know you."

"But I know you." His jaw clenched. "And I know what it's like to want someone so badly, you can almost taste them, almost touch them. You know how that feels, don't you, Maggie?"

"Yes," she admitted softly. The look in his eyes right now, she'd seen that desperate craving in her own gaze when she stared into the mirror for too long. "So who do you want, Rafe? Who do you want me to pretend to be?"

"That's just it. I want you. Margaret Eleanor Mortis."

She rolled her eyes, blew off his desperation-tinged words because she couldn't deal with the drama, and swung her legs off the bed. "I can't believe D told you my full name. He knows I hate it."

"I thought you weren't done with me." His tone was stiff and his body seemed braced for rejection. The jeans he'd retrieved from the floor dangled from two fingers.



She stared at him. He wasn't the slick kind of handsome that had defined Damian. Raphael was raw, sharp-edged, real. He didn't hide in sardonic wit or wry smiles. His body wasn't the glossy good looks orchestrated by gyms and surgeons. He was muscled from action, not just movement, and he trembled under her fingers because he wanted *her* touch. Not just some willing female. She didn't know why or how, but she knew it was the truth.

Shame burned across her face and she turned away from his accusing gaze. *I turned his gift into a joke because I wanted to believe that Damian had returned and given up his lust for other men. I thought I was only pathetic. But I'm worse than that. I'm heartless.*

"Can't do it, huh?" His voice held bitterness. "I'll never be Damian. And I won't fucking settle for second place in your heart."

He shook out the jeans and stuck a foot inside.

"Wait. Just *wait*." She reached for the pants and pried them out of his grasp. "I don't know what's going on. I don't know how I feel. You can't come in here, pretend to be Damian so I'll fuck you, then get all pissy because I took you up on the offer."

He blew out a breath, nodded. "You have a point."

"Gee, thanks."

His gaze pinned hers. "I didn't realize how much I needed you to need me. I wanted you, Maggie. Didn't care what it took." He grimaced. "Only I guess I did care."

"At some point, you're going to have to tell me why you know so much about me." She grabbed his arm and hoisted herself off the bed. "And you're going to have to give me the details about what's going with the High Council and why I'm going to need your help."

"I will tell you everything when the time is right."

"How vague and mysterious of you." She led him across the room and into the master bathroom. She flipped on the lights and heard Raphael's low whistle.

"Yeah, it's huge and filled with every indulgence. Oversized tub with jets. Separate stand-up shower. Two private toilets." Maggie walked to the three-sided glass stall and opened the door. She turned on the water and gestured for Rafe to join her. "C'mon, Raphael."

He joined her under the hot spray and she washed him slowly, thoroughly from head to toe. With every stroke of the soapy loofah, she offered silent apologies, even though she wasn't quite sorry that he'd given her Damian.

"I think it's gonna be difficult sticking both of those into your pants," she said as she washed the two penises.

He looked down and smiled. He pushed them together and they morphed into one cock.

"Goddess, that's sexy," said Maggie. She soaped it again, rubbing vigorously until it hardened. Raphael watched her, his gaze both wary and lustful, and Maggie dropped the loofah. "Let's try it again," she said. "Just you and me."

Raphael backed her against the wall and pushed his cock into the wet vee of her thighs. "Do you want me, Maggie? Because I don't need a pity fuck. I made the bargain with you. I shouldn't have reprimanded you for asking for what you really wanted."

"That was so five minutes ago." She cupped his face in her palms. "I'm not easy to like, much less love. I'm mean and selfish and I whine when things don't go my way. But I'll never break a promise and I'll never lie. It's all I got, Rafe. It's all I am."

"You are so much more than what you believe." His hands slid under her buttocks and he lifted her. Then he impaled her pussy with one swift stroke of his cock.

Maggie wrapped her legs around his waist and clutched his shoulders, her gaze held hostage by his. He thrust inside her pussy, grunting and groaning, his teeth clenched as he took his pleasure, as he gave *her* pleasure.

He made her shiver...moan...beg.

He took her all the way to the brink and, goddamn it, he wouldn't let her look away. His eyes glittered like sapphires—sharp and blue and unrelenting in their beauty. They cut at her, those eyes, like broken glass, like rusty blades.

And she trembled like a virgin in his arms, afraid of what he wanted and what he offered. Afraid she wasn't worthy of love. Of him.

*You are what you love, not what loves you.*

The meaning of Damian's oft-quoted line crystallized in the tender moment before the orgasm ripped through her.

*He didn't want me. I wanted him.*

*He didn't need me. I needed him.*

*He didn't love me. I loved him.*

She shattered—her body and her soul. Even as the bliss undulated from her core, sorrow carved through it. *Oh Damian. Goddamn you.* Sobbing, nails digging in to Raphael's shoulders, she held on tight as he fucked her.

"Maggie!" He plunged deeply, his fingers jabbing into her thighs, his eyes on hers as he pumped hot seed into her cunt.

They held each other, breathing hard, shuddering under the hot water. She'd been splintered. Destroyed. Crushed by the truth. By her own desperate lie. And Raphael, that beautiful demon, tucked her into his arms and held her close as she wept one last time for Damian.

## Chapter Four

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*Love is a strength and a weakness. It makes you strong, makes you vulnerable, makes you sacrifice. My father loved my mother. He loved us both. And he always felt guilty about what had happened to her. Like it was his fault she'd been possessed.*

*I never thought to wonder how Dad was so adept at demon hunting. I always believed that the Otherworld had rescued us. Helped us. But there are times...well, I just don't know. Dad didn't put everything in his journals. And so I am left with my love for him, and my sorrow, and questions that will never be answered.*

*I wonder what Dad would think about me sleeping with Raphael, the man with one foot in Hell. I don't think he would like it all.*

*But I do. I like Raphael a lot, even if he is half-demon.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Maggie entered her bedroom feeling tired and cranky. She'd bagged five demons tonight, but her usual queries got her nothing fresh. Magnus worked for some new demon king, Drak was pissed off, and no one knew the whereabouts of Abatu or which demon had murdered her father.

She plopped onto the bed and pulled off her boots.

"Bad day?" Raphael sauntered through the balcony doors, dressed in a pair of unbuttoned Levi's. His long brown hair was loose, brushing the tops of his bare shoulders. Lust stirred in Maggie, battling away the exhaustion.

"It's always a bad day. But as we speak Elise is taking more occupied prisms to the containment unit. Woo-hoo for the good guys." She stood and took off her weapons, aligning them on the wall hooks above her bed. Then she turned and found Rafe behind her, grinning.

"What were you doing outside?" she asked. "Howling at the moonlight?"

"I'm not a werewolf. And it's a new moon, not a full one." He smiled. "It's the demon in me that likes the black sky. The demon that gets frisky during this kind of lunar phase."

"Lucky me." She let him take off her clothes. Let him stroke the fatigue from her body. Let him bring her desire to a slow boil. "Did you talk to Meelena?"

"Still no word," he said as he leaned down to nibble her neck. "She'll be in touch soon. Don't worry."

"It's been a week since you got here. Do you think I'm ready to hear about the impending doom yet?"

"Yes."

He cupped her breasts and licked the nipples. She arched like a purring kitten and threaded her fingers into his hair. He encircled the taut buds, suckling lightly, before setting her away.

"Hey!" she protested. "You are soooo not finished!"

He pushed her onto the bed, and she laughed, delightfully stunned by the suddenness of it. Raphael bent down and opened the nightstand drawer. He drew out a pair of black leather panties that had a six-inch dildo thrusting out of the middle. "You wanna tell me what *this* is?" he asked.

"You sneaky bastard! Just because you're fucking me doesn't mean you get to snoop through my stuff."

"Sure it does." He reached into the open drawer and pulled out a small rectangular silver box. "The funny thing is," he said, "when you push this button the panties vibrate right about where your clitoris would be...if you were wearing them."

"I've never used 'em," she said. "It was just a desperate attempt to..." She mashed her lips together. Why admit she had bought the damned panties hoping to one day fuck Damian in the only way he *might* allow her?

It had been good between her and Raphael. The sex was beyond fantastic. And as the days passed, she felt her heart opening up to him, accepting him. He hadn't told her why he knew her. Why he thought he loved her. She wasn't all that sure it wasn't just a stupid demon trick.

"Damian might always be a ghost between us," said Raphael. "He's hovering just out of reach. We might not ever banish him. We can't pretend that you don't love him. That he wasn't here."

"I don't want to hurt you."

"That can't be helped," said Rafe. He tossed the panties and the remote onto the bed then shucked off his jeans and smiley-face boxers. For such a bad-ass, his choice of underwear never failed to crack her up.

Raphael reached into the drawer one more time before closing it. "We're going to hurt each other. We're human. Well, mostly human. We just make sure that love heals the wounds inflicted. As long as love is stronger, we'll be okay."

"You're so romantic," she teased, "that my heart is going pitty-pat just listening to you."

"Shut up."

He threw the object at her and she caught it. "Lubricant? Why should we use the dildo when you can just morph another cock? I like the real thing a lot better."

"Because you're going to use it on me."

"What?"

"That's what you bought it for, right? Somebody's getting fucked with it. I'd like it to be me."

"Rafe, I never got the impression that you...uh, liked it that way."

"It doesn't mean I haven't been with men."

Her jaw went slack. "Why would you do that if you don't like it?"

"I'll tell you sometime."

Maggie rolled her eyes. "Yeah, I know. When the time is right. Whatever." She tossed the lube onto the covers. "I'm not fucking you in the ass. You're not going to enjoy it."

"You turn me on," he said. "The way you look. The way you smell. The way you move. I may not like the idea of a guy's dick plowing me, Maggie, but you... Goddess, yes. I'll happily let you do it. And I have prepped accordingly," he added with a smug grin.

"There you go with the nice words again," she murmured. "Kiss me, Rafe. Then we'll see."

He crawled onto the bed and gathered her into his arms. His lips brushed hers, seducing her mouth until she conceded to his tongue. He dipped inside, tasting her, and she sighed as need clawed through her, tightening her nipples, slicking her pussy.

He kissed her into compliance, damn it. Helped her slip on the odd underwear. Gave her the lube. Then pointed the remote and clicked it.

The vibrator sewn into the undies whirred on, stimulating her clitoris immediately. Orgasmic spikes pierced her. "Wow. Whoa. Hey, medium setting or I'll come too soon."

"Really? What a shame." He leaned forward and sucked on her nipples. The pleasure spikes turned into quivering arrows of heat. And the arrows into bliss-driven spears...and... "Raphael!" She came, unable to stop her hips from bucking as her juice spurted, soaking the leather. Her cunt pulsed for endless seconds as she tried to regain lung capacity.

Rafe grinned. "Medium setting, you said?"

"Yeah. Thanks for listening." But she grinned back. Then she tugged the remote out of his grip and put it on the right setting. The vibrations slowed, but already she felt renewed sensations tingling in her clit.

"Stand up," she said. "I want to take you against the wall."

Silently, he did as she asked. He scooted off the bed, walked to the nearest wall, and spread himself against it. She walked to him, looking at him from head to toe. He was so handsome. Muscled and sinewy and drool-inducing.

Maggie's heart pounded erratically. She hadn't used this kind of toy before. Hadn't really done much but buy it and fantasize about using it on Damian. Tucking the lube into the top of the undies, she dragged her nails down both of Raphael's buttocks.

"I want you to play with your cock," she said. "And if you don't like what I'm doing, then tell me stop."

"It isn't my first time." He chuckled. "I'm a big boy. I can handle it."

"Why don't you get a handle on your penis?"

Maggie watched as Raphael braced one arm against the wall and put the other between his legs. As soon as he got a good rhythm, she kneeled and peppered kisses on his ass. She parted that gorgeous butt and dragged her tongue along the revealed flesh. When she got to his anus, she circled it, darting her tongue against it. Then she plunged inside the tightness.

"Maggie!" he cried. "Damn. Oh damn!" He was sucking in breaths like a man about to run out of air.

She licked the wrinkled slit one last time then lightly bit his left cheek. His ass twitched, but he said nothing.

"Keep stroking that big, beautiful cock," she said as she stood up. She took the lube and squirted it onto one finger. Slowly, she inserted the gelled digit into his ass. His anus clenched so she waited until it relaxed. Then she pushed further and further—sheathing the entire forefinger. She drew it out. And in again...in and out...in and out...

Goddess Almighty! It made her hot to penetrate him this way. The vibrations on her clit were working some good mojo. Heat spread from her core, anticipation tickling her. She increased the rhythm of her finger and heard him groan in raw pleasure.

"How're you doing, Rafe?"

"Give me more," he demanded.

She switched out her finger for the lubricant, squeezing some inside. Then she parted his buttocks and pressed the plastic cock against the puckered star. Gradually, she inserted the dildo.

As soon as he adjusted around the first half, she pushed deeper and deeper, until it was all the way inside. Pressing against his ass flattened the vibrator to her clit. Pleasure sparked—the lighting of fireworks she didn't want to detonate just yet. Damn. She panted, tightened, tried to stall the orgasmic quivers. "I'm going to come," she confessed. "Fucking you this way makes me really horny."

"Take my ass," he commanded harshly. "Because I'm getting ready to explode."

Maggie spread his cheeks and partially withdrew the dildo. After a few seconds, she got a rhythm going. Watching the cock penetrate Raphael's ass was *toofuckingbeautiful*. Every time she slid inside, the vibrator banged her clit. She gritted her teeth. *No! Not yet!*

Her body had other ideas. "Raphael...oh baby. I'm coming!" She didn't stop moving as the orgasm shook her. She was breathless and blind and quaking, but she plowed his ass until he screamed with stunned joy.

Maggie lodged the dildo fully into him then reached around and grabbed his cock with both hands. She wanted to feel those last thrusts, wanted to know that he was coming because of her. Because of what she did to him.

Her hands wrapped around his stroking one. Seconds later, he tensed, his penis jerking violently. Come erupted, a white geyser spurting onto the wall like an artist's effort at abstract painting.

"Maggie," he groaned. "Sweet Maggie."

Later, after they recovered sufficiently to clean the wall and the toy, they took a hot shower. It wasn't long before they had washed themselves into another sexual frenzy. Rafe took her against the wall, something he seemed to like to do in the shower, and with thrusting cock and whispered words, made her come again.

"I'm gonna sleep until next Tuesday," Maggie said drowsily as she stumbled from the bathroom toward her bed. She dropped the towel and crawled under the covers. "Rafe?"

He stood in the middle of the room, naked, his wet hair slicked down his back. He was so quiet and still, he might've been carved from stone. And what a statue he would make. Women would worship him. Call him God or Master or anything he wanted just for a touch, a look, a smile.

*And he's mine.* Maggie smiled dreamily. "Come to bed, baby. I need a hug."

"Stay here," he said.

The warning in his voice made her bolt upright. "What is it? Those demon senses tingling?"

"Promise me, Maggie, that you will *stay here*." He ran to the door, flung it open.

"I'm not promising you shit." She jumped to her feet, grabbed the moon scythes off the wall and followed Raphael.

Maggie couldn't catch up. No doubt Raphael's demon powers gave him speed as well strength and morphing capabilities. She heard muffled crashes and screeching as soon her feet hit the foyer.

She ran across the marble floor, through the double doors that led to huge formal dining room. At the back, where the huge cherry wood buffet took up most of paneled wall, she entered a hallway. It seemed to take forever to clear the passage and push through the swinging doors into the chrome-and-white kitchen.

Her gaze panned the area. Raphael wasn't in there. The titanium steel gate that protected the lab and the containment unit was wide open. *Shit.* Elise had gone down there to deposit the prisms. Had she come back out?

Growls emitted from the basement. She heard glass breaking, metal scraping across floor, and more crashes. Maggie felt her heart dive to her toes. What the hell had gotten loose down there?

Taking the stairs two at a time, she entered what looked like a family hangout. Pool table, dart boards, bean bags, shelves with board games and books along with a big-screen TV with a DVD player and Gamecube made it look like the ultimate play place.

But it was really just a false room she and Damian had created—if someone accidentally wandered downstairs, they wouldn't find anything out of the ordinary.

Unless they knew where to look.

Maggie crossed the room until she reached the far wall then she ducked through the already opened entrance. Usually lights went on when the door was engaged, but it was as black as a cave's interior. And just as creepy.

Ten steps got her to the lab. Its door was made of titanium too. It was not only triple-coded, but it was also bespelled by Meelena herself. The only people who knew how to get in were Maggie and Elise.

The quiet that had reigned for the last few minutes was destroyed by a wild scream and another crash. Heart pounding, moon scythes at the ready, Maggie entered the laboratory.

And stopped cold.

Most of the fluorescent lights were out, though several still flickered, giving a ghostly glow to an otherwise dark room. The concrete floor sparkled and Maggie realized she was looking at glass. Someone had purposely broken the bulbs. *Demons hate light.*

No way. How had a demon gotten free in the lab?

She hurried through, heedless of the jagged glass that painfully stabbed her feet. Tables had been overturned. File cabinets had been ravaged. Objects mundane and paranormal littered the floor. Paperclips and staplers. Charms and prisms. Shredded paper from research tomes and torn pages from spell books.

The containment unit was in the back. It was so large, two Cadillacs could park inside it, side-by-side. The door was open and, with fear a weight on her chest, Maggie crept inside.

The ceiling lights were out. Glass poked at her feet. Damn it. More broken bulbs. "Rafe?" she called out softly. "You in here?"

A triumphant growl warned her. She dropped to the floor and rolled out of the unit. She was in a crouch, moon scythes at the ready, when Elise bolted through the door. Her skin was the color of stone, her eyes gleaming solid black in the glow of the single light. Possessed. Fuck, fuck, *fuck*. Elise grinned, her mouth bloody, her nails elongated and yellow.

Maggie straightened. *What do I do? That's Elise.* "Get the fuck out of my friend."

"Make me," it said, stretching Elise's mouth into a terrible smile. Her lips split, and blood leaked down her chin.

"Stop messing with her!"

Elise lunged, sharp nails slashing.

Maggie bounced away. She couldn't kill Elise to get rid of the demon. While the worry for her friend beat an unhappy tattoo in her heart, her fear for Raphael sliced through her guts like rusty razors. Where was he? "Raphael!"

"Here," he said, limping through the containment entrance as he clutched his right side.



"Are you okay?" She glanced at the demon who seemed content to slowly stalk her.

"Got swiped, that's all. Whatever it is, it has the power to open the prisms. I don't know how many it destroyed before I arrived."

"No!" screamed Maggie. "That's impossible."

"Is it?" asked the demon. "Come to me, Margaret. Come to me the way your mother did. The way your father did. I love the Mortis family. I am the Mortis family."

Fear pierced her with cold spikes. Demons were liars. Beautiful liars. And what this one said scared the piss out of her.

"Demon blood," it hissed, inching closer. "Demon born."

"You are so full of shit. And you're a coward, too. Hiding in a helpless woman so I can't kick your ass."

"Expel me, demon hunter," cackled the voice. "Use your wondrous powers to save your friend."

It lurched toward her again and, as she turned to run, the claws scraped her shoulder. Still, she managed to slip away. Then she heard Rafe's shout and another crash. Over her shoulder, she saw that Rafe had taken Elise to the floor and they scrabbled against each other.

"Expel you?" she muttered. "You bet your ugly demon ass I'll expel you."

As Rafe fought with Elise, Maggie flipped the scythes and pushed them together. The handles clicked together; and the blades locked at each end. Now the scythes shaped like a sun circle and in its middle, the handles formed a pentagram. Four holes were drilled into the blades. She slipped her forefingers into the two on top and her thumbs into the two on bottom.

She spun around. "Rafe! Move!"

Raphael leapt up and skittered backward. The moment he was out of the way, she yelled, "Goddess arises; Her enemies are scattered and those who hate Her flee before Her. As smoke is driven away, so are they driven; as wax melts before the fire, so the wicked perish at the presence of the Goddess."

A bolt of light emitted from the sun circle, blasting Elise. The demon howled, not with pain, but with laughter. Maggie hurried forward, keeping the Goddess light on the demon. Something was wrong. No demon could withstand light, prayers *and* getting rebuked.

She tried again. "We drive you from us, whoever you may be, unclean spirits, all satanic powers, all infernal invaders, all wicked legions, assemblies and sects. In the Name and by the power of our God and Goddess, may you be snatched away and driven from the Earth and from the souls made to the image and likeness of our God and Goddess."

Elise rose to her feet as if a pulley had been attached to her waist and suddenly yanked forward. She turned toward Maggie, dusting off the stained and torn sleeves of the white silk shirt, and laughed again. Her face looked cracked. Flesh hung off her

cheeks in strips, black with blood, and her hair had been ripped out in large clumps. Maggie's soul keened for her friend. *He's killing her, damn it!*

"Is that the best you can do?" taunted the demon.

Maggie bit the inside of her cheek. Son-of-a-bitch. He was gonna make her recite Catholic rites. Using the sun circle she made the sign of the cross, and shouted, *"Exorcizo te, omnis spiritus immunde, in nomine Dei Patris omnipotentis, et in noimine Jesu Christi Filii ejus, Domini et Judicis nostri, et in virtute Spiritus Sancti, ut descedas ab hoc plasmate Dei, Elise, quod Dominus noster ad templum sanctum suum vocare dignatus est, ut fiat templum Dei vivi, et Spiritus Sanctus habitet in eo. Per eundem Christum Dominum nostrum, qui venturus est judicare vivos et mortuos, et saeculum per ignem."*

She sucked in a breath. The Catholic rites were such a bitch to recite.

"What was that? Didn't quite get what you were saying," said Elise in a bored tone. "Haven't you heard that Latin is dead? Y'know, like your family and your friends."

Maggie was sweating now, trying to keep the fear at bay. She'd never seen a demon resist so much good spirit mojo. Her arms strained to point the sun circle at Elise's chest, the muscles quivered so much that the scythes shook.

Again, she made the sign of the cross. "I exorcise thee, every unclean spirit, in the name of God the Father Almighty, and in the name of Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord and Judge, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, that thou depart from this creature of God, Elise, which our Lord hath deigned to call unto His holy temple, that it may be made the temple of the living God, and that the Holy Spirit may dwell therein. Through the same Christ our Lord, who shall come to judge the living and the dead, and the world by fire."

Elise rolled her eyes. "English translation isn't working for me, either. Whatever will you do, Maggie Mortis?"

"You have to kill her," shouted Rafe. "No demon can inhabit a dead body."

"No demon can resist rebuking, either, but he's doing it."

"Maggie, you have no choice," said Rafe, his voice sounding reedy and thin.

"I'm not going to kill Elise. The bastard has taken everything and everyone from me." She gritted her teeth, steadied herself. "Isn't that right, Abatu?"

## Chapter Five

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*Fighting demons is dirty fucking work. They smell bad, they don't care about your feelings, and they love to cause pain. A favorite pastime of these sulfuric assholes is possessing humans. Oh yeah. They have their personal puppet shows all the time. Demons can make these poor motherfuckers do anything – have sex with a stranger, kill their children, or leap off buildings.*

*I'd dealt with demon possessions before. I'd expelled more than my share of demons from humans. The humans remember nothing, and the demons remember everything.*

*Despite all my ass-kicking, demon-expelling experience, I never had to free one of my friends from a demon possession.*

*Mostly because I've never really had friends.*

*But let me tell you something, when your emotions get in the way, it's a lot harder to do the job. You get caught up in worry, in sympathy...and you make mistakes.*

*It's the mistakes that kill.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Elise clapped her hands. "Score one for the Magster." Hands on hips, she did a little jig. "I am Abatu. King of the demons. Murderer of the Mortis family. You've been wondering which one of us got your daddykins, haven't you? It was me. Came back for a little visit. Wanted to catch up on how things were going since I made your mother kill herself."

Anger and grief burned through Maggie. The demon that had killed her mother was the same asshole that had carved out her father's heart and left it next to his body. Dad had been in the old lab, protected by prayers, spells, and charms...and yet Abatu had managed to get inside and murder him.

"Maggie!" cried Rafe. "I'm sorry, baby. I'm so sorry. But you have to kill her!"

Tears fell as Maggie unhooked the sun circle and flipped the scythes. Elise was her last human connection. She had lost every person she'd ever loved to the demon Abatu. And he had counted on that, the slimy bastard. He'd fucking *counted* on the human weakness of love. He would use Elise to kill her. And then he'd kill Elise.

"What's the rush?" she asked, twirling her scythes as she crouched into an attack position. "Why are you so keen on making sure the Mortis family is dead?"

"When you go about trying to rule Earth and the Otherworld, it's not wise to keep heirs around. Even an immortal can be deposed from his throne." Elise put her hands together. A red light swirled between the palms.

The hellfire zinged toward her, but Maggie batted it away with a scythe. It dissolved into ash, leaving the rank smell of sulfur. "There is no fucking way I'm related to you."

"Yeah." Elise rolled her eyes. "Like there's no fucking way you'd sleep with a demon. But you're banging Rafe, aren't you?"

Okay, that was low. And the insult pissed her off. When Elise blasted her with another ball of hellfire, she punched it back. It stopped an inch from Elise's face, and Abatu left it there just long enough to melt the skin. The nauseating smell of burning flesh made Maggie's stomach roil.

"You're hurting her," said the demon. "You're killing her inch by inch."

"Get out of her! Fight me in your true form."

"Tsk. Tsk. You know a demon can't manifest after a possession. We're too weak."

"Good to know that some of the rules apply to you."

"What's wrong, Mags? Sickened by the idea of having demon blood? It's okay for you screw a demon, but it's not okay to be one? That's so hypocritical."

Abatu goaded her into the mistake. She knew it even as she went to mark a cross on Elise's chest and try to force the bastard out. The blades cut, burned, but failed. And Abatu wanted her close.

Maggie was on the floor in the beat of a heart, her back gouged by broken glass, as Elise lay on top of her. She brought the scythes to Elise's neck and the too-black eyes watched her gleefully. *Go on*, whispered a dulcet voice inside her head. *End her misery. End your misery.*

"No." It would be foolish to toss away the scythes. She kept them clenched in her fists as she lowered them. "Get thee out, oh father of evil. I rebuke thee!"

The eyes flickered, the mouth twitched. *What the – ?* Why would such simple words affect Abatu when other invocations did not? *Because I said father. Because it was an acknowledgement that I am his blood.* Was it true? Was the Mortis family somehow born from the demon Abatu?

"If you're wondering why your boyfriend hasn't come to your rescue," snarled Elise, "it's because I ripped off the right side of his torso. He's been bleeding to death. So...that means I get Elise, who you love, and Raphael, who you almost love, and you, dearest Maggie, whom no one loves."

"Get off her!" yelled Rafe. Elise was lifted as if she weighed the same as a feather and tossed into a shelf filled with books. The tomes tumbled onto the dazed woman.

"Goddess almighty," said Maggie as Rafe hoisted to her feet. "You're..."

"Ugly? Despicable? Unclean?"

"Kinda cute," she finished, "we'll have to explore this side of you if we, you know, live."

His black eyes swirled with surprise. Hell, she was surprised, too. But he was kinda, well, hot. And she'd never really been with a demon *demon* before.

Rafe was at least seven feet tall and the same gray color of ancient castle walls. He was hairless and muscled—oh Goddess was he muscled. His demon face was nearly the same as his human visage, but he had no hair and his eyes were black as brimstone. He also had thick, dark talons, and huge wings. He looked more gargoyle than demon. And she'd never seen anything like him.

"I can't believe you're thinking about sex at a time like this," he said.

"Who says I'm thinking about sex?"

One talon touched her hard nipple. Then the other hand snaked between her legs, one finger swiping her labia. He showed her a wet, gray finger, and grinned. *Wow. That's a scary smile.*

"So I'm thinking about sex. Get over it. Why aren't you bleeding to death?"

"I heal fast."

"No kiddin'." Maggie glanced at Elise. She was still slumped on the floor and covered with books. "What are we going to do about her? About Abatu?"

"Sex helps me think better."

"*Raphael...*"

He shrugged his massive shoulders. "What would Elise want you to do?"

Before she could answer the question, Elise sprang upward. Books flew everywhere and the acrid scent of sulfur filled the room. She floated a couple feet above the floor. Her black eyes glowed red.

"Goodbye daughter," she screeched. A wave of red flame undulated from Elise's body and rolled over Maggie and Raphael.

Maggie felt the heat of hellfire blast through her body and the evil in it blast through her soul. She collapsed to the floor, trying to mutter prayers of protection, but her ability to think burned away. Her lungs filled with smoke, and her skin felt on fire. "I...rebuke...thee, *father!*"

"Shut up!" screamed the demon. The air crackled as another wave of hellfire was drawn into Elise's body. She shimmered with the red flames then the inferno shifted forward...

"We drive you from us, Abatu, my father, my ancestor," Maggie said in a hoarse voice. "In the Name and by the power of our God and Goddess, I rebuke you of my own blood, my own body. I rebuke you, creator of the family Mortis!"

"*Nooooooooo!!!*"

A red mist issued from Elise's eyes and mouth. Boom! The hellfire roared through the room, but its supernatural qualities didn't just affect Maggie this time. The wall of

flame whooshed through the laboratory, setting everything ablaze. And under the crackle and flicker of the fire, were the fading shrieks of Abatu.

Maggie and Raphael rushed to Elise. Her eyes opened. Maggie swallowed the knot of her grief in her throat. She'd seen that look before. The look of the dying. She leaned down, cupped Elise's battered and bruised hand to her cheek. "We'll get you out of here. We'll get you to the Otherworld. Meelena can—"

Elise shook her head slightly. "No. Need to tell you." She looked at Maggie with those empathetic eyes, and whispered, "You are loved."

Her body went limp, her gaze staring at the ceiling. Sobbing, Maggie closed the eyes of her friend.

"C'mon, baby," crooned Raphael. He picked her up the way a father might an injured child. His wings wrapped around her, protecting her from the fire, and took her away from Elise, away from the lab, away from life as she'd known it.

\* \* \* \* \*

*One week later...*

"Are you sure?" asked Meelena. The tall, thin blonde was dressed in a white gown, a circlet of laurel crowning her waist-length, curly locks. As always, she was barefoot. Meelena loved to feel the earth under feet. She loved to keep a direct connection to Nature.

"Yeah," said Maggie. "We got everything we could out of the house. I kept Dad's original journals and backups of all his research in another location in case something shitty happened. Abatu opened almost half of the prisms—we can't figure out how he managed it. The ones he didn't get to, we hid. But we'll have to build another containment unit." Maggie's gaze wandered over the ruined mansion. She watched Raphael stand at the edge of the burned carnage. He had to be thinking of Damian. D was not only dead, but also all that had been his, even his beloved Elise, was destroyed as well. "Nothing else should be built here."

"Very well. The High Council will remove all trace of the house, fill in the basement, and bespell this place. Humans will ignore it and Otherworlders will avoid it. It is the least we can do for our Guardian."

"Thanks, Mel."

"Do not call me *Mel*," said Meelena in an annoyed tone that suggested she said the same thing often. "What of Raphael? He is not a Guardian."

"What is he?"

"That is for him to say."

Maggie rolled her eyes. "I guess I'll keep him around for a while."

"Until the bargain is met?"

Surprise had her turning toward the Priestess. "How did you know about that?"

Meelena shrugged. "Perhaps it is best that he stay with you. He has done what no Guardian, including your father, has managed to do."

"Not die?"

"Protect you."

Maggie remembered how Raphael had spirited her out of the burning house and into the Otherworld so that her cuts and bruises could be tended. "Yeah. He did. *This* time."

"So cynical. You are worried about Abatu. We will find him and capture him. Not only for you, dear one, but for every good soul."

"He's preparing for war. And he's strengthening his powers in ways that shouldn't be possible. If we don't catch that asshole soon, he's going to do a lot of damage to both our worlds."

"What you say is true, but for today, you should not worry about it." Meelena cupped Maggie's cheek and brushed a kiss on her forehead. Feelings of peace drifted through her. A blessing from a powerful and wise woman—*wow*. "You are worthy of so much, daughter. Accept the gifts given to you."

"What the hell does that mean?"

In typical Priestess style, Meelena sparkled away, her smile enigmatic as she left Maggie's question unanswered.

"Fine," huffed Maggie, supremely irritated. That irritation faded as she walked across the blackened ground to join Rafe. She threaded her fingers through his. It was a gesture of affection that she had never taken with another lover.

The idea of falling in love was both thrilling and terrifying. What she felt for Raphael was nothing she'd felt for anyone else—not even Damian. D had been a fantasy. She understood that now. It was easier to yearn for what she couldn't have than to risk for what, or rather *who*, she could have.

"So you're not a Guardian."

He turned toward her. "No."

"And that makes you..."

He kissed her and desire sizzled through her. She broke the spell woven by his lips and stepped back. "You're not going to tell me, are you?"

"Not yet."

"Will you tell me why you know me? Why you think you love me?"

"I don't think—I *know*." His gaze flicked toward the mansion then to her. "Damian was genuinely fond of you, Maggie. And he was a good Guardian. But he..." Rafe sighed. "When did he start letting you watch him have sex with his lovers?"

Maggie felt her cheeks heat. It still bothered her that Rafe knew about her voyeurism. It shouldn't. She was not a liar—not to others and not to herself. She liked watching people give each other pleasure. "About a year ago."

"That's when he started sending me the DVDs."

"He sent you recordings of his lovemaking sessions?"

"No. Of you...in the secret room."

The color drained from her face. "He *recorded* me?"

"He said I would like you." Raphael smiled, but his eyes remained wary. "He was right. I did like you. He wanted me to meet you. To see what we could have together."

She was still trying to process the idea that Damian had videotaped her. He'd never told her about his brother. Never said a fucking word in five years. But he'd been secretly taping her masturbating, screaming his name, listening and watching...and sending the evidence of her shameful passion to his *brother*.

"Heartless bastard." Tears pooled in her eyes, but she blinked them away. She was through crying for Damian. "Why didn't you take his advice? Meet me?"

"You were in love with him." He brushed her cheek with his knuckles. "You are so beautiful, Maggie. Watching you touch yourself, seeing that look of longing and love in your gaze... I wouldn't take that from you." He shook his head. "No. That's not true. I didn't want to face your rejection. To know how badly I wanted you to look at me the way you looked at Damian."

"And when he died..."

"I had no choice. Meelena sent me. And I wanted you so much that I morphed into Damian just so I could have you."

Sorrow weaved through her. She'd hurt him. Hurt him bad. And yet here he stood, taking whatever she could give him, because he believed that he loved her. "This is pathetic. I wanted Damian, you wanted me, and here we are...a vicious circle of—"

He kissed her again. Kissed her madly. Until she melted into his embrace. Until she burned for his touch. Until she was breathless and needy. "Raphael," she said against his mouth. "What am I going to do with you?"

He grinned. "I'll think of something."



## Chapter Six

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*Demons are difficult. After six solid weeks of living with Raphael, I'm tempted to say, "Hey, dickhead, your two-month stint as my babysitter is up!" But...okay, look, I'm attached to him. Me, Maggie Mortis, in serious fucking like with a half-demon, half-human.*

*If my father was alive, he'd kill me.*

*Rafe and I have established a new underground headquarters, paid for courtesy of the Otherworld High Council. It's not even half-finished, but it's already got a lot more protections in place than Damien's house. The place where my former Guardian's mansion stood is off-limits to humans and Otherworlders. Elise is buried there, too, along with everything Damien owned. I can't believe it's only been two months since I lost the last person I could call friend.*

*And gained a man I could call lover.*

*I mourned the loss of the Jaguar XLS so often and so loudly, Rafe gifted me with one of my own. It's same the stone gray as his demon skin. I get hot just looking at it because I think about what Rafe looks like in his demon form. And how that skin feels – as smooth as silk, believe it or not – and how I like kissing it, licking it... Whoa, baby.*

*What the hell is wrong with me? I spend my days kicking demon ass and my nights fucking my demon lover.*

*Does that make me a hypocrite, or what?*

*Ah...but what if I'm as Abatu claimed...what if I have demon blood?*

*Maybe I'd still be a hypocrite. Just in a different way.*

\* \* \* \* \*

When Maggie felt the tongue lick the inside of her thigh, she didn't bother opening her eyes. Instead, she spread her legs in invitation.

Rafe had returned early. *Thank the Goddess.* She hated to admit that she was lonely without him. Or that she didn't sleep well if he wasn't occupying the pillow next to hers. That would be a stupid, lame, uncool admission.

He'd been called away to the Otherworld. He hadn't told her why, only that it had to do with his pre-Guardian job—and he still hadn't confided what, exactly, his role was for the High Council. All the same, she was glad her demon had come home.

The tongue wiggled to her pussy and licked her repeatedly. Sensations skittered. She moaned, sliding her hands up her stomach to cup her breasts. With her thumbs and forefingers, she squeezed her nipples. Little zings pierced her. Then she gave the peaks

hard twists, shuddering as the little zings expanded into lightning bolts. And that glorious tongue kept working its magic, too. "That feels so good. Hmmm. Keep tasting me, baby."

He obliged, shoving into her entrance and tongue-fucking her. She squirmed, moving her hips to match his movements. Fingers dug into her thighs, the groans of her lover vibrating on her cunt.

"I want your cock," she said. "I want your mouth on my nipples."

There was a naughty delight in keeping her eyes closed. In imagining Rafe rather than seeing him. He felt both familiar and different. His naked body slid up hers. Two hands curved under her shoulders, anchoring.

She offered up her breasts and felt a mouth close around one nipple. Then the other. A tongue flicked. Sucked. Flicked again.

A hot, wet ache settled in her pussy.

The tip of his cock teased her entrance while that gorgeous mouth played with her breasts as if they were the only body parts requiring attention.

She seriously lost patience.

"What are you waiting for? Fuck me!"

He slammed into her, waited a nanosecond...then plunged into her hard and fast. *Goddess, just the way I love it.* Her legs wrapped around his waist and she matched his rhythm, grinding and bumping.

"Yes," she shouted. "Yes, baby. I missed you. I missed you so much."

She strained toward release, her rhythm wild and demanding. She raked her nails down his back, all the way to his ass. She was sweaty now, panting with effort, frenzied.

The orgasm was a stroke away.

"Make me come," she begged. "I want to come on your big cock."

"*Oui, cherie,*" breathed a very non-Raphael voice. "You will come on my cock. I demand it of you."

Her eyes flew open. In shock, she registered the face of Draymore, vampire and ex-lover...too late. She soared into pleasure. The orgasm rocked her, a nuclear explosion that rendered her senseless.

As her pussy convulsed and her breath heaved, Draymore planted his fangs into her neck. He drank from her while his own orgasm claimed him.

Gracious as she was, she let him come. Then she gave him a hard shove, which should've been like trying to move a one-ton boulder, but she surprised him and he tumbled off. He rolled onto his side, grinning.

"You were eager, my flower," said Draymore. "I have neglected you far too long."

"Argh!" She sat up and grabbed at the bedspread. Because Draymore lay on top of the silk comforter, she couldn't pull it out enough to cover herself. "Are you crazy? You can't just pop in anytime you like and have your way with me."

"Since when?"

"Since now!" She didn't want to know how Draymore had found her. She was three hundred feet underground, for Goddess sake! Panic burbled through her. She had broken faith with Rafe. She'd promised herself to him and him alone and stupid Draymore had seduced her. From now on, she would open her eyes if she so much as felt someone tickle her pinky toe.

"You have to leave, Draymore. You have to fucking leave!"

"Do not speak to me that way, *cherie*," warned Draymore. "Or I will punish you."

"Oh fuck you. I am so over that domination bullshit."

He laughed. Then he grabbed her hip and pushed her onto her stomach. "No!" she yelled. "You can't, Draymore."

He shoved one hand under her, flattening it against her pussy. Then he brought the other hand down *hard* on her left ass cheek. It stung. It really fucking stung. The next smack landed on her right cheek. He repeated the spanking twice more. The tingling pain roved her skin...and arrowed into her core, creating liquid heat. It should've been a humiliation instead of a turn-on. Yet, she had to bite her lower lip to keep from moaning.

Draymore's fingers splayed on her throbbing ass while his other hand cupped her mound. Her pussy pulsed with excitement, her cream dripping into his palm. He laughed softly. "Shall I continue? Perhaps we should get out the paddle."

"Stop," she begged. "I'm with someone else. We're...exclusive."

"I'm surprised you remembered," said the gravelly voice of Raphael.

Her heart jumped into overdrive. Shit, shit, *shit*! Maggie rolled onto her back and flushed with embarrassment. Rafe stood at the edge of the bed, his arms crossed and his expression inscrutable. She wasn't blind, though, to the hard-on straining against his black Dockers. She looked over her shoulder at Draymore and saw his smirk. "How long was he standing there?"

"Long enough, *ma petite fleur*."

Rafe shook his head, his lips pressed together. His blue eyes offered only cool reproach. "You can fuck whoever you want."

"If that is the case," said Draymore smoothly, "you may go. And Maggie and I will finish our play."

"All right, that's it!" said Maggie. "I'm not a ping-pong ball that the two of you can paddle between each other."

She shot to her feet and poked Rafe in the chest. "I love you. There, I fucking said it. I love you. And I thought Draymore was you. And I'm sorry I got fucked by another guy who *I thought was you* and...oh, fuck you."

She whirled to face Draymore. "If you don't announce yourself next time, asshole, I will stake you. In fact, you won't have to bother, because I will put a cross above every door, garlic in every corner, and will revoke your invitation."

"Maggie..." said Rafe.

"My flower..." said Draymore.

Dignity in shreds, Maggie had every intention of sweeping across the lushly carpeted floor and escaping into the bathroom. Rafe locked fingers around her wrist and dragged her into his embrace. "You love me?" he asked softly.

"Yes," she said.

"It's not like you to apologize," said Rafe.

"Don't get used to it."

Rafe's lips curled into a half-grin. Then his gaze met hers. "I won't kill him."

"That's nice of you."

"Do you..." He cleared his throat, embarrassed.

Maggie's hand wandered to his crotch and found that the hard-on still strained his pants. She stroked the ridge of his cock through the material. "What?"

Draymore crawled across the bed and put one hand on Maggie's ass and the other on Rafe's. "Ah, *cherie*," he said with a fanged grin, "he wants to know if you will take us both."

Maggie assessed Rafe. When they'd first met, he'd let her know that although he'd had sexual relations with men, he hadn't necessarily enjoyed the encounters. She figured those encounters had to do with his mysterious job rather than with his own pursuit of pleasure.

"Do you really want a *ménage a trois*?" she asked.

"I've missed you," he said, "and though I will admit finding a strange male in our bed spanking you was unexpected...I'm intrigued by his offer."

"Well...Draymore *is* an expert lover," she said as she took off Rafe's belt and unbuttoned his slacks. "He likes women. Men. Aliens." She sent the vamp an amused glance. "Wasn't there a sheep somewhere in there, too?"

"It was a goat," said Draymore with a lascivious smile. "It was the 1960s. Woodstock. I made the mistake of drinking from one too many people who'd taken acid. But the goat...ah, it never called, it never wrote."

Rafe chuckled. He took off his shirt and tossed it to the floor. He shucked his dress shoes and Maggie knelt to help him wiggle off his socks. That left the pants...

She shimmied up his body, pressing her breasts against his muscled chest. Her nipples pebbled against the heat of his skin. "Are you sure?" she whispered.

"Maggie..." He crushed his mouths to hers.

*Holy shit.* He was turned on by the idea of her being sandwiched between him and Draymore. As she accepted the violence of his kiss, she pulled down his Dockers and

the boxers with grinning orange ghosts on them. As always, the man wore the most ridiculous underwear. Cupping his balls and squeezing lightly, she used her other hand to stroke his cock.

"I want to play, too, my darlings," said Draymore. His hands wandered over Maggie's sore buttocks. "Such a delectable ass. I will enjoy taking it."

Maggie broke the kiss, licking Rafe's swollen lips. Her pussy felt swollen and wet, definitely ready for another round of good fucking. "I thought you were over your BDSM phase."

"For some it is not a phase, but a lifestyle," he said. "Alas, my attention wandered to tantric sex rituals. However, I am an impatient man so that, too, was short-lived."

"And now?" she asked.

"As always, *ma fleur*, I returned to you."

Maggie rolled her eyes. "Save that hearts-and-flowers shit for some simpering victim, would you?"

Draymore laughed. "What shall we do now, hmmm?"

"You'll watch me suck Rafe's cock," murmured Maggie. "Then you'll both fuck me until I pass out."

Draymore sat up, his legs out and knees bent. His long pale hand stroked his half-hard cock. His gaze glittered with anticipation. Maggie rolled her eyes. The guy had always been a horny bastard.

Maggie dropped to her knees, her fingers wandering over Rafe's cock and balls, stroking, touching, memorizing. She took the hard length of Rafe into her mouth until the head touched the back of her throat.

Rafe moaned.

His hands dove into Maggie's short hair, tugging on it until her scalp tingled. Slowly, his hips pumped into her mouth.

She looked up and felt her body go all melty. Her beautiful demon's eyes were closed, his mouth half-opened as he panted and hissed with harsh pleasure.

Sucking him hard, her tongue stroking the underside of his big cock, she grabbed his ass and held on while he pistoned forward.

He groaned raggedly then cried, "Maggie!"

Hot come spurted down her throat.

She licked every salty, yummy drop from Rafe's cock. Then she sucked him until his cock stood at attention.

"Draymore, stop jacking off," she demanded. "Unless you'd rather do that than fuck my ass?"

"As my lady commands," Draymore said with a wicked grin.

He scooted over and Rafe lay down. Maggie wasted no time getting on top of him. "Get the nipple nooses," she told Draymore, pointing at the nightstand's first drawer. "And the lubricant."

Rafe cupped her breasts, twisting and pulling on her nipples. She panted as sensations zinged straight to her pussy.

Draymore appeared at her left side. He handed one of the thin leather loops to Rafe. As he placed one on Maggie's left nipple, Rafe placed the other on her right nipple. Together, they tightened the strands.

"Oh Goddess," she moaned. "Tighter."

They obeyed her wish and her nipples swelled against the constrictions. The pain felt good, so good she wanted to feel more.

Draymore knew what she needed.

Grasping her neck he leaned her forward until her forehead touched the center of Rafe's pectorals.

The first hit sent waves of pain rocketing into her cunt.

Her ass hadn't quite recovered from the first spanking, her cheeks still sore.

The next smack made her pussy throb. Pain skittered up her spine.

Then she felt Rafe's fingers on the nooses. He pulled them just as Draymore hit her a third time.

She screamed as pain exploded from ass to cunt to nipples. Panting now, she tried to catch her breath. Dizziness assailed her and she blinked the sweat out of her eyes.

"She's ready," murmured Draymore.

*No fucking kiddin'.* As the vampire prepared himself, she slid her wet pussy across Rafe's cock. Her clit reacted immediately and pleasure shot through her. Rising to her knees, she held his cock straight while she slowly pushed down.

"Maggie," moaned Rafe. His hands wrapped around her thighs. She rose to her knees again, and took his swollen length into her pussy.

They both shuddered.

The next time, she settled onto his cock and lay on top of his chest, her tortured nipples rubbing across his sweat-slick flesh.

"Lift your ass," said Draymore.

She pressed herself against Rafe and offered her ass.

She felt the tip of the lube inserted into her anus then the cold, thick gel as it was squeezed inside. Draymore poked his finger into her ass, rubbing and stretching. With one hand, he soothed her tormented buttocks then he slipped another finger into her puckered star.

Lifting her head, she planted her lips onto Rafe's and kissed the living hell out of him. As they stoked each other's fire, she felt the tip of Draymore's cock push into her

entrance. Clenching her pussy onto Rafe's cock, she pushed back and inch-by-inch, Draymore filled her ass.

The full, burning sensation snaked all the way through her.

Sucking in a ragged breath, she asked, "Can we fuck now?"

Both were men of action, not words, so while Rafe's hands clamped onto her hips and his cock pumped into her slick pussy, Draymore pressed himself fully against her prone form and slid his cock in and out of her ass.

The pleasure had already built into a high peak for Maggie. As her raw, pinched nipples rubbed against Rafe, she held onto his shoulders for dear life. Just as she felt Draymore's teeth puncture her shoulder, Rafe stiffened and buried his cock deeply inside her pussy.

His orgasm triggered hers.

As the hot spurt of Draymore's come filled her ass, pleasure imploded, sexual fireworks that brought light and heat and bliss.

Maggie would never admit it, but she damned near did pass out.

"That was most pleasant," said a hoarse Draymore as he rolled off her and onto the bed. "Raphael is a man's man, eh?"

"Hell yes," said Maggie, as Rafe withdrew. She let herself fall between the two men. "He's actually a demon's demon."

"What?"

Maggie grinned at the shock in Draymore's voice. That would teach him to fuck around with her. Bastard. Cute bastard, though. Her two lovers—one dead and one only half-human.

Her love life was seriously fucked-up.

"This is not like you, Maggie. The last time I saw you, you would sooner stick a scythe into your own eye than let a demon touch you. And now you tell me you are sleeping with one?" Draymore scrambled off the bed.

His clothes had been folded and placed carefully on top of the dresser. He removed his red silk shirt and stuck his arms inside, buttoning it quickly. He loved to wear red and black—the cheesy symbols of a vampire, but hell, he still managed to pull it off with aplomb.

Too sexually sated to get really pissed off, she watched Draymore slip into the black silk boxers and Armani pants. The jacket was next then socks and his 900 Italian shoes. "Rafe's a half-demon. I trust him. I love him."

Draymore looked at her, worry in his brown eyes. His gaze slid to Rafe, who remained on his back, eyes closed. Maggie knew he wasn't sleeping, but it seemed obvious he didn't consider the vampire too much of a threat.

"Things change," she said. "And so do people. FYI, vamp boy, how I live my life is none of your fucking business."

She pierced him with a no-bullshit stare. Damned if he could pop into her life after a two-year absence and think that he had some say about her decisions.

What an asshole.

"I will go," he said quietly. "But do not punish me for worrying about you, *ma cherie*."

Draymore no more worried about her than he worried about his next human meal. Vampires could only pretend to have emotions. After living for centuries and seeing enough death, blood, and change to harden the gentlest heart, most vamps lost the ability to feel. But they could remember what it was like to care, and really, how could Maggie expect more from the guy?

"I won't revoke your invitation," she said. "But will you call first next time?"

A smile ghosted his lips. He bowed in a courtly fashion then said, "Goodbye, darling Maggie."



## Chapter Seven

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*It was fun to shake up the bedroom action, but Rafe is my demon. Mine. And I might share his body, but I ain't sharing his heart. I think he feels the same way.*

*Then again, Draymore's never been the kind of guy who sticks around. He's been alive so fucking long, everything bores him. I think his record for staying with me was three weeks, and only then because he was experimenting with bondage. All I can say is that he taught me the meaning of flexibility. And how to tie a mean knot.*

*I still miss Damian. Rafe and I don't talk about him too much. I don't know if that's because we're just not up to sharing warm fuzzies about him or if neither one of us can face the fact he's still a ghost between us. Rafe can't get over that I wanted his brother – and I guess I can't, either.*

*Maybe it'll just take more time. Or more sex. Or more love.*

*Or maybe Damian will always be there, a shadow in our hearts. Maybe his memory is like a stain that fades, but can never really be wiped away.*

\* \* \* \* \*

A few minutes before 9 p.m., Maggie entered the tiny pet store and grimaced. She'd followed the sulfur trail into a location that smelled like urine and mold. *Oh this makes finding the demon soooo much easier.* With sparse lighting and brown-painted walls, the whole place looked like a cave instead of a business.

From the bad smells and dusty state of the half-empty shelves, Pedro's Pets was not a high-quality animal-care facility. The big fish tank in front of Maggie had seen better days. Dead fish and floating moss filled the brackish water.

She turned to the right and saw three rows of wire cages. Most of the cages housed overturned bowls and dirty litter boxes. At the far end, she spotted movement. Clutching her moon scythes, her favorite among the many Goddess-smithed and Wiccan-blessed weapons she owned, she inched toward the last pen on the second row.

"Meow," came a pitiful whine. "Meooooooooow."

Maggie looked at the bedraggled and starved black kitten. Oh Goddess. Poor little thing. Its big yellow eyes stared at her. One paw pressed against the metal enclosure in supplication.

"Sorry, babe," whispered Maggie. "I can't take you with me."

The kitten sat down and tilted its head. "Meow?"

"There's this demon, and I gotta trap its sorry ass before it gets away. Ever heard of Magnus? Well, he's a shithead and I owe him some serious pain."

"Meow." The feline looked to its right then it looked at her again. It made the same peculiar gesture twice more then mewed.

Maggie wondered if the cat was trying to show her which way Magnus had gone – or if she was just losing her mind. "I'll make sure this store gets shut down and I'll find you a good home. I promise."

The cat lay down and closed its eyes, either too weak to continue sitting up or too cynical to believe that Maggie would rescue it from this hellhole. She tucked a finger between the bars and scratched the fuzzy head. The kitten issued a soft, ragged purr. Maggie's chest squeezed. When had she become such a moosh? *Suck it up, woman. You're a goddamned demon hunter – not a rep for the Humane Society.* Yet, Maggie found herself running the scythe's blade over the lock, which was like sweeping a hot knife through butter. The lock fell off and the door swung open. The kitten leapt onto her shoulder, planted its front paws on her collarbone, and wrapped its tail around her neck. The frayed purring kicked up a notch.

"Okay," said Maggie. "I'm glad we agree."

Moon scythes at the ready, and cat in place, Maggie made a quick, quiet search. Nothing. Most of the animals were gone or dead. Whoever was supposed to be running the joint was not here. She looked around as frustration tapped a rhythm in her temples. Hmmm. Past the dilapidated counter with its busted register was a door that probably led to a storage room.

Magnus might be in there, or he might've poofed after leading her on a merry chase. More likely, the human asshole who worked for Pedro's Pets was probably ensconced in there doing Goddess-knew-what. Either way, Maggie was gonna kick *somebody's* ass.

She twisted the knob, surprised when the door opened soundlessly.

Well, shit.

She was right on both counts.

Magnus was in there, all right, and so was a human. Well, what was left of one. Apparently the demon had stopped by for a little snack. Demons ate anything and everything. Garbage. Animals. Plants. Furniture. Insects. People. They liked negative energy. Gnawing on living things caused pain, which they loved, and eating stuff animate or inanimate caused destruction, which they craved.

Maggie got a look at the dead guy's face and sighed. Looked like ol' Magnus had been in the mood for Mexican. If she was lucky, the little bastard was Pedro – and Magnus had done her a favor. Any jerk who treated animals like he had deserved to be a demon's dinner.

"Does this look like a drive-through to you?" asked Maggie as she sheathed one scythe and removed a white-pain prism from her satchel. She couldn't wait to stick Magnus into it. After disguising himself as a human, he had wormed his way into

Damian's bed—then murdered him. She was ashamed that she didn't know what bothered more—that Magnus had killed her best friend or that the demon had slept with him first.

"Maggie Mortis," it said, the ugly maw red with blood. "Daughter of Abatu."

"Fuck you." She tossed the prism at its feet. "*Carcer!*"

He cackled and kicked away the prism.

Shit—oh—shit. The prism hadn't sucked in Magnus. Shock rendered her immobile for precious seconds as her mind spun with the implications. Two months ago, Abatu had destroyed her laboratory and with it, almost half the prisms holding demons she'd captured. Now, it appeared the prisms had lost their mojo completely.

Okay. This news really sucked.

Magnus dropped the hunk of Pedro, which landed on the concrete with a sickening splat. The rusty smell of fresh blood mixed with the sulfur stink that clung to the demon. His grayish-white skin was dirty and blood-spattered, his red eyes glowing with power, with knowledge. He knew something she didn't. Something big. Well hell. She knew something bad was on the way. Hadn't Abatu promised as much?

"You said something about fucking?" Magnus grabbed the sizeable cock dangling between its legs. Her gorge rose as she realized the direction of the demon's thoughts.

"I'll cut off your dick," she warned.

"It'll grow back," countered Magnus.

Maggie watched as the white hand with its yellowed, poisonous talons stroked the length into hardness. That cock had fucked Damian. Those hands had *killed* Damian. Fury burned through her. She withdrew the other scythe while Magnus stared at her, stroking his cock, waiting to make a move on her.

Demons couldn't be killed. They could be captured. Tortured. Imprisoned. Magnus deserved death. Painful and slow death. Just another goddamned thing she couldn't do, couldn't have.

Self-preservation probably urged the kitten to leave her perch. She jumped off Maggie's shoulder, walked a couple feet, then laid down. Curling into a black ball, she closed her eyes and went to sleep. Maggie grimaced at the cat. *Thanks a lot, you little turd.*

Magnus grinned, his rotting teeth black with blood. His stroking got aggressive, rough.

Then he lunged at her, his free hand swinging toward her face. She ducked under the arm and shoved the scythe into his stomach.

He screeched and reared back.

At least her weapons still had their powers. She whirled and kicked out his legs. Magnus fell onto his ass, but the damned demon wouldn't let go of his cock. Fighting seemed to add to his excitement.

"I want to fuck you, Maggie," Magnus moaned. "Fuck you and kill you and feed on your sweet flesh."

Apparently the idea of her as his next buffet sent him over the edge. Magnus came, shooting the load everywhere. Droplets rained onto the floor, the corpse of Pedro, Maggie's boots, and the kitten.

In a puff of black smoke and an echo of triumphant laughter, Magnus disappeared.

"Son-of-a-bitch!" yelled Maggie. She jumped up and down in a childish display of temper then stomped to the wall and kicked a big hole in it.

What the hell was wrong with her? She should've tried trapping Magnus into a different prism. Whacked the masturbating bastard in the skull with a scythe. Punted him in the balls and stomped the ugly penis.

"I'm losing my edge," she muttered. "Losing my mind, too."

She bent down and considered the sticky fur of the cat, who after sniffing its butt, decided more sleep was in order. It opened one yellow eye and looked at her. Maggie shook her head. "Look, I'll dispose of the body, okay? But no way am I giving you a bath."

\* \* \* \* \*

"What the hell is that?" asked Raphael.

"A cat," said Maggie. Goddess, she was tired. And she smelled like week-old garbage, thanks to dead humans and horny demons.

She put down the kitten, who wandered out of the bedroom, tail flicking as she went off to explore. Maggie turned her gaze to Rafe. He lounged on the bed, clad only in a pair of jeans. He was reading *Time* magazine.

"And you smell like..." Rafe frowned at her. "Demon come?"

"It's on my boots," she said as she toed off the offending shoes. "I'm burning these suckers first chance. Fucking Magnus."

"Magnus came on your boots?" Rafe rolled off the bed. He gathered her into his arms and held her tightly. She didn't realize how much she wanted a hug. But Rafe had known. Her heart warmed and she relaxed into his embrace. How nice it was to share her burdens with someone who loved her. Someone who knew what she needed even when she didn't.

"You need a long, hot bath," said Rafe. "I'll be right back."

In the blink of an eye, Rafe was gone. Maggie heard the squeal of the knobs then the gurgle of water pouring into her very big, very expensive bathtub. Made of black marble, it had jets, carved seats, and could comfortably hold four people. Her new bathroom totally outranked D's old bathroom, which had been better than any spa's.

"Are you okay?" asked Raphael when he returned. He pulled her back into his arms. "What happened?"

"I tracked Magnus' sorry ass to this pet store in the bad section of town. That's where I found Hellion."

"You named the cat?"

"Yeah." She glanced up and saw the shock in his eyes. "*Shut up.*"

"I didn't say anything."

"Good." She sighed and put her head against his shoulder. "Anyway, Magnus had already killed a guy and was gnawing on the poor schmuck's insides when I finally got there. Then he jacked off—while I was trying to kick his ass—and poofed." She pulled away just enough to meet Rafe's worried gaze. "The white-pain prism I tried to use on Magnus failed. We still haven't figured out how Abatu broke the prisms. He infiltrated the lab protections because... Shit, Rafe. He's gotta be related to me. How else do you get through the genetic locks and the blood spells?"

"You think Abatu is going to move on you again?" asked Raphael.

"Six weeks without hearing from him? That asshole's been busy doing something—something more important than killing me and we know that's a priority for him. Today was the first time Magnus has wandered into my territory. He's kept away because he knows I want his head on a pike."

"Abatu sent him."

"Probably. But why? To see if I'd notice?"

"To test your resolve. Or maybe to test your weapons."

"You mean to see if the prisms worked on Magnus? You think Abatu has hooked up his minions with anti-entrapment magic or something?"

"It's possible." Raphael grimaced. "Damn it. I don't want to leave you. Not now."

"Leave me?" Maggie stared at him, not liking the trembling of her heart or the way her stomach dipped. Since when had she been the clingy sort? She didn't need Raphael babysitting her. In fact, she should be relieved he was going away. What was wrong with having some time to herself? *Liar, liar*, whispered her conscience. *You don't lie to yourself. Don't start now just because you're in love.*

"I don't want you to go," she admitted softly. "Stay with me."

"It's an assignment," said Rafe. "The High Council needs my particular talents to accomplish this mission."

"You're my Guardian. That's your assignment," said Maggie. What was with this feeling of desperation and fear that needled her? Raphael could go wherever he wanted any time he wanted and he was capable of taking care of himself.

"Maggie?"

Shit. Rafe had sensed her very un-Maggie-like reactions.

"Ignore me. I'm fine. I'm good. Do what you gotta do." She broke out of the embrace and sauntered toward the bathroom. Rafe enchained her wrist, spinning her around and gathering her into his arms again. She let him do it. Let him because she

needed him to hold her. She was so weak. So vulnerable. Because of him. Her beautiful demon.

"The water is almost ready," said a tiny voice. "I need a bath, too."

Rafe and Maggie looked down. The black kitten sat at their feet, looking up.

"You say something?" asked Maggie.

"I stink. I want a bath, too."

"A demon," said Rafe. "And you brought it here."

"You little fucker!" Maggie raised her foot, intending to squash the deceiving bastard. "You tricked me into taking you. Acting all pitiful and cute. Argh!"

"Please, mistress. You saved me and so, I am bound to you."

Maggie's foot hovered above the kitten. Reluctantly, she put it down and sighed. "Well, shit."

*Two demons, Maggie? Have you decided to collect them rather than kill them?* She reached down and picked up the scrawny, smelly thing. "Give me one good reason I shouldn't put you into a pain prism."

"You saved me from Abatu's wrath."

Maggie blinked. "Ooookay, that's a good reason. Why did Abatu want you squirming?"

The kitten tilted her head, her gold eyes staring at Maggie. Finally, she heaved a sigh. "He has found a way to kill demons."

\* \* \* \* \*

"You're nine months pregnant," Maggie said. "I can't hire you."

They sat at a table on the patio of Starbucks, Maggie with a Venti Mocha and the tenth unacceptable applicant with a Tao Tea. The afternoon light faded into the purple and blue hues of dusk. A headache that started hours ago still throbbed in Maggie's temples. *Give me a demon. Any demon. Kicking immortal ass is so much easier than hiring an assistant.*

"I'm six months along," said Miss Sarah Lynn Traynor.

Maggie looked at the young woman's huge stomach. "You're shitting me. You look ready to pop. What the hell do you have in there?"

"The Anti-Christ."

Her tone was matter-of-fact and her lips didn't twitch into a smile. Maggie resisted, *barely*, rolling her eyes. "Okay, look. I know dealing with the Otherworld is weird. But I'm not taking on looneys."

"I'm not insane," said Sarah. She didn't sound offended.

Maggie sipped her mocha. *Where does Mel get these people? Probably thought it would be funny to send someone pregnant with...oh shit.*

"You...uh, know the name of the father?"

"Oh, yes. His name is Eltar."

"Eltar." Maggie blew out a breath. For a split second, she thought Sarah would admit to being pregnant with Abatu's child. Stupid. Abatu was trying to kill all his offspring, demon and human. He wouldn't go around and make more rivals.

"You can type?"

Sarah nodded.

"How's your spell work?"

"I specialize in protection spells." She looked down at her tummy. "Well, I do now. I learned a lot of safety and lock-key magic to keep Eltar away. He's really horny."

Maggie nearly spit out her coffee. Instead, she put down her cup and pressed a napkin to her lips to hide her grin. "What about battle skills? Do you know how to wield a sword or throw a knife?"

"I can shoot really well with my Glock."

"I can't believe I'm about to do this, but honey, you're the best of the bunch. You're hired." Maggie reached out her hand and Sarah took it, pumping it twice. Then she dropped her palm against her tummy, drawing Maggie's gaze. In Sarah's womb grew the child of the demon Eltar.

*Goddamn it. I really am collecting demons.*

## Chapter Eight

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*Turns out the fucking High Council knew that Abatu had acquired the ability to kill demons. That's why they called in Raphael. They want him to take a little trip into Hell, find out how Abatu is doing it. They want to learn how to assassinate the demons, too.*

*They're not all that interested in why Abatu is killing off his own kind.*

*I worry about the High Council's motives. I'm not sure they're into peace, light and love like they want everyone to believe. Meelena hasn't exactly been herself either. I can get no answers...not even from Raphael.*

*He's leaving me.*

*I can't fucking believe it.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Maggie stood in the choir loft of the abandoned church and looked down at the dusty pews and collapsed altar. When she was a little girl, her parents had brought her to this place of worship outside the city. Then, the stained glass windows shone brightly, filtering in the perfect light of Love. They almost always sat in third pew on the left side. She would squeeze between her mother and father, her dress sliding against the polished wood, the faint scent of lemon oil mixing with the floral perfume her mother wore.

Every Sunday until her mother's death, they came to this tiny church and listened to the pastor talk about sin and about redemption. How small her world had been then. How beautiful and perfect. Yeah. Ignorance really had been bliss.

"Maggie?"

She turned, her hands twisting around the rickety railing, and faced Raphael. He moved silently out of the shadows. How long had he been standing there, watching her?

It was past midnight. She'd had a lousy night of demon hunting, haunted more than usual by the ghosts of her past. "Do you think the ones who abandoned this church abandoned their faith just as easily?"

"People carry their faith with them. They don't leave it in an old, broken-down building." He stood next to her, his enigmatic gaze on her face.

"How did you find me?" she asked.



"I will always find you." He gathered her into his arms and held her tightly. "I will always love you."

"Shut up," she said, tears threatening. "You've turned me into a stupid, blubbing mush-ball, you know that?"

He drew back just enough to look at her. "You say the most romantic things."

Maggie smacked his solid chest, but a laugh escaped. "You're leaving."

"I have to."

"No, you don't." She wrenched away from him, terrified. This was what happened when you got attached to people. Hadn't she lost enough loved ones? Everyone she'd ever cared about was gone. Everyone but Raphael. Damn, she was a fool.

"I'm not leaving you forever."

"So what if you did?" She clenched her fists, fought the pain raking her heart. "I don't need this shit. Just...go. Go and fucking stay there, okay?"

"Maggie..."

She didn't want to hear his promises. Didn't want to be soothed or cajoled into feeling better. Turning, she strode away, but Raphael suddenly stood in front her, holding her by the arms.

"Don't, Rafe."

"Don't what? Don't care about you?"

"I'm not in the fucking mood!" She pushed him away, but he wouldn't let her go. He was half-demon and *way* stronger than her. But he'd never used his powers against her. Her heart trilled with fear, but she beat it back. "Let me go."

"Never." He yanked her forward and kissed her.

She struggled, smacking his chest and arms, kicking at his legs. But he didn't stop. His mouth conquered hers with gentle reprimand. Love was in his kiss. Love and longing.

He broke her with that aching submission, and she collapsed against him, sucking his tongue into her mouth. She tasted her own fear on his lips. "Rafe."

"Ssshhh." He undid the buttons to her shirt, parting it to reveal her black lace bra. Leaning down, he kissed the top of each breast before reaching around and releasing the clasp.

"You're killing me," she said.

"I'm worshipping you." He removed the shirt and bra. He cupped her breasts, his thumbs swiping the nipples. Need scissored through her, cutting deeply. "You are so lovely, Maggie."

He captured one taut bud between his lips and flicked his tongue over it. Maggie moaned, her hands diving into his hair. His mouth swooped across her breasts, tasting her flesh with lips, with tongue. He captured her other nipple and gave it the same divine treatment.

His hands coasted to her jeans, unzipped the denims and slid them off her hips along with her panties. Lust shuddered through Maggie and she tore at his pants, ripping at the buttons. His hands clasped hers and gentled her movements.

With trembling fingers, she pushed down his pants and boxers, releasing the thick length of his cock. She grasped his hard-on, stroking the firm, warm flesh, reveling in Rafe's harsh intake of breath. Her other hand cupped his balls, squeezing gently.

He kissed her temple, then dropped to his knees and helped her take off her shoes. Then he stripped off her jeans. When he stood, she impatiently tugged on his shirt. He took it off, tossing it to the floor.

Hungry for him, Maggie rubbed the smooth planes of his chest, her hands coasting down his muscled stomach to once again take his cock. While she stroked him, her tongue danced along his chest, nipping here and there, then she attacked his nipples.

Groaning, Rafe grabbed her ass and brought her closer, then used one hand to cup her sex. Two fingers parted her flesh and found her sensitive clit, fondling it until she trembled on the edge of orgasm.

Then, and only then, did he lift her into his embrace and slowly penetrate her. His cock filled her, stretching her to the max, and she wrapped her legs around his waist and clenched him, her pussy swollen and wet and needy.

For a long moment, they held on to each other, taking in the feel of their bodies, skin against skin, heartbeat against heartbeat.

Then Rafe began to move, his cock plunging into her wet heat, slamming against her until she moaned with pleasure.

Her nipples scraped his chest as she met his strokes, riding him, holding on to his shoulders for dear life. Because he was, she realized, very much part of her life. Part of her soul.

Her tears fell, dropping between them, mixing with their sweat, with their tender sorrow.

Then she felt the rise of bliss, it crashed over her...through her...and while she rode the wave, she heard Raphael's cry...then he was riding the wave with her. Together, they fell into the darkness – buoyed only by each other.

\* \* \* \* \*

As they left the church, hand in hand, Maggie turned to her lover. "You said that you had to go. Why?"

Raphael hesitated then brought her knuckles to his lips and kissed each one. He met her gaze and the emotion glittering there made her heart leap in distress. "When the Guardian rescued me and Damian and took us to the Otherworld, the Council bound me to their service."

"What?" Maggie felt the breath rush out of her lungs.

"I'm half-demon, Maggie. They figured I couldn't fight my true nature forever and might one day turn on them."

"Bastards. They want someone to do their dirty work." She seethed. Raphael had proven his worth to her—and to the Council. It wasn't fair that he couldn't refuse the Council's demands.

"There are others like me. Other half-breeds they've rescued and bound." He grimaced.

"They can't do that to you."

"Yes, they can." He brushed his lips across hers. Then he released her hand and stepped back.

She watched as he morphed into his demon form. His clothes and shoes popped, falling away in shreds as he rose in height, widened in build. His stone-gray skin glistened in the moonlight. Then, his magnificent wings unfurled. Maggie grinned. "Why did you put on your clothes if you weren't going to wear them?"

"You said you liked it when I did my Hulk routine."

Laughing, she ran into his outstretched arms. "I *love* it when you do your Hulk routine." She kissed the base of his throat.

"I love you, Maggie Mortis."

She leaned back, looking into his black eyes. "You really piss me off, y'know that? Love makes people vulnerable."

"Yes. But love also makes people strong." He wrapped his arms around her waist and Maggie pressed her face against his chest. Bending his knees, he launched into the night sky and they hurled into forever, a demon cradling his most precious possession—the woman he loved.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Meelena, you bitch." Maggie looked at the wavering face of the High Council Priestess in the water of her scrying bowl. "Raphael's been gone a goddamned month."

"We will send you another Guardian."

"And I'll send him back to you in fucking pieces."

Meelena sighed. "Your bargain with Raphael is concluded. We need him now. There is a war raging in Hell and Abatu is winning. When he is finished conquering the minor kings, he will fight Drak. If he wins against Hell's high king, nothing will stop him from trying to conquer Earth."

Maggie hated the desperation that clawed at her. "Have you heard from Rafe?"

Meelena's eyes flashed with worry, but her lips formed a reassuring smile. "We will keep you updated."

"Oh fuck you!"

"Maggie!" Meelena's usually serene features pulled into a scowl. In that instant, Maggie saw the true emotion that ravaged her boss. If Meelena was this concerned about what was going on in Hell, then it was bad. Really fucking bad. The Council had sent Raphael into the war zone—knowing that Abatu had the power to kill him. "You don't care about them, do you? The ones that you bind to your service. Rafe didn't choose to be born a demon!"

"The High Council does not answer to you, demon hunter." Meelena's eyes snapped with anger. "Your relationship with Raphael has severely affected your judgment and your abilities. If he succeeds in his mission, I will assign him elsewhere."

Shock ricocheted through her, stealing her breath, her heartbeat. "What? You're not going to let him come home?"

"His place has always been in the Otherworld. It was a mistake to let him come to you. If Damian hadn't extracted my promise—" Meelena's gaze filled with sorrow and with secrets.

"You might as well tell me the rest," whispered Maggie.

"Damian had something of mine. He agreed to give it to me only if I promised that if he should die, I would allow Raphael to replace him as your Guardian."

Stunned, Maggie steadied herself. Damian had bartered with Meelena to ensure his brother would find her. Had he done it for her? Or for Raphael? Had he known that they would fall in love? Goddess above. It was a beautiful, terrible thing he'd done. "If you made such a bargain, why did you wait six months to send him to me?"

"I've told you more than enough."

"If you promised Damian that you would make Raphael my Guardian, then you cannot break your word. You have to return him to me."

"Damian should've made a better bargain," said Meelena. "Because he never specified how long Rafe had to remain your Guardian."

"You really are a bitch."

"I do what is necessary. You will continue to hunt demons that threaten humans and await further orders." Meelena sighed. "Do not contact me again about Raphael, Maggie. He is lost to you."

The water went dark. Anger and terror pulsed through Maggie, tearing her to shreds. She screamed, sweeping her hand across the table. The scrying bowl flew across the room, smacking the wall, its contents puddling the floor.

"Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!" She stomped around her bedroom, twirling her scythes, wishing she could lodge the blades into some High Council ass.

"Maggie?"

"What!" she shouted at Hellion. The kitten sat on the unmade bed watching her. If Maggie didn't know any better she'd think the little poot was worried about her. "I'm in a really bad mood."

"Not as bad as Sarah's. She threw me out of the office because I was purring too loudly." The cat looked offended. "Are you sure she's only seven months? She looks like she's going to give birth any second."

"I know, I know. She's humongous. But she can type, do spells, and shoot people. She's too good an assistant to give up because she's getting ready to pop out a demon." Maggie plopped onto the bed and stroked Hellion's fur. The picky bitch would only eat tuna. She enjoyed hunting down snakes and mice, but she didn't eat them. She left them as presents for Maggie...in the bed, on the shower floor, in a desk drawer. Maggie could slam her scythe into a demon's head without blinking an eye, but finding a dead snake in her shower stall gave her the heebie jeebies.

Hellion's raggedy purr comforted her. The kitten's fur felt good threading through her fingers. Pampered and well fed, she had healed from malnutrition and her ratty fur had given way to silky.

Where was Rafe? Was he okay? Had Abatu gotten to him? Surely, if he'd been able to get word to her, he would have.

Sarah's scream startled her. But it was the gunshots that drove Maggie to action. She jumped to her feet, scythes at the ready, running out the door, down the hall, and into the office.

When she got there, she found Sarah, her pretty blue dress ripped open, backed against a wall, the Glock pointed at a familiar male.

"Draymore?"

The vampire turned and stared at her. Goddess! He looked like shit. His designer clothes were torn and stained, his shoes missing. Sarah was a helluva shot. Six holes pierced his chest, the wounds leaking black blood. Draymore's skin looked gray. His mouth was flecked with dried blood and spittle. And his eyes—his eyes were empty.

"Maggie Mortis," hissed a voice not Draymore's. "Give me Auren! Give her to me now!"

Auren? Was he talking about Sarah's unborn child or the mouthy kitten? Maggie twirled her scythes and circled closer to the possessed vampire. Her new place had strong magical protections, including blood spells wrought from Raphael. Abatu might disengage codes that held her genetics, but he didn't have dominion over Rafe. No one but her, Sarah, Rafe and Hellion could walk into the compound and live. But she hadn't recreated spells or codes to keep out Draymore. There was no point. Vampires could get around most magic. The only way to ensure they wouldn't cross a threshold was to revoke their invitations.

"Magnus, you really do have shit for brains."

Draymore's mouth widened into a barbaric grin. He lifted dirty, pale hands and made a "come get me" gesture.

"I exorcised Abatu," said Maggie with a confidence she didn't feel. She could seriously beat the crap out of Magnus, but she didn't want to hurt Draymore. "What makes you think your sorry ass has a chance?"

"I will kill your friends. All of them. Did I not tear out the heart of your beloved Guardian?" His tongue slithered out, wiggling like an obscene lizard's. "Human hearts are so delicious."

"I really fucking hate you," said Maggie, rage drumming an ancient beat in her blood. "I'm going to expunge you, Magnus. I've been working on a special pain prism just for you."

"You cannot trap me, with your prisms or your words." Draymore's body danced close, the movements of deranged puppet. "Give me my master's daughter."

Well, that explained the pet-shop prison. Abatu had kept his progeny there, awaiting their execution. And Magnus had figured out that he'd missed one. *Hellion*. Maggie smiled. "You killed ol' Pedro because you thought you'd gotten them all, right? Then you found out Auren was missing. Tsk, tsk. What would your master do if he found out you failed to kill off all his demon children?"

"Give me Auren!" he screeched.

"Tell me how to kill demons and we'll talk."

Draymore's lips pulled into a snarl. Then he tilted his head, considering. "A bargain?"

"Tell me how Abatu is killing demons."

He shook his head. "Give me Auren and I will not kill your precious Draymore."

"If I bring Auren to you, I want you to promise to never harm anyone I call friend."

Magnus cackled. "If I agreed to your terms, Abatu would have no use for me."

Maggie gritted her teeth. She had never wanted to capture a demon more in her entire life. The prism she'd been building for him was unfinished, but it was unlike any ever made. It would hold Magnus and keep him in excruciating pain for as long as he resided in it.

"Give me Abatu's daughter," said Magnus in an oily voice. "And I will tell you where to find Raphael."

Her heart revved. She wanted to see Rafe again, to feel his arms around her, to know that he was safe. All she had to do was hand over a demon—a demon who might very well be her only living relative, other than Abatu. Damn it. How could she honor Raphael's love for her if she sacrificed those she'd promised to protect? She had enough blood on her hands.

"Promise that you will not harm me or anyone I call friend for the next twenty-four hours, and I will bring Auren to you."

"You are a fool to give up Raphael for your friends." Magnus considered her words, obviously examining them for tricks. He nodded sharply. "I agree, Maggie Mortis. If you bring Auren to me, no harm will come to you or your friends this day."

"Maggie," whispered Sarah. She was still pressed against the wall, the Glock pointed on Draymore's back. "You can't give him what he wants. That damned cat is annoying, but she doesn't deserve to die."

"I made a bargain." Maggie sheathed her scythes. "I bring him one little demon and we live through today." She avoided Sarah's gaze, knowing that she'd see disappointment in the woman's eyes. No one could feel worse about the situation than Maggie. She'd given up Rafe, for Goddess' sake. What the hell was Auren's life compared to his?

Maggie hurried to the bedroom. Hellion sat on the bed, her gold-eyed gaze sad.

"C'mon, you little turd." Maggie picked up the tiny black furball. To her credit, the cat settled into her arms with a resigned sigh.

They returned to the office. Neither Sarah nor Magnus had moved from their spots.

"Okay, shithead. I've brought you Auren."

Magnus sidled closer. He obviously wanted the kitten desperately, but not badly enough to risk Maggie's scythes and prism.

"Have I displeased you so much, mistress?" Hellion sighed. "I suppose it is honorable to trade my life for those you love."

Maggie lifted the kitten and kissed its nose. "You're my friend, Auren."

Magnus reached for the cat, but Maggie stepped back. "The bargain is met."

"Give her to me!"

Maggie smiled. "I never said I would give her to you, Magnus. I just agreed to bring her to you. And you agreed to not hurt my friends today, which includes Auren."

Magnus snarled and leapt forward, his hands extended. He froze, growling and wailing, his gaze on the kitten. Demons might be able to resist prisms and exorcisms, but one rule was absolute. They were incapable of breaking a bargain.

"By the way, Magnus...fuck you." Maggie grinned maliciously. "Draymore, I revoke your invitation."

"Nooooo!" He sparkled out of sight. Since Magnus couldn't harm Draymore, he would no doubt leave the vampire of his own accord. And someplace safe, too, since he had guaranteed no harm would come to those she called friends.

"I need a drink." Maggie released the kitten, who padded to Sarah. Hellion sat down at the woman's feet and mewled.

"Uh-oh." Sarah looked at Maggie wide-eyed. Water gushed from between her legs, dowsing the unsuspecting kitten. Hellion scurried away, yowling.

Maggie sighed. "Just when I thought this day couldn't get any worse."

## Chapter Nine

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*Margaret Eltarina Traynor arrived a little early, but healthy. Turns out Sarah was closer to her due date than she led me to believe. And she named the kid after me. Can you believe that shit? Hell, she didn't need the job as much as she wanted the protection afforded by the compound. Her baby girl is beautiful. Doesn't make me yearn for children or anything. She's just kinda cute, when she's not screaming her lungs out.*

*Looks like Sarah and Margie will be hanging out with me and Hellion for a while. She doesn't have anywhere to go and she's determined to keep Eltar away. I have my own reasons for keeping her around – like making sure the High Council doesn't try to bind the child into their service.*

*Draymore called me on my cell phone to report that he was okay. I offered to reissue his invitation, but he declined. He says he's staying the hell away from me for a while. I think Magnus's possession scared the crap out of him. Draymore has control issues. And a demon taking over his undead form was just too much. He usually takes off anyway. He has commitment issues, too.*

*I dreamed about Rafe last night. I was in the abandoned church, sitting in the third pew on the left side. Light shone through the broken stained-glass windows, creating rainbows for dust motes to dance in.*

*Raphael appeared next to me and I looked at him, feeling such an aching sorrow in my chest that I couldn't catch my breath. He took my hand and whispered, "People carry their faith with them."*

*Then he faded away. I was alone, with my fears and my weaknesses. When I awoke, I was weeping. Goddess above! Too much has been taken from me.*

*I have no faith, Raphael.*

*Forgive me.*

\* \* \* \* \*

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*It's been two weeks since I foiled Magnus' latest attempt to kill me. Draymore still hasn't forgiven me, but I've pointed out – several times, I might add – that I wasn't the one who possessed his vampire ass. He's stopped answering my phone calls. I wouldn't be surprised if Draymore stays in Europe for the next century or two.*



*Gah! I hate that shithead Magnus. As soon as I learn the secret to killing demons, instead of just entrapping their sorry asses, he's the first one to go.*

*Then I'll destroy Abatu. Ooooh. I can't wait to kill that motherfucker.*

*Now that I have Auren, aka Hellion the mouthy kitten, Abatu should be redoubling his efforts to kill us. But he hasn't. It's been too quiet on the demon-fighting front. I've hardly beat any scaly assholes to a pulp, which leaves me plenty of time to bond with my weirdo kin.*

*Auren is sorta my sister, though I haven't found anything in Daddy's journals or our family records to indicate the Mortis family is descended from Abatu.*

*The other two people in our strange little family are Sarah, my former assistant, and her half-demon bambino, Margie. They live in the compound full-time. I'm getting good at holding the little wrinkly, pink thing, but you really gotta watch out when you burp her. Flames shoot out of her mouth. Thank the Goddess I have short hair or she'd have burned it all off by now.*

*We are missing one precious component to our household.*

*My lover...friend...Guardian...Raphael has not returned. If the Otherworld High Council has its way, he will never come back to me. Six long weeks have passed since he said goodbye.*

*All attempts to get Meelena to reveal his whereabouts have failed. She won't even tell me if he's alive or dead. For the longest time, I thought I was fighting on the side of the good guys. But I'm not all that sure the Otherworld High Council sees "good" the same way I do. Maybe they're not heartless, power-hungry, ugly jerks like Abatu and his crew, but they're still shitheads. They bind half-demons into their service – slaves to do their dirty work in Hell.*

*You know what? I don't really care about the High Council's goals or their preparation for war. All I want – all I need – other than Abatu's head on a pike, is Raphael.*

*Oh, Rafe. Where are you, baby?*

\* \* \* \* \*

*"Sugar cookie, dearie?"*

Maggie looked up, her eyes bleary from reading another of her dad's journals, and found Mrs. Pottersworth offering a plate of frosted sugar cookies. Plucking one from the stack, she stared at the big yellow happy face drawn on it.

"You don't have to cook," said Maggie. She bit into the warm, moist, carb-rich treat, making sure she ate the obnoxious smile first. Hellion purred raggedly in her lap. The demon popped open one yellow eye then, finding nothing of interest, closed it and returned to her nap.

"Oh, I enjoy it. Don't have no one to cook for since my Maurice passed on," she said, lyrical Elvish tinting her words. The plump old lady's blue eyes sparkled merrily. "Filing's done, correspondence is mailed, and I even had time to run the vacuum in the office. Do you need anything else?"

Mrs. Pottersworth glanced around the library, which held floor-to-ceiling shelves crammed with books, as if she might offer to do some dusting. The room was Maggie's favorite. Persian rugs covered the concrete floor, a fire crackled merrily in the marble

fireplace, and the plush chairs and love seat offered comfy seating for long hours of research.

"We don't deserve you," said Maggie. Mrs. Pottersworth had shown up the day after Sarah had birthed Margie. She had impeccable references—she'd been the gatekeeper for the Elven Order of Magic and Science for more than three hundred years, and knew how to do darn near everything. Plus, she could brew nasty magical spells, throw daggers, and bake the best sugar cookies *ever*.

With a baby, a spoiled kitten, a new mother, a missing boyfriend, a battle in Hell, and fights with boss to deal with, Maggie had hired the grandmotherly woman on the spot. So what if Mrs. Pottersworth seemed too good to be true? The Head Master at EOMS had practically given the woman the Elven equivalent of sainthood. *If she's so great, why isn't she still your gatekeeper?* Maggie had asked. *Because she wants to live in the human world,* said the Head Master. *I think she's looking for another husband. She likes marrying humans.*

Apparently so. Because Maurice had been hubby number seventeen.

"I'm going to go out for dinner, dearie," said Mrs. Pottersworth. "I might be back late. Need anything while I'm out?"

Maggie took the plate from Mrs. Pottersworth and grinned. "Nope. I'm good."

\* \* \* \* \*

"No."

"Sarah, c'mon. The guy's been moping around outside since the day you brought Margie home."

They sat at a long metal table in the laboratory. Everything was silver and shiny and brand-new. It smelled like fresh paint and sulfur. While Maggie put the finishing touches on the very special pain prison she'd made for Magnus, Sarah bottled holy water in glass bubbles. The orbs shattered on impact. Demons hated any blessed object, but they hated holy water the most.

Margie was wrapped against her mother in a pink sling. She slept peacefully. The infant was so beautiful—even with the two pink nubs poking out from her blonde hair. Other than the horns and her ability to breathe fire, she looked like a typical human baby.

"He doesn't seem that bad," said Maggie. She couldn't believe she was advocating for a freaking demon. Life was easier when she just kicked their asses and bound them into prisms. But nooooo...now, she was living with 'em. Cuddling 'em, for Goddess' sakes. *Is it because I'm losing my edge, my mind? Or is it because I'm a demon, too, and comfortable around my brethren?*

"I don't want to see Eltar," said Sarah. "He has plenty of other women and children to visit. He probably has a hundred wives and concubines. He doesn't need me or Margie."

Maggie knew the sounds of longing and crushed hopes. They clung to Sarah's words. Sarah wanted Eltar. Eltar wanted Sarah. *What* was the problem? "Two weeks is a long time to loiter outside our gate and make moon-eyes at you every time you get the mail." Maggie wrapped the clear prism with a silver cloth and tucked it into a pouch on her weapons belt.

"I'll open the gate and listen to his lies on the day it snows in Hell," said Sarah. She finished filling the last glass bubble. She handed the filled tray to Maggie, who stored it in the shelf behind her. "Did you see the newspaper this morning?"

"Nope."

"They found another pair of male legs on a downtown sidewalk."

Maggie stopped rearranging the contents of the shelf and turned around. "What?"

"Last week, this Starbucks barista finds a pair of male legs about five feet from the entrance to the store. Just the part below the knees. Still has on a pair of flip-flops." Sarah shook her head, grimly amused. "Last night, this lady gets off the downtown bus and she notices a pair of shoes. When she gets closer, she sees two half legs, still wearing Dockers and dress shoes."

"That's really weird."

"Oh no. It gets better. The medical examiner claims both sets have huge bite marks. He says it was like the guys ran into a carnivorous dinosaur. Something big enough and mean enough to lean down and chomp."

"Bizarre," muttered Maggie. "I'd say it was a demon, but I don't know of any that kill that way. They like to torment humans. They usually nosh on 'em while they're still alive. All the screaming—it's like dinner music for those guys. Hmmm. You wanna do some research on this for me?"

"Sure," said Sarah. She got up from her stool, cradling the underside of the sling. "Hey, did Mrs. Pottersworth make any more cookies?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"How did you find me?" Maggie asked as Raphael approached her.

"I will always find you." He gathered her into his arms. "I will always love you."

They were in the choir loft of the old church again, the one she'd attended with her parents when she was a little girl. Yeah. Before she lost them, before she lost her faith. She wanted to run. To hide. That had never been her way, though. She faced her fears. Her demons. Hah.

Rafe's mouth conquered hers with gentle reprimand. Love was in his kiss. He broke her with that aching submission, and she collapsed against him, sucking his tongue into her mouth. She tasted her own fear on his lips. "Rafe."

"Ssshhh." He undid the buttons to her shirt, parting it to reveal her black lace bra. Leaning down, he kissed the top of each breast before reaching around and releasing the clasp.

"Why this one?"

"Hmmm?"

"The last time we...were together. Why do you make me remember our goodbye?"

"I don't make you remember, Maggie. You're doing that. This is your mind. Your dream."

He removed the shirt and bra. He cupped her breasts, his thumbs swiping the nipples. Need scissored through her, cutting deeply. He captured one taut bud between his lips and flicked his tongue over it until sensations zinged into her belly. He gave the other nipple the same divine treatment.

I miss you. Oh Rafe. I miss you so much. "What have you done to me, goddamn it?" she whispered.

"I turned you into a stupid, blubbering mush-ball, remember?" He chuckled as his hands coasted to her jeans, unzipped the denims and slid them off her hips along with her panties. Lust shuddered through Maggie and she tore at his pants, ripping at the buttons. His hands clasped hers and gentled her movements.

With trembling fingers, she pushed down his pants and boxers, releasing the thick length of his cock. She grasped the hard-on, stroking his firm, warm flesh, reveling in Rafe's harsh intake of breath. Her other hand cupped his balls, squeezing gently.

He dropped to his knees and took off her shoes, stripped off her jeans. When he stood, she impatiently tugged on his shirt. He took it off, tossing it to the floor.

Maggie rubbed the smooth planes of his chest, her hands coasting down his muscled stomach to once again take his cock. While she stroked him, her tongue danced along his chest...nipping here and there...then she attacked his nipples.

Groaning, Rafe grabbed her ass and brought her closer, then used one hand to cup her sex. Two fingers parted her flesh and found her sensitive clit, fondling it until she trembled on the edge of orgasm.

Then, and only then, did he lift her into his embrace and slowly penetrate her. His cock filled her, stretching her to the max, and she wrapped her legs around his waist and clenched him, her pussy swollen and wet and needy.

For a long moment, they held onto each other, taking in the feel of their bodies, skin against skin, heartbeat against heartbeat.

Her tears fell, dropping between them, mixing with their sweat, with their tender sorrow...

Maggie bolted upright, heart raging, pussy wet and throbbing. She pressed her hands against her face. Weeping like a virgin on her bridal night.

Damn it.

She curled into a ball and allowed the tears to seep from her. What a damned sissy-girl she'd become. Vulnerable. So fucking vulnerable. Goddess-be-damned, she hated feeling weak.

After a long while, she drifted back to sleep and floated into another dream...

"Hey, Mags."

The voice was one she thought she'd never hear again. Heart pounding, Maggie opened her eyes. She was no longer tossing and turning in her bed. Now, she occupied a white room with two gleaming silver chairs. She sat in one. And in the other...

"Damian." Her gaze roved over him. He looked as he always had in life. Dressed in black—from his fancy shoes to his silk shirt. Tall. Buff. Confident. His brown eyes twinkled with amusement. She looked at him, loving him and missing him, but those thin ribbons of desire that usually lashed her heart bloody had loosed...and fallen away.

Damian had been a wet dream. A never-met need. A crushed hope.

"Forgive me, Mags?"

"No." She pressed her palms against her cheeks and found them wet with tears. Damn it. "How's your afterlife?"

"All the sex I want, free trips to Godiva, and stores where designer shoes are always on sale."

"Sounds divine."

"For me, maybe." He tilted his head, assessing her. "You look tired, darling."

"No shit." She ached to confide in him the way she had when he'd been her Guardian and her best friend. She wanted his hugs, his comfort, his laughter. But no...it didn't seem right. Raphael deserved those privileges, those responsibilities. She wanted him. Not Damian.

"Meelena doesn't know you're paying me a little visit, does she?"

"Meelena doesn't control afterlife visitations," said Damian. "Technically, these communications aren't allowed."

"You've been gone a long time," she said wearily. "Why are you popping in, D? Do you know how many times I could've used you before now? Elise..."

"She says hi." He smiled sadly. "I sent you Raphael. He loves you. And you love him."

"You're a bastard." She waved away the recriminations, the admonitions. The past was ash now. Burned away like Damian's mansion, like Damian himself. "Tell me. It's bad, isn't it?"

"Depends. The future isn't yet determined."

Maggie rolled her eyes then flipped him the bird. Damian chuckled. "God, I miss you, Mags."

"I miss you, too." She swallowed the knot of grief lodged in her throat. "But I miss Rafe more. She sent him away. To Hell."

Anger flashed in his eyes. "I know. And if she's going to play the game that way, then so can I. Listen to me, Mags. I hid something of Meelena's. She thinks it's safe now because I'm dead and because I didn't tell anyone else about it. It was part of the bargain we struck. She gave her blood-word to make Raphael your Guardian if I died."

"She told me. She also said that you made a bad bargain because you never specified how long he should be my Guardian."

Damian grimaced. "If my instincts were incorrect about either of you, then I didn't want you to be saddled with each other. It seems Meelena has made the most out of that consideration. I was supposed to give her the item the day I was...dispatched. Part of the bargain was that I would hide the object and would never reveal what it was or where it was hidden to anyone but Meelena – as long as I lived."

Maggie stared at him. "But you're not living anymore, are you?"

"No." His smile held no charm. Fury curled its edges. "The High Council needs Raphael desperately. Meelena figured her secret was safe, the bargain met, and that the fate of the world was more important than your improbable love."

"But you don't?"

"I think improbable love will save the world."

His gaze was enigmatic. He let her process his words in that annoying, patient way he had. Maggie's mind raced. What the hell was so important that Meelena, centuries-old high priestess and most venerated advisor of the High Council, would cave in to the demands of a mere Guardian?

"Are you ready to hear this, Mags?"

She nodded.

He told her what the object was and where it was hidden. When he was finished, he stood up and held out his arms. She didn't hesitate. She leapt from her chair and accepted the embrace. "I love you, D."

"I know, darling. I love you, too."

Ping. Pong. Pang.

Maggie awoke. She still felt Damian's strong arms around her. She held on to that feeling, relishing it. She missed him. She always would. But love...love never died.

*Ping. Pong. Pang.*

Argh! Stupid scrying bowl.

Maggie shoved off the covers and stomped to her dresser. The bowl was filled with scented rose water and drops of Maggie's blood. She peered inside it and scowled. "What do you want, Mel?"

Meelena looked tired, her face pinched and pale. No longer did the beautiful blonde look like a wise woman who could give people peace with a single touch or a kind smile.

Maggie had been so wrapped up in her own changing life that she hadn't paid much attention to what was happening in the Otherworld. Frankly, she didn't give a good goddamn. They had broken faith with her. Maggie didn't trust the High Council anymore—especially after Damian's revelations. Hell, she didn't trust her own memories or her old beliefs. Everything she'd known had been tossed, ripped and burned.

Worst of all, they had kept Raphael from her.

That was a sin never to be forgiven.

"I've summoned you because Magnus has been seen skulking in your territory. When you find him, do not trap him. You will call me at once."

"Yeah, okay." *I'll get right on that, you bitch.* If Magnus was stupid enough to be anywhere near the compound, Maggie would find him and put him into the pain prison she'd constructed. Fuck Meelena. "Where's Raphael?"

Meelena's eyes flickered with sympathy. She sighed. "I received word moments ago. Raphael failed in his mission."

"Sucks to be you," said Maggie, putting bored irritation into her tone. "When is he returning to the Otherworld?"

"He's not. Maggie...he's dead."

## Chapter Ten

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*After Meelena told me Rafe was dead, I broke the scrying bowl and with it, my alliance with the Otherworld.*

*I no longer work for those motherfuckers.*

*Rafe! Rafe! No, no, no! He's not dead. He's not! Meelena is lying...oh Goddess, I hope she is lying.*

*I couldn't sleep. So I went to the little church, the one I had attended with my parents before Mom died and before my innocence, my faith were shattered. The night before he left, Raphael had made love to me in the choir loft. Demons engaging in a carnal act in God's house – how blasphemed was that act?*

*Demons. I feel Abatu's poisoned blood in my veins. I think he is close to winning Hell. Then, he will turn his attentions to me and Hellion and whatever other offspring he might have left in this world. He will kill us.*

*Right now, I don't care if he does. Why should I live in a world without Raphael? Yeah. Why should I save a world that will never honor his sacrifice? That will never know his name or that he was loved or that he deserved more than being a slave to the whims of the High Council.*

*It's your fault I'm a mooshy moron, Rafe. How dare you open my heart to love and go away? You're an asshole.*

*Goddess! I can't write anymore. I can't think anymore. Tomorrow...tomorrow I'll decide what to do.*

\* \* \* \* \*

"Um...dearie, assassinating the High Council is not a good idea." Mrs. Pottersworth flitted around Maggie in the lab, straightening items moments after Maggie dug through 'em, gathering an impressive arsenal.

"Don't care. Dismembering Meelena will make me feel better."

"Ah. I'm all for grasping your little piece of sunshine, dear, but killing off the rulers of Otherworld is a tad extreme."

"Did I ask you what you think?" Maggie cringed at her shitty tone. The woman didn't deserve her rancor. "Sorry, Mrs. P."

"No apology necessary, hon." Her eyes flashed with sympathy and worry.

Maggie raided the dragonfire pellets. She peered into the metal box. Damn. Not many left. Loaded into any type of gun, they penetrated like bullets, but once lodged



into the victim, the outer casing melted and the dragonfire burned through the body. "They killed Rafe. I'm killing them."

"Here's a thought," said Mrs. Pottersworth as she watched Maggie load fifteen dragonfire rounds into the 9mm cartridge. "Why not ask that demon hovering around the outside gates if Meelena told you the truth?"

Maggie popped the cartridge into the gun and pulled back the barrel, which snapped the first bullet into place. "Why would she lie?"

"Because you better serve her purposes if you believe Raphael is dead? If you believed the High Council's mission is what led to his death...would you not go finish that mission?"

Maggie placed the gun in back of her weapons belt. Then she tucked small, poison-tipped daggers into the front of the belt. After she finished, she adjusted the belt better around her hips and then added her moon scythes to the loops on each hip. "You think Meelena is using me?"

"I think Meelena wants something and she intends to use you to get it." Mrs. Pottersworth's grandmotherly gaze was filled with concern, but Maggie saw the steely determination, too.

Hmmm. Like the very special object that Damian had stolen from Meelena and secreted away so that high priestess would do as he wanted? No. Meelena had counted on Damian to keep the bargain and wouldn't believe that Maggie knew the identity of the item, much less where it had been hidden. If Mrs. Pottersworth was right...then Meelena wanted something else.

"Magnus." Maggie punched the filing cabinet next to her. "She wants Magnus brought in alive. Why?"

"Find out," said Mrs. Pottersworth.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I have no idea what the High Council hopes to achieve," said a befuddled Eltar in a very proper British tone. "I left Hell ages ago. I don't much care for politics."

Maggie leaned against the thick iron bars of the bespelled gate and stared at the man. He'd taken a human form—tall, gorgeous with silky black hair and melted-chocolate eyes. He looked like a salesman in his suit and tie, forlornly holding a briefcase.

"She doesn't want to see you," Maggie said for the millionth time. "Maybe you should go back to your wives. Or concubines."

"I am not married," said Eltar. "I freed all my concubines after I met Sarah." He turned a desperate gaze on her and Maggie saw the flare of pink in his eyes. Huh. Little Margie's demon dad was pink-skinned, no doubt. "I love her. She doesn't believe me. She thinks I just want to have sex with her."

"Well, duh. You seduced her and impregnated her and left."

"I came back!"

"Oh." Maggie rubbed the back of her aching neck. Goddamned demons. She felt like she was hosting a Jerry Springer show.

"How is Margaret?" he asked.

"Fine. Good. Breathes fire."

"Really?" He looked very proud of her. "I wish Sarah would let me see her."

"She's cute," said Maggie, feeling sorry for the guy even though she didn't want to feel *anything* for him. Sarah was her friend and she'd put the kibosh on ol' Eltar. That was that. "She's got pink horns. Your side, right?"

Eltar grinned. "Yes, indeed."

"Look, I'll see what I can do, okay? I mean you've been out here since forever and that says something about your commitment. I can't make any promises."

"Thank you, Miss Mortis." Eltar held out his hand and she grasped it. They shook briefly then he turned toward the gate, staring at the wooded area that hid the location of her underground home. "I'm sorry I can't help you, but perhaps that poor chap hiding in the forest across the road could."

"What chap?"

Eltar shrugged. "Injured demon. Probably a casualty of the Hell wars. He's tried several times to approach the gate, but I've told him to bugger off."

Maggie's gaze swept across the curving, empty road to the dense forest that covered most of the hills. The area was isolated and fairly undeveloped. It was a good hour jaunt to a major city and at least half an hour to the nearest gas station. She liked it that way, too.

"Thanks, Eltar."

Maggie crossed the road and ducked between two pine trees. Moments later, she discovered the demon, ravaged and bloody, sitting at the base of a big oak tree. He didn't bother moving, not even when she placed a booted foot against his inner thigh and pressed *hard*.

He lifted his head, his black eyes filled with pain and defeat.

"Hello, Magnus."

"Maggie Mortis." He coughed, pressing a hand to his mouth to wipe off the blood dribbling from his lips.

"Give me one reason I shouldn't shoot your ass into this prism." Maggie removed the special pain prism—it contained a combo of Wicca binding spells, Goddess bolts, and silver dragonfire, which was very rare and caused extreme pain. Agony, suffering, revenge...she'd constructed it with all three aspects with him in mind.

"I will take you to Raphael."

"He's dead."

Magnus shook his head. "No. He's the prisoner of Abatu."

"I don't believe you."

He held out his palm. A red ball popped up. Inside it, she saw the wavering human form of Raphael. He was naked, on his knees, his hands bound by thick, black chains. Bloody stripes layered his shoulders and back, bruises covered his torso and thighs, and his ass... No! Fury roared through her. They'd raped him.

"Torture is more fun," said Magnus as the red orb faded into nothingness. "Rafe has a sweet ass, doesn't he? I got to plow both brothers...yummy."

"Motherfucker." She ground her teeth, fists clenching. Reluctantly, she reined in her rage. "Meelena lied to me. Why?"

He laughed—or tried to laugh. Mostly, he wheezed and hacked up more blood. "A bargain made between a demon prince and an immortal priestess." He grinned, his rotted teeth black with blood. "You've figured it out, haven't you?"

"You should hope I haven't, you ugly bastard. Otherwise I won't need you."

"Protection, Maggie. I barter for your protection."

*I couldn't protect Rafe. Why would I protect you?* "What do you offer me?"

"The location of Raphael."

"That's all?"

"What more do you want?"

"Tell me how to kill demons."

"Abatu betrayed me," he said bitterly. "I will tell you his secret, but you must promise to not use it against me. Not *ever*."

Maggie bared her teeth in a feral smile. "Fine. You will be protected from everyone who wants to kill you, including me, and I won't use the ol' demon-killing secret to end your miserable life. In exchange, you tell me how to kill demons and where Rafe is being held."

Magnus took his time considering her offer. The last time they'd bartered, she'd fooled his sorry ass and ousted him out of her home without incurring casualties—for once.

"I accept your terms." Magnus shifted, as if he might try to stand. Maggie couldn't resist one final jab at his thigh before she moved back and let him rise. He grimaced as the sharp toe of her boot embedded into his flesh, but he said nothing. Leaning against the tree, he managed a half-grin. "The blood of Heaven and Hell kills demons...and angels. In fact, it kills all immortals."

"Blood of Heaven and Hell? What the fuck is that?"

"What do you get when a child is born of a demon and an angel?"

Maggie unsnapped the pouch on her left hip and fingered the prism. "You're full of shit."

"The object you're hiding from Meelena, the one she wants so badly? It holds the child she bore with Abatu."

Shocked to her core, Maggie stared open-mouthed at Magnus. He nodded, obviously too weary and beaten to relish her reaction. Damian hadn't told her the crystal held a freaking child within it. Just that Meelena valued the crystal and its power above all else—even her own life. "Meelena and Abatu were lovers?"

"She delivered twins," confirmed Magnus. "Two girls. Abatu killed one—drained its blood and put it into vials. It only takes a drop...and it will kill any living thing, mortal or immortal."

Cold horror clenched Maggie's stomach. "Christ." She looked at the demon, taking an ugly satisfaction in his pain. "And the other baby is locked in the crystal?"

"Alive, but inanimate—to protect her from Abatu. But he doesn't need the death of his other daughter. Not yet. He has managed to exterminate all his kin...all but you and Auren."

Realization dawned, sharp and brutal. "Meelena sent Rafe to destroy the vials. And Abatu captured him. Goddamn it. It's a trap. Meelena doesn't want me to go after Rafe so she lied about his death. She's fucking protecting me."

Magnus laughed. "Protecting *herself*, demon slayer. What do you think the High Council will do when they realize their most venerated leader fucked the enemy and had his children?"

Like Maggie cared. She had her own demon lover to worry about. Besides, she couldn't fathom what about Abatu had ever drawn Meelena's interest. Power, maybe. The priestess wouldn't be the first female drawn in by a charismatic, potent male.

"Abatu will defeat Drak," rasped Magnus. "Once he rules the Underworld, he will attack this plane, then the Otherworld...and finally, Heaven."

"No. He won't." Maggie would make sure of it. "Tell me where Rafe is."

"I'll have to take you. You can't get into Hell without me."

Unfortunately, that was true. She was a human mortal...she couldn't just pop into Hades whenever she wanted. Getting to the Otherworld was easier, but she had to have a God or Goddess-inscribed token. For Hell, you needed a demon.

"Where is he? Fifth level? Tenth?"

Magnus's black eyes flickered with exhaustion and pain. "Tenth. Abatu's private lair. You'll never find it without me."

"Sure I will." She popped the prism out of its bag and tossed it at Magnus' feet.

The demon blinked at her, disbelief in his gaze. "You promised protection."

"You'll be protected. No one will get to you. And you'll live. Though death was probably the kinder option. *Carcer!*"

The prism emitted gray smoke, which surrounded Magnus. He screeched and lunged, but it was too late. He melded with the smoke and was sucked into the prism. Maggie picked up the crystal and tucked it into the pouch. "By the way, Magnus...fuck you."

\* \* \* \* \*

"I say, Miss Mortis," said Eltar as they crept along the dark corridor. Hell was a labyrinth of rock-hewn hallways, pocketed with caves. "Do you really think Sarah would reconsider my proposal if we rescue Raphael?"

"Yeah," said Maggie. *All I gotta do is make it snow while we're here and she'll have to see you.* "Are you sure we're on the tenth level?"

"Oh yes. This is where I kept my concubines. My females liked to have sex and I wasn't always able to oblige them. Many of the caverns focus on one particular kink or sex act. The girls could flit down an entire hallway of sensual delights to occupy themselves."

"Gak." Maggie rolled her eyes. "So where is Abatu's pad?"

"The next hallway leads to his palace rooms." Eltar grabbed Maggie's arm and yanked her into a curved doorway. "Abatu's guards," he whispered. "Even though you're disguised, you're still a human. They'd just as soon dismember you as look at you."

"Shit!" Maggie peeked around the corner and saw three huge demons clomping down the shadow-filled hallway. They were at least seven feet tall with black, leathery skin, blood-red eyes, and wicked-looking horns. The lead demon stopped, turned his large, bull-like head, and sniffed the air. "Damn it. He's scenting me. Quick! In here!"

"No, Miss Mortis!"

Maggie plunged through a crude wooden door, Eltar hot on her heels. As the door slammed behind them, she found herself face-to-face with a creature that looked like a very large blue python.

"Welcome, lover of perversion. What is your pleasure?" The host's beady eyes moved from Maggie to Eltar. A blue tongue flickered out and swept Maggie's arm. It hissed. "Human..."

Eltar grabbed her arm. "How dare you enter before your master! Bow down to me *now!*"

Maggie knelt, though it damned well galled her to do it. Freaking demons. She knew Eltar was saving her ass. All the same, she didn't particularly like putting her forehead on the dirty, rock-strewn floor. It smelled even worse this close to the ground than it did breathing the regular sulfur-tinted air.

"Humans are so ill-behaved," he said. Maggie peeked and saw Eltar place coins on a table near the blue python. A bribe. Good. Maybe their cover wasn't blown. "I'm still training her. My apologies, kind proprietor."

"Just be sure to keep her in line."

The door creaked open. The floor vibrated as a large black hoof came within inches of Maggie's face. Shit. One of Abatu's guards. She pressed closer to the floor and tried to steady her breathing. She could kick demon ass just fine, thank you, but she couldn't take on all of Hell. Not without the vials.

"Is Desredia free?" boomed a deep voice. "And her sisters? I want all three."

"Yes, m'lord," hissed the snake. "I will prepare your chamber at once."

She felt the demon's stare on the back of her neck. The tip of his hoof edged her thigh. "What is this one?"

"Mine, m'lord," said Eltar in a deferential voice. "I am thinking on the appropriate punishment for her disobedience."

"You should fuck her ass," offered the demon. "With a hot metal rod."

"I prefer to punish with my own rod."

The demon roared with laughter. "Yes, of course. And I as well." Maggie flinched as a huge hand coasted over her ass. "I don't like humans, but this one isn't too bad. Nice ass. Perhaps you'll allow me to punish her. I will pay you for the privilege, of course."

No fucking way was demon boy plowing her ass. Bastard. She might not take 'em all out, but she had enough prisms to confine a few dozen demons before she bit the big one. She shifted, but she felt Eltar's hand press on her skull.

"Forgive me, m'lord. Your offer is most kind, but she does not deserve your impressive cock ramming her. Perhaps when you are done with Desredia and her sisters, you might make the same offer? Maybe she will have earned your punishment by then."

"Bah," said the demon. "No human is worth so much trouble. I'd as soon kill her as fuck her."

"M'lord? Your chamber awaits," hissed the snake demon.

The guard tromped away. Maggie was getting tired of pressing her face into the dirt and sucking up demon fumes. Once again, she moved, intending to stand up.

"You will obey your master," yelled Eltar. He smacked her hard across the ass. The sting vibrated right up her spine. Son of a bitch!

"You wish a private chamber?" asked the proprietor.

"Oh..." He hesitated for a fraction of a second. "Yes."

Eltar grabbed the back of her shirt and yanked her up. She wobbled to her feet and shot him a look of pure hatred. He bared his lips in a grim apology, but she knew they couldn't very well waltz out without drawing attention to themselves. Silently, they followed the slithering demon through a hallway. It stopped before a door. Eltar opened it and shoved Maggie inside. A moment later, he joined her, shutting the door behind him.

"So how long do we have to stay in here pretending to do the wild thing before we can go?"

Eltar shook his head. "We cannot just pretend, Miss Mortis. This cavern caters to voyeurs. If we agree to take a room, we agree to fuck for the pleasure of others. If we do not...Makbes will know something is wrong and alert the guards."

"I'm not fucking you."

"If you want to save Raphael," said Eltar in a sorrowful voice, "you must."

## Chapter Eleven

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*Rescuing people from Hell ain't easy. And Goddess help me if I ever have to enter those sulfur pits again! But if I do, there's one item I'm bringing with me...*

*Ice.*

*And lots of it.*

\* \* \* \* \*

"I do not wish to hurt you, Miss Mortis, but I have every intention of living through this adventure," said Eltar. "I love Sarah and Margaret. I will do anything for them."

"This is seven kinds of wrong." Maggie put her hands on her hips and looked at the tall, pink demon. He'd shed his human form before entering the portal to Hell. He was kinda cute as pink, hairless, horned devil. He'd also used his morphing talents to make her look more like Marilyn Monroe than Maggie Mortis. Even so, she had her weapons tucked into various secret places in the white pantsuit and prisms all around the white belt, but she had to leave her moon scythes behind. No other demon hunter had those weapons. They would've given her away in nothing flat.

"Fine." Maggie had done more and worse to accomplish her goals. She shed her clothing, carefully making sure the weapons and prisms stayed intact within the fabric. "Let's get this over with."

Eltar grimaced, obviously not looking forward to screwing her any more than she wanted to screw him. He looked down at his soft cock and sighed.

"Don't worry," said Maggie. "I can get you up." She looked around the small cave. A pile of pillows and covers occupied one side of the room, otherwise the space was empty. "So, who's watching?"

The low red lighting flickered. Maggie heard a shushing sound behind her. She turned and watched one wall of the cave flicker until the rock melted away to clear glass. Behind the barrier, a gray demon who looked rather bored sat against a chair carved from stone. While the female between his legs sucked on his cock, another sat in the chair and fucked the big, black horn on the top of his head.

Dumbfounded, Maggie watched as the female demon fucking the horn reached a frenzy that should've by all rights impaled her—then she came. As she convulsed and twitched, her cream flowed down the horn and over the gray male's skull.

He yawned.



Then he looked to the left of the chair and Maggie's gaze followed his. Chained to the wall was a familiar figure. He sagged forward, his head down. The chains held him in such a way that he was forced to remain kneeling.

Maggie cried out and slammed herself against the window. "Raphael!"

Eltar grabbed her hair and yanked her backwards. She lost her balance and fell. Only Eltar's grip prevented her from smacking into the ground. He pushed on her head until her forehead touched the floor. She shuddered as fury and fear vibrated through her. Tears fell, splashing into dust and grime centimeters away from her mouth.

"Forgive me, m'lord," Eltar offered in a smarmy tone. "My slave wishes to the kill the one you have chained to the wall."

He yanked up Maggie's head so that she faced the window, but stayed on her knees. For fuck's sake! She was getting really tired of being jerked around like a damned rag doll.

"Your slave hates my prisoner?" The gray demon perked up.

*Is that Abatu? I thought he was involved in a war. Bastard!* Maggie wanted to reach through the solid glass and throttle the asshole.

"Yes, Lord Sardek," replied Eltar. He leaned down and whispered, "Sardek is one of Abatu's lieutenants. Stay quiet and let me do the talking. Maybe we'll survive this night."

Sardek pushed the female off his crotch. She rolled away, screeching and scrabbling. The other female crawled out of the chair and onto the pissed-off she-demon. They kissed and fondled each other while their master ignored them as thoroughly as if they didn't exist.

"Leave," said Sardek to the two she-demons. They hissed in displeasure, but rolled to their feet and departed through a door on the left. "If you two entertain me, then I will allow your slave to torture Raphael."

Maggie's jaw clenched as rage pulsed in every nerve. Eltar leaned down and whispered. "If you get close enough, can you free him?"

"Yes. But I need a prism to confine Sardek," she whispered back. Her gaze slid to Raphael. He was in demon form, his stone-gray skin bruised and covered in bloody wounds. She wanted to rip Sardek's head from his shoulders. Maybe she would.

"We are at your command, Lord Sardek," said Eltar.

Sardek sat in his chair and gestured for them to get on with it. Maggie had used her body in many ways to get what she wanted. She liked sex. Liked the push and pull between two beings trying to reach the pinnacle of pleasure. But she couldn't face having sex with Eltar when Raphael was battered and broken ten feet away from her. She wanted to break the glass, kill Sardek, and release Rafe. *But I can't, goddammit.* The glass wouldn't break, Sardek wouldn't die...and Raphael would still suffer.

"Spank her," said Sardek impatiently. "Or whip her. Yes. The whip."

"Do it," said Maggie through gritted teeth. "Give the bastard what he wants so I can get to Rafe."

"I'm sorry, Miss Mortis," said Eltar in a very low voice. "Please forgive me."

"If you're gonna beat me," she whispered, "then at least call me Maggie."

He didn't dare smile, but she saw the flash of humor in his pink eyes.

She dared another look at Raphael. He had lifted his head and stared at her. Did he recognize her? Did he realize what a predicament she was in? Did he believe in her? His lips tipped at the corners—a tiny acknowledgement. *Raphael! I wish you could hear me. I love you. I will save you. Trust me.*

Rafe's eyes were dazed and sullen. He was strong, her demon, but had Abatu's cruelties driven him to the breaking point?

Maggie remained kneeling, not daring to move, not daring to raise even the tiniest suspicion in Sardek's mind.

Along the wall near the tossed coverlets and pillows were whips, chains and other implements. Eltar chose a flogger. "Forehead to the floor and raise your ass," he commanded.

Maggie did what he asked. She hoped to hell he knew what he was doing with that thing. Then again, pain was pain whether gently or roughly administered. He slid the leather straps over her buttocks, allowing her to feel the softness. He stroked her cheeks over and over until she relaxed.

She heard the snap of leather seconds before the blow landed on her ass. She barely had time to adjust to the multiple stings vibrating up her lower back before another blow landed. Then another...and another...

Maggie lost count of the strikes. Though her mind was on Raphael, her body reacted to the sensual punishment. Her pussy swelled with wet heat, her nipples hardened and ached. All she could think about was Rafe...his hands stroking skin...his lips melding to hers...she floated, her mind nearly separated from her body.

It took a minute for Maggie to realize that Eltar had stopped smacking her. She was panting and trembling. Her ass felt raw and sore. Goddess above! Eltar knew how to hit, that was for damned sure.

"That was excellent," said Sardek in a breathy voice. "Give me more."

"Yes, m'lord." Eltar grabbed her hair and yanked her up, pushing on her shoulders until the heels of her feet hit her tender ass. She sucked in a pained breath. He leaned down, his taloned fingers digging into her scalp and whispered, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah." She looked at his crotch. His dick was really big and was slightly hard, but definitely not hard enough to do the job. *Fanfuckingtastic*. Her body betrayed her for an ass whipping, but his remained unaffected by their play. This was not good. "Can't you get that up?"

"You are not Sarah."

"Eventually, he's going to want you to fuck me." She looked at the flogger in his hand, her gaze on the long, thin handle. "I don't suppose there are condoms in Hell?"

His brows lifted.

"Guess not." She glanced at Rafe. His obsidian gaze met hers. She forced herself to look away, though she wanted more than anything to reassure him. In a low voice, she asked, "Any suggestions?"

He knelt next to her and caressed her raw ass. In her ear, he whispered, "Disobey me. Behave like a bad slave, Maggie. I'll do the rest."

"No prob."

Eltar rose and dribbled the leather straps across her breasts. Sardek clapped his hands. "About time! Hit her some more. Hard!"

Eltar snapped the whip. The tips of the straps struck her tender breasts, stinging her nipples. She gasped as pain ricocheted in her chest. Another snap. This one hit her even harder. With a strangled cry, she jumped to her feet and grabbed the whip out of his hand.

"On your knees! Now!" Eltar backed away as Maggie brandished the whip at him.

"I refuse to serve you, demon," she said. "I would rather see you dead."

Maggie cracked the whip and the strands raked his chest. Glancing at Sardek, she saw him watching with rapt attention. She smacked Eltar again, aiming for the area just above his genitals. The demon flinched, snarling. Then Eltar lunged and grabbed her throat. He squeezed just enough to convince Sardek he wanted to kill her right there.

"Fuck her!" screamed Sardek. "Fuck her as you choke the life out of her."

Sick bastard. Maggie dropped the whip and Eltar kicked it away.

"She does not deserve my cock, m'lord," said Eltar. "She must be punished." He looked from Sardek to Rafe and allowed an evil smile to crease his lips. "If you will allow, m'lord, I ask you for a great favor."

"You may ask."

"My little human must be taught to obey me. And so, to punish her, I beg for your indulgence." Eltar's smile grew cold and calculated. "I will make her give you pleasure, m'lord, by her pain and humiliation."

"How?" Sardek looked more than interested. His cock was at full attention; his eyes glazed with consuming lust. Maggie watched in disgust as Sardek's mottled gray hand encircled his penis.

Eltar nodded toward Rafe. "I will make her fuck her enemy."

"Excellent!" Sardek waved his hand and the window melted into nothing. He gestured at Eltar. "Bring her."

Maggie flopped to her knees as if she might beg mercy from her Master. Instead, she groped for her clothing and unsnapped one prism from the belt. She palmed it then, head down, followed Eltar into Sardek's chamber.

Grabbing Maggie's arm, Sardek grinned hideously. "You will fuck my slave," he hissed, "and I will fuck you."

"No thanks." She swung her arm up and shoved the prism into Sardek's right eye. "Carcer!"

Maggie smacked him with an around kick to the chest. The demon flew backward, hitting the back cavern wall with a sickening crunch. As black blood poured out of his eye socket, Sardek howled, his hand scrabbling to dislodge the prism.

Too late.

Pure gold light surrounded him, drawing the creature into imprisonment. The prism dropped to the rocky ground and Eltar kicked it away, obviously detesting its powers. Or maybe he just didn't like Sardek in any form.

Maggie hurried to Rafe. She placed her hands on his cheeks and lifted his head. "Rafe?"

His cracked lips formed a pitiful smile. "Chains. Weaken. Me."

"Eltar!" Maggie kissed Rafe's forehead then grabbed the nearest thick metal chain and yanked hard. "Help me!"

Eltar grabbed the other chain. No matter how hard they pulled, the chains wouldn't give. "They're bespelled, Maggie," said Eltar. "No wonder Rafe didn't just rip them out of the wall and hand Abatu his ass."

"How do we break the spell?"

"Get the vials," rasped Rafe. "Destroy them. More important than me."

"Your priorities are really screwed up." Maggie ran a hand over her spiky hair and tried to think of a way to free Rafe. "Would this enchanted blood disintegrate the chains?"

"Maybe." Rafe looked up at her wearily. "Love you."

"Love you, too, babe." Maggie's heart beat jaggedly in her chest. She wasn't going to lose Raphael. She'd been torn to shreds when she thought he'd been killed.

"If I take the back way out of the room, I take it I'll run right into Abatu's palace rooms?"

Rafe nodded.

"Where are the vials?"

"Go right. Then...two lefts. 'Nother right. End of hall." He heaved out a breath. "Guards. Everywhere."

"How many vials?"

"Meelena...said...thirteen."

"Yeah. Figures."

Maggie took precious moments to get dressed. She'd need all her weapons and prisms. When she returned to the squalid room, she pressed a kiss against Rafe's parched lips. Then she looked at Eltar. "Stay here. Protect him, if you can."

He nodded. "Be safe, Maggie."

She slipped out of the room through the back door. The hinges creaked ominously as she shut it. Waiting a moment to gather her nerve, she went right, going as fast as she dared. The craggy hallway was dark and smelled moldy. The ever-present hint of sulfur clogged her throat. Damn! This place needed an Ionic Breeze—several thousand of 'em.

Okay. One hallway to the left. No demons so far. Her heart hammered in her chest and she fingered the poisoned daggers hidden in her white belt. Another hallway on the left. Reddish light, without any visible source, lit the ceiling. Anxiety plucked at her spine. Where the hell were the guards? You'd think Abatu's palace rooms would be swarming with every kind demon in Hell. She hadn't even met a servant or a concubine.

She reached the right hallway and paused at the entrance. Goddess, she hated how scared she felt. She didn't want to die. Didn't want Rafe to die. For the briefest moment, she thought about a normal life. Getting married. Having kids. Maybe getting a real cat or a real dog. Living in a regular demon-free home.

Maggie snorted with laughter. *You will never be normal, much less have normal. Shut up and get moving, bitch.*

The release of pent-up energy bolstered her courage. She peeked into the hallway, which was also lit by the strange red glow. Hmmm. Nothing down there. Foreboding scraped at her, but she'd come too far to back off. Rafe depended on her. And so did the world—even though humans would never know it. Well, unless she failed. Then every being in this world and the next would know Abatu's wrath.

Staying to the right, she ran down the tunnel until she reached the last door. The lack of movement from any quarter unsettled her. Where were the guards?

Pushing open the door, she stayed to one side and looked into the plush room. Oh, yeah. Definitely Abatu's digs. Filled with every luxury, from silk-covered divans to oversized pillows on floors and the two facing beds, to the fully stocked bar that took up the far back wall—this could be none other than where Abatu held court. The faint scent of sandalwood trickled out. Incense? Huh. Maybe Abatu didn't appreciate the stench of his home.

Maggie scanned the room several times, but detected no one inside. It was creepily empty. Sucking in a breath, she dove inside, grabbing two daggers and pointing them to each side. Stupid move.

No one was in the room.

She searched through it anyway, and confirmed her suspicions. Had Abatu scrambled every one of his people to for the final battle against Drak? Or had he lost and been abandoned by those who had followed him?

Maggie looked at the walls for a possible hiding place. Damn it. She should've asked Rafe *where* the vials were located in the room.

"There."

Whirling around, daggers at the ready, Maggie almost fell over.

"Meelena?"

"Two years ago I made a mistake." She looked like shit. Pale as a ghost, her usually pristine white gown was stained and torn. "I lay with a demon who tricked me. I don't need to tell you about a demon's unearthly attraction, do I? He impregnated me on purpose. I didn't know. I bore my twins in the Otherworld and when Abatu found out—" She shrugged. "He killed Seelie and drained her, but I saved Keelie. Put her into the stone and thought her safe until goddamned Damian. How did he know? How did he find my daughter and steal her from me?"

"I don't know," said Maggie. Her heart leapt to her throat. Meelena had been traumatized to the point of madness. Her once-kind blue eyes raged like an ocean storm. She twisted her slim fingers over and over, and paced between the bulky floor pillows. "High priestess of the Goddess! The leader of the Otherworld High Council! I was so proud of my station, of my abilities." Tears squeezed from her eyes. "And I was brought so very low by demon scum."

Meelena blinked, seemed to come into herself for a moment. She looked at Maggie, desperation palpable. "The vials are in the floor safe. See? By the wall near the bar. Abatu's symbol. Prick your finger. You have his blood and you can open the lock. Destroy them all, Maggie. Thirteen. I have rid this place of the guards, the servants, the sluts. You are safe until you rescue Rafe. After that, you're on your own."

"What about you?"

"I will die," said Meelena. "I cannot live with my shame and I will make sacrifice to my Goddess. You will protect Keelie for me, won't you? You are the only one who knows her location. The only one who can help her."

"Yes, Mel. I'll help her."

A smile flitted across her thin, cracked lips. "Don't call me Mel." She sparkled out of sight, her hand raised in goodbye. Maggie realized it was the last time she would ever see the woman she'd thought of as mentor, friend...as a pseudo-mother. Her first memory of the Otherworld was Meelena's smiling face and outstretched hand as Dad introduced her to the beautiful priestess.

"Fucking Abatu." Maggie focused her rage, her grief on that demon asshole. He would pay for all the pain he'd incurred on her and those she loved. What kind of power did he have that he could wreak havoc on even the most beloved of the Goddess' servants?

Running to the safe, Maggie put one of her daggers away then used the other one to prick her thumb. She pressed into the middle of Abatu's symbol. Blood followed the lines and swirls to a dark point in the middle. Snick. Snick. Snick. The square door rose up two inches. She pushed it over and looked into the dark recess.

Inside were the small silver vials.

Shit. She wasn't a math genius but...

Quickly, she counted the containers. Eleven.

Two vials were missing. Cussing in human and Elvish, *thank you Mrs. Pottersworth*, Maggie used her knife to tear open one of the smaller pillows. She tucked the vials into the fluff then sheathed her blade. Holding the precious blood of Heaven and Hell, she hurried out of Abatu's domain.

Moments later, she returned to Rafe and Eltar. To her relief, they were alone and had been undisturbed.

"You got the vials?" asked Eltar.

Maggie nodded. She placed the torn pillow onto the stone chair and withdrew one vial. "Hold his arms out."

Eltar took each of Rafe's chained wrists.

Removing the stopper, she sniffed it. Blech. The rusty smell of fresh blood. Damn. If she touched it or put near Rafe's skin, either one of them might perish. She used her dagger to shear off a tiny piece of her clothing. It was demon-proof material, so it should withstand the blood's effects. Twisting it into a stick, she figured it would do in lieu of a cotton swab. Heart pounding, mouth dry with fear, she dipped it into the vial.

Quickly, Maggie used the blood to draw a line on the left metallic wrist cuff. Where the blood touched, the metal melted. She repeated the process on the other wrist cuff. Within moments, Rafe was free.

He sagged forward onto his knees as the chains fell away and clinked against the rocky floor. Maggie caught Eltar's worried gaze, but she smiled and shook her head. Without the bespelled chains, the strength and healing ability of his demon side kicked in. The bruises faded. The cuts healed. And after what seemed like a year, Rafe climbed to his feet and stretched his wings.

Maggie threw herself into his arms and nearly hugged the life out of him. "Rafe!"

"Maggie, my love." He kissed her fully and she felt such joyous relief, she cried.

"Ssshhh, now. Let's destroy the vials and get out of here." One gray finger caressed her wet cheek. "Are they all in the pillow?"

"Some were missing," admitted Maggie. "I brought the ones I found." She stepped back and adjusted her white belt. "How are we supposed to get rid of them?"

"Meelena gave me a spell."

She helped Rafe line up the vials on the arm of the stone chair. Maggie joined Eltar behind Raphael. The demon spread his wings to offer protection and then he spoke a string of guttural words. Cold infiltrated the room, a spiral of white, freezing mist.

When the room was filled with cold and with white, she heard loud crackling then several sharp pings.

"It's done," said Raphael.

Maggie and Eltar joined him and viewed at the remains of the vials. They had shattered – any blood within them had dissipated.

White flakes drifted from the ceilings. Maggie looked up and the cold stuff caught on her eyelashes. "Snow?"

Raphael chuckled. "Leftovers from the spell, I suspect."

Maggie plucked her razor-thin cell phone from her belt and flipped it open. Selecting the camera setting, she pointed it at the baffled pink demon. "Hey, Eltar...smile."



## Chapter Twelve

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*Forgiveness is a bitch. Maybe if I could learn how to forgive others, I might find a little self-compassion. But that's not who I am. It's not my way. Vengeance pulses inside me, guides me along the path I've chosen.*

*It's stronger than love.*

*And that shames me.*

*But I've made my decision – and there's no turning back.*

\* \* \* \* \*

In their bedroom, Rafe stood before Maggie, naked in his human form, his cock long and thick and already hard. Her gaze moved from his impressive manhood to travel over his muscled body. Demon or not, she could not deny the perfection of his form. He was tall with broad shoulders, his big chest hairless, his stomach rippled with muscle. He had the bluest eyes, the color of sapphires, and his dark hair was full and long. Already her body reacted to his male beauty, to the lust that belonged only to him.

She, too, was naked. And she stood a foot away, admiring his body the same way he admired hers.

"Maggie..." He stepped close. He grasped her chin and tugged it up until her gaze met his. "Are you sure about this?"

"Yes." She stared at him, emotions crowding her throat, and managed to whisper, "I am yours. I will submit to no other, but you."

Her gaze sought the recently installed chains that hung from the ceiling. She had seen him helpless at the hands of others. She hated that feeling of vulnerability, of weakness. She wanted to give back to him what others had taken. And the only way she knew how was to give him dominion over her.

Gently, he cuffed her wrists with his fingers and led her forward. He put her into the chains. "Are your arms okay?"

"Yeah. My legs are free, Rafe. I can still kick your ass if you piss me off."

He grinned. He went to the nightstand and opened what they called "the naughty drawer". Withdrawing the nipple cuffs, he wiggled them at her. The long silver chain had a little metal cuff at each end. He also plucked out a heavy silver ball, which he would hook onto the middle part of the chain.

Rafe crossed to her, lust in his eyes. Her belly jumped as desire warred with nervousness. She had never laid herself open to a lover like this. She was scared and turned on. A helluva feeling...

Laving each nipple until they were hard and aching, he clasped each taut peak into the metal bindings. Then, merciless bastard that he was, he put on the ball. The weight of the orb pulled painfully on her nipples. She gasped as the tightness bloomed from pain into breathless pleasure.

Rafe stood back, his gaze drifting from her cuffed nipples to her glistening pussy, but he didn't move toward her. No, he tortured her with looks of lust and love and need.

She ached for his attention. Despite the impatience snapping at her, Maggie held her tongue and kept still. What good was a gift for Rafe if she ruined it with her own wants?

Rafe cupped her breasts, his thumbs brushing the tips of her distended nipples. Then he let go and tugged on the ball. Pleasure-pain jolted through her and she moaned. Oh, Goddess!

Soft lips descended on her tender flesh, peppering the tops and sides of her breasts with sweet kisses. The wetness of his tongue against her raw nipples made her shudder. She trembled with joy at the sensations zipping from her nipples to her core.

Maggie panted, pulling against the chains, and writhing in the heat flooding through her. Sweat dribbled between her breasts, droplets caught by Rafe as he kneeled to kiss her rib cage...her stomach...one hip... She lost her breath as he swiped an inner thigh. She strained toward Rafe's mouth, but he denied her that pleasure.

Then...oh then...he started licking her clit.

Her beautiful demon built and stoked the sensual fire between her legs. With every lick, every touch, her pussy throbbed, her clit tight with pleasure, streamers of bliss threatened.

Rafe reached up and tugged on the damned silver ball. Lovely anguish attacked her nipples, jolts that traveled straight to her weeping cunt.

Sensation overload. "Oh, fuck!" she cried out. "Rafe!"

Her orgasm swept through her, a thick sweet wave so intense, she arched her entire body, and screamed.

Rafe licked her come, his tongue tickling her oversensitive clitoris. She wanted him to stop. Wanted him to do it some more. Her whole body felt on fire.

Rafe rose to his feet. Eyes ablaze with desire, he circled around her. Maggie felt the steel warmth of his body as he pressed against her, his penis fitting between her buttocks. "You are beautiful, Maggie. So beautiful."

He lifted her hair and feathered kisses on her neck. His hands drifted down to her thighs, trailing up her ribs oh-so slowly until his big hands cupped her breasts. A moan

escaped, a gasp of relief as he kneaded her flesh. Her breasts felt heavy, her nipples taut and deliciously achy.

"One moment," he whispered.

She cried out in frustration when he moved away. She heard metallic rattles and realized that Rafe was back in the naughty drawer. Before she could beg for his return, he was there. She felt the lube tip he inserted in her anus, the cold squeeze of the lubricant as it filled.

"I want to fuck you hard," whispered Rafe. "I'm going to take your ass and your cunt. You like that, don't you, baby?"

Maggie gasped. Her knees buckled, but the chains held her up. Rafe wrapped an arm around her waist to support her. With Rafe's ability to morph, he often created two big cocks that stuffed her fully. Goddess, she loved the sensations of him in her ass and in her pussy, pounding them both until she wanted to die from the pleasure of his double fucking.

The tip of his top penis slid between her buttocks. Slowly he inched his cock into her ass. She felt it stretch to accommodate him and inhaled roughly, as the hot, full feel of his cock filled her.

Then she felt his bottom cock slide into her pussy. She gulped breaths now, her body on fire. She groaned as both cocks worked into her body, giving her such a sensation of fullness, she didn't know if she could take all of him this way.

Rafe didn't give her time to worry, to think. Eager for her, he pounded into her, one cock sliding into her anus while the other cock plunged into her wet cunt. He created a steady rhythm, his breath harsh in her ear, one arm around her waist, one hand tugging the ball between her breasts.

"Come for me, Maggie."

She was on fire now, a torrent of joy rippling across her...

"I love fucking you," he said in a ragged voice. "More to the point, my darling...I love you."

His words sparked the avalanche...

"Maggie!" Rafe tensed, his cocks trembling then jerking violently as his seed spurted into her ass and pussy.

She went over the edge, pushing onto his cocks while her orgasm sliced her with ribbons of harsh, delicious pleasure.

\* \* \* \* \*

Later on, they snuggled in bed, arms around each other. Maggie drowsed against Rafe's chest, so utterly satisfied in both body and soul, she felt as if she could fly. Rafe's heartbeat was a lullaby. Just as she felt herself drift from awake to sleep, Rafe asked, "Are you sure you got all the vials, Maggie?"

"Yes," she reassured him. "You destroyed the ones I found."

"Only ten," he murmured.

"Yeah." Maggie felt a cold lump form in her stomach. Why did he have to keep harping on the subject? Damn it.

"That means Abatu has three. And even with only three containers, he can do a lot of damage."

Maggie pushed him onto his back and lay on top of him, kissing his neck. "Stop worrying so much. We've kicked his ass so far, right?"

She nibbled on his lips, slipping her tongue into his mouth. He chuckled then drew her in for toe-curling kiss that made her body hum to life.

Without warning, Rafe sat up and Maggie slid sideways onto his lap. Before she could wiggle to a sitting position, Rafe pressed a palm against her back and made her stay still. "What are you —"

His hand smacked her ass. She sucked in a breath of both outrage and lust. "Damn it, Rafe!"

Another swat landed on her buttocks, this one even harder. Pain vibrated up her spine, but she bit her lip to keep from moaning.

He slapped her again then put one hand between her legs, sticking two fingers into her pussy, pushing up on the knot of nerves above her entrance. He spanked her again and again while pushing those fingers in and out of her pussy, knocking against her G-spot. She moved her hips frantically, reaching for the pleasure that glittered just out of reach.

Rafe pushed her off his lap and pulled up her hips until her wobbling knees pressed into the bed. Grabbing her hips, he guided his cock into her wet pussy and plunged deeply.

He fucked her hard. And with every other thrust into her pussy, he paddled her sore ass. Pain and pleasure intertwined. Gasping, panting, sweating...still the orgasm teased her.

"Turn over," Rafe demanded harshly. He withdrew, barely allowing her time to flip onto her back. On his knees, he spread her open, bringing her legs up against his chest, and holding onto her legs with one braced arm, he pushed his cock into her needy cunt.

"Rafe," she cried in frustration. She cupped her own breasts and tugged on her nipples. Sensations wound tighter and tighter.

Now, her demon pounded into her pussy while one finger flicked her clit.

The fickle orgasm burst. She sobbed and clenched as pleasure overwhelmed her. Vaguely, she heard Rafe's cry of release and felt his come spurt hotly inside her cunt.

After a long moment, Rafe released her legs, gently laying them onto the disturbed covers and stroking the trembling limbs. She tried to find her emotional foundation, but Rafe had destroyed it. She was completely at his mercy, which both terrified and pleased her.

He settled next to her and brushed sweat from her forehead. "You wouldn't hide anything from me, would you, Maggie?"

"No," she lied, looking directly into his sapphire gaze. "Never."

## Chapter Thirteen

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*When Rafe and I first met, I told him that I would never break a promise and I would never lie.*

*I can't tell you how desperately I wanted to keep those two tenets, but I had already broken one...and soon, I will break the other.*

*Only a week has passed since Eltar and I rescued Raphael from Hell. I found eleven vials in Abatu's safe, but I only gave Rafe ten.*

*I had to keep one. How else could I kill Abatu? Everyone wants him dead because he's trying to rule everything in creation. I want him dead because he has killed almost every person I've ever loved. Because of him, my father, my mother, my Guardian, my friend, and countless others are dead.*

*I'm not a woman who believes in peace, love and understanding.*

*I believe in revenge.*

*At any cost.*

\* \* \* \* \*

"Marry me."

Maggie stopped unloading her weapons and turned to stare at her half-demon lover. "What?"

"You heard me," said Raphael as he crossed the distance between them. He closed the bedroom door, locking it against their ever-expanding family of humans and demons, and then turned to her. He wore only a towel and his long, dark hair was still wet from his shower. He looked as beautiful as ever, his blue eyes filled with love.

Oh, God. Her heart felt more and more burdened lately. She could barely look at him because she might give away her secrets, her lies...her betrayal. Instead, she pressed against him and kissed him until she lost her breath.

She whipped off the towel and stroked his thick cock until it was hard. He tended to the removal of her clothing and when she was naked, she hooked her leg around his and tumbled him to the floor.

He could take a hit. Still, landing on his backside with her on top, left him breathless. He wheezed his laughter, his hands cupping her breasts as she lowered herself onto his cock.

"Maggie," he moaned as he met her thrusts. He twisted her nipples, and pleasure radiated straight to her pussy.

She rocked on him, her hands planted onto his chest, her vaginal muscles clenching tightly. She fucked him, wanting to give him pleasure, wanting him to come while she denied herself.

But he wouldn't deny her.

He grabbed her, rolling her onto the floor until he was on top. He sucked one of her nipples into his mouth as she wrapped her legs around his waist and arched, taking his deep thrusts.

Desperation had her clinging to him, had her squeezing back tears. Then Rafe was groaning his release, his demon cock pulsing as his come filled her. She wasn't surprised when he rose to his knees and revealed that his cock was as long and hard as ever.

That was the advantage of a demon lover. He was like the Energizer Bunny. He could keep going and going and going...

He bent her legs forward. "Grab your ankles."

She did as he asked and raised her hips to give him access to her ass. He pushed a finger into her vagina, lubing it with his come and her juice, and then he worked it into her anus.

The finger wiggling inside her sensitive ass tissues made her shudder with pleasure. He inserted another lubed finger and used both to ring her over and over, stretching it. She cupped her breasts, tugging on the nipples to increase the erotic sensations zinging her.

*Finally* he fit his cock against her tight hole and pushed it inside inch by inch until he was fully seated. Her ass burned at the violation, but she loved having her ass stuffed. She loved anything Raphael did to her.

The hand he used to ready her anus clamped onto her hip. The other hand cupped her mound, flicking her clitoris until she moaned.

Drawing flush against her, he stroked in and out of her ass. She relished his every movement and her nails bit into the flesh of her ankles as she begged for more.

"I'll give you anything you ask," promised Rafe. But his gasping words trailed into a groan. He stopped pumping into her.

"Rafe! Goddammit!"

"Sshh, baby."

His moved his hand from her pussy, and forming a beak with his fingers he slowly pushed them into her vagina. She sucked in deep breaths. Having her anus stuffed along with the incredible fullness of his hand stretching her vaginal walls tipped her toward excruciating bliss.

When he'd filled her up to his wrist, he curled his fingers into a fist then rhythmically bumped her G-spot with his knuckles as he ass-fucked her into orgasmic oblivion.

Her entire body seemed to shatter into a thousand stars. One orgasm rolled onto the next one as her cunt and ass throbbed, she vaguely felt the hot spurt of Rafe's seed fill her.

She had barely floated down to Earth again when she felt his tongue whipping on her clitoris. He sucked and flicked her into a third orgasm. Her hips came off the floor as her pussy convulsed and covered his face with her come.

Completely spent, she sprawled on the floor and tried to catch her breath. Rafe lay down next to her and wiped the sweat off her brow.

"What was the question again?" she asked, teasing him.

"Would you please marry me?"

"Okay." Maggie kissed her own essence right off his face. Agreeing to marry Rafe was absolutely the wrong thing to do.

So why did it make her so fucking happy?

\* \* \* \* \*

"Where are you going?" asked Rafe. He studied Maggie's black demon-proof outfit, belt fitted with potions, knives, and moon scythes, and her three-inch spiked ankle boots.

"Uh..."

*Damn it.* Five minutes ago, he'd been in the lab working on translating the Book of Demons and creating über spells for the next round of prisms. She'd hurried into the bedroom, dressed, and was on her way to sneaking out. Raphael had popped into the hallway, literally, in a blast of blue flame.

"Maggie?" He frowned, his brows dipping ominously. "I thought you were taking tonight off. Did we get an alert about demon trouble?"

Before she could tell yet another lie to her beloved, Mrs. Pottersworth barreled into the hallway with Auren and Sarah huffing and puffing behind her. "We're ready, dearie!"

Maggie's mouth dropped open. "Er...yeah? Good."

Auren, who usually preferred the form of a scruffy black kitten, had taken her human form—a slight, pale woman with long black hair and ruby red lips. She wore a black leather bustier, black leather skirt, and matching calf boots. She was beautiful in a mesmerizing way, a demon goddess who would just as soon rip your heart out as look at you.

Sarah stuck Margie in the crook of Rafe's arms and shoved a pink bag stuffed full of kiddy crap onto his shoulder. "Her bottle's in there. You have to alternate regular



formula with demonfire. The blue kind, okay? Red makes her gassy. Don't give her plastic keys, she melts them. Don't forget to burp her, but watch out for your hair. She'll burn it off." She touched her own singed locks and scrunched her face. "Am I forgetting anything?"

"Rafe has your cell phone number," said Mrs. Pottersworth. "He's very good with children."

Rafe looked stunned. "I am?"

"Of course, you are." Mrs. P patted his arm and smiled beguilingly. Her elf ears poked out of her silvery hair. "Okay, ladies, let's go."

"Go where?" asked Rafe.

"Why, shopping for the wedding, of course. We have to check out the dresses—"

Maggie bristled. "*Dress?* Oh hell no!"

"*Dress,*" repeated Mrs. P with a steely look in her eye. "Then we have to pick out the flowers, the bridesmaid gowns, the menu for the reception..."

"And you can do that at nine o'clock at night?" Rafe sounded suspicious.

"We're having a girl's night out to look through magazines and catalogs," said Sarah. "Unless you want to—"

"No," said Rafe, shuddering. "Really. That's okay. I'd rather baby-sit." He shot a look at Maggie that was half-amusement, half-relief.

Mrs. P rushed Maggie out the door, which triple-locked behind them. They entered the elevator. The doors snicked shut and the car started to rise. The compound was three hundred feet underground and had more security than the Trump Towers.

"What the hell is going on?" asked Maggie. "I wasn't going wedding shopping. Yuck!"

"Well, you are now," said Mrs. P. "It's not like you to get caught sneaking out."

Her reprimand stung, but she was right. Maggie wasn't sloppy. Her game had been off lately and she worried every minute that she'd made the wrong choice. What was the point of killing Abatu if it meant losing Rafe?

"Unless you wanted to get caught," said Auren. She sounded completely bored, but Maggie knew better than that. Her little sis wasn't apathetic, no matter how she sounded. "Maybe you're feeling guilty."

That hit the nail on the head. Fuck, fuck, *fuck*. "Oh, shut up! What's wrong with a little demon hunting?" she grouched. "It's what I do."

"Lying to Rafe is bad enough," said Sarah, her voice full of censure. "But don't you dare lie to us."

The doors opened and the women stepped into the hallway. Totally pissed off, mostly because her friends were right, Maggie led the way. She wished there was a demon to hunt because she'd love to stick her boot heel into his throat. Argh!

The compound was built underneath an empty mansion, surrounded by bespelled fencing. Anyone who got through the fence would then have to get into the heavily magicked and alarmed house. If they made it that far, they had to know the codes to open the elevator and have the right blood to even make it work. Everyone with a code to the house also had to prick their finger on a specially made button. If your DNA wasn't in the system, a gas emitted from the elevator and knocked out the occupant.

They entered the kitchen, walking across the black-and-white tile to the door that led to the garage. Inside the five-car garage was Maggie's Harley, the silver-gray Jaguar XLS, an SUV, Sarah's 1994 Honda, and Rafe's BMW. They trooped toward the SUV, which was bullet-proof, demon-proof, and fancied up with the latest in gadgets and weaponry.

Sarah got to the driver's side door before Maggie. She grinned widely then swung up into the seat.

"This is my fucking car," said Maggie, her temper about to snap. "No way are you driving."

Mrs. Pottersworth snaked the front passenger seat and Auren climbed into the back behind Sarah. "Would you rather tell Rafe where you were really going, dearie? We'll wait."

Muttering darkly, Maggie stalked around the car. "This blows!"

She got into the backseat with her sister and viciously strapped herself into the seat. This was what happened when a demon hunter had friends. They...they...bossed you around and got you into trouble. *Fuckers*.

"So, where are we going?" asked Sarah as she started the SUV and revved the engine.

"Like I'm telling you," said Maggie between clenched teeth. "Besides, aren't you forgetting someone?"

"Eltar is a non-subject."

"You said it had to snow in Hell," said Maggie, just petty enough to enjoy Sarah's grimace. "Do I need to show you the pictures again?"

"Fine!"

The garage door opened and Sarah slammed the SUV into reverse, barreling down the long driveway. Just before they got to the entrance gate, Sarah wheeled the car into a one hundred and eighty turn. Dust spewed as she braked hard, leaving the front bumper inches from the black iron bars.

"Jesus!" Maggie resisted the urge to slap her friend upside the head. "Could you chill out?"

Sarah giggled. Maggie realized then Sarah was suffering from a bout of nerves. As much as she badmouthed Eltar, nobody was fooled. She was in love with the father of her child.

But she sure as hell didn't like him very much.

Just as he did every day, Eltar waited near the mailbox. Maggie had to admit he was persistent. Only love could make a demon act like a beggar day after day.

Sarah pushed the button on the gate remote and the iron bars swung open. She drove through then rolled down her window. Eltar approached cautiously, peering at her with hopeful eyes. He looked like a well-dressed salesman in the pin-striped suit. He also wore a hat and carried a briefcase.

"Get in," she demanded.

Auren opened her door. Eltar tossed his briefcase and hat into the back, then scurried across Auren to sit in the middle of the backseat.

Maggie looked at him and smiled grimly. "Welcome to my own personal hell."

He grinned back. "Delighted as always, Miss Mortis."

\* \* \* \* \*

"You didn't tell me you planned to bring a posse." The young woman stared at Maggie reproachfully.

"I didn't bring them," said Maggie. "They leeches onto me."

They stood at the gates of the tiny cemetery. It was located on the grounds of the abandoned church Maggie attended as a child. Her parents were buried here. Her mother had a funeral and mourners and gravediggers. Her father had been buried by cover of night with only her digging his grave and later, speaking tear-filled prayers. By the time Abraham Mortis met his maker, the cemetery and its church had been abandoned. No one buried their dead here. No one sought solace or faith.

No one but her.

Daddy made his coffin from the same bespelled material in which he'd buried Mom. Putting her father's remains into a coffin he'd carved and magicked himself was the hardest thing she'd ever done.

Turning away from the graveyard and old memories, she considered the girl. She was beautiful with black, wavy hair and big, blue eyes. She wore a T-shirt and jeans. Her purse was a big, shiny number that didn't quite fit her hippie appearance. "What are you, twelve?"

"Eighteen," she said. "And I'm really good at my job."

"Who are you again, dearie?" asked Mrs. Pottersworth.

"Deb Johnson," answered the girl. "I'm getting freaked out. I don't like audiences. It's not like raising the dead is easy."

"Raising the dead!" Sarah looked horrified.

All eyes turned to Maggie. "You wanted to tag along." Her tone was a shade too defensive. "Isn't this better than shopping for wedding dresses?"

"You're getting married?" asked Deb. "That's righteous!"

Maggie resisted the urge to throw up. What had possessed Rafael to ask her to marry him? What had possessed *her* to accept? Argh!

"Deb, how did you get into this profession?" asked Mrs. Pottersworth.

"Oh, yeah...well." Deb shrugged. "Mom is all into the arcane arts. She's been teaching me stuff since I was like a year old. I'm good at necromancy, but I never really did anything on my own before—'til about a year ago. My boyfriend died in a car crash. I took one of my necro spellbooks to his grave and sorta...woke him up."

"You brought your dead boyfriend back to life?" squeaked Sarah.

"The spell worked great, but the thing about necromancing is that you gotta be specific. I brought his body back, but his personality is totally gone. A zombie only has a tiny piece of its original soul." Deb's big blue eyes assessed Eltar critically. "Hey, Phil might be dead, but at least he's not a demon."

Maggie stared Deb. "You can see Eltar's true form?"

"I got this thing about auras." Deb shrugged. "Dude, you've got a weird psychic ambience. It screams 'demon' but you got serious white light, too."

"He's kinda good," explained Maggie. "He doesn't possess humans or try to eat them and he's in love with Sarah, but she's being stubborn."

"Yeah. I can see her resistance toward him."

Sarah stared daggers at Maggie, who just smiled benignly.

A loud moan echoed. The creepy noise was followed by gurgling and shuffling.

Maggie released her moon scythes from her belt and took an attack position. "What the fuck is that?"

## Chapter Fourteen

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*People suck.*

*Especially friends who say they're trying to help, but all they're really doing is hindering.*

*Don't they understand how much shit is gonna go down? How can I protect them and Rafe if they're...they're following me around?*

*Too many have died because of me. It was bad enough letting Rafe into my life. Bad enough loving him. Bad enough betraying him. But now there's Sarah, Margie, Mrs. P., and even that too-polite Eltar. They keep multiplying, for fuck's sake!*

*If they'd just leave me alone for a day, I could track Abatu, kill him, and save the world.*

*Sheesh!*

\* \* \* \* \*

"That's Phil, my ex-boyfriend," said Deb. "Poor guy. He wouldn't go back into the grave and die again, so he mostly follows me around." Deb turned toward the well-dressed corpse inching toward them. He had obviously been embalmed because his skin looked as fresh as a peach. But his eyes were rolled back into his head and his mouth was contorted. His fingers were curled into claws and his legs were stiff as petrified logs.

"How can he see where he walks?" whispered Sarah. She ducked behind Eltar.

"Zombies don't really use their physical senses to get around. It's kinda hit and miss," said Deb. "Phil, I told you to wait in the car."

"Uuuuuuuhhhh."

"You don't sleep with him or anything, do you?" Sarah's hands crept around Eltar's waist and she peeked at Zombie Phil. "Because that's seriously sick."

"First, his penis doesn't work – and no, I didn't check myself. It says so in the Necro books. Second, you've had demon penis so I hardly think you should judge anyone else's tastes."

Maggie sighed as she put away the moon scythes. "This night is getting shittier and shittier. Can you put away your pet so we can get this show on the road?"

"Yeah, yeah. Don't get your panties in a twist." Deb took Phil by one gnarled hand and dragged toward him yellow VW bug. "You gotta stay in the car. We talked about this, honey, remember?"

"Uuuuuuuhhhh."

When Deb disappeared, Maggie's four friends surrounded her, their arms crossed and concern in their gazes.

"What the bloody hell are you doing?" asked Mrs. Pottersworth.

"Yeah," chimed in Auren. "Why did you hire a necromancer?"

Maggie didn't want to tell them. She didn't want to drag them into the situation. It surprised her to realize that she liked having a family. She wasn't a loner anymore. She wasn't freed from the constraints of relationships. She *wanted* to be a friend, a sister, and yeah, even a wife.

And knowing that scared the living hell out of her.

"There's no use lying to us," said Sarah. "Or trying to hide what you're doing. Just fess up."

"Okay, okay," grumbled Maggie. She couldn't quite look anyone in the eyes. "I hired Deb to get in touch with someone. Someone who can help me destroy Abatu."

"Who?" asked Auren sharply.

Maggie swallowed the knot in her throat. "My father. Abraham Mortis."

The instant silence was weighted with shock.

"Are you insane?" asked Sarah, her voice strained. "You're going to raise your dead father so you figure out how to kill your immortal ancestor?"

"Not immortal," corrected Maggie. "We've established that there is a way to kill demons."

Mrs. Pottersworth narrowed her eyes. "You destroyed the vials."

"Not the ones that Abatu kept." Maggie looked over her shoulder, as if checking for the return of Deb. But what she was really doing was avoiding the gazes of her friends. She hated lying to them. But she couldn't risk them or Rafe. Not again. Not ever.

"If only the High Council wasn't in such disarray," said Mrs. P. She sounded distressed.

"I don't work for those motherfuckers anymore. Besides, they've got their own problems. If Meelena, who was probably the purest being among them, could fuck a demon and bear his children then they're in a lot of trouble." Maggie rubbed her bare arms against the chill in the wind. Odd. It shouldn't be cold at this time of year. "And, oh yeah, I hope they all fucking die."

"Sorry 'bout that," said Deb as she rejoined them. If she heard Maggie's forceful protest against the High Council, she refrained from offering an opinion. "So, are you guys ready or what?"

"I'm ready," said Maggie. "These guys will wait in the car."

The protests were immediate, loud and vigorous, but Maggie shook her head. "I'm talking to my father alone."

"I do better without an audience," said Deb. "And sometimes the dead are reluctant to show up for a bunch of people."

"Fine," said Auren as she sent Maggie a you-will-tell-us-everything-or-die look. "How long will this take?"

"It takes as long it takes." Deb hitched up her big-ass purse and turned to push through the gates.

"Maggie," said Mrs. P, her voice way too sympathetic. "Are you sure this is the right thing to do?"

"Nope." Maggie followed Deb, leaving her friends to stare after her.

When she caught up to Deb, the girl was putting candles around the grave of her parents. Only her mother's name was on the headstone. Her father lay beside his wife, unmarked perhaps, but not unknown.

"How did you know where he was buried?"

"I got the vibe." Deb completed the five points of what was probably a pentagram and lit each votive. The smell of vanilla wafted to Maggie.

"So what will happen? Will Dad pop out of his grave or what?"

"He decides the form he takes."

Maggie watched the rest of Deb's preparations. She recognized some of the magic and herbs, but necromancy was a different craft than the one Maggie had learned. She wasn't sure she could handle talking to him no matter how he revealed himself, but she hoped Dad wouldn't choose to speak through his corpse. But even though she had Rafe and the others to support her efforts and to offer their encouragement, no one could ever replace her father. He had always been her compass. He knew how to give advice, how to nudge her in the right direction, how to help her. She needed guidance in the worst way.

She needed her father.

Deb sat down in front of a candle. She pointed to the opposite side. "You sit there. If I'm successful, you'll be able to speak directly to your father. It's very rare that entities choose me as the vessel. Most dead people are attached to their earthly forms and like to reappear in them—one way or another.

"Keep your questions simple. Ask the ones you most want to know first because timing is always iffy. You might have five minutes or less. I've never been able to hold a spirit here longer than an hour. Phil is the exception, of course. Then again, it's really his re-animated body following me around."

"I got it," said Maggie, biting back her smile. She had a lot of problems, damn it, but at least being followed by a dead guy wasn't one of 'em. "The second Dad appears, I start talking and I don't stop until he's gone."

Deb nodded.

Maggie sat cross-legged where Deb indicated. She watched the girl put her palms together in a prayerful gesture, then she said, "O God, O Goddess, I invoke thy powers on behalf of thy worthy children. Hear our prayers and grant us thy mercy."

A sparkling gold light leapt from the candle in front of Deb to each votive. The lines crossed until a pentagram glowed. Feeling as if she'd been electrified, Maggie felt the hair rise on her arms and neck. Powerful magic vibrated in the air.

Even regular human beings could, with study and practice, create and use simple spells. But Deb was harnessing raw power. She not only knew magic, she had the talent to wield it.

Maggie's heart crawled to her throat and beat wildly. She felt breathless and uncertain. If Abraham Mortis appeared even as a shadow of himself, he'd be pissed that she'd called him.

The wind kicked up, rustling dead leaves and dry grass. Once again, Maggie felt a chill in the air, which twisted around her and caused her flesh to prickle.

"With the blessings of our God and our Goddess, we call the beloved parent of Margaret Eleanor Mortis," intoned Deb. "Please accept our offering."

Deb threw silver powder into the middle of the pentagram. The purple petals of lavender followed and then drops of what Maggie assumed was holy water.

Within moments, a white wisp emitted from the grave. It wafted upward, hovering about three feet off the ground. Slowly, a face formed along with a neck and the barest hint of shoulders. When the figure had completed its manifestation, Maggie swallowed the hard knot clogging her throat. Oh, holy hell!

"Hello, daughter," said the ghost, smiling.

Tears slipped down Maggie's cheeks. "Mom?"

"I assume you were trying to call your father," said Mom. "He was lucky enough to spend more time with you." Her mother's ghostly gaze looked her over. "You're hair is so short. I used to love brushing your pretty, long hair."

Maggie rubbed her spiked locks. "It's better for the job."

"I know. Darling, I've watched over you. What a life you've had...and that Rafe...isn't he yum on a bun?"

"Mom!" Maggie's chuckle reversed into a sob. "I miss you. And I miss Dad. H-how is he?"

Her mother's ghostly gaze flickered. "Tell me what you want, Maggie."

"I want to find Abatu. I have the means to kill him."

"You want to save the world?" asked her mother. "Or you want revenge for all the evil he has wrought on you and yours?"

"Both," said Maggie. She grimaced. "But mostly the second thing you said."

"I thought as much." Her mother sighed. "Abatu seeks conquest and power. He has no conscience and no morality. I will tell you what you need to know because he must be stopped."

"Am I really related to him?"



"Yes. Your father can trace his bloodline directly to Abatu. You have demon blood. It's why you're so good at what you do."

The freezing wind blew again. Maggie's mother shimmered then steadied again into a floating, pale form. "Abatu is in hiding, protecting himself while his loyal generals assemble demon armies. If this assault is successful, he will take Hell, Earth and the Otherworld in one fell swoop."

"And Heaven?"

"Where do you think he is hiding? And where do you think he wishes to rule from?"

Astonished didn't begin to describe Maggie's reaction. One of the most powerful demons in all the planes of existence was *hiding* in Heaven. And there, where good and love and light reigned supreme, he was going to rule all creatures. "I didn't think our God and Goddess would allow him to hang out in the holy kingdom."

"Life is about balance. Good and evil are two sides of the eternal coin. Sometimes, the scales tip toward one or the other."

"So no matter what we do or don't do, the scales will eventually tip the other direction?"

"It is the actions of the Universe's children that tip the scales." Maggie's mother smiled. "*Your actions will tip the scales.*"

Maggie nodded. Her father had once told her that she wouldn't win every battle. The important thing was to keep showing up with the intention of winning. *Fight your hardest, fight your very best, Maggie. Never focus on the outcome. It's standing for good and for right that makes the difference.*

"Where's Daddy?" she asked softly.

"Oh, baby," said her mother. "I wished you hadn't asked." Her expression turned sorrowful. "Abatu called Abe's soul and trapped him...in one of the prisms you made."

Horror clawed at Maggie. "No!"

"When you find Abatu, you will find your father." Her mother started to fade.

"Mom! I love you!"

"I love you, too," came a low whisper, "and congratulations on your engagement."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Did you pick out the dress?" asked Rafe. He was lying on the bed wearing only a pair of faded jeans. In his hands was a well-worn novel by Robert Ludlum. Her sexy demon wore no shirt, allowing Maggie to feast on his magnificent abs.

"Hell, no," she said, tossing the magazines onto the bed. "We're going to Vegas, that's what we're doing. Mrs. P started talking about china patterns, for God's sake!"

Rafe chuckled as he nabbed a magazine and thumbed through it.

After the graveyard visit, Mrs. P insisted on stopping at a twenty-four-hour Walmart and picking up the magazines. Then they went to Denny's and ate pancakes and actually discussed wedding stuff. Maggie hated every fucking second of it. Not only did she not want a traditional wedding—yuck, yuck, ptooeey—but she also had other plans to make. She had to figure out how to get into Heaven, how to track down Abatu, and how to rescue her father. It killed her to know that his soul was suffering in a device designed for demons.

"This one is nice," said Raphael. He held up the magazine. The dress looked like something Cinderella would wear to the ball, all big and fluffy and diamond-speckled.

"You like that gown?" she asked as she took off her weapons.

"Don't you?"

Maggie took off her boots then wiggled out of her demon-hunting suit. Still in her black lace bra and panties, she crawled onto the bed and snuggled next to Rafe. As she stroked the hard muscles of his stomach, she looked at the picture again then at her fiancé. "If you like that frou-frou shit I guess I could wear it."

Rafe's blue eyes twinkled. "You must love me, Maggie, if you would even think about showing up to our wedding dressed in frou-frou shit."

She lightly punched his shoulder. Then, feeling vulnerable and guilty and in love, she sat up and cupped his face. "I would do anything for you."

His eyes went dark and he leaned forward to capture her lips. Electric heat raced through her, and she slid onto his lap. Pressing her sex against the lengthening bulge in his jeans, Maggie broke their kiss long enough to unclip her bra and throw it to the floor.

Rafe cupped her breasts, bringing one peak to his mouth. He tugged the nipple between his teeth, flicking the aching tip with his tongue. Maggie moaned, her hands drifting down to stroke at the juncture where her pussy met his jean-clad hard-on.

Rafe seemed to be in a lazy lovemaking mood, which suited Maggie just fine. She wanted to relish every moment in case...well, in case nothing. He would forgive her. He would understand her reasons. Maybe he'd be pissed off for a while, but he wouldn't leave her. And even if he did—her breath caught in her throat—then he would be alive. That was the important thing. If he was walking around and breathing, wasn't that worth sacrificing his trust?

*I would do anything for you, Raphael.*

Her heart kicked up a frantic beat, caught between the unfurling lust heating her inside out and the adrenaline-spiked guilt threatening to cool her ardor. Goddamn it. As despair jabbed her, she pushed aside all her worries and focused on Rafe and on how he made her feel.

Right now, there would be only love.

She would think about all the rest tomorrow.

Maggie unbuttoned his jeans and freed his cock. Her fingers stroked his thick shaft and brushed against something. "What the —?"

She looked down. Rafe wore a penis-and-ball strap. A large metal ring encircled the base of his cock. Attached to it was a leather strap that stretched under his scrotum and up to a second ring. Both rings were bound at the top by another strap.

"What is this?" she asked.

"Maybe you need to take a closer look."

Maggie grinned as she helped Rafe wiggle off his jeans. She knelt between his legs and bent down to suck the tip of his cock. She ran her tongue down the shaft, licking at the flesh bound by the metal ring.

"Lower," he moaned. "Take my balls."

She licked his scrotum, wiggling her tongue under the strap. As her tongue glided down, she felt something square and hard. What the hell kind of sex aid was this thing? Maggie lifted Rafe's sac and stared at the object dangling from the larger metal circle.

Oh holy goddess.

The platinum band with its rectangular blue stone was...her engagement ring.

## Chapter Fifteen

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*I never thought I would marry. Hell, I never thought I would fall in love. Love strengthens me and humbles me. I've never felt this way about anyone, not even Damian, who held my heart for so very long. A heart he didn't want. Because of him, I have Raphael. That was his final gift to me.*

*I wish I felt like I deserved him.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Maggie lifted Rafe's scrotum higher and looked closely at the beautiful ring. The large rectangular gem was deep blue. Purple glinted within it. "Demon sapphire! You made me a demon sapphire?"

"Yes."

Her gaze met his and she felt an insane need to weep. Demon sapphires were the rarest of all gems on all planes of existence. Only a demon could make one and since most of them were selfish bastards and the process to create such a stone was arduous, not many of these gems existed.

"Take it off!" she demanded. She felt almost giddy. And heaven knew she was acting *way* too girly. But it was her ring and she wanted to wear it.

"Ah," said Rafe. "I'm afraid you can't have it until my cock is a little less...er, happy."

Maggie laughed. "I can help you with that."

She sucked him, tickling the underside of the mushroomed head with her tongue. She traced each bulging vein of his cock, her fingers slipping under his scrotum to tug on her engagement ring.

Rafe groaned, his hands fisting into the covers.

She was merciless in her efforts to make him come, alternating between sucking mouth and stroking fingers.

"Maggie!"

She took him down to the first ring as he pulsed hotly in her mouth. His come geysered down her throat. She drank the warm salty essence and licked him clean.

The blowjob only softened him slightly.

"Damned demon dick!" she grouched.

"Don't worry, Maggie. It's enough." He chuckled as he disengaged the strap and retrieved her ring. "I love you," he murmured as he slid the platinum band onto the second finger of her left hand.

"I love you, too." She stared at the jewel in amazement. Holy fucking shit. She was engaged. She was going to get married. The very prospect of getting hitched scared the crap outta her, but at the same time, she was excited about it, too.

Rafe tumbled her onto her backside and kissed her. She melted in his embrace, molding her lips to his, darting her tongue into his mouth. All the while, her restless hands danced along his back. She cupped his ass. He flexed his buttocks and made her laugh. Then he dropped kisses on her collarbone and devoured her with his hot mouth and talented tongue.

She writhed beneath him.

Rafe's fingers danced on her bare skin, skimming the underside of her aching breasts, teasing her areolas. He suckled one of her nipples, letting go of the tender nub to blow softly on the crinkled flesh until the peak tightened even more.

Hot desire liquefied Maggie. She stroked his rib cage, tickling his flesh until she found *his* nipples. She rubbed them to hardness then twisted.

He sucked in a sharp breath, a shudder running through him.

"Maggie," he moaned, kissing her breasts.

He wedged his hand between them, cupping her sex and caressing her outer lips. Then he pierced her with two fingers and crooked them to rub her G-spot. She moaned, her hips lifting in the same rhythm as his fingers.

He lifted her leg and shifted his body until he was at the correct angle. Her restless hands fluttered to his shoulders, her nails digging into his skin as he plunged into her slick cunt.

Her legs trembled and her heart thudded as he thrust again and again and again. She wrapped her free leg around his buttocks and clawed at his flesh, her moans and movements just as frantic as his.

The orgasm roared through her. "Rafe! Oh God! Yes!"

Rafe slammed into her, her name a mantra as he reached his own completion. He stiffened, groaning as his come spurted into her weeping cunt.

He collapsed against her, his tongue flicking the beads of moisture rolling down her neck. "So," he murmured. "Do you want to set the date?"

Maggie punched him.

\* \* \* \* \*

"They found another pair of men's legs," said Sarah the next morning. She handed Maggie the front page of the newspaper.

Maggie sat at the kitchen table and poured herself coffee. Mrs. Pottersworth made yummy, strong java. She blew on the liquid before venturing a sip. "Mmm. Mocha caramel?"

"Hazelnut truffle," said Sarah. "I don't know how she does it. She would kill Starbucks if she opened her own coffee business."

Maggie laughed. She sipped her coffee as she scanned the story. The mysterious killer who left only the legs—from the calves down—of male victims had left another pair on a downtown sidewalk. The serrated wounds had been compared to animal teeth, except no animal large enough to eat a grown man in one bite still existed.

The method of death was surely paranormal, but it didn't fit a demon MO. It also seemed like the victims were chosen randomly—out of convenience rather than because they fit a certain profile. Actually the only profile they fit was that they were men. The strange incidents made Maggie curious, but whether or not there was a paranormal or human explanation for the murders, it wasn't her game.

She had bigger demons to hunt.

"You have a visitor," said Rafe as he walked into the kitchen. Auren, in her black kitten form, sauntered beside him. When he sat down, she jumped into his lap and closed her eyes.

"I think it's weird that my sister is curled on your lap."

"Jealous about this little pussy?" asked Rafe, grinning.

"Yuck." Maggie leaned over and kissed him. "You'll pay for that, you know."

"Yeah, I know."

"Who's the visitor?" asked Sarah. She resumed feeding the infant snuggled in her arms. The bottle glowed with blue demonfire. Margie sucked contently on the bottle, which had a specially made nipple since all the rubber ones tended to melt due to her higher body temps. It would take a while for the child to find a balance between her demon and human halves.

"Says her name is Deb."

Maggie found her half-empty coffee cup very interesting. "Deb, huh?"

She flicked a glance at Sarah. Her friend smiled. "The coordinator, hon. Remember?"

"She doesn't look old enough to be a wedding planner," said Rafe, snaking the paper from Maggie's hands. "Are we interviewing her for the job or did you dig her up last night?"

"Dig her up?"

Rafe looked up, obviously hearing the strain in Maggie's voice. His eyebrows dipped into a frown. "Are you okay?"

"Fine." Did he know that she'd tried to call her father's ghost? Was he trying to get her to confess? Or was her own guilty conscience causing her to overreact to his words?

"Where is she? Did you talk to her?" asked Maggie as she rose from the table.

"She's in the mansion. Mrs. P is with her in the living room we keep furnished for entertaining guests." Rafe gulped his coffee and picked up Auren, who meowed sleepily.

"Where are you going?"

"With you." Rafe stroked the top of the kitten's head. "I figured since it's our wedding, I should have some input."

Sarah laughed. Rafe and Maggie turned to look at her. She put down the bottle and lifted Margie to her shoulder. As she lightly patted the infant's back, she said, "I'm sorry. It's just...weddings are for the women. Honeymoons are for the men."

"I'll keep that in mind," said Eltar as he wandered into the kitchen. He was in his human guise, wearing one of Sarah's terry cloth robes and a very satisfied expression.

"Why would you keep it in mind?" asked Sarah. Her cheeks suffused with color and she suddenly found the tabletop vastly interesting.

"Because I wish to marry you, of course."

"Who's to say I want to marry you?"

"I love you, Sarah." He dropped a kiss on her mouth, ignoring her astonished expression.

Eltar's gaze fell to Maggie's left hand. He whistled. "Demon sapphire. Must've taken you a while to craft that, old boy."

"Something like that," admitted Rafe. "So, you want to talk to the wedding planner alone?"

Goddamn it. He sounded hurt. If Deb were a real wedding planner, she wouldn't have any problem with Rafe coming with her. In fact, she would happily let him make all the decisions about every nauseating detail. But Deb wasn't here about a wedding.

So, what was she here about?

"You never said how you found this Deb."

Great. Now Rafe sounded suspicious.

"You really are thick-headed," said Sarah. Margie punctuated her mother's statement with a loud burp. Flames shot out from her pert mouth then she gurgled, ramming a tiny fist into her mouth.

"May I?" asked Eltar. Apparently, the two of them had worked out a number of issues during their night together. Sarah handed over the baby and Eltar held his daughter with great tenderness.

"Why am I thick-headed?" asked Rafe.

Maggie noticed the way her husband-to-be kept his gaze on Eltar and Margie. Oh, Goddess in Heaven! Was he thinking about children, too? Next, they'd be picking out a cottage with a white picket fence. And demon-proof siding.

"Obviously Maggie is trying to plan a surprise for you."

Rafe's eyebrows rose. He turned to look at Maggie. "So, Deb isn't a wedding planner?"

"Yes," said Maggie.

"No," said Sarah.

Margie gurgled.

"Look, *you* stay here," said Maggie to Rafe. "Sarah, come with me." She leaned down and cupped Rafe's face. "I swear that once we begin the actual planning of our wedding day, you will be there every step of the way."

"That's so kind of you," he said with only a hint of sarcasm. "Allowing me to plan my own nuptials."

"Hey, I'm a generous person."

"You're going to pay for that," he said, chuckling.

"Yeah," she answered. "I know."

\* \* \* \* \*

"You should tell him the truth," said Sarah on the elevator ride up to the manse.

"No, I shouldn't. I won't risk his life."

"But you'll risk yours?" Sarah crossed her arms and glared at Maggie. "You haven't exactly revealed what happened in the graveyard. You're going to do something stupid and brave, aren't you? The lone heroine taking on the world... Seriously, that is so overdone."

"Shut up."

"You're very cranky today."

Maggie rolled her eyes. Cranky didn't begin to cover her emotional state. The elevator dinged and opened, allowing them to enter the foyer. Across the large space were the double doors to the living room. She'd left the decoration to Sarah and Mrs. P. Decorating wasn't her thing.

The doors were open. A fire crackled in the marble fireplace. On a very large Persian rug, two divans faced each other. Between them was an antique table. Centered on it was a very large red candle on a diamond-shaped mirror. Its flame was thin and wavering and the smell of cinnamon wafted in the room. Red hues in the pillows and stripes on the wallpaper made the room, filled with tans and creams and bronzes, feel more cozy.

Two wingbacks were positioned so that they could be moved to face either the couches or the fireplace. They were big, dressed in brown leather and studded with bronze. Bookshelves lined one wall and they were filled with books Maggie had never seen before.

"Hello, dearies," said Mrs. P cheerfully from the divan. Deb sat next to her, looking pale and tired.



"I assume you have a good reason for showing up at my house, Deb."

Maggie watched Sarah sit on the opposite couch and pour herself a cup of tea from the silver teapot. She fiddled with sugar cubes and creamer. When the hell had they gotten so civilized? *Tea in the drawing room, Miss Mortis?* Blech!

"Phillip is gone."

"Your dead boyfriend?" Maggie flung herself onto the couch next to Sarah and sighed. "I don't do missing persons. Dead or alive."

"Maybe he went back to the grave," suggested Sarah.

"I checked. He's not there. He's just...gone."

"He's basically a walking corpse, right? I mean, somebody will find him and...well, I'm not exactly sure what they'll do." Maggie smiled weakly, knowing she wasn't exactly aces at making other people feel better.

"Duh. They would freak out," offered Sarah.

Maggie bit back a chuckle, especially since the teacup in Deb's hand quaked in her trembling hands.

"I think he was called by another necromancer—or something worse." Deb tried to sip her tea, but before she managed to bring it to her lips, she spilled it. She started to cry.

"There, there," soothed Mrs. P. "It'll be all right." She took the cup from Deb and set it on the coffee table.

"I know he's a zombie now," said Deb, sniffing. Mrs. P produced a white handkerchief, which Deb gratefully accepted. "But I loved him once. I'm responsible for him."

Foreboding tickled Maggie's gut. She sat up and stared at Deb. "It's bigger than that, isn't it? Phil was attached to you. It would take something really powerful to pull him away."

Deb nodded. "I sense something evil. Really evil. Once I return to a steady emotional center, I can do some psychic delving."

Steady emotional center? Maggie rarely had time to think about her emotions, much less how she might iron out the kinks in her own psyche. "Deb, is there anything you can tell us right now? We might not have time for psychic delving."

"Well," said Deb, her voice edged with sarcasm, "I bet it has something to do with the demon dude hiding in Heaven. Maybe you should ask him."

"Demon dude..." said Sarah, her gaze turned to Maggie.

"In Heaven?" finished Mrs. Pottersworth, her stare also taking in Maggie. "Are we talking about Abatu, dear?"

"That was a secret," Maggie hissed, avoiding everyone's looks of censure. "Isn't there some sort of confidentiality code for necromancers?"

Deb's smile was edged with malicious pleasure. "Nope."

"Abatu is hiding in Heaven," murmured Mrs. P. "He has those hideous vials that can kill immortal creatures."

"If Abatu had laid a hand on anyone in the golden realm, we would know." At least Maggie hoped she would know. With Meelena dead and her secret revealed, Maggie wasn't the only one after Abatu or the child still bound within the crystal. The child would remain hidden—at least until Abatu was dead.

"You weren't going to tell us," accused Sarah. "Just like I thought! Go off and save the day like you're the only who can."

"I am the only one who can."

"Now, dear, we all have our strengths."

Deb peered at her strangely. "I haven't been able to figure out your aura."

"I'm an elf, darling."

"I've met elves," said Deb in an offended voice. "You're more like a—"

"Time enough for that later," said Mrs. P rising from the couch. "We must go talk to Raphael and Eltar and make a plan."

A group effort. Argh! Maggie's insides started to churn. If only *she* went—if only her life was at risk—then she wouldn't be worried about her friends. Sarah had found love again with Eltar and they had a baby. Mrs. P was like the grandmother she'd never known. And Rafe—he was her one, truest love. She would die for him.

"Abatu is my problem."

"You are so stubborn!" yelled Sarah.

"She's scared," countered Deb. "She feels responsible for you all. What you call stubborn is really just...love."

"Oh, gawd," moaned Maggie as she slapped her forehead. "Necromancers really don't know how to keep their mouths shut."

## Chapter Sixteen

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*Trying to be sneaky around people who also know how to be sneaky really sucks. Being around friends who think they know what's best for me doesn't inspire the warm fuzzies. I'm not on solid ground anymore. Fear and love erupt together, warring with each other, and shake me to the core.*

*Deb talks about an emotional center. I don't have one. I'm too scared to look inside and find it. I already know I'm fucked up.*

*But unlike most people's, my demons are real.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Everyone, including Deb, hung out in the kitchen while Mrs. P made tea and plated blueberry scones and chocolate-chip cookies. Eltar and Sarah left to put Margie to bed, so everyone retired to the library and tucked in for a planning session. Everyone...except Rafe.

Maggie sat down at the kitchen table in the chair next to his. "I have a confession."

"You chose a red wedding gown?"

"No," she said. "But that's a great idea."

She leaned forward and took his hands. "Deb isn't a wedding planner. She's a necromancer. I hired her to contact my father."

"You asked him to help you destroy Abatu."

"No. My mother showed up instead. He said Abatu sucked my father's soul into a prism and was holding him prisoner. She said...she said Abatu is hiding in Heaven."

Rafe looked thoughtful. At least he didn't look pissed off. Relief cascaded through her. *See, she told her guilty conscience, he's handling this just fine.*

"You don't trust me."

The accusation was low, soft, and deadly.

She flinched and pulled away her hands. "I love you."

"I know." Rafe didn't try to hold her hand again, but his gaze never left hers. "We're a team, Maggie. We should trust each other."

"I don't want you to get hurt. I've already lost you once. I've already lost everybody." She couldn't stop the tears. She brushed them away, furious with her lack of control.

"I understand, Maggie. You're scared. You've lived with fear and loneliness and pain for so long, you don't know what to do with emotions like love and joy. You don't know how to let someone else in – how to rely on someone else."

"It's too fucking hard."

"Is it?"

She nodded. She wanted him to understand. She wanted him to forgive her. He offered no penance. He simply stood up and, disappointment and hurt lurking in his gaze, delivered the final blow. "You're selfish, Maggie. And you're a coward."

His words stabbed at her. The tears started again and she didn't bother to wipe them away. Let him see her pain, her weakness. He didn't give a shit about her feelings.

"How can you say that to me? After all I've done for you and for us?"

"I love you, Maggie. I loved you before you even knew my name. I know that you would die for me. I think that would be the easier thing for you to do, if you were given a choice between dying for me or trusting me."

"Isn't it all the same?" she asked. "What more can I give you?"

"If you can't find the courage to give me yourself, heart and soul, mind and body, then what do we have but empty promises and dreams with no chance of coming true?"

"I'm not a dream, damn it! I'm real. All this talk about hearts and souls and minds...it's all bullshit! God, Rafe, you're hurting me."

"I'm telling you the truth. All or nothing, Maggie." He looked at her and she saw the determination in his eyes. He really meant it. Either she gave him everything—including her trust—or they were finished.

He kissed her on the forehead and walked out of the kitchen. Maggie took a few moments to get herself together. Holy fuck, he was a sanctimonious bastard. Anger and fear and pain twisted up her insides. She wanted to scream and to cry and to beat the hell outta something.

After a few moments of deep breathing, she got her roiling emotions under control. She pushed every single recrimination and guilt-filled thought deeper and deeper until she didn't feel their stings. She willed herself to feel numb. To feel *nothing*.

She had one thing to do. Kill Abatu. The rest of the world, and everyone in it, could go straight to hell after that.

\* \* \* \* \*

Getting into Hell took either being a condemned soul or a demon. Humans and other immortal beings could hitch rides with demons, but most didn't because really, who wants to go to Hell?

Transport to the Otherworld, the world between worlds, was a little easier. You got a god/goddess-blessed token and found a portal, you hitched a ride with a resident, or

you asked for an assignment there. Neutral beings populated the Otherworld—creatures who took neither the side of good or of evil. However, the balance between good and evil was supposedly guided by the Otherworld High Council.

Meelena, who'd been a revered High Priestess and long-time Council member, had slept with Abatu, then a minor king in Hell, and borne his twins. When her indiscretion had been revealed, it turned out to be the cherry topping a corruption sundae. The Council had been taking half-breeds of all kinds, in particular children of humans and demons, and indenturing them. Raphael had been such a case.

The Council had been building its own power base. Rather than pay attention to keeping the balance between darkness and light, greed and gluttony had infiltrated their ranks. By the time they had figured out that Abatu had used their lack of vigilance to begin his own bid for power, not just for his plane of existence but for every plane, they were too late to stop him.

And Meelena, by bearing his children, had given him the keys to ruling over all. The blood of a child born of pure good and of pure evil could kill immortals.

As Maggie and Raphael relayed this history to the people sitting in the library, she had one thought—being right didn't mean you were going to win. If life were about truth and justice, then right and good would always conquer wrong and evil.

The balance worked both ways—too much good could spoil people into laziness, into ungratefulness, into complacency. Too much evil could kill the spirit of hope, of working hard, of trying despite the odds.

But Maggie knew even as her friends plotted about how to get into Heaven and track down Abatu that they had no guarantee of winning. If she went alone, she would risk only herself. If she died, they still had a plan. They still had Auren, who was also a child of Abatu.

*They don't need me to succeed.*

*And I don't need them to fail.*

Raphael was pleasant to her. He treated her like he treated everyone else, but Maggie still felt the wall between them. The wall that *he* had erected. He knew her, heart and soul. Knew what she was capable of and he still wanted more than she could give him. She had never asked him to be any different or to be any better. That he could create such terrible expectations and call them *love* wasn't fair. He wanted all. But he would get nothing.

As the conversation drifted from saving the world to the more mundane topics, Maggie stood up. "Gotta go to the potty. Be right back."

"I'll go with you," said Deb.

"Uh, one per customer, honey."

"You only have one bathroom?"

Rafe laughed. "We have several."

"Yeah," said Maggie. "C'mon."

Deb stepped out the door and Maggie shut it behind her. "Go down the hallway, third door on your left."

"What are you doing?"

Maggie looked at Deb. "I told you. I'm taking a piss."

"But your aura —"

Maggie punched Deb hard in the jaw. She caught the little darling and dragged her into the bathroom. She put her into the bathtub and grimaced at the swelling on Deb's cheek. "I don't have time for your fucking questions. Sweet dreams, princess." She frowned. "And, y'know, sorry about popping you one."

She shut the shower curtain and left the light on. Then she shut the door. Crouching to the floor, she took a silver piece of chalk made from fairy dust, demon scales, and ground angel feathers. She drew a binding symbol on the floor then pricked her finger and allowed one drop of blood to lock the spell.

Then she hurried down the hall and made a larger binding symbol on the floor outside the door of the library. She whispered words to strengthen this spell, then again, pricked her finger and allowed three drops to fall within the circle. Once again, the spell was locked.

The spells were timed. If her friends couldn't figure out how to break her spellwork, it would release them in an hour's time. As she stood up, she heard Sarah say, "The baby's fussing."

Shit. Sarah had that fancy baby monitor. The PDA-like device had audio and video. Any minute now, she would try to leave the room. Maggie hurried to the nursery. She took out a vial from her belt, unplugged the stopper, and waited precious seconds as a gray mist emitted. Soon, the entire room was filled with the harmless fog and she crept to the crib and scooped up Margie. She grabbed a blanket, a toy, and a half-full bottle. Then she hurried to the bathroom. She unlocked the spell and stepped through the door.

Deb was sitting in the bathtub, cradling her jaw. "That hurt! Why did you hit me?"

"Take her."

"What? Why?"

"Take the baby!" Maggie leaned down and handed Margie and her things to a very reluctant Deb.

"What are you doing, Maggie?"

"What I have to do to protect those I love." She looked at Margie and smiled.

"If you don't let us help you," warned Deb, "you will die."

"I know. But I'll take Abatu with me. Then everyone will be safe."

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard."

Maggie let the insult slide. "You're a good kid. I wish you all the best and I really hope you find a new boyfriend."

She turned around and slammed the door, re-initiated the spell, and grimaced. The sounds filtering from the library were pure pissed-off. She was sorry to worry Sarah and Eltar, sorry that she was disappointing Mrs. P, and really damned sorry Raphael couldn't love her just like she was – flaws and all.

He said all or nothing.

So, he was getting nothing.

Maggie pushed aside the regrets. She had one mission, one goal, one desire. Kill Abatu. She didn't much care what happened after that.

At least, that's what she told herself.

Maggie hurried into the bedroom and dressed herself in her battle gear. As time ticked away, she risked a trip to the lab, where she filled up a bag with everything that would fit, from holy water globes to dragonfire bullets. She didn't know what it would take to slow down Abatu, but she'd throw everything she could at him. She also took plenty of the new prisms, including the one Rafe had made especially for Abatu.

Maggie looked around the laboratory and sighed. She'd probably never see this place again. Her guts clenched in foreboding. Was Deb right? Was she going to die? This was the last battle. And goddamn it, she was going to win.

She tore out a page from an old spellbook and grabbed a red marker. She scribbled, "I love you, Rafe. Forever and always."

Staring at the message, she kissed the tips of her fingers and pressed them against the page. "I'm sorry it wasn't enough. I'm sorry *I* wasn't enough."

Maggie didn't have it in her to write notes to the others. Rafe had called her a coward. It surprised to her to realize that he'd been right. She'd been too scared to embrace her relationships, to figure out how to be happy. She was bitter. Too damned bitter.

Maggie heaved the bag over her shoulder and left the lab. When she got to the elevator, she created another locking symbol. This one was much stronger than the others. It could not be unlocked and it was not time-released. As clever and smart as her friends were, she was sure they'd figure a way out. But not before she'd found Abatu and destroyed him.

She removed the precious vial of blood that she'd stolen from Abatu's safekeeping. Carefully she unstopped it and allowed three drops to fall. The symbol glowed red.

Maggie took the elevator to the mansion. She repeated the symbol in front of the elevator, and took a moment to create it on the porch before the front door. The three symbols locked with each other and soon, a red glow encompassed the whole house.

Everyone inside was now officially trapped.

They would be really pissed off, but they would be safe. They couldn't get out. And no one could get in.

Maggie took one last look at the house then turned away. Earlier in the day, she had stashed her motorcycle in the bushes near the gate. Before she got into Heaven, she

needed a token and a portal location. There was only one way to get either of those objects.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What has she done?" yelled Raphael. His fists were raw from banging on the library door. There was no other way out. Maggie had trapped them inside so she could go after Abatu.

"What have you done?" asked Mrs. Pottersworth. She was pouring tea for what seemed like the thousandth time that evening.

"What are you talking about? I haven't done anything."

"I have elf ears, dearie." Mrs. P's gaze ensnared his. "I heard your conversation."

"That was private."

Mrs. P shrugged, obviously unrepentant for eavesdropping.

Rafe threw himself into his chair, frustration and fury pulsing through him. He looked at Eltar, who held a sobbing Sarah in his lap. "She wouldn't do anything to Margie," he said. "Maggie would never hurt her."

Sarah looked at him, her puffy eyes filled with worry and anger. "If even one horn on my baby's head is nicked, I'm going to kill Maggie myself."

She lay on Eltar's chest, accepting his tight hug and his low words of comfort. Rafe looked away and caught the sharp-eyed gaze of Auren, who had assumed a human form to help with the planning session. He wasn't sure if her eyes held condemnation or concern. Truthfully, he preferred her as a kitten.

"Rafe, I'm about to give you some unwanted advice," said Mrs. P. "I know that you're hurt Maggie didn't confide in you about hiring Deb."

"I'm a little more hurt that she never admitted she stole one of the vials from Abatu."

Mrs. P nodded. "Yes, I thought as much, too."

Rafe slammed his fist against the arm of the chair. "I've given her every opportunity to tell me the truth."

"Maggie is operating the only way she knows how. You cannot expect her to be somebody different or better or more because you think she should be. Either you love her the way she is or you don't."

He heard his "all or nothing" ultimatum echo in Mrs. P's words. He had been patient with Maggie, waiting for the day she realized she could trust him. Then he realized she wasn't going to trust him—or anyone—unless forced to face the truth about herself and her decisions.

"I don't expect her to be different," he stubbornly insisted. "I expect her to trust me."

"Why?"



"Because I love her. Because she's going to be my wife. Because I goddamned deserve it!"

"Maggie trusts you," said Mrs. P. "But she doesn't trust herself. She's afraid of losing you. Of losing everyone who is in her life. She doesn't know how to lean on someone completely because every time she does, that person is taken from her."

"I understand that," said Rafe. At least, he believed he understood Maggie's nature. He was beginning to see Mrs. P's rather sharp point.

"Has she ever asked you for anything?"

Rafe didn't answer. Guilt burned away his anger. Maggie had never asked him for a damned thing. She had given everything she knew how to give and he had asked for more. Was that the demon in him? Pushing and prodding until he broke her? He hated the idea that he might've hurt Maggie because he couldn't control his demon side.

"What's the advice?" he asked gruffly.

"Apologize," said Mrs. P. "Beg her forgiveness and if you do love her, Rafe, don't ever give her another ultimatum."

He nodded, unable to articulate his swirling thoughts. Tonight Maggie had taken a step toward him and he'd pushed her away. She had told him about Deb and had he given her more time, more love, she might've walked the rest of the way.

What had he done?

"It's probably too late," said Auren, her voice thin with censure. "She'd rather die alone than see anyone else she loves murdered by my father."

"It's not her decision," said Eltar. "She has taken away our choices so that she might have her own way."

"Love and fear makes us act strangely," said Mrs. P. "Ah. There we go."

There was a distinct pop as the magic holding them there released. The library door swung open. Deb stood on the other side holding a sleeping Margie. The left side of her face left no doubt how Maggie had disabled her.

"Well?" she asked. "Are we going after Maggie or not?"

## Chapter Seventeen

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*How do you say goodbye? Maybe it's better not to say anything. Is it cruel to leave someone with no words? Given the opportunity, those left behind can create better and more tender parting scenarios. Like the orphaned child who dreams of rich and beautiful parents, a mourning soul can think up lovely things that could've been said or done.*

*"If she'd had the time," he'd say, "she would've kissed me tenderly and told me how much she loved me. Yes, that's how it would go."*

*Better that, I think, than a scribbled note and an abandoned ring. I'm pissed off at myself for breaking my own rules. I lied to others and to myself. I made promises I didn't keep. I fell in love without knowing my own boundaries. I hurt Rafe. And he hurt me.*

*We all have our faults, our weaknesses. Sometimes, they overshadow our good qualities. Maybe hatred drove me to abandon the ones I loved to go after the one I hate. Yes, I want revenge. Saving the world is a very distant third on my list of reasons to pursue Abatu.*

*I am not sorry that I'm going after that demon bastard. I will not be sorry if I lose my life in the attempt. Don't get me wrong, I have regrets...but killing Abatu will never be one of them.*

\* \* \* \* \*

The club's name was Midnight, at least in this century. For as long as there'd been a city, Celeste Duvall had offered a neutral play place for any creature. So long as demon, angel, vampire, werewolf, human or half-breed stepped foot on her property, all agreed to no battles or bloodshed.

Creatures were allowed to indulge in any sinful or saintly pleasure. Celeste had no truck with wrong or with right. Celeste was a neutral, a former resident of the Otherworld, who found Earth amusing and exciting.

Celeste loved two things—money and sex. Anything expensive and shiny drew her interest, whether it was jewelry or walked on two—or more—legs. In fact, as Maggie was allowed entrance into Celeste's inner domain, she got to witness the stacked blonde getting fucked by two men. She was chained to the ceiling, one man entering her anally and the other thrusting his impressive member into her pussy. Sulfur twined with the smells of incense and raw sex.

Incubus times two. Oh, for the love of— Maggie sighed and crossed her arms, impatient. "I'll wait outside."

"I like it better with someone to watch," gasped Celeste. The lover so joyously fucking her ass grabbed her breasts and plucked at her nipples. Celeste moaned loudly.

The incubus in front of Celeste kissed her with enthusiasm. From Maggie's perspective, he appeared to be trying to choke the woman with his tongue. She broke away, her expression turning rapturous. "Yes!" she screamed. "Yes!"

As Celeste orgasmed, the two men allowed themselves the same indulgence. Maggie sat on the black divan and picked up one of Celeste's magazines. It was the new edition of *Cosmo*. She flipped through the pages, not really interested in the information. But it was better than watching the threesome try to extract from each other and get cleaned up.

Finally, Celeste, in a robe *thank the Goddess*, dropped beside Maggie and lit up a clove cigarette. "Well, well, well...to what do I owe the honor? You haven't been to the club in a while."

"I've been busy."

"So, I've heard. That Raphael is yummy."

"He asked me to marry him."

Celeste's arched brows rose. "Did he? That's fabulous. When's the wedding?"

"I'll let you know," said Maggie. *It'll be on the twelfth of fucking never*. "I need a token to Heaven and a portal location."

"You don't ask for much." Celeste blew out a stream of fragrant smoke. "What's in it for me?"

"Money."

"I have money. Lots of it. What else can you offer?"

"Five prisms and gun that shoots dragonfire bullets."

"I'm not interested in holding cells for demons. And I know several dragons who'd be more than happy to give me their fire." Celeste's blue eyes held amusement. Maggie had forgotten how much the woman liked to negotiate.

"I don't have time for this shit," said Maggie. She plucked off the ring with its glittering demon sapphire and handed it to Celeste. "Demonfire jewel. I know you don't have one of these."

"It's gorgeous!" Celeste stubbed out her cigarette in a glass ashtray and took the ring. "Demons rarely make such gems. They have to put a lot of effort, not to mention something of themselves into the stone. What do you think he added to yours?"

*His heart*. She was sure he took a piece of his own heart to craft the ring. And now, she was trading it to this bitch for the chance at vengeance. Instead of answering Celeste's question, she merely shrugged.

The blonde looked at Maggie, her perfect lips pulling into a frown. "This is your engagement ring."

"Do we have a bargain?"

"You're a fool to give up his ring, darling. Demons, half-breeds or not, do not lightly forgive disrespect of their gifts."

Maggie resisted the urge to scream. Instead, she sucked in a steadying breath. *"Do we have a deal?"*

Celeste considered her for an ungodly amount of time. Then she nodded. "It's your choice." She rose from the divan and looked at Maggie. "Such choices can be a real bitch."

"Tell me about it."

\* \* \* \* \*

"She used blood from the vial," said Auren. "If it had been her blood, I could probably unlock it."

"That's a helluva spell," agreed Mrs. P. "It might take a while, but it can be broken."

"We don't have time," said Raphael as he stood up.

Sarah was tending to Margie, but the rest of them had convened at the elevator. Actually, they had chased Rafe to the elevator. The magic of the symbol threw up a wall every time someone tried to cross it.

"If I know Maggie, she's put other symbols on the upper floors." Rafe studied the symbol again. "She's too damned smart."

"We can't get through, no matter how we shape-shift," said Auren. "She covered all forms."

"No, she didn't," said Mrs. Pottersworth.

Everyone looked at Mrs. P.

"I'm not really an elf," she admitted with a smile. "I'm a dragon."

\* \* \* \* \*

Maggie made one more stop before heading toward the location given to her by Celeste.

The portal was in a graveyard on the other side of town. Maggie felt time ticking away second by second. Worried that her friends might already be searching for her, she knew she had to get into Heaven before they found her.

Unlike the cemetery where her parents were buried, this one was large, well-kept, and offered the impression of a lovingly tended park. She hurried toward the small chapel. Inside it were the crypts and in one, was a walkway into the highest realm any creature could obtain. Well, most creatures. Some beings, by either their born natures or unrepentant natures, would never reach the domain of the God and the Goddess.

How Abatu had squirmed into the pearly gates was still a mystery to her.

The chapel was low-lit and very quiet. Maggie's boot heels rang on the marble floor as she walked quickly to the correct crypt.

In curling script was a quote from the book of Mark: *"There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."*

"Yeah," said Maggie as she fit the token into the circle beneath the words, "but I bet you didn't count on a demon being the one in power."

The token clicked into the slot. Maggie felt a hum of energy then a bright light encompassed her.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Ah," said the statuesque blonde. "The ex-fiancé."

Behind the glossy black desk, she sat in a huge leather chair with her bare feet propped on the glass top. She was dressed in a silk robe, uncaring about the amount of cleavage showing or that the material threatened to reveal if she was a real blonde.

"Ex-fiancé?" Raphael felt his heart drop to his toes.

"Traded me your beautiful ring," she said. She held up her right hand and he saw the purple glow of the demonfire gem. His guts clenched. Even though he had given Maggie an ultimatum, he had believed they would work out their relationship. Obviously, she had no qualms about using the symbol of his love as bargaining chip. Maggie had abandoned him.

"What did she get in return?" he asked.

"I'm Celeste," said the woman, ignoring his question. "And you are the yummy Raphael."

"I know who I am. And I don't care who you are. Where the hell is Maggie?"

She laughed. "I'm a neutral being, Raphael. I do not give aid to either side. However, I am a woman who loves her comforts. I'm amicable to a trade."

"You'll give me information, if I give you something you want."

"The demonfire led you here, didn't it? What part of yourself did you add to it?"

Raphael grimaced.

"Maybe you attached strings to it—the same way you attached strings to your love. You made her feel like she didn't deserve you."

"How the hell could you know that?"

"Perhaps she told me," said Celeste as she slid her legs off the desk and gracefully rose from her chair. "Weeping and repentant, she sought out my comfort and advice. And I told her no man who would tell her what you did deserved another second of her consideration."

"Liar." Raphael watched Celeste slink around the desk. "Maggie doesn't cry. She chose vengeance over love and killing Abatu over trusting me."

"Really?" Celeste stood in front of him, her blue eyes raking his body. "Is that what she said?"

"It's what she did."

"You two have such communication problems." Celeste tugged on the sash of her robe and the material parted to reveal her lush body. "Ask me what I want, demon."

"I don't need your help. I know where she went."

"But you don't have a token, do you? And you don't know which portal she used. And you don't have your beautiful ring, either."

Raphael gritted his teeth. Finally, he said in a low voice, "What do you want?"

"You."

"No."

Celeste peered at him. "What else do you have to offer? Don't bother with prisms or paranormal weapons. Maggie tried that route, too."

Raphael was silent. He had nothing else to offer her and she knew it. As a demon and an indentured servant to the High Council he had done much worse than using his body to get what he wanted. The longer he tried to bargain, the longer it would take to get to Maggie.

"I want a Heaven token, a portal location and the ring."

"Hmm. That's a lot of wants. What do I get?"

"I'll take any form and you get one sexual act."

"Two sexual acts." Celeste's blue eyes went molten with lust. "First, you will eat my pussy. Second, you will fuck me with your cock. And you will make me come both times."

"And the form?"

"I want your demon form."

"Fine," said Raphael. "The bargain is made."

Celeste let her robe drop off her slim shoulders. Rafe turned into his demon form, incinerating his clothes in the process. He dropped to his knees as Celeste leaned against the desk and spread her legs.

He parted her labia and ran his tongue on tender flesh, flicking her clit before sliding down to encircle her entrance. Celeste obviously loved sex—she immediately got wet and squirmy.

"Mmm," she moaned. "That's right, baby. Ooooooh."

Rafe pretended that he liked what he was doing. How many times had he engaged in a sexual act because it had been his job? He thought that when Maggie had broken his bond to the High Council, he would never again have to offer himself as a prize.

Yet, here he was, giving in to the salacious demands of another Otherworlder who sought only to assuage her own needs. She didn't care about him or Maggie or the world.

"Slow down, big boy," she murmured as Rafe sought out her clit. "You are good. Too good."

He ignored the directive. As a demon, he was only required to meet the terms of their bargain. Time had not been a consideration in her request.

"Oh! Oh!" Celeste grabbed his skull and tried to move his face away from her pussy. "Not yet, damn it!"

As her fingers uselessly pushed on his firm, gray skin, he redoubled his efforts.

She shattered. Her scream could've been anger or joy...he didn't much care. Rafe climbed to his feet and lifted her to the desk.

Celeste looked both dazed and furious. "I told you to take it slow!"

He positioned her ass close to the edge and fitted his cock inside her. Her arms wound around his neck as he began thrusting.

"I can last all night," she purred. "I can make myself wait and wait."

Rafe smiled. Celeste had no power over her own body. When she'd made her demands, she had given him control of her pleasure. While he fucked her, he morphed two thin extensions from his cock. One wound around her clit and the other flattened and curled just under her entrance to pound at her G-spot.

Within moments, Celeste went over the edge. Her pussy sucked at him as her fists flailed against his back. "Goddamn it!"

"You don't sound pleased." Rafe withdrew from her and stepped away. He morphed into his human form, clothes and all. "The bargain is met."

"It could've been enjoyable for you," she said as she took off the ring and threw it to him. "You could've made it last much longer than ten minutes. And you could've come!"

"You didn't include my enjoyment in the terms of the deal," said Rafe, his tone flat.

"I get it. I'm just a means to an end," she said. She rounded the desk, opened a drawer, and withdrew the gold coin. "You sure do know how to make a girl feel special."

"I would do anything for Maggie."

"With the exception of loving her without stipulations." She tossed him the coin, her lips curved into a mean smile. "Memorial Park Cemetery. It's east of town. Go to the Rose Crypt and seek out the center tomb on the right wall."

Rafe flamed out of the room and reappeared in the alley next to the club. Eltar, Auren, Mrs. P, and Deb waited for him.

"What took so long?" asked Auren.

"She wanted to bargain with me," said Rafe. "I have what we need. We need to go Memorial Park Cemetery."

"Better back up, dearies," said Mrs. P.

Having watched the woman transform into a dragon when she busted out of the mansion, everyone hastily backed up.

In one instant, Mrs. P was a sweet grandmotherly elf and in the next, she was a dragon—a very, very large black, scaly, fearsome dragon.

Everyone climbed onto her back and held on as she rose into the night sky and flew toward the Memorial Park Cemetery.

"What's going on?" asked Auren as the dragon landed on the wide road that cut through the cemetery.

Shuffling corpses were headed toward the main street. Next to them were at least forty bodies in various positions of getting out of their graves. More scrabbling, scratching and creaking noises resounded throughout the grounds.

"Zombies," said Deb. "Someone's calling them."

"Why?" asked Eltar. "They can't really do all that much."

"Distraction, maybe. Keep the humans busy until the demon hordes arrive," said Raphael. "Abatu is making his move."

"I'll stay here and try to minimize the zombie problem," said Deb.

"I will accompany you," offered Eltar.

"Me, too," said the gravelly voice of Mrs. P. "A dragon may come in handy."

"I'm going with you," said Auren to Rafe. "I can't do shit about zombies, but I may be able to help Maggie."

"Let's go," said Rafe.

They took off toward the Rose Crypt. *Please*, prayed Rafe to whatever deity might be listening, *let us get there in time*.

\* \* \* \* \*

As Maggie walked the streets of Heaven, she realized what an irony it was to be alive in a place meant for the dead. It was beautiful here. The grass was green, the flowers beautiful and plentiful, and the trees offered picnic shade.

The buildings were low and flat and white. Everything was clean and perfect, even the blue, cloudless sky. The weather was perfect, too.

Yet, everywhere she had gone felt wrong and empty. She hadn't run into a single human soul or an angel or even a demi-god.

Where was everyone?

"Abatu!" she yelled. "Get your sorry ass out here!"

No answer.

Had he already conquered Heaven? Had he started his attack on Earth? Her heart beat in dread. She dropped the bag with her weapons. From a small satchel attached to her belt, she removed an oval-shaped crystal.

"I have your daughter!" she yelled. "C'mon, Abatu!"

"You really must want to die," said a silky voice.

Maggie whirled around. Abatu had chosen his demon form—he was seven feet tall, sported red skin and red eyes, two thick horns jutted from his bald head and his long,



whip-like tail flicked behind him. Red fur coated him from his waist to his black, cloven hooves. He looked every inch like the Hollywood-version of Satan.

Fear chilled her, but she'd come too far and sacrificed too much to chicken out. She held up the crystal and said, "You want her? Come and get her!"

## Chapter Eighteen

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

*"Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned, forgive, and ye shall be forgiven."*

~ 1 John 4:18

*"If sweet, sweet God loves you so, then I will make you worthy of His love. But it's only in the face of horror that you truly find your noble self, and you can be so noble. So...I will bring you pain, I will bring you horror."*

~ Gabriel in Constantine (Warner Bros. 2005)

\* \* \* \* \*

Abatu wasted no time in attacking Maggie. The red lightning emitted from his hand. She dove out of the way, but the bolt razed her left arm, singeing her demon-proof suit and burning her skin.

"Shit!" Holding on to the crystal for dear life, she darted away, looking for shelter. She ran to the nearest building, only to find the door locked. Doors locked in Heaven? What the fuck!

"Heaven's on lockdown," said Abatu as he trailed after, apparently in no hurry. "Ever since I revealed my presence, everyone shit their collective pants and ran away."

"Aw. Did they hurt your feelings?"

Abatu laughed. "Of all my heirs, Maggie, you're the one I hate the most. You don't know how to show respect to your elders."

"I don't respect you," she called over her shoulder. She was hauling ass up a gentle sloping hill. *What are you doing, moron?* Running away was stupid. Abatu would catch her eventually. At the top of the hill, she stopped. Her body shook violently as she removed the precious vial of blood from her weapons' belt. She managed to unstop it.

She held it at the ready as she turned around.

Abatu strolled up the hill. He grinned, his white jagged teeth a sharp relief against his red lips. In the blink of an eye, he appeared next to her.

"Give me the crystal."

"No." With the opened vial clenched in her fist, she threw the blood at Abatu. In her other hand, the crystal burned her palm. Pain radiated down her arm.

He disappeared.

As horror pulsed through her, Maggie watched the blood speckle the grass. The green blades died instantly. Damn it!

Abatu reappeared on the other side of her. "You're not a threat to me, Maggie." He raised his arms as if to encompass the whole of Heaven. "The God and the Goddess have abandoned their own domain in fear of me. You are nothing but a buzzing fly...one that I need only to swat."

Maggie felt an immense pressure in her skull. Pain slammed into her mind and drove her to her knees.

"Give me the crystal."

She shook her head, but of its own accord, her arm rose up to offer up the sleeping child of Abatu.

The demon pried it out of her hand.

Maggie was forced to the ground, her face pressed against the earth. She could smell the essence of roses planted just a few feet away. She could feel the dirt grinding against her cheek. She could hear the faraway call of her name.

"You have given me the world," he said as he cupped his prize. "With the blood of my child, I shall—"

The invisible hand crushing the life out of her eased enough for her to look up. She stared at Abatu, but she was in too much pain to enjoy his shock.

"What have you done?" he roared. His hands smoked then flamed. As the acrid smell of burning flesh scarred the air of Heaven, Abatu's hands turned to ash. The crystal fell to the soft earth.

The magical fire raced up his arms.

"No!" he screamed. "No!"

Maggie couldn't form words. Though her vision was no longer graying and she could breathe again, she wasn't yet capable of speech. But she was capable of tears and those fell freely as she watched the fire engulf Abatu's torso and legs.

A smile pulled on her lips as she watched her family's enemy turn to dust. But Abatu had not left this realm yet. His eyes glowed red and Maggie realized she wasn't going to live after all.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rafe and Auren ran down the clean-swept street toward the two people on the hilltop. Maggie was on all fours, one hand outstretched toward the disintegrating Abatu.

"Maggie!" Rafe screamed. "Maggie!"

Twin red beams emitted from Abatu and struck Maggie.

"No!" cried Rafe as he watched Maggie collapse.

Ten seconds later, they reached the hilltop. Abatu's corporeal form was nothing but ash, which was carelessly tossed away by the gentle breeze. As Rafe dragged Maggie into his arms, Auren sifted through the ash.

"She did it," murmured Auren. "He's gone."

"Maggie? Baby?" Rafe tapped her cheek, but she was limp and unresponsive. He put an ear to her chest and heard no heartbeat. She wasn't breathing. Her body smelled charred and her torso had taken most of the damage. The demon-proof suit had not withstood Abatu's final, brutal attack.

"Ow!" Auren dropped the crystal she had found among the ashes. "It's hot. It's got...oh crap. She put the poisoned blood onto the crystal holding Abatu's daughter." She looked at Rafe. "She knew he'd take the stone."

Her gaze swept Maggie's damaged palm. "It must've hurt like hell to hold it while she waited for him to take the bait."

Rafe barely heard her. Grief slammed into him. "She's gone, Auren."

"No," she said softly, her voice breaking, "she can't be gone. She's...she's invincible."

"Do not worry, my child," said a lyrical female voice. "She is merely sleeping."

He raised his eyes to two figures surrounded by light so bright, their forms were merely golden outlines. Auren's mouth dropped open and she knelt before the God and the Goddess.

"Rise, daughter," said the God. "You are welcome here."

"I am but a demon," said Auren.

"It is true you were born a demon," said the Goddess, "but your choices reveal your true self. You have entered Heaven to save your sister. You have chosen an act of love."

Auren nodded.

The Goddess stretched out her hands. "Rise, Maggie."

To Rafe's shock, Maggie's eyes fluttered open. All her wounds healed instantly. She sat up, dazed, and turned to look at Rafe. She threw her arms around him and hugged him tightly.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm so sorry. I love you. I don't care about anything else, Maggie. We'll work it out, I swear it."

"I gave your ring away," she sobbed. "I loved that ring and I gave it away!"

The God and the Goddess laughed. "Do not torture her, Raphael."

He grinned, pulling the ring out of his pocket and putting it on Maggie's finger once again. "I got it back."

She cried harder, obviously not caring about showing weakness or acting like a bad-ass. Rafe wiped away her tears while ignoring his own.

"The balance is restored," said the God.

"Where were you?" accused Maggie. "You think one human with a little demon blood can save the world?"

"One did," He answered. "Abatu is no more. Your father has been released from his prison and he walks in Heaven again."

Rafe heard Maggie's gasp as a tall gentleman with black hair, kind eyes and an easy smile ascended the hill. Maggie stood up and embraced her father.

"You did well, Maggie my girl," he said. "I love you."

Maggie released her father. "Daddy, this is Rafe. He's...ah, my fiancé."

Abraham Mortis shook Rafe's hand. "Congratulations. I would tell you to take care of her, but..."

"I know, sir. She can take care of herself. How about if I agree to just love her for all time?"

Abraham nodded. "That'll do."

"And now, for one more task," said the Goddess.

The crystal that held Abatu's twin daughter floated from the ground to the Goddess's hands. "There is another choice. Destroy the one who might one day destroy the world or..."

"Or what?" asked Maggie.

The Goddess smiled.

\* \* \* \* \*

*One month later...*

In their bedroom, Maggie smoothed the sandalwood oil over Raphael's chest. She palmed his nipples, leaning down to nip his chin. He tried to capture her lips, but she smiled and slid further down his body, rubbing the oil across his stomach and down his thighs.

"I love you," he said, as his hands drifted down her arms.

"I love you, too," she said. Their marriage had not been in Vegas, but in Heaven where the God and the Goddess had blessed their union. You couldn't get any more sanctified than *that*. And both her parents had been able to attend.

It had taken days to get all the zombies returned to their graves. Even Phil had returned to his resting place. The demon hordes had barely started rampaging when Abatu died.

Drak, the former high king in Hell, had resumed control of demonkind and reigned in the rebellion. Demons were still assholes who needed ass-kicking, but at least they weren't overrunning the Earth.

The Otherworld problems were not easily solved. The High Council had been disbanded. The so-called neutral beings in charge of keeping the balance were no longer

considered neutral. Even Celeste had felt the pinch of the new rules. Her club had been shut down, lest it create a place where beings from different planes could plot against the balance.

Maggie didn't much care for the Otherworld. Hell sucked, too. But Heaven, now there was a place she'd be happy to hang out for all eternity. The God and the Goddess told her and Rafe that there was more work for them to do. One day, the world would need them again. And they had a very important task to take care of until that time came.

Smiling as happiness entwined with desire, she lubed Rafe's cock and stroked the thick member until Rafe begged for mercy. She cupped his balls, massaging them lightly as her hand continued torturing her husband's cock.

"Maggie," he moaned. "That feels so good."

"I know what will feel better." She rotated so that her ass faced him, and then she placed her knees on either side of his hips. Rafe guided his cock into her slick entrance.

She rose slightly and lifted her hips. The delicious angle bumped her G-spot and sent pre-orgasmic tingles through her. She found a rhythm that tortured them both, panting and moaning as she worked his cock in and out of her.

"Oh, Maggie!" Rafe slapped her ass and the stinging pain shot straight to her pussy.

"Yes, Rafe," she called out. "Yes! Ooooooh!"

Her orgasm quickened as he slapped her ass again. Sweat dripped from her breasts and raced down her neck and back. She could barely get oxygen into her lungs as pleasure curled within her pussy.

"Rafe!" She gasped as the orgasm roared through her. The strength of it pushed Rafe's cock out. She whipped around and sucked him greedily.

He came within seconds, his hot seed hitting the back of her throat as he thrust deeply. His cock pulsed within her mouth as she sucked him dry, licking him down to the balls.

When she was finished, Maggie rose to her knees, and grinned. "Wanna do it again?"

Rafe flipped her and held onto her wrists as he nuzzled her breasts. He sucked on her aching nipples. Maggie moaned as renewed pleasure coasted through her. She wrapped her legs around Rafe and drew him closer.

His cock was already hardening again as he played with her breasts. She arched against him and rubbed her cunt against his cock.

Rafe kept hold of her wrists as he demanded, "Put your legs together."

She did as he asked.

His cock pierced her thighs and found her slick entrance. He pushed inside her and groaned.

He fucked her slowly, his lips plucking at her nipples until he built another fire, one which burned higher and hotter until she came.

As her orgasm sucked at his cock, he let go of her wrists. "Press your tits together."

She pressed her breasts against each other, and Rafe extracted himself from her pussy and moved up until he could fit his cock into the cave formed by her breasts.

He held onto the headboard as he fucked her breasts, which were lubed by her own sweat and come. Maggie heard his sharp intake of breath, then his cock pulsed hotly against her flesh.

His come showered her collarbone and neck in thick, hot spurts.

After a moment, he managed to unclench his hands and roll onto the bed. He used a corner of the sheet to wipe Maggie's neck clean.

Maggie smiled then whispered, "You wanna do it *again*?"

He laughed, but his response was stalled by a distinct cry sounding through the monitor on the nightstand. Rafe reached over and grabbed it. "She's awake."

They put on robes and walked to the nursery next to their room. Now, their underground facility housed a shape-shifting grandmother, a necromancer, a human, a demon, and their baby, and this child.

Their adopted daughter.

"Sssshh," said Rafe as he scooped the fussing infant into his arms. She quieted, looking at him with big, green eyes.

"She's so beautiful," whispered Maggie. She tugged on a tiny fist. "Do you think we did the right thing?"

"Yes," said Rafe. "She deserves a life. She deserves a chance to make her own choices."

Maggie nodded. Love had bloomed suddenly and fully within her for this baby. This little girl was hers and Rafe's and nothing else mattered.

"I'll fix her some demonfire," said Rafe as he handed her to Maggie.

"What are you fussing about? Hmm?" asked Maggie in that silly tone all parents used with their children.

The baby cooed as the distinct odor of poop wafted to Maggie's nostrils. "Ew. That's why your daddy handed you over."

Maggie took her to the changing table and put her down. As she unsnapped the pink sleeper, she looked at her daughter as said, "Now is that any way for an angel to act?"

*The End*

## **About the Author**

Riley Ashford loves to write sensual love stories that explore unusual relationships and supernatural settings. She lives in the Midwest with her family, and enjoys reading, knitting and watching action flicks.

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and e-mail address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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