



StarCrossed 1: Demon Tailz

A Torquere Press Single Shot by Reno MacLeod and Jaye Valentine

Prologue

Famous for the notorious witch trials of 1692, the small seaport town of Salem, Massachusetts had been trying to smudge out the horrible image of murder and injustice for centuries. In a complete turnaround, the town had begun welcoming anyone who was a self-proclaimed witch, and by the early 21st century, one in four Salem residents claimed either to be a witch or to know one.

It hadn't stopped there. The welcoming and nurturing attitude toward special residents hadn't gone unnoticed.

They'd lived undetected for years -- vampires and were-creatures, angels and demons -- stealthily and steadily filtering into the day-to-day lives of the humans. When the secret had finally emerged, it had been to a handful of levelheaded individuals who had recognized the potential

for harmony... *and* chaos. A decision had been made to allow the supernaturals their continued, civilized co-existence, but that the secret must remain confined to Salem alone.

A fragile peace has existed ever since.

Chapter 1

Halloween. Salem. The two went hand in hand. Salem transformed itself each October from a sleepy little town into *the* party of the year for a month-long festival of playful fright and mischief. Ghost tale tours, costumed ballroom dances, and street vendors all cashed in on the not-so-rosy history of the coastal New England town.

It was the night before the big day, and the upscale bar named Tailz was hopping with thirsty guys, gals, and ghouls. The place was full of new faces: some in costume, some come-as-you-are. The locals knew better. When October rolled around, Salem residents typically took to their homes and waited out the maelstrom of tourism, including the supernatural residents.

Jace Barton, on the other hand, thrived on the chaos. The handsome, dark-haired demon loved to be in the thick of the mortal coil. He'd owned Tailz, along with his brother Konnor, for several years now, and business had never been better. At midnight, the bar was packed to the gills, and a rowdy cheer officially welcomed in the holiday. Tailz was in full swing, and Jace barely had time to breathe between pouring drinks. By a quarter to one, most of the visiting party hounds were beginning to trickle out, stumbling back to their hotel rooms to rest so they could do it again later that night.

Cash Rowan had given up for the evening. The tip he'd gotten from a hunter in upstate New York had garnered nothing but a wasted wild goose chase. He'd slept in the car for two nights straight, lurking around the athletic field that concealed the tainted ground of Gallows Hill. He'd had half a mind at one point to say fuck it, to head south to check out the old Lizzie Borden house in nearby Fall River. It had been a long time since he'd taken out a ghost. If the rumors of that place being haunted by old man Borden and his second wife were true, then Cash would be more than happy to help them on their way. He'd seen the old TV movie rebroadcast at least a dozen times; Elizabeth Montgomery had been hot when she was young. Captured in that tacky bronze *Bewitched* statue in mid-town Salem, though? Eh, not so much.

When the apparitions had failed to show at Gallows Hill after two long nights of patient surveillance, Cash had decided to give up on *that* particular hunt. But the hunt that had driven him for the past ten years wouldn't let him leave without doing a little extra nosing around first. He'd gotten a room at a small bed and breakfast, showered and changed his clothes.

A brief chat with the innkeeper had led him to this place. Cash held open the door as a long line of costumed, happily inebriated folk paraded out onto the street. He kept trying to get in, but they kept coming out. One even tipped him like he was the goddamn doorman. When a break in the procession finally materialized, Cash hurriedly slipped into the bar called Tailz. According to the innkeeper, that was his best chance for finding a demon in these parts.

With closing time rapidly approaching, Jace could finally take a breather, and he strolled over to

the jukebox to play something to his liking. He'd had a whole night of Pussycat Dolls and Jonas Brothers, and while he wouldn't have minded sinking his claws into the latter, their music made the demon's stomach churn worse than a jigger of holy water. He punched in F-8, and the strains of *Darkness, Darkness* by the Youngbloods began to fill the room.

He was surprised to hear a man's voice singing low, as if under his breath. "Keep my mind from constant turning, toward the things I cannot see now." Jace turned around and watched as the man stepped up to the bar, pulled out a stool and slid onto the seat. With fingers laced together on the shiny, polished bar top, the man's thumbs tapped on the wood in time to the beat. He looked up, as if to see who'd played the song. "Good tune, man. Haven't heard that one in a while."

"It's a personal favorite of mine," Jace said. He hadn't heard the new guy come in, and he wasn't prepared for the devilish good looks he was now presented with. Short brown hair a little spiky on top, slim build, and a killer smile. Jace unconsciously licked his lips. This one didn't look like the typical tourist. Something in his eyes was different. Darker. "What can I get you?"

"Whiskey. American. Neat." The man's thumbs kept on tapping to the slow, steady beat. "This your place?"

"Yeah. Well, my brother's and mine."

The man scanned the room. "He workin' the back office?"

"He's not here tonight, but we usually work together. He goes camping every Halloween week, partly to get back to nature but mostly to get away from all the goddamn tourists. He's a bit more high-strung than me." Jace grabbed a bottle of his finest top shelf Tennessee and poured them both a hearty three fingers. He passed one glass to his guest and raised the other. "Cheers."

The man clinked their tumblers together, offering his right hand. "Cash Rowan."

Jace took a swig of his drink then reached for the offered hand, shaking it firmly. "Jace Barton. You don't strike me as the type of person here for the Candlelight Haunted Tour, Cash. Moving into Salem or just moving through?"

"Here on business," Cash said. "I've got some time, though, so I might stick around for a few days. Soak up some, ah, local color as they say. Maybe I'll get lucky and see a ghost." Cash grinned, hazel eyes twinkling. He downed the rest of his drink and set the tumbler on the bar. "Hit me again. Been a long couple of days, and I got me a nice little room well within staggering distance."

"Ghosts run rampant in this town. If you're looking for one, they say the old Hawthorne Hotel down on Washington Street is haunted." Jace chuckled and topped their drinks off. The only other patron in the bar -- an older gentleman with salt-and-pepper gray hair -- had left his tip and was heading for the door.

"Have a good night, Rhett," called Jace. "See you tomorrow?"

Rhett paused by the door. "You know you will. Be good, Jace." He arched one grizzled brow and nodded toward Cash.

Jace knew that Rhett's inborn pack mentality always had him looking out for the younger non-humans. He knew that he and his brother were just pups in Rhett's rheumy old eyes, and that Rhett was always wary of leaving them alone with strangers. Jace recognized the look he'd just gotten from the old werewolf that said: *Are you all right alone with him? I can stay if you need me.*

Jace snorted. "Go home and get some rest, old man."

Rhett shook his head and smiled, pushing open the door. "Happy Halloween, Jace. Tell Konnor I said hello when he gets back from his trip."

"And then there were two," Jace said, downing his second drink as the front door swung closed. The song on the jukebox ended, and behind the bar Jace flipped on a radio already set to a classic rock station. *Sympathy for the Devil* spilled out in Mick Jagger's gruff, growling tones. "It's good to have company."

"Likewise," Cash said to Jace, but his eyes lingered on the door as the old guy hit the street. "You and your brother close?" He lifted his drink and swallowed the whiskey right down. Cash set his glass on the bar again and gave it a little twist.

That had been a challenge if Jace ever saw one. Both glasses got a quick refill. "Very close. He keeps me out of trouble." Jace shrugged, fingering the tumbler. "We're identical twins. I guess maybe that's partly why I feel so out-of-sorts when he isn't around. This is *his* time, though. He needs the fresh air and lack of humanity to remain sane the rest of the year."

"Yeah, I can understand how that goes. Not much on crowds myself." Cash absently ran the tip of his index finger around the rim of the glass.

Jace pulled out a pack of smokes, tapped it out on the bar, and pulled one cigarette out. Massachusetts prohibited smoking in public places, but Tailz had officially closed at one a.m., and Cash didn't look like the militant anti-smoking type. A snap of flame briefly brightened the dim room, and bluish smoke swirled around Jace's face as he took the first drag into his lungs. "Personally speaking, I could still die a happy man if I never see another pine cone."

Cash chuckled. "You got a Mrs. Jace Barton around?" His gaze roamed the room. Jace looked around, too. Dark wood, real brass rails polished to a gleaming sheen, pristine white napkins tented perfectly at place settings on blood-red tablecloths. Utensils were lined up with precision.

"Classy joint, all the little details taken care of down to the letter. Kinda smacks of a woman's touch." Cash shrugged.

"Nah. Women are trouble. Only woman in this town that I can stomach wears a badge and a gun, and she'd just as soon throw my ass into a jail cell as she would a bed." Jace grabbed a second bottle of whiskey and came out from behind the bar to join Cash. "Konnor takes care of the particulars -- cleanliness and organization are *his* deal. How about yourself? Visiting our fair town all by your lonesome?"

"Yeah, just me," Cash said, hefting his drink to take a nice, leisurely sip. He swallowed it slowly and licked the rich flavor off his lips.

Jace watched closely, cigarette poised at his chin. There was something about this guy besides the pretty face and laidback manner, an underlying aura of mystery. Cash was obviously someone very sure of himself, but the look in his eyes suggested a deeply buried pain. Something lost. Something that made him dangerous. "What are you looking for, Cash Rowan?"

"Same thing as any man, I reckon. A little piece of heaven here on Earth to make all the bad shit worthwhile." The glass went to Cash's mouth again, and he polished off the whiskey with a shrug. "Even if it's just for one night."

Jace couldn't help himself. He let his blue eyes flash silver and then back again. "You're tired. I can hear it in your voice."

"Yeah, I'm tired. So fuckin' tired, you can't even imagine." Cash picked up the whiskey bottle, and with another shrug he took a swig straight from it. He chuckled darkly, a wry, knowing smirk on his face, and he pointed at Jace with the neck of the bottle. "Nice trick with the eyes, there. Saw something similar in *Men in Black*. But I ain't Tommy Lee Jones, and I'm bettin' you're not an unlicensed cephalopod from another planet." The bottle went back to Cash's lips. This time he drank deeply.

"No, I'm very much from this planet." Jace checked the clock. It was just after two in the morning. "I need to lock up the bar for the night, but you can come upstairs to my apartment if you like. We can have a few more drinks and talk 'til the sun comes up." *And maybe I can learn what the hell it is about you that you're trying so hard to hide.* Jace ground his cigarette out and swiped his keys off the bar.

Cash slid off the stool, legs firmly under him, the bottle still in hand. "Sure," he said, smirk still there, but now more world-weary than wry. "I've got no place else more important to be."

Chapter 2

Konnor had decorated the apartment for Halloween before he'd left town for the week, and Jace chuckled at the little paper cutout sign that hung on their front door as he unlocked it.

Trick-or-Treaters Will Be Eaten!

"My brother has an interesting sense of humor," said Jace, popping the door open and holding it for Cash to enter.

The upstairs décor was a continuation of that in the bar: dark wood, rich textures, and classic jewel tones. The sofa and matching chairs were expensive black leather, and they framed a rather large high-definition television and a marble-topped coffee table. There was a little bar against the far wall, and a small but well-equipped kitchen on the opposite side of the room. Oriental partitions separated the rest of the open space into more private areas, including the bedroom. Portraits and still-life paintings created by Jace himself were scattered on the walls and several easels.

Jace flicked on the TV for some white noise -- *Friday the 13th* was running in marathon. He then went to the bar, which was festively decorated with strings of tiny orange and ultraviolet lights. "Where are you from, Cash? You're lacking the usual Bostonian accent."

Cash's jaw tightened. "Eldorado, Texas. Where are *you* from, Jace?" He tipped the bottle back and took a good hit of the whiskey. "*You're* lacking the usual disgusting sulfur smell most of your kind have."

A pulse of whiskey jumped over the rim of the glass tumbler onto the hardwood surface of the bar. Jace's lip tugged upward, but he finished pouring out the two drinks without looking up. "That was uncalled for." Silver eyes lifted, and Jace held out the drink to his guest. "Hunter."

Cash ambled over to Jace and set the bottle down on the bar, taking the glass in its place. He scrubbed his other hand back over his short brown hair. For such a young man, Cash was far too gray at the temples, had too many crow's feet at the corners of his eyes. "No offense; a compliment, really. Took me a lot longer to figure you out than I usually take. You're good." Cash raised his glass in salute then took a sip of his whiskey. His eyes stayed fixed on Jace.

"Silver eyes tip you off?" Jace rolled the ice in his glass as he studied the man before him. His blood pressure had spiked at the first revelation, but his jets cooled seeing as he was in no immediate danger. "Not all demons reek of sulfur, only the ones spawned in hell." Jace shrugged. "Something in the water there, maybe. Konnor and I are Earthborn. I'll admit, I wasn't sure about you. The eye trick was a test. When you didn't react, I started to think I'd been mistaken."

"Well," Cash said with a chuckle, "after some of the shit I've seen, it would take a hell of a lot more than some rock star eyes to make me go, 'ooh, scary.'" Cash knocked back the rest of his whiskey, and then pushed his glass aside. Arms folded over his chest, he leaned on the bar with

his elbows, one foot propped on the polished brass footrest. "Everybody in your little town as civilized as you? Or has the human population been dwindling as you guys move in? Just curious."

Jace's lips went tight. It was one thing that Cash had figured *him* out, quite another if the hunter decided to turn his eyes on the rest of the town. There were innocents in Salem, beings who would never harm a soul but who were different enough in a human hunter's view to still warrant a bullet. The tail tucked down Jace's right pant leg twitched with nervous apprehension. "We like to think we've moved beyond medieval times and witch burnings, Mr. Rowan. Let me offer you a friendly warning -- *civil* lasts only as long as we don't feel threatened. We watch out for one another. The townies respect us, and they leave us alone so long as we do the same."

Lips pursed and brow knit in thought, Cash scratched his head. "Gotta admit, I'm impressed. How'd you end up so tame? Might have to started sendin' the scourges here instead of back to the pit." Grinning, Cash fingered the Tailz logo imprinted on a coffee mug that sat on the bar. "Especially if you're all such good businessmen. Sweet place you got, seriously."

Jace folded his arms over his chest. "I'm not tame, I'm smart. I *know* I have it good here. I've been on the other side. I've known suffering; I prefer not to know it again. I was lucky enough to fall in with someone who took the time to show me this version of life." Snatching up his drink, Jace nodded toward the leather chairs. "If you swear not to harm my friends or to be a dick, you can have a seat and I'll promise not to add you to the Tailz special menu."

Cash put his hands up surrender-style as he moved toward the chair, careful not to spill his drink. "I got no complaint with you. Long as you don't step out of line, neither will I. Scout's honor."

Grunting, Jace took the opposite chair. He clicked off the television, plunging the room into silence. Head resting on an upturned hand, Jace studied the man: the lines around his otherwise pretty mouth, his rough hands and the way his fingers tightly curled around the glass, the depth of his tired eyes. "I've never met a hunter before. Heard of them, but I guess I don't emulate my wild cousins often enough to draw attention. What brought you to Salem?"

"Ghosts," Cash said, "cliché as it sounds. Got a tip from another hunter." He settled back into the chair, knees spread comfortably wide. "Dead end, so to speak. I think he just wanted me off his turf. Can't say I blame him, given my rep." Cash's eyes stayed on Jace's over the rim of his glass as he took another swallow. "Why'd you invite me up here, demon? I don't buy that you're starved for company. My mama didn't raise any stupid sons."

"Exactly that, actually. I might not be a soul-collecting demon, but I can read them like playing cards, Cash. Your soul is wounded in a way I haven't seen in a long, long time." Jace shrugged, finished his drink, and set the glass down on the marble coffee table. "I realize it's none of my business, but sometimes talking about your pain can help set you on the path of healing. In your line of work, it isn't often you come across someone who will not only believe your stories, but who might actually be able to relate to them."

"Oh, *that's* rich." Cash laughed, his tone harsh and sardonic. "Just fucking perfect." He emptied

his glass as he rose from the chair, and he strode back to the bar with purpose. Once again, he exchanged his small glass for the bottle. He swallowed audibly as he gulped down enough to have floored most mortal men. "I come here lookin' for a way out, and what I get is goddamn Dr. Phil? Shit, just my freakin' luck."

Cash lifted the bottle to his mouth again, but instead of taking a drink from it, he hurled it hard across the room. The glass shattered on contact with the wall, the sour smell of whiskey permeating the air. Cash swiped his forearm angrily across his red-rimmed, watering eyes. He blew out a sharp breath, hands falling to his hips, and he stared at the hardwood floor. "Shit."

Jace barely flinched. Between the alcohol and the stress of the conversation, Cash was coming undone. Jace could see the threads of the man's soul rubbing raw. "A way out?" He rose from his chair and stalked toward Cash, not stopping until he was well inside of the hunter's personal space. Jace caught a few dark wisps at the nape of Cash's neck and caressed them. "You came up here hoping I would kill you?"

Cash slowly lifted his gaze from the impeccably stained floor to Jace's gleaming silver eyes. He didn't flinch under Jace's touch. "Yeah. Yeah, I did."

"A little cowardly, isn't it?" Jace arched one eyebrow, hoping to ignite something in Cash. "How old are you?"

"Thirty-three, and don't you *dare* fucking judge me."

"I can smell the rage inside of you." Jace leaned in close enough to catch the aroma of Cash's blood as it pulsed hard and fast beneath his skin. "You think I haven't known pain? I lived in a world of it for the first fifteen years of my life. There are humans on this planet far worse than hunters, Cash. Humans who are capable of atrocities that can make even demons seem like fuzzy little bunnies in comparison. If you want to die, fine, but I came here to start over. I swore an oath to behave myself while living in this town. If you want me to do the deed, you're going to have to give me one good fucking reason to go back on my word and risk everything."

Unblinking, Cash kept focusing on Jace's eyes. "A demon killed my lover ten years ago on Halloween night. We were on a camping trip in upstate New York, fishing and hiking in the Adirondacks. I cou--" Cash's voice caught in his throat, and his lower lip trembled. "I couldn't stop it. I also couldn't live without him afterward."

Cash shoved his shirtsleeves up to his elbows and held his hands out to Jace, palms facing up. Matching raised red scars ran the lengths of his inner forearms. "Down the road, not across the street. I did it right, but my goddamn landlord had to pick that moment to come into my apartment to repair a light fixture that I'd been bitching about for weeks."

He yanked his sleeves down and swiped at his eyes with one arm. "Turns out it was for the best that I didn't succeed. A priest came to see me in the hospital, or at least I thought it was a priest at the time." Cash chuckled. "I was pretty doped up, but somehow I remembered everything he said once I came around. He told me what I needed to do to be reunited with Adam. You know,

down *there*."

Jace was floored. "Your lover is trapped in hell?"

Cash nodded.

"What did the priest tell you to do?"

"Well," said Cash, "like I said, I don't think he was really a priest." Cash let out a shuddering sigh, as if to make sure his emotions were reined in for the moment. He leaned back against the bar. "The memory is fuzzy, but what I thought at the time was a white priest's vestment -- you know, like they wear at Easter?" Cash shrugged off the notion. "Well, maybe you don't know that. But in trying to piece the memories together since, I think it was actually long white *hair*. I'm talkin' down-to-the-floor long." Cash shook his head. "I don't know for sure. Anyway... he told me that in order for me to be with Adam, I had to die on the tenth anniversary of his death. He said I had to die in the same exact way Adam did, too -- defiled and then killed by a demon. A silver-eyed demon, to be more specific. You know, I could really use another drink."

Jace felt an ache rush down between his shoulder blades. Whispers of such knowledge could come from few places, and Jace was certain no angel would have sent Cash seeking his death. The priest had to have been a demon. The image of floor-length white hair narrowed the possible list further for Jace. "I think you've had enough to drink. Did you see the demon that killed your lover? Would you know him if you saw him again?"

Cash nodded, his jaw drawing tight, a tiny muscle beneath one eye twitching with his pulse. "Yeah, I saw him. I stood there with my eyes wide, my mouth hanging open, pissing in my pants and too petrified to move. First time I'd ever seen anything like that in my life. Like most sane people, I'd thought that kinda shit was all books-and-movies make-believe. Been huntin' ever since, hopin' that along the way I'd either find that son of a bitch himself, or at least another one like him." Cash licked his lips; they looked dry as old parchment. "Took me ten years to find *you*. I'm not gonna get another chance."

Anger rolled off Cash in thick, tangible waves that crashed over Jace and awoke the darker side of the demon. Though he and Konnor had been living in Salem under careful guidance for sixteen years, the inherent wickedness in the twins' blood had never really diminished. They'd made conscious, intelligent choices instead of relying solely on instinct, but those baser instincts were still there.

Listening to Cash, seeing the man bare his emotions, had aroused Jace to no end. He moved closer, knowing the signs of change were evident: silver eyes seeming to turn molten, and the sound of bones snapping and shifting began. The expected clawed, skeletal hand captured Cash's face and held it firm. His two spiraled horns of ebony began to push out from the sides of his skull, curling around behind his lengthening, horse-like ears.

Jace halted the transformation there, not ready to exhibit his full demonic form just yet. "You've been strong for so long, Cash Rowan. It's all right to let it all go now. I'll give you what you want

most."

Cash swallowed hard and wet his lips again. "Then you'll do it?"

Jace answered by roughly shoving Cash up against the bar, his claws digging into the soft flesh of the hunter's cheek as their lips came together brutally. An inhuman purr came up from somewhere deep within Jace as he tasted Cash's tongue.

A groan ripped from Cash's gut: part relief, part revulsion, part heat. No fear. This is what he'd come here for, so he didn't try to hold back, didn't try to fight against it, at least not yet. Instincts could be tricky things, though, and the last ten years had been all about staying alive: a decade of paranoid struggle, of always looking both ways, of death-gripping handrails, of carefully chewing his food to prevent the possibility of choking. All so he could die tonight -- right here, right now, like this.

Jace came up for air, Cash's tongue already sore, lips swollen, chin bruised. Blood flowed in thick lines down Cash's cheek where Jace's hooked claws had buried themselves deep.

"You'd do this too, right?" Cash touched his fingers to the blood coagulating on his face. "If your brother -- Konnor? -- was taken away from you? You'd do anything to be with him, wouldn't you?" Cash looked at his fingertips, dabbed them on his tongue, life and death both in one little taste. "Wouldn't you?"

A small sound took the place of the previous purring. Jace cocked his head, eyes boring into Cash's as he collected Cash in his claws. "I would die for him, yes. Konnor is my world." Most likely reflecting on Konnor a moment more, Jace loosened his grip on Cash, his hands drawing down the front of the worn denim shirt. Claws caught on the metal snaps, popping them open one at a time, revealing more and more of Cash's chest. "You said Adam was ravaged. You need it to be the exact same way?"

Breath coming ragged, Cash nodded, desperately trying to fend off the fight or flight urge surging through his body. "Do you--" Cash moaned. "Do you still think I'm a coward?"

Jace paused. "No. In fact, I think that you are perhaps one of the bravest, most honorable humans I've ever met. Few would have struggled through ten years of searching. Few would still love enough to care. Fewer still would be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice." Jace sighed, obviously at war with something inside. "I promise that when the final moment comes, I will make your death swift. You've earned that much."

Cash shrugged out of his shirt and let it fall, the metal snaps clattering lightly when they hit the polished hardwood. He nudged off his shoes and socks then kicked them aside. His breathing slowed marginally. "Do me a favor: don't leave anything. Not a scrap, not even bone. That way, if this happens not to work, I won't be able to come back here and pester you. No bones, no ghost."

Jace hooked his fingers under the waistband of Cash's jeans and jerked him forward, flush against his chest. Those hazel eyes were so vibrant and alive it seemed a shame to snuff them out. "Not a scrap. Now off with these." The zipper of Cash's jeans gave under the force of Jace's hands, and he reached his hand in to cup Cash firmly. He gave a squeeze and brushed cheek against cheek to whisper in Cash's ear. "We have until the stroke of midnight. This could be quite pleasurable for a while before I do the final deed."

Cash froze. "It wasn't pleasurable for Adam."

"Adam was struggling for his life." Clawed fingers tore open Cash's underwear and shoved them down with the jeans, exposing Cash fully. Jace removed his own clothing and dropped it into a pile, all the while his gaze devouring Cash's nude form. Lust brought loss of control over the transformation, and Jace groaned as pain shot through his skull. He felt his jaw begin to elongate into a sharply defined muzzle.

The color drained from Cash's face. "It was *you*."

Jace let out an agonized howl, piercing the gloom of the apartment as he completed his metamorphosis. His slate-colored wings had broken through his human skin, the right one strong and full; the left was nothing more than a gnarled, deformed mess. The human skin drained of color, his flesh toughening into his familiar, mottled gray animal hide.

Jace swung his now-massive head toward Cash and grinned menacingly. "Not quite. You see, poor Cash, I told you my identical twin brother went away every Halloween. All year long he is *so* well behaved, but come Halloween he goes a bit stir-crazy. We send him off to the Adirondacks for a week, get him away from the crowds so he can work things out."

Cash stumbled back, tripping over his jeans and boxers that were still bunched up around his ankles. He shoved them off as his ass hit the floor, and he scrambled backward like a crab on his palms and heels. Instinct. Breaking out into a full-body sweat, fear poured off him in waves. His voice was raspy, as if bile were rising in his throat. "You promised you'd make it quick."

"It probably wasn't all that quick for Adam, Cash." Jace dropped down to all fours, swishing his long gray tail back and forth like that of an angry cat. He stretched, letting bones and tendons pop into their final places. "Konnor isn't alpha. Sex and killing, when he's alone, can be protracted and messy. Your Adam likely got quite a ride." Jace followed Cash until the hunter was backed against the wall.

"Then quit talkin' about it and just fuckin' *do* it," Cash said, teeth clenched tightly, his back now obviously to the wall in more ways than one. "You almost had me fooled. I was almost feelin' sorry for having sent so many of you to hell without having had this nice little game of 'Getting to Know You' first. Fuck them, fuck *you*, and I hope your brother runs into one of *my* buddies during his little holiday expedition."

Jace swiped at Cash, the force of it sending Cash halfway across the floor and leaving four long trails of crimson across Cash's neck and face. Jace gave Cash no time to recover. He gathered his muscles and used his four hundred pounds of solid strength to pin Cash hard to the ground. Jace rubbed against Cash, bathing Cash's face with hot breath, bare flesh to bare flesh.

"That's right, come on and fuck me, demon. Show me what you got." Cash reached up and tweaked Jace's nipples roughly between fingers and thumbs. "Or is this your kinky version of playin' hard to get?"

Jace's eyelids drooped, covering his eyes. "I bet Adam creamed himself before the last breath was out of him." Jace groaned, rolling his leaking cock into Cash's brown thatch as he began a slow rutting. Once he was good and hard, Jace gripped Cash by the ankles and flipped him onto his belly. He hoisted Cash up onto his elbows and knees, and teased the rim of Cash's hole with his tongue.

"What...*ah fuck*...what the hell are you trying to say? You didn't even know Adam." Cash moaned. Jace's tongue, long and thin, wiggled and lapped at his hole. He stiffened despite his revulsion.

Cash let his arms and legs go out from under him, and he fell flat onto his stomach, skin slapping loud on the bare wood floor. The element of surprise bought him a moment to scamper away from the beast. Cash screamed, crazed with anger. "You couldn't just fuck me and kill me and be happy with that. Gotta make shit up to mess with my head. "

Jace grinned, apparently more than happy to play a charming little game of cat-and-mouse. He stalked after. "I *am* a demon, Cash."

Winded and defeated, chin to his chest, Cash sagged back against the wall. "I didn't mean what I said about your brother. I wouldn't wish the pain of that kind of loss on anyone. Not even you." He could feel tears staining his flushed cheeks. "I'll do anything you want, but please...promise me you'll kill me before midnight. I'm *begging* you."

Jace rocked back on his haunches and motioned to Cash. "Come to me."

Exhausted, Cash crawled slowly on his hands and knees toward Jace, sitting back on his heels when he got within arms' reach. "I don't know what your brother told you," Cash said with a shrug. "Maybe he didn't want you know the truth about him, but what I saw was brutal and in *no* way consensual. Not at any time, not in any fashion. It was rape and then it was murder and *I let it happen*. I stood there shaking in my shoes, and I let Adam die." Cash craned his neck to look up at the demon's eyes. "I don't need your help. I think maybe I already earned my ticket to hell that night ten years ago."

"There was nothing you could have done against my brother, Cash. He would have torn you

apart as well, and there is no eternal damnation for fear." Jace reached out to Cash. "I have no doubt that Adam is waiting, but it isn't in hell. I *wanted* to make you angry. I *wanted* you to lash out, to let go of the self-hatred you've been carrying around with you to make it easier for you to take the final blow." Jace shrugged. "Maybe I *have* gone tame."

Cash put his hand in Jace's, and he laughed despite the grave situation. The size difference was so great it was comical. "Who was that person in the hospital with me? Why would they have told me that Adam was in hell, and that I had to die the same way to be with him, if all that wasn't true?"

"Some demons feed on despair. By telling you that story, the demon was pretty much guaranteed ten years of your wandering around in misery. Ever feel drained, Cash? Ever sleep for days, only to wake up tired as if you'd never slept at all? Nightmares?"

Cash nodded, suspicion suddenly sinking in.

"All of that points to a demon sucking the life out of you." Jace pulled Cash's much smaller body against his own, cradling him almost as if he were a child. Claws made for rending flesh made gentle patterns on Cash's pale skin. "Some demons collect souls. Some collect sorrow. Some just want to steal your favorite pair of socks. There are all levels of evil, Cash."

Cash sighed heavily against Jace's thickly muscled chest. "I've never felt so lost as I do right now. What am I supposed to do?" He closed his eyes, tears now dried, and listened to the deep, reverberating thud of Jace's heart.

"Angels are just as real as demons, Cash. I think it's much more likely that your lover is waiting for you upstairs than down." He'd lose his Evil-R-Us membership card for that comment for sure, but Jace felt for this broken man. He tightened his embrace around Cash and whispered, "Finding Adam will have nothing to do with how or when you die, Cash. With love like yours, he'll be there waiting for you tonight or a hundred years from now. But if you're ready, I can still be the vehicle that gets you out of here and away from the horror that's tormenting you. Death and killing are what I do."

"That's been my life, too, ever since Adam's been gone: death and killing. Then I see how you all are living here with your neighborhood bars and your white picket fences." Cash closed his eyes. "It's time for it to end, all of it. I'm ready, Jace. I can't do this anymore."

"Do you have something of his with you? If I just send you off, it could take a very long time for you to find him." Jace reached for an empty whiskey glass that had fallen onto the floor during their tussle. "If you have something of his, I might be able to speed up the process."

Cash crawled toward his clothes. He caught one leg of his jeans and dragged them across the floor back to Jace, and then slipped his wallet from the back pocket and quickly flipped open the billfold. In his fingers he held two matching rings: simple, classic, white gold bands. He handed

the slightly larger one to Jace. "Adam wanted us to get married someday, as soon as it was legal somewhere."

Jace took the ring and shook his head sadly. "Ten years later and that's still a very fragile wish."

He settled back on his haunches, and with one claw he etched the letter 'Y' and the letter 'N' several inches apart into the polished wood floor. He placed the upturned whiskey glass by the letters and placed the wedding band carefully on top. "Give me your hand, Cash."

Cash complied, offering his right hand, the smaller wedding band gripped tightly in his left.

The slice was small and quick, just enough to draw out a few thick droplets of Cash's blood from the palm of his hand. They rolled down Cash's lifeline, gathering fat at the heel of his hand until they finally fell, splashing the wedding band on the glass below. Jace released Cash's hand and turned his claw on himself, duplicating the action and adding his blood to the lovers' mix. "The three of us are part of this. My blood is my brother's blood. It will suffice."

Jace patted the floor near the glass. "You should be the one to call him. Place your fingers on the edge of the glass. Have you ever used Ouija before?"

"No," Cash said, "we didn't have much in the way of games where I grew up. I've seen it on TV and in movies, though. Didn't think they actually worked." Cash slipped the shiny band on his left-hand ring finger, smiling sadly. "It still fits." He rested his fingertips lightly on the smoothly beveled bottom of the glass.

"Ouija boards are much older than Parker Brothers. Normally, I would have you draw a ring of salt around yourself, but a demon sitting beside you will keep any tricksters and malcontents away. I'll be able to see things your mortal eyes can't." Jace settled himself behind Cash and looked over his shoulder. "Now, call for him. Ask him to come to you, and keep his image firm in your mind's eye."

Cash took a deep breath and cleared his throat. "Adam, if you--" He craned his neck to peer back at Jace. "Are you sure this is going to do something? I feel kinda silly, and if you're yankin' my chain--"

Warm breath blew across Cash's cheek as Jace snorted. "You're sitting here talking to a *demon*, you travel around hunting ghosts, and you can't believe a Ouija board works? Don't be so self-conscious. Don't think of him as a ghost if that's what's bugging you. Talk to Adam as if he were here in the flesh."

"All right." Cash turned around and positioned his fingers back on the glass. "Adam, I don't know where you are, but if you can hear me, I really need to talk to you. I miss you." Cash sniffed hard. "I love you. Adam?"

Silence filled the room. Jace sat quietly behind Cash, his demonic senses fully extended, hunting for the smallest tremor in the paranormal web. It was slight when it came, like the presence was

just waking from a decade-long nap. The light crackle of energy alerted Jace to it first, and then the smell. Horrid, sweet, untimely death. "He's here. Or, at least, someone is. The presence is too faint for me to tell yet. Ask him something that he can answer yes or no."

"Adam, can you hear me?" The glass shifted slightly under Cash's touch, and then crept its way toward the deeply etched 'Y.'

Jace could see the apparition now that it had gathered energy from Cash. It was a man. Young, handsome, and by the way he was adoringly gazing at Cash, most definitely Adam. Jace smiled. This was going to end well. "He's right in front of you now, Cash. Reach outward, and you should be able to feel the cold spot."

Cash gingerly moved a hand forward. He nodded and swallowed hard. "I can feel it." His eyes fluttered closed, and Cash sucked in a stilted, shaky breath. "It's him. God, I can *smell* him."

Jace watched as the translucent form that was Adam bent forward and nuzzled his cheek against the offered hand. It was so touching that Jace felt remorse, even though he'd not been the one to separate them. He began to wonder how his meek and mild Konnor could have done it.

"Adam," Jace said to the soft, hovering glow, "Cash is going to join you now. It's of his own free will that he's asked me to help bring him across to you. Will you receive him?"

Cold licked at Cash's lips, and the glass slid away from the 'Y' and back again. He turned to Jace behind him. "Thank you."

The snap was lightning quick.

Cash's body went limp, his head hanging at an odd angle against Jace Barton's chest.

The hypnotic glow of the Jace's eyes began to fade. Like the snake charmer putting a cobra into a trance, Jace had only needed to lock eyes with Cash for an instant. Brute strength had done the rest. He watched as a thimble of light slipped out from Cash's lifeless body. It circled around Adam's vague form, growing steadily larger.

Jace picked up Adam's wedding band.

"I'll make sure these both get a proper burial--" The spectral lights had already begun to dissipate, dispersing into that Other Place together, the mortal world already forgotten. Jace waited until they were completely gone before turning his attention to Cash's empty shell.

Though Jace required human flesh to live, he had not eaten an entire human -- especially bones and all -- in many years. Meat now came in the form of sanctioned tidbits from recently deceased John and Jane Does, and from donated organs that had been stored past reasonable freshness at the hospital's organ bank. It took the rest of the night and all the next day to finish Cash Rowan

off. The bone had been the hardest to devour, even in his full demon form. He'd managed, barely, and afterwards had felt quite queasy.

For the first time since its opening, Tailz was completely dark on Halloween. Even if his stomach hadn't been struggling to keep his promise down, Jace's heart just wasn't into celebrating. The events of the night before had made him long for Konnor until he couldn't bear it sober any longer. When the midnight hour struck and Halloween was over, he'd nearly emptied the apartment of alcohol, finished two full packs of smokes, and had fallen asleep on the sofa.

Chapter 3

Konnor Barton peered into the smoked-glass window on the front door of Tailz, a hand over his brow to shield his eyes from the mid-afternoon sun's glare. He frowned, puzzled. He'd fully expected to find Jace inside and still busy with the post-Halloween-night cleanup. Shrugging, he fished his keys from his windbreaker pocket.

Stepping inside, he dropped his heavy hiker's pack on the floor, the metal supports clanking loudly on the wood. No sign of Jace. Stranger than that, there was no sign that Halloween had even been the night before. It was usually a shambles until Konnor got his hands dirty to whip the place back into shape for business on All Saints' Night. Also a busy evening, All Saints' was another excuse for the patrons to dress up. Anyone costumed as a nun, priest, or Catholic school student got half off on drinks the whole night.

Hands on his hips, Konnor scanned the large room. No *way* had they been open last night, not unless Jace had hired a professional cleaning crew after the fact. He locked the front door, heaved his pack off the floor, and headed upstairs to the loft.

The old wooden stairs in the back of the place creaked under the combined weight of Konnor's athletic, six-foot frame and the overstuffed hiking pack. He slid the heavy burden off his tired, aching shoulders as he pushed open the still-decorated door. "Hey! Anybody home?"

The answer came in the form of a constant, low snore.

Konnor rolled his eyes, setting his pack down gently on the shiny wood floor to avoid scratching the carefully polished surface. He toed his heavy camping boots off, stuffed his socks inside them, then tiptoed barefoot across the cool floor. Konnor rolled his eyes again when he rounded the corner of the sofa. Jace was sacked out, a huge gray blob on the sofa, arms and legs all akimbo, muzzle hanging open and tail hanging down to the floor. Konnor squatted down beside the big snoring mess that was his minutes-older twin.

"Hey, Sleeping Beauty," Konnor said lightly. He shook Jace's thickly boned shoulder. "Wake up, I'm home."

The long snout snapped closed, and Jace whistled through his nose as he rolled onto his back. Another light shake and Jace's silver eyes rolled open, taking a moment to focus on his brother. His black-tufted tail smacked happily against the leather upholstery. "Konnor. You're home. Wait...what day is it?"

Konnor quickly surveyed the room. "January second. You missed the ball drop, Times Square was packed, and I gave your regards to Broadway. What the *fuck* happened up here?"

Jace rolled his eyes and snorted. The bulge in his gut had gone down considerably, but it would still be a bit of a risk shifting back into human form. The thick walls of his demon-form stomach

could handle bone splinters that might puncture the more fragile human lining. Jace looked around the loft. "Can you tell I had a party?"

"Jesus, Jace." Konnor gave Jace a quick kiss on the nose. He brushed the palm of his hand over his brother's distended belly like he was rubbing a Buddha for luck. "Who was the main course? Holy shit." He craned his neck, looking past the sofa toward the little bar up against the wall. His gaze dropped. His jaw flapped open. "And what the *fuck* did you do to my floor?"

Jace watched Konnor from the sofa, hand casually rubbing the hard-on he'd suddenly sprouted. Konnor rarely raised his voice to his older brother. Jace got off on it when he did.

Konnor rose and stomped over to the marks that were dug deep through layers of polyurethane finish and into the expensive knotty pine plank. His hands went to his hips, eyes down. Konnor's demeanor shifted substantially. "Ouija." He blew out a long breath through his nose. His voice was soft, obviously concerned. "Jace... what have you done?"

"Had a visitor. He was looking for you, actually." Jace proceeded to tell the tale of Cash and Adam, and he didn't give Konnor an opening to speak until the story was done.

"Jesus." Konnor sighed, his line of sight traveling from one mess to the next. Jace followed Konnor's gaze as it shifted. The ad hoc Ouija board carved into what Konnor proclaimed his good floor. The bloodstains on the skirt of the couch and on the edge of his favorite Persian rug. Yellowish stains on the eggshell paint of the far wall, glass all over the floor beneath it. Jace could imagine the thoughts running through Konnor's mind.

"Let me see if I've got this straight. You summoned the dead, you killed a human being because he asked you to basically help him to commit suicide, and you performed a forbidden guiding ritual to help them get together on the other side?" Konnor's eyes looked like they practically rolled to New Hampshire. "Who do you think you are, Jace? The bastard gay love-child of John Edwards and Dr. Kevorkian? Jesus!"

The more Konnor's ire rose, the harder Jace's inhumanly thick cock became. "Yep. That pretty much sums it up, I think. Except you forgot the part about me consuming Cash's body afterward." Still lounging against the sofa cushion, Jace patted his belly and then hooked his finger in Konnor's direction to call him over. "Missed you."

Konnor rolled his shoulders, cracking his neck. He slid his thumbs in the front belt loops of his faded stonewashed jeans and sauntered back over to the sofa. With a shake of his head, he got close and looked down over his brother's lazily lounging form. "I don't know whether I should feed you grapes, or if I should go put on a little metal bikini." Konnor cracked a smile. "Missed you."

The tip of Jace's tail sneaked behind Konnor and tickled him along his inner thigh, slowly coiling upward to wrap completely around. "You should crawl on top of me and let me welcome you

home proper."

"Ah, Jace." Konnor sighed, slung one leg over his brother's massive tree-trunk thighs and settled his ass down on them. Jace's tail remained wrapped around Konnor's leg, cutting off the circulation of Konnor's own tail coiled beneath it under his loose-fitting jeans.

Konnor knew when to back off and listen; he had since they were mere pups just learning to walk. He balanced himself with his hands resting on Jace's wide hips, and his bare toes wiggled against the sides of Jace's backward knees. He raised one eyebrow, the smallest of smirks on his face. "Appalachians."

"Hm?" Jace had already set loose his hands and they were busily tugging at Konnor's belt.

"*Appalachians*. You said the guy -- Cash, was it? -- lost his lover to a silver-eyed demon that looks like us while they were hiking in New York in the Adirondacks, right?" Konnor gasped when Jace roughly drew his belt from the loops so hard it was a wonder that his jeans didn't catch fire from the friction. "I've never *been* to the Adirondacks. I go to the Appalachians every year, so I would have been hundreds of miles away in Pennsylvania at the time. I didn't do it, Jace. For the record, I haven't killed anybody on *any* of my Halloween trips."

Jace stared, muzzle gaping, belt dangling from one claw. "Appalachians?"

"I. Didn't. Kill him."

"Oh." The belt clattered to the floor. "Hm. Well, I didn't either. There must be another demon out there somewhere that looks like us, which is pretty... the Appalachians? Really? And you've *never* eaten anyone while you're away? Wow." Jace was apparently mulling that over, his clawed fingers moving lightly along Konnor's thigh. Jace had finally loosened his tail and it was snaking its way down the back of his brother's jeans. "So... wanna fuck?"

"Yeah, I do. Missed you." Konnor crossed his arms, grabbed the hem of his polo shirt and yanked it over his head. The week in the wilds had been good for him. Fresh air. Strenuous exercise. Survival diet. He knew his suntanned body was lean and ripped. Konnor flexed so that his taut muscles showcased each rib, biceps subtly rippling. He reached down and gripped Jace's cock, the hot hard meat more than filling his grasp. Jace's dick in this form was impressive. Konnor gave it a squeeze with the barest dig of his blunt-cut nails. "Missed this." He grinned at Jace, blinking silver.

A slow hiss slipped out of Jace, his long tongue slapping along his muzzle. "Shit, Konnor. I love what being outdoors does to you." Jace unhooked Konnor's pants and peeled them back. He worked his twin's cock free, and Jace found Konnor just as eager as himself. With his neck longer and more flexible in his natural demon form, Jace leaned forward and lapped at the head of Konnor's dick, making it glisten. He was careful not to close his razor-sharp teeth over the hardening flesh; he let it ride against his super-soft tongue.

"Oh... oh fuck, that's good," Konnor moaned, hips rocking slowly forward and back, sliding his cock over pink, velvet softness. "God, could hump your tongue all day." He released his grip on Jace momentarily, long enough to use both hands to shove his jeans down as far as they would go. Mid-thigh was the best he could do. His balls were free and loose now, but Konnor was still effectively trapped on Jace's lap by his own bulky pants.

The playful glint in Jace's eyes said he had Konnor right where he wanted him. He sucked, hard, and in between the sucking he let his tongue wander further back. It tickled Konnor's balls, fondling them with every bit the same dexterity as fingers. Just as Konnor was about to shoot, Jace withdrew his mouth completely.

"Turn around," Jace said, "and get those damn pants off."

Konnor climbed off, skimmed his jeans the rest of the way down and hastily kicked them aside. He slid a hand over his own chest, rolled a nipple between his forefinger and thumb, and gave it a tight, hard pinch. He did the same with his other nipple. His hand strayed southward, fingers tickling at the narrow stripe of hairs that led the way to his erection. He curled his fingers around it, giving his cock an introductory tug.

Konnor ran his eyes over his brother's powerful demonic form. His dick got hotter, harder in his fist. "How many times did you jerk off this week thinking about me, big brother?"

Jace had told him often enough that there was nothing more disturbingly sensual, in Jace's eyes, than seeing his brother so aroused. Jace watched as Konnor gave his little show, a deep primal rumble surging up from his throat in appreciation. "Just about every minute of every day. Come here." Jace's tail sought out its twin, wound around it and pulled Konnor closer. "I couldn't sleep with you gone, Konnor. The nights have been horrible. Cash and his situation wiped me out. Next year, I'm going with you."

Konnor chuckled, stepping back toward the sofa, "I don't think that's a very good -- *ouch!*" He hopped on one foot and something shiny spun out on the floor. Konnor knelt down, and as he retrieved the small item, another shiny glint caught his eye. He held both wedding rings up for Jace's consideration. "Do I even want to know?"

"Their rings, Cash and Adam's." Jace took one of the rings and rolled it between his fingers. "That was what I used to call on Adam's spirit. I told them I'd bury the rings when I got a chance. Maybe we can take a ride out to the Adirondacks next week and do that together." He gave another tug with his tail. "Why are you still not lying on top of me? *Konnor...*"

"Yeah, we can do that." Konnor set the rings on top of his jeans. He climbed back onto Jace's muscular thighs, this time facing away. Konnor peeked back over one shoulder. "Happy?"

"Mm, perfect." Jace's hands ran up over Konnor's back and down his spine. He groaned, and Konnor could see Jace's taloned toes curling into the plush leather sofa as he arched to rub his cock against Konnor's ass. "I felt bad for him, Konnor. Cash, I mean. Ten years of waiting,

hunting, separated from the one man he loved more than his own life. It brought back memories of *our* start. It makes me realize how lucky we were to get away and find this place."

"Sad story," Konnor said. "We can talk about it later. Want to feel you now, Jace." He ground himself against Jace's legs, his cock hard and leaking on Jace's hide.

Jace didn't need any further incentive. His hands on Konnor's hips pushed Konnor forward and up against the sofa's bolstered arm. Jace maneuvered up behind him and buried his face in Konnor's up-thrust ass. His tongue went back to work against his brother's hole, and Jace wrapped his claws around his own cock and gave it a twisting pump through his fist. "Going to feel so good. *Fuck*, Konnor. Need you so bad."

Konnor supported himself on the arm of the sofa, looking back over his shoulder. "Oh yeah, Jace, lick me, get me good and wet, open me up for you. God, want it, want *you*."

"So fucking hot, Konnor." Jace inhaled Konnor's scent and then snorted warm air against Konnor's slicked-up hole. He snapped his teeth on Konnor's left ass cheek, sharp points scraping hard enough to leave a marking trail. Jace's cock slapped hard against his own belly, and he knew he needed more. His fingers slipped around Konnor's hips and Jace pressed himself up close. He rolled his hips, the length of his cock surfing along Konnor's wet crack. "Coming in now, Konnor. Grab on tight."

Fingernails digging into the sofa's fine leather, Konnor rocked back as the head of Jace's dick pressed insistently against his ready hole. He pushed back. Jace slipped in.

"Oh fuck! Konnor! Easy, little brother, easy!" Jace buried his face in the curls at the nape of Konnor's neck, and he gave his hips a gentle push. He could feel the heat of Konnor's passage close around him as he sank in deeper. One arm wrapped around Konnor's chest, supporting him, cradling him. "Oh god, you're *so tight* when I'm in this form. Don't want to hurt you, Konnor."

Konnor bucked back, took Jace in further, looking over his shoulder with a mask of concentration on his face against the burning pain. He arched his spine, wriggled his ass, and fucked himself back hard, taking Jace's cock down to the hilt. "Want it," he growled, "want it *all*. Want you to fuck me hard, Jace. Missed you so fucking much."

Jace nodded silently against the back of Konnor's neck and bit down. He gathered his haunches back again, and with his fingers guiding the rest of his length he thrust forward and buried it deep. He warmed Konnor's neck with breath and saliva. Jace moaned as he was clenched and held. He slapped Konnor firmly on the ass with the flat of his hand and began to move with a punishing rhythm.

Sweat poured off Konnor's body. He released his grip on the furniture with one hand to swipe at his eyes. "God," he said, stealing a glance over his shoulder at Jace's looming gray hulk slamming into him. "God, so beautiful, Jace, so goddamn beautiful. Want to see you come."

Konnor hissed in a sharp breath through his teeth. "Want to watch you come all over me, wherever you want. Just... fuck you're so hard... need to see it."

Jace knew that the sounds coming from his own throat were anything but human. Snarls, grunts, deep raspy growls; it would have been terrifying for anyone other than the one who loved him. Jace pounded into Konnor, but it was the nipping and licking of his brother's neck that Jace knew would get Konnor off. Konnor squirmed under him.

Jace moaned. "I'll mark you, Konnor, is that what you want? Fuck, I know you do." The slick between them was sticky-wet, and it slurped as Jace pulled out. He stopped suddenly, his hand grabbing the base of his cock, applying pressure to prevent his immediate release. "Konnor, over, turn over. *Now!*"

Konnor scrambled off his elbows, his moans joining the loud creak of the leather upholstery, and he flipped over hard onto his back.

Jace's bulk pressed in over Konnor again, this time face-to-face. He gathered Konnor's dick with his own, jerking them both in his huge fist. It was fast. Hot. Nasty. "Coming. Oh, Konnor, come with me..." Jace growled and pressed his muzzle into the nape of Konnor's neck as his ass tightened, and he shot a thick stream of slick. It coated his hand and splattered Konnor's stomach. Jace dropped his hips and ground hard against Konnor's groin, milking the pleasure as his cock jerked with every wave of relief.

No sooner had Jace finished unloading than he watched Konnor's orgasm hit with the intensity of a truck careening around a blind corner. Konnor's fingers clutched at Jace's rough skin, scratching and clawing, his cries muffled in the straining muscles of Jace's chest. Konnor moaned unashamedly as he came long and hard between them. "Jace, Jace..."

Still trembling from his own orgasm, Jace gathered his brother close. He covered Konnor's face in soft licks. "It's all right, Konnor, I'm here. Hold onto me." Their bodies wrapped around one another, the tempo of their thrusts gradually slowing to a gentle rock. Finally spent, Jace arched his back and his bones began to shift and snap as they compressed back into their human form. It was just as painful as the reverse transformation. "Fuck! Hurts!"

Konnor held on fast despite Jace's twisting and thrashing. He whispered soft assurances into Jace's ear until Konnor held an exact mirror image of himself within his tight embrace. He nuzzled his face against Jace's, one long leg hitching around Jace's waist. "Not letting you out of my sight for a while," Konnor said, breathing hard against Jace's neck, teeth scraping along flesh that Jace knew was now as fragilely human as his own. "Love you, love you so much."

Jace wove his fingers with Konnor's and brought them to his lips to cover them in soft kisses. "Need you by my side, little brother, can't imagine life without you. Love you with every shred of my soul."

Konnor had finally managed to get his brother's ass off the sofa, and Jace had gone downstairs to the club. After a shower to clean up from their less than tidy reunion, Konnor had attacked the task of putting the loft back in order with vigor.

Glass was swept up, and walls were scrubbed. Sanding the Ouija board off the hardwood floor would have to wait for another day. The club would be busy later, and he was running short on time. Konnor rolled up the Persian rug and pushed it against a wall. An expert would have to deal with the blood. In their years in Salem, they'd practically kept the local crime scene cleaner in business all by themselves. Living with a demon was messy business, messier still when that demon was Jace.

Konnor set the two white gold wedding bands side-by-side on the shelf just inside the front door. He fetched the broom from the kitchen closet and, after one more sweeping pass through the entire apartment, he was about to call it quits when something skittered across the floor.

He bent down and picked it up, rolled the little white nub around in his fingers, unsure of what it was until he put it to his nose. Bone. Human. Male. Unsure of what to do with it -- Jace could be weird about keepsakes, a sentimental softy -- Konnor dropped the tiny, pea-sized nugget into a vase on the marble coffee table. He'd deal with that later, too.

The loft clean, Konnor flicked off the lights and headed downstairs to join Jace at their bar, not noticing that the wedding bands were now stacked one atop the other.



The *StarCrossed* Series continues...

StarCrossed 2: Opposite Ends of the Spectrum (January 2009)

and

StarCrossed 3: Objects in the Mirror (March 2009)

Demon Tailz

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ISBN: 978-1-60370-523-3, 1-60370-523-6

Printed in the United States of America.

Torquere Press, Inc.: Single Shot electronic edition / October 2008

Torquere Press eBooks are published by Torquere Press, Inc., PO Box 2545, Round Rock, TX 78680