



# ***Blood Bought***

**Cruentus Dragons Book Two**

By Brynn Paulin

*Resplendence Publishing, LLC*

<http://www.resplendencepublishing.com>

Resplendence Publishing, LLC

P.O. Box 992

Edgewater, Florida, 32132

Blood Bought: Cruentus Dragons Book Two

Copyright © 2009, Brynn Paulin

Edited by Tiffany Mason

Cover art by Rika Singh

Electronic format ISBN: 978-1-60735-096-5

Warning: All rights reserved. The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

Electronic release: December 2009

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and occurrences are a product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, places or occurrences, is purely coincidental.

*To everyone who's waited so patiently and those who've sent me letter, too...*

*I love you guys!*

## ***Table of Contents***

<i>Prologue.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Chapter One.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Chapter Two.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Chapter Three .....</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Chapter Four .....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Chapter Five .....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>About the Author .....</i>	<i>66</i>

## *Prologue*

Jonah Genjhury took a gulp of his Starbucks quad espresso, ignoring the burn down his throat as he stared out the window of his wingscion's office, high above Central Park in New York City. Though their home was in Colorado, his scion, who was also the elder of their Dragon clan, the Cruentus, had relocated his workplace on Jonah's behalf.

Jonah waited as the buzz from the coffee vibrated through his veins, temporarily easing the ache that had plagued his body for the past six months. He was his clan's healer, but there wasn't a thing he could do to heal himself. There was nothing to remedy the absence of a mate. And while he searched in vain, his body punished him for his mate's desertion.

He chugged another swallow of the steaming drink, the scalding of his throat nothing in comparison to the twisting agony in his middle. His entire body seemed to tremor constantly, his hands mimicking those of a human with a debilitating disease. He shoved one hand deep in his jeans' pocket while he fought to keep the other steady in his scion's presence—not that Janos didn't know exactly what was happening to Jonah, but most days, he acted as if the elephant in the room didn't exist and left Jonah to his searching. Jonah knew Janos would far rather be helping him, but this was Jonah's battle. His trial. His...hell.

"Anything?" Janos asked, finally breaking the silence.

Jonah didn't look at him. He couldn't. Every time he looked at his elder, the man who was his bound wingscion and his best friend, he was reminded of the happiness that came from being mated. The sepia-colored marking on Janos' arm told of his union with the woman he

loved—Scarlett, the cousin of Jonah's mate, Athena. Jonah had a similar mark. It had nothing to do with love, and everything to do with the torture he'd been dealt as his lot.

Six months. After six months, he couldn't find Athena.

"No," he answered, his voice raw as sandpaper across metal. As much as he tried to hide it, the separation was taking its toll on his systems. He'd lost weight and, by heaven, haggard was a generous description of his being when he looked in the mirror every morning. It was as if he had a cancer in his soul, and it would kill him soon. It was the way of all separated mates. He tried to hide it, but he knew Janos wasn't fooled. As scions, they shared a psychic connection that even mates didn't possess.

"Every time I think I've found her, she's two steps ahead of me," he continued. "I've started scouring the old books, looking at the ancient Dragon magic—"

"To scry her location?"

Jonah shook his head. "No... To remove the bond. To end my connection to her."

Legend told there was such a spell. It would mean that—

"You'd never be mated," Janos interrupted in disbelief. "Jonah, you can't—"

"I can. Do you think never having a mate could be worse than this? The mating call has nearly debilitated my body because the pain and the need override all things. I suck down this stuff as if it's life's blood just to keep from sleeping. But caffeine doesn't work well on Dragons, and I'm still dragged into sleep. It's like falling into a pit of razors, tearing at my body."

"I've heard you," Janos said quietly, his calm voice counterpoint to Jonah's agitation. It only made Jonah want to scream from the rooftops of the skyscrapers surrounding them. He now understood some of the mad Dragon rampages written about in history. They weren't Dragons who'd started out bent on murder and mayhem. They'd needed their mates, those fucking fairytale princesses high in their towers. Yeah, Jonah understood all too well. Every minute he felt as if he were moments from letting loose a firestorm on the city. He knew Janos was exerting some sort of mind control through their scion connection to keep him leashed. Jonah wasn't fooled. It was why Janos stayed nearby.

Yet another humiliation heaped on him by this ordeal.

"I'm going back to the archive," he announced. The sooner he could be free of these mating shackles, the better.

“Perhaps you’d be better served to go to the New York compound. Their elder’s wingscion has strong scrying magic. Perhaps he can help you—”

*And perhaps you can leave me the hell alone.*

Janos cleared his throat, letting Jonah know he’d heard the mental exclamation.

“My apologies, my elder.”

Janos sighed. “Jonah...”

“I’m fine,” Jonah gritted out between his teeth. His stomach gave a violent twist, underlining the lie. He stifled a groan and swallowed more of the espresso. Dusk was nearing. How long would he be able to stave off the sleep?

Another sigh told of Janos’ disbelief. “I...I need to—”

“Go,” Jonah interrupted. “You have a family. Scarlett needs you.”

He tried not to sound bitter. He amongst all people was happiest for his elder’s mating. It was ordained and perfect and...torture to witness.

Janos left the room without another word. There was nothing to say that hadn’t been said in the last six months. Alone, Jonah gave into the agony that he’d barely contained during the meeting with his elder. His legs buckled, driving him to his knees and the thin paper cup crushed in his fingers. Burning liquid flooded over his hand and wrist. His body barely reacted, barely felt. Sluggishly, his skin shifted to scales to cover the area, too late for any real protection.

This was how Dragons who’d lost their mates perished. Their hope died...then their hearts...then their souls...then finally, their shell of a body.

Jonah was three-quarters of the way there.



## *Chapter One*

Over the last six months, Athena Xanthopoulos' life had become a quagmire of needs and desires. Survival. She scrambled to do what was necessary to survive and left everything she wanted, everything she dreamed of in the sawdust that comprised her past.

*Well...not every dream*, she ruefully admitted as she huddled close to the window of the Greyhound bus and stared out into the dismal rainy afternoon. Nightly, visions of *him* plagued her, filling her head with his exquisitely sculpted features that held the delicacy yet ruggedness she'd only seen in Eastern European men. Her fingers curled with the longing to tunnel into his silky raven hair while she stared into his dark brown eyes that were only a shade lighter than her own.

Her body craved him. She hated him. He'd done this to her, the same way that other man, his friend, had captured her cousin's senses. Her cousin, Scarlett, called the man she clung to 'mate'. Scarlett had stayed with him, while Athena had run. That was the gist of how things had ended, anyhow.

Jonah.

Her belly clenched as familiar craving trembled through her. Nothing dulled it—not alcohol, which just managed to make her stupid, and not men...

A trembling hand pressed to her lips as she fought back nausea. With dread, she pulled Jonah's visage to her mind's eye to force away the sick feeling. She'd thrown up on the first man with whom she'd thought to stave her desire. Being a slow study and thinking it was a bout of food poisoning, she'd tried with another in another city. No dice. She was stuck with this painful,

gnawing need in her pussy, day and night. And an empty gnawing in her middle, a gnawing that always seemed greater at night when it engulfed her in nearly unbearable pain.

If she ever saw Jonah again, and she hoped not, she'd kill him for doing this to her.

She fingered the sepia-colored design that scrolled up the length of her arm. The filigreed tattoo had just 'appeared' during her time with him. If she had the misfortune to cross paths with him again, she'd smack him up a bit over it, too. No one marked her body without her permission.

*You'll see him again. You can't live like this forever.*

Once a wall-street wiz, she'd become a nomad. Her savings and luck had kept her afloat, but both were dwindling.

She looked up as a man plopped into the seat beside hers. A damp, spicy scent wafted her way. It unsettled her stomach. Once upon a time, it would have aroused her and drawn her attention to the wearer. Now her stomach churned.

*Dear God, don't let me vomit on him.*

Wouldn't *that* be conspicuous? She pressed closer to the window.

The rain had plastered his damp black hair to his forehead, and he regarded her with electric-blue eyes no true human had ever been born with. Six months ago, she would have denied otherworldly or supernatural beings existed. But now...

"What do you want?" she demanded, breathing shallowly so that the scent of a man other than Jonah wouldn't have her hurling on the bus.

"Can't a guy take a ride?" he asked, his eyes dancing.

"A guy?" she scoffed.

"A Djinni, but I've still got balls, Athena."

*Yeah, balls of blue light that can explode or electrify their target.* "And you want something. What?"

"I've been searching for you. Why didn't you go back to him after I saved you?"

Athena stared at the Djinni, the only one of his kind who wouldn't immediately try to kill her because she was a Dragon mate—or so they said. She'd been huddled in the woods, cursing out her cousin, Scarlett, for ditching her to run back to the psycho who'd brainwashed her into thinking she was his mate, when a man and a woman had come upon her. They'd tried to kill her with the glowing balls of light they'd created in their hands.

This man had killed them with his own deadly orbs of light and rescued her. He'd told her to run back to the psycho's friend, Jonah, who was *her* 'mate'.

She'd run all right. She'd run as fast as she could, burying herself in obscure towns no one would think to search and huge cities where she could be a nameless face.

"He's not my mate. I'm *not* his."

"And this pain?" he asked, touching her stomach.

She shrunk away, bile rushing to her throat. "God! Don't touch me."

His arms crossed over his chest, and he gave a nod as he glared at her. "He feels the same. Probably worse."

Worse? There was worse than this?

"What do you care?" she rasped.

"I care."

"Why?"

His eyes narrowed, and it struck her that he looked like Jonah when he glared like that. "You know, you're a pain in the ass."

Sounded like Jonah, too.

"Again, what do you care?"

"Look. I came to warn you. A band of my kind is waiting in Detroit. They're waiting for *you*." He carefully enunciated each word as if speaking to an idiot, which, she supposed, he thought she was. "They know you're coming, and when you get there, they intend to kill you," he told her in a low voice, barely heard over the tires of the Greyhound. "You need to get off this bus at the next stop, and you need to stay off. Change your direction. If you value your life, go back to Jonah. He'll keep you safe."

"No, he won't," Athena whispered, voicing a fear she'd kept buried inside her. She'd seen Jonah kill with barely any effort. And he despised her. He'd kill *her* before he'd ever consider helping her.

"His life depends on yours, just as your life depends on his..." His brows furrowed as he trailed off. "Don't you know anything—"

"I know my life has been destroyed," she snapped. "Six months ago, I was considered a financial genius. Highest in my field, baby. Six months ago, I was planning the wedding of the year, a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful wedding to a man I thought adored me." She sighed. "I

thought I loved him. He wanted to kill me. He was only using me as bait to get my cousin. And poof, it's all gone. My life, my fiancé, everything. Jonah killed him, you know. My fiancé was trying to kill me and Jonah..." She shook her head. "I never believed in dragons or shape-shifters or...you. They were fine for myths and Dungeons and Dragons geeks and *The Lord of the Rings*. But in the middle of my life..."

She broke off and pressed her forehead to the glass, staring at the rain.

His scent wafted to her as he leaned forward. She held her breath to keep it from wrenching her stomach. The heat from his body so near hers made her skin crawl.

"It's your destiny," he told her.

"Bullshit."

"More like the fodder of war." The air beside her cooled as he sat against his own seat. "It's stupid really, rank with the odor of ethnic cleansing, racial hatred and religious crusades."

*War?* "Tell me," she demanded.

"Tell me you'll get off the bus at the next stop."

She sighed. "Do I have a choice?"

"No. I'd prefer not to use magic, but I will."

"I'll get off. I'm getting good at changing directions."

"Except for going the direction you should."

"Just tell me your annoying story. The bus isn't stopping for a while. You have time."

"The Elvish and the Djinn have always been here. For a long time, the Elvish ruled the land, dwelling under the sun, while the Djinn ruled the underground. There are caverns the like of which you cannot imagine. We were always at battle—the Elvish wanted our wealth while the Djinn craved the sun. And we were different..."

"So why don't you just fight each other and leave the rest of us out of it?"

"I'm getting there, if you'd let me."

"The Reader's Digest version would be great."

He glared at her.

She raised her eyebrows in challenge. "You were saying? You are different..."

"Both the Elvish and the Djinn value pure bloodlines. Both were afraid that they would be tainted by the rival race. We probably would have continued fighting each other and eventually destroyed each other had the Dragons not come here."

“Come here? You mean they emerged or that they came from...another planet?”

“Another dimension.”

*Gee...why not?* Athena pressed her fingers into her eyes. “Another dimension...” she echoed weakly. A Dragon from another *dimension* had done this to her. A Dragon from another *dimension* claimed to be her mate. Great.

“Mm-hmm. And there was one thing the early Djinn and Elvish had in common. They liked to make trouble for the humans of the planet. There were so many humans. They reproduce at a much greater rate than we do. The Dragons were kind to them, and the early humans worshiped the Dragons. In return, the Dragons infused their followers with their blood—the blood you have flowing through you, by the way. They had no compunctions about mixing species. They mated readily with the humans, and it soon became evident that they’d fill the earth with their kind, this mixed-blood race. When they began to mate with some of the free-thinking daughters of the Elvish and Djinn, the war began. Dragons could not take over the earth, they could not taint the pure lines, they could not have our daughters, and they could not be worshipped by the humans—”

“Wait. My life has been destroyed over a...*pissing contest*. Are you *kidding* me?”

“I told you it was stupid.”

“Then why don’t you stop it? Why doesn’t everyone just stop?”

“Why do humans feud with and kill other humans the world over? Tradition, fear, hatred...”

Athena lapsed into silence as she considered everything. A part of her longed to go back to Jonah, though she wasn’t sure why. They’d never had a nice word to say to the other. And she really couldn’t think of anything to say to him now other than “fuck me, fuck me now”—if that could remotely be called kind words. Depended on point of view, she supposed. Most of men would appreciate it.

Probably not Jonah. He didn’t appreciate her language. If he was feeling what she was, he’d get over her mouth quickly. He could kiss it into silence.

Her pussy clenched at the thought. Mmm...his lips on hers. His arms around her, keeping her safe from this stupid war.

“Why are you helping me?” she asked suddenly. “And do you have a name?”

“Not that I’ll tell you.”

“Of course.”

“Look. Not all of us are—” He broke off and grimaced against whatever he was going to say. “Let’s just say, not all of us are ‘hip’ with the purebloods’ plan. It’s antiquated and simpleminded. But it’s also unsafe to go against the majority. Deadly.”

“So there are more like you?”

He gave a short laugh. “Actually, no. Not that I know of.”

So she should assume any Elvish or Djinn would shoot first and destroy her later. Her life was as dismal as the sheeting rain now pummeling the bus. And after no-name guy’s story, she was pretty sure she’d be better off with Jonah. Trouble was she had no idea how to get to him.

She’d just have to keep running. Her eyes closed against the storm drumming down around them. Vaguely, she noticed the bus slowing. With the weather as bad as it was, she wasn’t surprised. Could the driver even see the road? She could barely make out the trees lining the rural highway.

“Oh no,” the Djinni beside her breathed.

“What?”

He grabbed the backpack at her feet and thrust it into her lap. “Hold onto that. Give me your hand and don’t let go.”

Athena heard the screech of the vehicle’s doors being forced open then saw two men surge up the steps and into the aisle, their blue eyes glowing like gas-lit fire. Before she could scream, knowing she was trapped, the world around her seemed to turn electric as it prickled across her skin. Her surroundings faded and there was nothing but black.

\* \* \* \*

Riven of the Djinn caught Athena into his arms as they materialized in a safe room within the Ojos Del Salado mountain. He supposed she wouldn’t be thrilled that he’d stolen her from the States to visit the Atacama region of Chile, but he’d needed direction. His boss was here in this compound, and he’d tell Riven his next move. Riven’s first choice was to take Athena to Jonah, but since he had no idea where to find *that* Dragon...

He looked down at his charge, wondering if she knew where to find Jonah—not that she could tell him now. The Djinn wards had a tendency to overcome humans, and Athena was no different. Unconscious, she breathed shallowly, her features pale. They were emphasized by her black-brown hair and brows. Her looks hinted at her Greek heritage—her name confirmed it.

“What did you do to her?”

Riven glanced up to find the leader of the compound striding toward him. Behe, AKA Behemoth, headed this clan and the Dragon Council and gave Riven orders. Strong in Dragon magic, Behe had no doubt sensed Riven tearing through the fields protecting the compound. Since Riven did that on a regular basis, he also didn’t doubt Behe knew where to find him—in this safe room where he gave Riven assignments and received covert information. However, Behe looked a bit stunned to see the woman.

“She fainted coming through the wards. Not unusual. She’ll be fine in a few moments.” Riven’s lip curled. “My *kinsmen* came upon us. It was *transporation* or death. Of course, I chose magic to save her and avoid discovery.”

Behe nodded. “I’ll contact Jonah.”

Riven hefted her slight weight higher in his arms and made to hand her over. “I’ll leave her in your care then—”

“No. Last I heard, Jonah is searching New York for her since he’s sure she’ll return there. He’s fading quickly, overcome with the affliction of the mating call. It’s vicious when unanswered. I need you to take her there. We can waste no time saving them both and restoring his strength. It’s quickest—”

“I can’t see him. He’ll know.” Riven would not speak his secret here, a secret few but he and Behe knew. Even unconscious, part of Athena might hear his revelation if he spoke it. He would not.

Behe raised a brow to refute his reticence. “And that would be so bad?”

“I wish you didn’t know.”

“But I do. Jonah must be told—”

“No.”

Behe sighed. “Fine. But only because I value your service.”

Another Dragon came in, eyeing Riven then looking to Behe. He spoke softly to their leader, his words too low for Riven to hear, then the Dragon swiftly left the room and the scene he would no doubt be ordered to forget.

“Jonah *is* in New York,” Behe told him. “Take her to the New York compound. The leader, Levi, awaits you and will take the woman from there. You will have opportunity to depart before Jonah arrives, though I urge you to meet with him soon.”

“Sure, okay,” Riven answered, knowing full well he’d avoid that meeting at all cost.  
“While I am here...do you have orders, my leader?”

“Yes... Lucan of the Cruentus Clan was lost to us for many years. He mated before he rejoined the clan, but now he knows not where his mate is. We must find her before your *kinsmen*.”

A harsh breath pushed through Riven’s nose. “So I’m the bride catcher again. Can’t these women stay put?”

“And make our lives easy? They’re too headstrong for that. Now be off. Jonah will waste no time getting to Levi’s compound.” He smiled. “And you have your orders. You can run without worry before he gets there.”

With eyes narrowed at Behe, Riven opened his wards and let the energy of his magic flow over him. The force pulled at his middle then he was flowing through the vortex, speeding towards New York.

\* \* \* \*

They’d found her. And he’d found *it*.

Jonah lifted the spell he’d copied from the crumbling pages of his people’s past and folded it into a small square then shoved it in his pocket. Transcribing it hadn’t been easy. The archives of Dragon magic weren’t physical. The ancient ones had hidden the tomes in the ether far out of reach from most. Only healers like Jonah or those strong in Dragon magic could access the knowledge, and then, only in bits and pieces. He’d projected his being through the mists of space and time to walk amongst the memories of the ancient ones. Since he couldn’t very well take notes in his spiritual form, he’d returned over and over, transcribing the incantation a line at a time until he had the whole written here.

The irony of the moment didn’t escape him. Just as he’d tracked down the means to free himself of the mating call, Athena had been located.

Against every ion of his being that screamed to rush to her, he hesitated. He could stop this now. He could end the agony and call they’d both experienced for the last six months, but...if they were together, it would end anyway. They’d experience the bliss that only came to those perfectly suited to one another by the universe. The mated.



His feet were in motion before his mind fully worked out the import of the moment. He tore down the wide, red-carpeted hallway of the floor Janos had rented for their stay here. Vaguely, he noticed Janos standing in one of the doorways with his wife, but Jonah didn't pause.

*Jonah, what's up?* Janos asked through their mental connection.

*Athena... Found... Going... Getting her...* He couldn't get out more than the jolting words as his single focus was in getting to the compound north of the city.

Behind him, he heard Janos laugh, but there was no mocking in the happy tone. *Do you need me to come with you?*

They were wingscions, partners in most things. Janos had Jonah's back in whatever trial he faced. But not this.

*No. Taking her to the cabin. Will return after...*

After she'd agreed to stay with him and to fully unite with him. And if she wouldn't, he'd go with plan B. The paper in his pocket suddenly seemed to weigh thousands of pounds. He had only to mutter the incantation and drink the potion that would accompany it. That wouldn't be necessary.

Within minutes, Jonah was in his silver Mercedes and rushing across the city as fast as he could. Of course, it was New York and every cab seemed intent on killing him. Most people would call him a moron for driving in New York City, but he needed it, and it wasn't as if he could fly without detection. As he got stuck in a snarl, leaving the metropolis, he wished he'd taken the chance.

\* \* \* \*

Athena woke slowly. Her stomach roiled at the scent of the Djinn on her. He'd done nothing untoward that she could tell. But she could smell him, and he wasn't here now.

She blinked in disorientation. She'd been on the bus, and...well, she had no idea where she was at the moment. The opulent room, wherever it was located, was dim with the wall sconces casting a muted glow around the space. She'd been left on a wide, cushy bed. The blankets were so soft and thick, they seemed to nest around her as she lay atop them. Pushing upright, she looked around, already devising an escape plan.

"Don't bother," came a dry voice.

Her eyes narrowed on the dark-haired man who sat in a huge wingback chair across the room. Despite the size of the piece of furniture, it almost seemed too small for the enormous man. Her stomach gave a twist of recognition. Not Jonah, but definitely a Dragon.

“So I should just sit here on this cushy deathbed and wait for you to drain me dry? No way.” She swung her feet to the floor, grateful to find she still wore her shoes. There was no chance she’d willingly hang around here for one of these creatures to sink his fangs into her. That was what had happened her first day with Jonah—some Dragon had mistaken her for a...what had Jonah called it? A blood letter?

She tried to forget the enormous pleasure that had slid through her when that strange Dragon had bitten her. She tried to only remember the outrage. And Jonah, he’d been outraged too. The battle that had ensued had been no small fistfight. Jonah had been ready to full-out kill the other Dragon.

“I’m not going to bite you, as delectable as I’m sure your blood would be. I don’t relish Jonah’s wrath. I heard about what happened with Niko. I like my face as is.” He grinned. “I’m Levi. This is my compound.”

“Nifty,” she replied. “And the door would be where?”

“The door would be locked.”

She blew out an irritated breath through her nose. These Dragons were a pain in the ass. Trying to kill her aside, she almost preferred the Djinn.

“So you’re in league with that jerk.”

“Jonah? The term is mate, honey.”

Damn it. This one was on that whole mate train, too. And she really wanted to get off the ride. What had happened? She’d been on the verge of wedded bliss—well, probably not bliss since the guy had been bent on killing her. Oblivion. She’d been on the verge of wedded oblivion when her cousin Scarlett had gotten to the church to help with final plans. Then Athena’s fiancé had tried to kill them. The guy had friggin’ blue balls, and not the kind she’d really wish on him. Bastard. He’d started flinging glowing orbs of energy at her and Scarlett and blowing up everything in his path to them. As if that weren’t enough, in came the Dragons—also blowing up stuff, then dragging the two women off into the sky to go to their lair in some Colorado mountain.

It was a lot to comprehend. A homicidal fiancé who wasn't exactly human and Dragons. As if that wasn't enough, two hours later, one of the Dragons had bitten her to drink her blood. Because yeah...dealing with flying, shape-shifting men and near death wasn't good enough for one day. She'd had to deal with fangs, as well. Dragons were also the creatures from which vampire lore had been drawn. One day and a whole fantasy grab bag that would have had her Mythology professor in college scratching his head.

It had been too much. And all within the space of a few hours. She'd run. And since her ex—and dead—fiancé's kin were after her, she'd been running ever since.

"I don't have a mate, you deluded imbecile," she snapped. What was it about the Dragons that made her so virulent? Yeah, she had a strong personality, but usually, she was nicer about it. It was probably self-preservation, not letting these creatures get the best of her. They'd dragged her into this stupid feud and ruined her life. This mate thing was just over the top. Yes, she'd been engaged, but she wasn't enamored with the idea of a lifetime with a man—any man. Look how poorly the last go round had turned out.

Still, to her chagrin, her insides gave a lurch of pleasure at his name and the pain in her middle temporarily abated.

Levi smiled again. "I'll expect an apology after Jonah's fully claimed you." He took her arm. "Come along, hellion. Time to go meet him. I'm sure he's got plenty of things in mind to curb your temper."

She recoiled as he took her arm, her retort slipping away as revulsion crawled over her skin. He sighed then murmured a few words, pressing the third and fourth fingers of one hand to her forehead. An odd numbness slipped over her, and her eyes lost focus, everything around them taking on a muzzy glow.

"That won't last, but it will at least get you through the short journey to the meeting place. Don't worry. You'll be back in top hostile form when Jonah arrives." His fingers tightened, and he pulled her toward the door—which wasn't locked, but at the moment, she couldn't bring herself to care. There wasn't anything she could do to escape his iron grasp. Did she want to?

*Jonah, Jonah, Jonah...* As she shambled along beside him, her traitorous body took up the happy chant. It reminded her that he'd done this. It was his fault her life had been turned

upside down. From everything she'd learned, she knew her situation wasn't precisely his fault, but he was still the center of her ire.

“When I get my hands on him...” she mumbled.

“I should have sold tickets,” Levi said, leading her from the room and into a corridor.

“The two of you should be quite a show.”

## *Chapter Two*

Athena's unmistakable rage radiated across the compound and hit Jonah full force as his sedan raced up to the house where the party awaited him in the inner courtyard with his woman. Grimacing, he pushed his body past feeling the pain that had plagued him since she'd left him. She was his mate and his body craved her, not that she gave a care about that.

No, she'd run rather than mate with him.

His jaw locked as his own anger joined hers. His only solace was in the knowledge that her pain was equal to his, as was her rightful punishment for running from their union. A thin smile momentarily curved his lips. Soon all the pain would end and she would bear another punishment for her desertion, one meted out by his hand, one he'd sorely enjoy. Athena would be at his command and begging for his touch. That would be pleasure indeed.

The smile faded as she came into sight. Two Dragons from the New York clan held her, and everything inside him rebelled at another male touching his woman though he knew it was necessary or she'd run. Athena was good at running, as he discovered in the months since she'd fled the Cruentus compound.

The Dragons, who were in human form, seemed relieved that he'd arrived. Athena on the other hand looked even more pissed off. They had her chained between them as a safeguard. That was overkill. A small woman against a pair of full-grown Dragons? She'd never escape them. He suspected that Levi had done this for effect. She'd been captured and was now to be returned to the one who'd master her.

If Levi had hoped to impress the import of the situation on her, he'd failed. Impotently, she fought, her long black hair flying wildly around her head. Even from a distance, he could see the fury in her dark brown eyes while the muscles of her arms strained against the manacles that held her.

She glared at his car, though he was sure she couldn't see who was inside, not in the faint moonlight of early evening. But she knew... As her struggle increased, her teeth bared in contempt.

"Get out here, you bastard, and call off your dogs," she screeched.

"Um, honey, we're Dragons. And if you weren't Jonah's mate—the poor sucker—I think I'd barbeque you," the taller of the pair holding her said dryly. Levi. Jonah was grateful the elder had chosen to see to this matter personally. And Levi seemed intent on jerking her chain. Literally.

"Hey, no toasting my *Velree*, Levi," Jonah cut in as he slid from his silver car. He drew a black leather case from the backseat and approached the trio.

"I'm not suggesting toast." Levi glared at Athena. "I'm thinking banshee on a spit. She *bit* me."

"Did she break skin?" Jonah asked, more concerned with his mate prematurely ingesting Dragon's blood than for Levi's wellbeing.

"No. Thank goodness."

"I'm right here, you jackasses!"

Jonah shook his head, holding back his chuckle as he met Athena's stormy brown eyes. Silently, he surveyed her while she just as silently glared back. So many times during his fruitless search, he'd arrived just after she'd departed. Just as often, her scent had still been in the air, tormenting him. The mating call had twisted his insides more viciously than normal, the innate need to be with her bringing him physical pain.

Did she not feel the same?

She must. In her short-sleeved T-shirt, he could see the mating mark on her left arm that matched the one on his right. How did she control the call? It should be so strong that even the Dragons holding her wouldn't be safe from her need.

He shoved away that repugnant thought that would cause him to hate his friends who held her. Intent, he headed directly for Athena, holding her gaze. One thought filled his mind.

One thought? No, many. Full thoughts escaped him. His head was filled with random images. Her neck, his teeth, her blood.

His.

She was his, and it was time she realized it.

Holding her gaze, he stopped before her and opened the case. Her eyes widened at the leather shackles he removed. Snarling, she fought as he deftly replaced the iron that had held her.

“What?” she sniped. “You’re not man enough to handle me without tying me up?”

“Sweetheart, I’m not taking any chances of you jumping from the car.” He lifted her wrists to inspect the gashes from the metal shackles.

She pulled away. “Back off, Fang. I’m not dinner.”

“You’ll be whatever I choose,” he replied, content to spar with her as long as she was with him. At this proximity, the need to couple with her increased, but the pain somewhat receded—the first relief he’d felt since the mating mark had appeared on his arm.

He shook his head at her continued belligerence. He knew the need pulsed through her. He saw it in the way her nipples pushed against her shirt and heard it in the way her heart thundered. It certainly wasn’t caused by fear. Jonah was convinced this woman felt none.

His tongue pressed to the bottom of his front teeth, and he slightly parted his lips, drawing in a breath. Yes...there it was. Her arousal filled his senses as he tasted the air. The heavy flavor of her desire nearly had him yanking her into his arms and dragging her away. The other Dragons would be able to scent it as well, and she was his! He wanted her as far from other males as possible until he was fully united with her.

Shaking, he pulled himself from the edge of frenzy. He had more control than this. Gently, he stroked her cheek, and his skin tingled at the long-awaited contact.

“Get your hand off me or *you’ll* see what it’s like to be bitten,” Athena growled.

“In my dreams,” he murmured. He sighed. “Still a shrew, I see.”

“Jerk,” she said, her voice hardly a whisper as desire darkened her eyes.

He’d played around long enough. Before the thought was half-formed in his mind, Jonah’s arms snaked around her, one capturing her waist and the other banding her shoulders.

“*Velree*,” he murmured as his hand threaded through the hair at her temple and tilted her head to the side, revealing the vein that throbbed from her struggles. She tried to fight him, but his unbreakable grasp held her still. He insinuated his knee between her legs as he angled his

body to hers. In the position, none of the self-defense moves she'd mastered and he'd been warned about would work. He held her more helpless than the chains.

She shivered as his tongue flattened and dragged over the vein. "Can you already feel me inside you?" he murmured. "Is your body even more wet knowing the one who will master it has now captured you?"

"No," she whispered hoarsely, but he knew it was a lie. She quivered against him and her body heated with her lust.

"Mine," he replied, his lips brushing her skin. His teeth sank into the soft flesh at the base of her neck to punctuate his declaration. Euphoria filled him as her blood sang across his taste buds, the flavor of his *Velree*, the one woman destined just for him.

Athena moaned, her body arching into him as the aphrodisiac from his bite flowed through her body, making her wild with her pent-up need. It would have affected Jonah as well, if he hadn't prepared against it. He could not afford to succumb to the lust for his mate. Not yet.

Shuddering as he pulled his mouth away from the nirvana of her blood, he took a step back. It took a moment for him to collect himself. Finally, he was able to look at the men who still held Athena while she writhed and cried out in her mindless need. Jonah stepped away quickly, knowing he was an inch from giving in to her.

He clipped the two cuffs on her wrists together then nodded to the men before he led the way to his car and he popped the trunk. He hated to put his mate there, but it was the safest place for her at the moment. She was so far gone with her desire, she would barely notice anyway.

"Jonah, I need you," Athena whimpered as the men laid her carefully on the nest of blankets he'd put there for her comfort.

Levi pulled Jonah back when he took a step forward to answer her pleas.

"Soon enough," Levi whispered.

Jonah nodded as the trunk was shut. He'd bitten her and fed his Dragon who'd waited so long for his mate. It sealed the contract that had been started when their bodies had recognized one another as mates. She was his. Bought with blood.

There was no turning back. The spell that seemed to weigh heavily in his pants' pocket warned otherwise, but with Athena here, would such drastic measures be needed?

Not if he had any say.



Nodding goodbye to Levi and the other Dragon, Jonah rounded the car. He climbed inside, his mind already segueing to the trip ahead. In a few short hours, they'd be at Scarlett's cabin in Vermont. Then they'd both be at the mercy of what fate had ordained.

\* \* \* \*

Even in the dark of the trunk, colors seems to glide past Athena's eyes as her body reacted to whatever Jonah had done—and she didn't doubt he had done something with that bite. When she'd first seen him, everything inside her seemed to leap. Her brain had screamed no, but her body had been ready to dash to him and crawl inside his skin. Just the embrace of his arms wouldn't be enough. She needed to be joined with him.

And then he'd bitten her. It was nothing like when the other Dragon had bitten her the day she'd learned of the Dragons' existence. That had freaked her out. This...this made her want more and more and more. It could be extremely dangerous and addictive.

She moaned, her hands fisting and her arms pulling at the cuffs as a tremor rolled over her body and exploded down her limbs. Arousal tugged hard in her pussy, and she groaned at the slick cream seeping into her folds. As she writhed, the slide of the tissues only served to heighten that same arousal and trigger identical reactions, causing a maddening, unending circle of sensation. The blankets seemed to massage her body, and her clothes chafed her skin. The sensation was far from unpleasant. Still she wanted to tear away her garments. Each feeling seemed to assault her body with a blinding pleasure that catapulted her closer and closer to a massive orgasm.

The car went over a bump, jolting her, and the seam of her jeans rubbed over her clit. Athena screamed as her entire body convulsed. Driving waves crashed over her body. Her breath arrested, her body arched. Every muscle in her body contracted and released in almost violent succession.

She'd never felt such pleasure and such abject misery as her pussy clamped around emptiness. Was this punishment for leaving him, a maniacal torture to show her who had the upper hand or to drive her out of her mind?

As the orgasm receded, she was left panting. Tears streamed down the side of her face and into her hair as the process started again. She'd kill him for this! She'd fuck him right to death!

Jonah gritted his teeth as Athena's screams reached his preternatural hearing even over the music he'd turned up to drown her out. His cock throbbed behind the fly of his pants. It took everything in him to keep from pulling the car to the shoulder of the road, opening the trunk, and fucking her in the middle of the heavy traffic. He'd sent an aphrodisiac flowing through her blood with his bite and a small sample of it had flowed into him as he'd ingested the sweet nectar of his mate.

To finally taste her after all this time, to be so close to joining with her...

His knuckles whitened on the steering wheel as he took deep breaths through his mouth to control his need. Bad idea. Her scent flooded the receptors on his tongue and his vision darkened. His jaws snapped shut as he pulled in panicked draws of air. He still smelled her, but not as clearly as with the sense heightened by his Dragon's blood.

His heart seemed to slam against his breastbone and he was almost surprised his body didn't shift to protect against the abuse. His skin tingled with the need to touch her bare skin. He longed to trace his tongue along the mark that signified her as his. He needed to taste her again, but he would not...not until his cock was lodged deep inside her while she screamed his name.

The feel of his *Velree* would be like none other.

She would not run again. Surely, once their bodies joined, she'd recognize what their blood had already deemed. They were destined to be together. She was his and, so help him, he was just as much hers. Somehow, he had to make her understand they couldn't survive apart, not because of his enemies, but because their beings needed one another.

Resolute on getting to the cabin and following through on his half-baked plan to make her see reason, a plan that would show her the pleasure of being his, he embraced the raw need. Pain meant he was more alive than he'd been in months.

\* \* \* \*

By the time Athena felt the car stop and the engine, the orgasms powering through her had lessened in intensity. She wasn't sure if that was due to her body being so thoroughly wrung out from the contractions, or if it was because whatever Jonah had done was wearing off. In either case, her brain was able to somewhat override her physical urges. One thing was clear. She needed to get away from the Dragon and fast, but not because of his being a Dragon. Over their separation, she'd come to accept there were things of this world she'd never imagined as more than fairytale. The first ball of light sailing for her head had made that crystal clear. There was

nothing like death to clarify a situation. No, she had to get away from Jonah now because she couldn't let him do this to her again.

She liked sex, though her body seemed unable to contend any man but Jonah. She liked orgasms and extreme ecstasy. But she wouldn't allow this abomination he'd wrought on her. It was nothing except a hollow imitation of what she really needed.

The lock on the trunk clicked and her middle twisted as it always seemed to when Jonah was nearby. In a moment, she was staring up into his face, illuminated by the trunk's interior light. Valiantly, she tried to hide the need and the vulnerability that weakened her. Her bottom lip trembled. She sank her teeth into it, then under the guise of pushing back her hair, lifted her bound hands to wipe away any trace of tears.

*"Velree,"* he murmured.

She didn't know what it meant, but the tenderness of his tone almost melted her resolve to get away as quickly as possible. Silently, she raised her arms toward him, hoping that now that they'd reached wherever it was he'd brought her that he'd release the bonds. To her surprise, he did. His fingertips brushed the sensitive skin on her inner wrist as he unclipped the clasp holding the cuffs together. A tremble lifted goose bumps across her skin.

This was what she wanted. His touch. His lips.

*"Kiss me,"* she whispered.

For a moment, she thought he hadn't heard her, then he was blocking out the full moon above as he leaned toward her. His woodsy scent filled her at his close proximity. His arms wrapped around her, slightly lifting her from the blankets. Time seemed to suspend as she waited for his mouth to claim hers. Finally, when she thought she'd cry for her wanting, his lips brushed over hers. The feather-light sensation tore a sob from her.

Months of emptiness stood on the brink of being filled. He dove in, taking advantage of her parted lips. Athena arched into him, her arms wrapping around his shoulders as she met his kiss with her own fierceness. She gave and received with a fervor equal to his own, her tongue exploring his mouth, her own mouth sucking at his tongue.

Jonah groaned and placed her back on the blankets, never letting her go, never departing her lips. She felt the car dip as his knee came onto the bumper, then he was straddling her in the small space.

She needed him closer. Restlessly, she shifted, and he accommodated her without needing to hear her words. One knee slipped between hers then the other until he knelt between her thighs as he bent over her. It still wasn't enough, and again he seemed to know. One powerful forearm moved beneath her hips, drawing her closer.

They both cried out as their groins connected, and Athena ground against him, glorying in the closeness. The friction of their bodies moving together sparked the need in her blood back to life. Her arousal fisted in her pussy, flooding her cream from her channel and knotting her nipples against her shirt. As the ridge of his cock pressed the seam of her jeans between her folds to rub over her throbbing clit, her fingers tore at the back of his shirt.

What wild thing had overcome her? She didn't care. She just wanted him to shove down her jeans and fill her clenching body.

"In the trunk. My God, in the trunk," he muttered.

"I don't care where." In another moment, she'd beg him.

Her hips bucked against him when his fingers pulled at the button on her pants. Together, they struggled to push down her jeans and panties, shimmying in the confines of the space. Jonah slammed his head first against the top inside of the lid, then on the edge of the trunk as he leaned in to kiss her again. It barely slowed him. The head of his cock lodged against her entrance. Vaguely, she wondered when he'd opened his pants, but she didn't care. She didn't consider their 'bed' either, or that they were, for all intents, outside. All she needed was to feel the slow slide of his width into her sheath.

She sighed into Jonah's mouth as the broad head of his arousal breeched her body for the first time. It wasn't enough. She wanted all of him. She jerked but he held her still.

"Easy," he urged.

"No. All..." she replied. Her eyes drifted closed and she allowed the sensation flow over her body. Pressure built in her pelvis, growing and spreading until it seemed to suffuse her entire being with tingling heat. A fine sweat beaded on her skin. Every ion of her body pulsed as if threaded directly to the one place that held her entire focus. The perfect union of their bodies into one piece. "Jonah...it's so..."

"Good," he finished. His mouth took hers, capturing her cry as he surged deep and filled her completely.

Yes...it was good. So much more than good.

Her legs went around him and locked behind his waist as he started to move. Her knees and feet bumped the top of the open trunk as he pounded into her. The desperate tapping created an arousing counterpoint to their moans.

“Harder,” she begged. “I’ve needed... For so long... I need to feel you. I need you to take me hard.”

“*Velree*.” His hips moved faster, his base slapping against her clit. The raw sensations of possession sent her screaming into a climax stronger than the ones she’d had alone earlier that day. She twisted beneath him, mindless with the pleasure rifling through her limbs and driving through her veins. Another took her as powerfully as a bolt of lightning when he stiffened above her and his heat flooded her womb. Her eyes slitted open enough to witness his face contorting in rapturous satisfaction.

“*Velree*, mine,” he murmured.

She wasn’t so sure she wanted to know what that meant, but she didn’t let it intrude on her bliss in that gold-infused moment. Instead, she reveled in the feel of his weight on her as he collapsed, spent. Her hands ran over his back. She’d missed this—the closeness, the utterly male heaviness pressing over her, the femininity of cradling a man’s body.

Lethargically, she kissed his neck, inhaling his musky, almost smoky, post-sex scent. Was that a Dragon thing? She liked it, the smoke. She took another breath of him. It was almost like the smell of a wood fire in winter.

He turned his head and kissed her, his tongue making lazy dives into her mouth.

“We should go inside,” he said finally.

She nodded and gave him a small smile, hiding her regret. The sex had been awesome. It had taken away the edge that had tormented her these six months and extinguished the powerful need his bite had filled her with earlier. And now she had to get the hell out of here.

He got up and knocked his head on the trunk again as he exited. This time, he winced and rubbed at the offended spot. “Trunks should be bigger,” he laughed.

She grinned. “I don’t think sex is their intended purpose.”

“No? Hmm. I’m going to go unlock the front door and turn on some lights.” He seemed to stop and look around. His narrowed eyes told her he was sensing more than seeing their surroundings. “It’s safe here,” he confirmed. “Wait right there a sec, and I’ll be right back for you.”

*Not likely.* “Okay,” she lied. As he walked away, she sat up and watched his head toward the cabin. They seemed to be in the middle of a clearing, surrounded by thick trees. Occasional shadowy clouds dotted the otherwise clear sky where bright stars and a full moon shone with stunning glory.

Okay, no light pollution. That mean there wasn’t a city nearby. Difficult but not undoable.

As soon as Jonah went inside the cabin, she leapt from the car and straightened her pants while she tried to steady her wobbly legs. In moments, she seemed to regain equilibrium. She took a final regretful glance to the house. This was a life she just couldn’t accept.

*Goodbye, Jonah.*

Gathering her wits about her, she took off for the trees as fast as her feet could carry her. If she was lucky, she’d be able to secret herself within the thick growth before Jonah came back outside.

Jonah exited the house just in time to see Athena break the tree line. Anger threaded through him. So she still thought she’d run.

His arms crossed his chest as he stared at where she’d disappeared. Slowly, he shook his head. She had no clue who or what she was dealing with. She was about to find out.

Then he’d make very certain she stayed by his side forever after.

## *Chapter Three*

Athena ran until a stitch cramped her side. She paused for a moment, leaning against a tree and wondering at what strange bug or frog was making the odd whistling sound she heard as she traveled. After a few moments, she started off again. Thankfully, her jeans protected her skin legs from cuts as brush and low branches pummeled her. Still, she'd have nasty bruises when she eventually stopped. Her torso and arms weren't so lucky. Her arms would be a maze of abrasions. She had little hope that her stomach and chest would be much better. Her T-shirt offered almost no protection.

She cried out as she missed her footing and tripped over a thick root hidden by the darkness. The fall jarred her, but she was determined to continue. She scrambled to her feet just as something crashed through the trees overhead. The moon was blocked out, then thick, iron-like arms wrapped around her. A solid body curved around her as she was lifted free of the trees and into the air overhead.

"Enough," Jonah rumbled, his voice slightly garbled and more gravelly in his Dragon form. Behind him, his wings flapped sedately, creating the sound she'd wondered at. Now she recognized it, having heard it before. It was far more of a whirl than a *whistle*, but either way, it unsettled her because now she was in his captivity again.

Her face pressed into his blackish-green scales on his neck. She clung to him, though she knew he'd never drop her—at least she hoped not. Even without him saying so, she knew she'd angered him.

His powerful arms tightened then his head tilted over hers almost tenderly, and she wondered if he understood why she'd run.

"Did you think I wouldn't find you?" he asked. "In this form, I can see you even though the trees. If I didn't have sight, I could hear you even if you were miles ahead of me—your stumbling, your footsteps, your breathing. And even if I didn't have that," he opened his mouth and drew in a breath, "I could scent you. I can smell our sex. I can smell your natural fragrance. I can smell your...blood. You are my mate, and now that I've tasted you, you will never be far from my arms. Never, Athena."

He landed in front of the cabin with a thump and set her on her feet beside the car. With fascination, she watched she watched his scales slide away like dominoes falling into invisibility. Once again, he stood before her as a man, fully clothed and staring down at her solemnly. With one hand, he slammed shut the trunk. With the other, he took hold of her wrist, still within the cuff he'd put on her earlier, and pulled her toward the front door.

"Don't I have a say in this?" she demanded as he pulled her through the house. Pride demanded that she put up some fight. This was her life. She should have a choice.

"No," he replied. "Fate has ordained this. You were born with the blood marker that destined you to be a Dragon mate."

She didn't understand, but was sure it had something to do with what the Djinni had told her about on the bus. The Dragons had infused some of the followers with their blood, and now that Dragon tainted blood flowed in her. That blood made her his *mate*?

"No. That's ridiculous. What about dating? Attraction? Choice?"

He paused and raised an eyebrow at her. "I'll date you."

"Right," she replied in disbelief. What part of 'you are my mate' gave way to dating?

"Do you deny the attraction between us?" he asked, dragging her flush to his body. She drew a breath at the feel of his hard, muscular ridges against her softer body. He head leaned toward her.

"Don't you bite me!" she exclaimed, remembering what had happened the last time.

He drew back and smiled at her. "I don't need to bite for you to want me."

"I don't want you." It was a lie and they both knew it.

Jonah shook his head, still smiling faintly, and leaned forward again. She tensed in anticipation of his teeth penetrating her skin.



“Liar,” he murmured. His incisors scraped lightly over her neck. She trembled at the sensation, the need starting again. He was right. He didn’t need to bite her. She was ready to fall into his bed with little more than a look from him. It had never been that way with another, even before he’d “claimed” her. “You want me. Admit it,” he urged.

She moaned, unable to say what she really felt and unwilling to betray herself.

His smile widened, but it didn’t convey mirth. It gleamed with danger. She shuddered, caught in his snare.

“And choice?” he continued. “Neither of us has a choice.”

Without ceremony, he scooped her into his arms and rushed her through the cabin. She knew they were on their way to a bed, and if she was forced by fate to be with him, that was exactly where she wanted to be. No matter what, she *did* want him. She might as well enjoy the ride until she found a way to make the escape he claimed was impossible.

In the bedroom, Jonah set Athena on the braided rag rug beside the bed, steadying her when her legs wobbled. Confident she wouldn’t run—at least, not right this moment—he pulled back the gingham comforter. He’d known all along that this would be where he’d bring her once they were together again. The sheets were clean; the room dust-free. He smiled, thinking of the other preparations Athena would soon discover. Hopefully, she was as adventurous as he suspected.

His anticipation growing despite their recent activity in the trunk—in the trunk for God’s sake! What had he been thinking?—he reached for her shirt. The fabric hissed as he ripped it from collar to hem and laid her bare. Her small breasts peaked, the nipples hard pebbles.

“Animal,” she whispered.

He lifted a brow. Wordlessly, he shoved off the shirt-cum-rag. Her pants were shoved to her feet before the cloth hit the floor. Grasping first one then the other a tiny ankle, he helped her step free of jeans. It didn’t escape his notice that she was completely compliant with the proceeding. In fact, the scent of her growing arousal quickly filled his senses. As he knelt, he edged her feet further apart with one of his knees then leaned forward and parted her folds with his thumbs. Athena moaned as he grazed her clit. She was so wet. His cock hardened as her slick moisture coated his questing fingers.

He had to taste her. He had to fill her. He had to make her come again. His needs rushed through his brain in quick succession, all urgent, all necessary, all clamoring for his instant action. Determined to take his time with her and woo her into mindless pleasure, he continued to stroke over her clit while two fingers slid back to penetrate her soft channel.

“Yes, Jonah... Oh, God, yes...” she keened as he bent forward and lapped at her gathering cream. Sweet nirvana. This was the proverbial nectar of the gods.

Her hand landed on the back of his head, urging him on as he slowly licked and sucked. His fingers continued their constant fucking. Moving his thumb aside, he captured her clit between his lips and sucked.

He needed her, but his name now spilled like a mantra from her lips, and he was more than willing to continue these ministrations until she screamed and collapsed. Suddenly, her pussy convulsed around his strokes, and she started to fall. Jonah quickly caught her into his arms and immediately took her down to the bed, covering her with his body. While she arched beneath him, he fastened her cuffs to the rings he’d attached to the headboard a few months earlier.

Her eyes widened as she came down from the orgasm and realized what he’d done. She yanked at the restraints. “Let me go!” she demanded. Even as she fumed, excitement flickered in her eyes. His little cat liked bondage. Perfect.

Jonah shook his head, denying her order. Instead, he set about exploring her exposed body. Straddling her hips, he kissed her shoulder and nipped at the straining muscles of her shoulders.

“Relax,” he coaxed. “I won’t hurt you.” He suckled the pulsing vein on her throat. “I won’t even bite you. Even if you beg me.”

“Jerk.”

“You want me to bite?”

She scowled. “Why does it feel...”

“So good?” he asked. “It’s a sort of blood-venom exchange. Harmless, I assure you. At least, it’s harmless if you,” he leaned to her ear, “fuck.”

Her intake of breath seemed to wrap around his cock, caressing the length then pulling tight. He needed her. Bad. To distract himself and keep from falling on her like the ravening

beast he was, he kissed a path over her shoulder and down to her breast. Slowly, he explored the ridges in the puckered peak.

Athena writhed beneath him, whimpering as he lingered. Her pelvis pressed to his in her fervor. He thought he might die. *Take your time, Jonah*, he reminded himself.

“Please...” she begged.

Pretending to ignore her plea, he lackadaisically licked a path to her other nipple and repeated the treatment. Her skin tasted of roses and smelled just as good. The supple firmness of her nipple against his tongue was like no other sensation. He could spend hours exploring the texture while he tasted her. The pounding of her blood so close to his lips tempted him, but he denied his desire.

She yanked at her cuffs again, but he knew this time it wasn't to get free of the restraints. “At least take off your clothes,” she implored.

Yes. His clothes were coming off. Sitting up, but keeping his weight from her by balancing on his knees, he slowly unfastened his shirt. Her hungry eyes watched him as he released one button at a time, staring down at her the whole time. Her teeth sank into her bottom lip and her fingers flexed. Pleasure surged through him straight to his cock. She wanted him. If her hands were free, she'd be all over him. This was how it should be between them.

He yanked his arms from the sleeves and tossed the garment to the side. His hands went to the button of his dark pants as did her eyes. Her nostrils flared when he released it.

“Let me go so I can touch you.”

“Uh-uh. Tonight, you're my prisoner, *Velree*, and I intend to plunder you.”

“Oh God...”

He shook his head. “Oh Jonah,” he corrected. “No one's going to save you tonight.”

She took a shuddering breath, her chest heaving. “Good. I mean...” A gleam entered her eyes. “I mean...oh no! Please let me go. Please, please don't fuck me really hard and really long.”

“You're awfully naughty.”

“Just figuring that out? I have a secret for you... I like sex. A lot.” She yanked her hands. “I like being tied up. A lot. I even...” She looked away and sighed. “I even kinda like the, um, other stuff.”

“What other stuff?” he asked, encouraged by the direction of her revelation. He inched down his zipper. She stared when the head of his cock emerged. He paused, blocking her view with his hand. “What other stuff, Athena?”

“Um...you know. Spanking. Things like that.”

“Like what? Toys?”

She nodded.

“Maybe a cream to heighten your arousal and drive you wild.”

She nodded again. “But I don’t need that. Not with you.”

He grinned. He adjusted himself so he was fully covered by his pants, then leaving the fly partially opened, he slid his hands up Athena’s torso. His palms cupped her breasts then his fingers rolled her nipples. Gently, he pinched, the pressure gradually increasing.

“And you like clamps?”

She gasped. “Maybe. I never tried them—oh, please! Harder!”

He complied, carefully watching her. The sensation pierced through her. He could tell by the undulating of her belly as her hips moved, trying to find more...something. More of what only he could give. Without releasing her peaks, he leaned his head down and licked each tip. Then he let go and watched as her breasts turned rosy with the blood flow.

Athena screeched, an orgasm flooding over her. Moving quickly, he dove between her thighs to eat at her cunt and devour the juice flooding from her. His tongue stabbed into her channel to gather the tangy lubricant while he treated her clit to the same handling as her nipples. Mmm...a set of three clamps might just be in order. And she’d love it. She was the most perfect Dragon mate any man could imagine. For the first time in six months, he thanked fate for the cards dealt him. No other woman could match her desires as she could. This was why such a strong willed banshee had been chosen for him. Anyone weaker would never survive eternity with him, let alone hold his interest for long.

He shoved down his pants. Holding her hips still, knowing instinctively that she’d like that restraint too, he surged into her pussy. He drove deep as she screamed. He gathered her cries in his mouth as his lips sealed over hers, giving her a taste of herself and taking her gasps to his soul.

His woman. His lover. His destiny.

The perfect mate.

His hips pistoned quickly while she moaned beneath him, unable to do much more than move her legs around him and battle his restriction on her. And there was no doubt she loved it as her channel convulsed, the sweet muscles there squeezing him. She grew wetter and wetter, her blood rushed so quickly through her, the sound was like that of a speeding train to his sensitive ears. His ragged breathing rivaled it, and his being seemed to gather in his groin as he pummeled her sex. Insidiously, it moved lower, taunting him, promising him. He wanted the moment to last forever, but he knew his end was seconds away.

“Jonah,” she screamed. “Jonah, please!” She thrashed. Her face contorted with pleasure. Her body clamped around him. Losing the battle, he cried out, his voice one with hers.

The sensation of Jonah’s cum surging into her was perhaps the most perfect feeling in the world. Athena stared up at him while she tried to catch her breath. In that moment, it was as if her world had just...shifted. No one—*no one*—had ever made her feel like this, like they completely understood her. And...being with him just...*fixed* the awfulness that had pervaded her life these last six months. Of course, the awfulness was partly his fault. At the moment, she could completely forget that.

Was it possible she really was supposed to be with him? Or was that just her sex-addled brain putting a golden glow on life?

As she looked into his eyes and took in his masculine features, his dark hair falling around his face, something clicked inside her. The thought of running from this man suddenly repulsed her. She didn’t want to be apart from him.

“Jonah...” she whispered.

He nuzzled her cheek then kissed her in front of her ear.

Her emotion-laden breath shuddered from her. The words to express her revelation evaded her. “Can you free my hands?” she asked instead. “My arms are starting to hurt.”

“Of course.” His thumb and first finger caught her chin. “Don’t run.”

She shook her head. A moment later, she was loose. He gathered her against his rock-hard chest, and his iron-like arms held her tight. He turned them, shifting her as easily as if she were a doll, so that she was between him and the wall. Reaching down, he grabbed the blankets then pulled them over their bodies. His breathing evened, though his arms remained tight.

The lamp he must have turned on when he'd initially opened the house was still lit, but she didn't care. She snuggled into his chest and the light was blocked. Her own breaths calming, she inhaled his scent and wondered once more at the slightly smoky smell. She'd never sit near a blazing fireplace again and not think of him.

\* \* \* \*

Athena didn't know how long she'd slept, but when she awoke, Jonah's arms had shifted away and only his hand remained. It rested on her belly while his face pressed into the side of her neck. His closeness seeped inside her being and warmed parts of her that had been so empty.

Her stomach growled, but she didn't figure there was food in the cabin. She wasn't going searching for it by any matter. Stealthily, she crept away from Jonah and scooted to the end of the bed, determined to get a glass of water from the bathroom.

The air was chilly after being snuggled beside his furnace-like heat and the wood planking felt like ice beneath her feet. Shivering, she hoped she found the bathroom quickly. She didn't want to wander around this place naked. She didn't want to wander at all. She wanted to get back into Jonah's arms—after her water. Now, that she was on her way, she realized her mouth was dry as the Sahara.

"Where do you think you're going?" Jonah growled when she'd made it halfway across the floor.

She turned then gestured behind her to the door. "Just to the bathroom. To get a drink."

He stared at her, obviously trying to decide if he should trust her.

"Look, I'm hardly going to go anywhere naked," she said on a irritated sigh. He had every right not to trust her, but it still annoyed her.

One side of his mouth turned up slightly. "You know...you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

Heat rushed into her face as she glanced down at her nude figure. She'd never thought much about her looks. She was passable and not distracting with either extreme beauty or homeliness. Evidently, the lamplight here became her. Her slim curves appeared milky and free of blemishes. She didn't know many men who wouldn't like the way her nipples were beading in the cold. She supposed she did have nice breasts, firm and not overly small. He'd no doubt liked the way her waist narrowed then flared into her hips and thighs, creating what she'd always

described as the female heart—her pussy directly in the center. His attention was centered on the small patch of black hair covering it. He might be a Dragon, but he was *such* a guy.

“So can I go now?”

He sat up, and she thought maybe he meant to drag her back to the bed.

Instead, he leaned against the headboard. “Hurry, back.”

She grinned. Returning to him, she brushed her mouth over his lips. “Keep the bed warm. It’s freezing out here.”

His warm hands caressed her hips. “Then stay here.”

She almost said yes. Reluctantly, she stepped away. She needed to get her head straight. At the moment, she’d give him anything and that might not be the best place for her thoughts to be. He wanted her as his forever mate and she just wasn’t ready for that. She didn’t know if she’d ever be.

Jonah watched as Athena rushed from the room. His first instinct was to run after her. That wouldn’t bode well for the faith that needed to build between them. He wanted to trust her, and he knew she didn’t trust him.

Across the hall, he heard the latch on the bathroom door then water running. He was just relaxing when she exited. Every nerve ending went on alert as she headed the wrong direction.  
*Damn it!*

He shoved back the blanket and stomped out into the hallway. Just when he thought she’d cooperate. Chagrin stopped him as he entered the sitting room and found her crouched in front of the fireplace. She looked up and smiled.

“It’s freaking freezing in here. Do you think we could start a fire?”

“It’s warm in bed. Come back.”

With a sigh, she stood and swept past him. “You don’t trust me,” she muttered.

His arms spread as he followed. “Tell me why I should.”

The glare she tossed over her shoulder cut through him. “I *said* I wasn’t going anywhere.”

“You could be lying.” His eyes closed. *Shouldn’t have said that, Jonah.*

Her face darkened, but whatever acidic retort she’d been about to spew was interrupted but banging on the door.

“Jonah!” came a muffled call. “Jonah! Athena! Open up!”

Athena had already entered the bedroom. Confused because no one should know they were here, Jonah headed for the front door. The Djinn and Elvish wouldn’t knock. They’d splinter through the wall or send the door flying from its hinges. The pounding continued. Despite his urge to fling open the door and demand the visitor go away, he cautiously approached and slid the curtain slightly aside.

At the sight of the Djinni on the other side, Jonah’s instincts took over. His scales slid into place, his body thickening and reforming into Dragon shape. The door slammed open. A rumble ground in his chest as his body prepped to explode fire at the interloper.

“No, Jonah!” Athena screamed.

Shock pummeled him as she dashed between them, wrapped in a sheet. She turned her back to the Djinni and hugged Jonah, her cheek to his chest.

“He doesn’t intend to hurt me! I promise.” She glanced over her shoulder. “Do you?”

The stranger shook his head. Quickly, he slipped around them. “For God’s sake, shut the door. Jonah,” he said. “I’m Riven.”

“He’s saved me from his people more than once,” Athena said.

*What?* Jonah stared at them in shock.

“It’s true,” Riven supplied. “I report to Behe. I’ve been shielding her, keeping her safe all this time.”

Athena reached up and stroked Jonah’s cheek, though he could barely feel it through his Dragon armor. She pressed her lips to his chest. His arms and wings wrapped around her blocking her from the other man’s view.

Riven let out a disgusted breath. “Move ya bag of fire. I’ll shut the damn door.”

Reluctantly, Jonah stepped backward. He didn’t want to be shut in with this Djinni, but a closed door would at least act as a temporary deterrent against any others. In particular, he didn’t want his woman anywhere near his enemy, this man.

“Jonah, you’re crushing me,” Athena protested weakly.

Immediately, he loosened his grip.

“He’s not going to hurt me,” she insisted.

“I’m not,” Riven said.

“As if I should believe you,” Jonah snarled.



Riven threw up his hands and turned away. He paced to the window. “If I were going to fry her, I’ve had six months to do so. I’ve been keeping her safe.”

“Why?”

The Djinni’s jaw locked. He looked ready to say something then gave a small shake of his head. “Does it really matter? She’s alive.”

“She’s also in the room, imbeciles,” Athena snapped. “Jonah, let me go!”

He ignored her, tightening his wings when her small fist pummeled his chest. He couldn’t help the betrayal that hit him harder than she ever could. How could she defend this...*enemy*? His mind reeled while, on the outside, he remained impervious to attacks.

“Why are you here?”

“I’ve been discovered. I can’t shield her location anymore—they recognize my magic. I’ve come to warn you. To tell you to get her out of here. To get her to somewhere safer. I’m sure you wanted to be alone here, and you felt you could protect her since we usually travel in small bands, but you cannot fight the force heading here. They intend to take her—”

“You mean kill her?” Jonah interrupted. No one would harm his mate!

“No. *Take* her. They want you, and the quickest way to you is her. And the quickest way to your wingscion is you.”

They wanted Janos, the leader of the Cruentus. It was a strategy they hadn’t tried before now. Until this point, the Djinn and Elvish had been content with cutting down the Dragons’ mates like Athena and Janos’ mate, Scarlett.

“Jonah, what is he talking about?” Athena asked.

He looked down at her, knowing what he had to do. He had to end their bond in order to protect her. It went against his every instinct. No Dragon willingly broke the mating call. He had no choice. He couldn’t allow Athena to die. And the Djinn would kill her. Eventually. They wouldn’t let a Dragon mate live.

Fighting back his pain, he loosened his arms and his wings. A moment later, he stood before her in human form once more. Obliviously naked.

“Every Dragon had two parts outside himself,” he told her, his arms running over the smooth skin of her arms. He already missed what he would soon be without. “One part, you know. That’s the Dragon’s mate. Like you. Like Scarlett. Women destined to walk by our sides for eternity. Our bodies immediately recognize them.” He lifted his arm. “They show us. The

Dragon blood marker in each draws design like the one that is on both of us. But each Dragon also has another part. His wingscion. He is the perfect partner in battle. Scions can read the other's action without speaking. They can anticipate and strengthen. We can read each other's minds. We can feel each other's pain. We can sustain each other—Janos, the leader of my clan, is my scion. He's upheld me while I searched for you."

"And they want him to cripple your clan?" she asked.

"And the Dragons," Riven added. "The Cruentus clan is one of the most powerful."

Jonah couldn't let the enemy get its hands on Janos, and he wouldn't let them touch Athena, even if it came at his own expense. "How much time do we have?" he asked.

"Three hours. They'll converge from all directions. It will be difficult to get past them. They're blocking my wards. I'm searching for an opening—"

"I need a half hour."

Riven nodded. "I'll survey the area."

## *Chapter Four*

Athena turned to Jonah as Riven left. “We’re not leaving right away?” she asked.

Jonah yanked her into his arms and covered her lips in an urgent kiss that cut clear through her. His touch seemed desperate, as if they stood on the brink of being parted for years. Helplessly, she fell into his embrace. The sheet fell away, leaving her naked in his arms.

He lifted her, and she wrapped her legs around his waist. Her fingers threaded into his hair. The silky strands tickled her palms as she slid them upward to catch in the longer strands and hold him to her. She opened her mouth to his tongue. As his desire reignited the embers of her own, she needed him in her and filling her in every way possible. And she wanted his cock...

Suddenly, she pulled back and let her legs drop. Before he could stop her, she slithered to her knees. Her hands pressed to his thighs. His muscles tensed as he guessed her intention. Languidly, she licked the underside of the long shaft then swirled her tongue along the glans. The slit wept pearly droplets of pre-cum. She caught it into her mouth, humming her pleasure at the salty flavor of him. Intent on giving him a measure of the pleasure he’d given her earlier, she sucked the wide head of his length into her mouth, sliding forward and back while her groaned. Her knees parted as she took him between her lips and savored his taste.

She moaned. As she moved, her position sent odd tendrils of arousal into her slick pussy. The air played at her overheated folds like invisible fingers. Frantically, she sucked him deeper, flittering her tongue over the vein that ran his length.

“Athena... Sweetheart...” he moaned.

Yes, that was the tortured sound she wanted from him. He didn't give her time to enjoy her triumph. Strong hands grasped her arms and hauled her up, forcing her to release his cock. She pouted, but he was having none of it. He bent her over the back of the heavily padded couch. Anticipation thrilled to her nerve endings. Would he? Biting her lip in happy eagerness, she awaited the feel of his hand. He knew she wouldn't object.

He knocked her feet apart, opening her to his pleasure and leaving her off-balance. She pressed her hands into the cushions in front of her as her toes reached for the carpet.

"Such a pretty ass on such a naughty girl," he murmured. His hand rubbed, lightly over her rounded bottom. Slowly, he arched toward her drenched sex. "Mmm...you *do* like this," he murmured as two fingers penetrated her channel. "Do you want me to spank you, my precious shrew?"

She nodded then pressed her burning face into the couch. "Yes," she answered, her voice muffled. "Please, yes."

Jonah dragged his fingers from her. Her cream smeared along her skin, a trail attesting to her need.

"Hmm...I don't know," he teased. "You seem to want it too much."

"No," she answered. "I don't want it at all."

He chuckled, obviously not believing her. His palm made small circles on one buttock. Then suddenly, it was gone. Athena hardly had time to gather a breath to protest when his hand returned with a resounding clap.

She whimpered, barely daring to make a sound for fear that he'd stop, that he'd torment her with waiting or, worse, with ceasing.

Another spank then another rained down, and each time, she stifled her cries. There was no stifling the juice that flooded from her cunt to trickle onto her thighs. God, how she loved this. She groaned as Jonah paused and bent along her back.

"I want to hear you," he growled, his lips brushing her ear. "Do you like it?"

Another slap landed on her bottom and she nodded. "Yes...more...please..."

Did she like it? Divine heat seeped down from her ass into her pussy, intensifying her arousal. There was absolutely nothing like it, and Jonah was so good at aiming each blow. If only, he'd move just a little closer to her needy flesh.

“So polite,” he laughed. As if he read her mind, his hand clapped onto her ass much closer to her sex. “Your lovely rear is turning a pretty shade of pink. More?”

“Yes,” she cried. *Yes, yes, don’t stop. Please don’t ever stop.*

Several more spanks shoved her to the brink of orgasm, then he paused again. His hand tapped against her sopping cunt. Her fists clenched into the cushions as a streamer of tension shot through her. Mindless, she angled her pussy toward him. Taking the hint, he continued his light strikes. They grew steadily more intense, winding the pressure in her middle tighter and tighter until she thought surely she would scream if it tightened a bit more.

She writhed, straining to him, begging, crying.

She did scream a moment later when his cock surged into her fiery passage, stretching her over-aroused tissues to their brink. His hand settled on her back, holding her captive as he pummeled into her passage, relentlessly fucking her while she shrieked her pleasure.

“Harder,” she urged.

He slammed forward, his balls swinging upward and smacking her clit. Colors flew before her eyes, lightning flowing through her veins. Her toes curled. “Jonah,” she screamed.

Pulling from her, he twisted her to face him. His cock immediately shoved back into her. Her legs wrapped his carved ass, the muscles in it undulating as he fucked her.

“Bite me,” she whispered.

Her back hit the mattress, and she realized he’d been carrying her to the bed. As one of her legs hung off the side, he bent up the other, opening her wide. His shaft pushed deeper than she’d thought possible. She gasped, straining her hips into him and wanting even more.

“Yes,” she cried as his teeth pierced the juncture of her throat and shoulder. Ecstasy tore through her, black dots filling her sight. “Jonah,” she moaned.

Above her, his guttural bellow heralded the flood of hot cum into her womb. Another violent set of tremors rocked through her, and Athena sagged into the bed in a faint.

\* \* \* \*

Jonah was murmuring in a tongue she couldn’t identify when she woke. The words flowed like poetry, skimming over her senses and raising eerie goose bumps over the entire surface of her body. Strange panic filled her and she knew whatever he was doing, she had to make him stop.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

He shook his head and kept reading from the thick paper in his hand. His hand made a circular motion, then fisted and jerked to the left.

Athena screamed as a rending sensation ripped across her. “No!”

His eyes closed and he climbed from the bed, turning his back on her.

“What did you do?” she sobbed, instinctively know it was bad. “What did you do?”

“I ended our mating,” he replied in a dead voice. “You’re free. You can...you can...” He took a deep breath. “You can be with any man you choose now. The call won’t prevent you.”

“No!” she screeched. “No! How could you do this? You bastard,” she finished on a whisper. “How could you?”

Empty, absolutely desolate, she collapsed on the bed, curled into fetal position and sobbed.

After all this time, she’d found the perfect man, a man she...loved, and he didn’t want her. He might as well have killed her. But she couldn’t even muster the voice to tell him so when he told her she was safe now then left the room.

He’d betrayed her. He’d made her need him and want to be with him, then he’d betrayed her.

She was still laying on the bed when she heard Riven pounding on the door.

Desolate, Jonah opened the door for the Djinni. Riven dashed past him. “They’re coming,” he exclaimed.

“Already? You said three hours.”

“I was wrong. But I found an opening. I can use *transporation* and get us out of here. Where’s Athena?”

“Bedroom.”

Riven was already dashing down the hallway. Jonah pounded after him. He entered just in time to see the Djinni lift Athena into his arms.

*Mine! My mate! Mine!* Jonah’s soul screamed. No, not his. He swallowed back rage as Riven headed toward him. Jonah wanted to rip him apart for touching her. His hands fisted and his nails, transformed to Dragon claws, ripped into his palms.

Riven paused and sniffed. “Something’s...off. Oh fuck!”

“Yeah, we had sex,” Athena sniffled. “So what? Are you going to hate me, too?”

“Hate you?” Riven repeated.

“I don’t...hate you,” Jonah managed.

Athena wrapped her trembling arms around Riven’s neck. “He doesn’t want me. He did a spell to unjoin us. To get rid of me.”

“Athena, no...” Jonah protested.

“No,” Riven groaned. He glared at Jonah. “Damn it, no.”

“I did it to protect her.”

“She’s in more danger than ever! And I can’t take her through the portal. It’s not safe for her.”

“What?”

Riven rearranged Athena and freed an arm then slugged Jonah. “Take a deep breath, asshole. I bet you figure it out real quick then start groveling. And while you’re at it, you better get ready to fight. They’re here.”

Athena’s scent and the change in her suddenly slammed into him like a lightning bolt from an angry Djinni. “Put her down now while I’m still in control,” he grated through his teeth. His skin itched as he fought to keep from shifting into a Dragon and burning Riven into a bubbling puddle of goo.

There were some things the spell couldn’t do. Jonah’s mate was pregnant. With his spawn. And...he and Athena needed to unite as quickly as possible.

Riven set her on her feet and she sent Jonah a watery scowl. Keeping away from him, she slid into her discarded jeans and went rifling through the closet for a shirt. Angrily she pulled on the first suitable piece she found.

She rounded on him, her anger apparently overriding her sorrow. Rage filled her face. This was a woman ready to beat him to a pulp and he felt stupid enough to let her.

“You promised me—”

The window shattered behind her and Jonah dove for her, his body transforming as he moved.

Athena struggled beneath Jonah as she heard timber cracking and glass shattering around them. Knives seemed to slice through her belly. She must have been hit by something. It was in her. She had to get it out.

Jonah leapt to his feet, standing over her like a junkyard dog. In a daze, she wondered why she was seeing two Dragons.

“Riven,” Jonah growled, his words slightly slurred by his form.

“Surprise,” the Dragon identical to Jonah replied.

It took her a moment to realize Riven was the other beast, and she wasn’t seeing double because of her pain. The two sent blasts of fire through the gash in the wall. Screams beyond told her there’d been a direct hit.

She couldn’t lie here, no matter how much agony twisted her middle. She struggled to her knees, despite the crippling paroxysms.

Riven lifted his hands and sent an energy wave at a dark-suited man with glowing blue eyes who was climbing through the jagged window. The man flew backward, his body twisting in an odd position. Jonah blasted another man with fire. He reached down and touched her head. An odd peace flowed through her, relieving her discomfort.

“Stay near me,” he warned.

“You need to fly her out of here,” Riven advised. “We’ve already delayed too long.”

They continued to fight as the enemy ripped apart the walls, piece by piece. A narrow spike of wood spiraled toward Jonah, barely missing his eye. Another rocket, this one of metal pierced the armor of his upper arm. Jonah howled, his fire cutting the assailant in half.

Suddenly, an icy hand covered her mouth and an arm wrapped her waist from behind, yanking her away from the battling Dragons. Impotently, she clawed at her attacker, groaning when a weak blast of blue energy circled before her eyes and drilled into her temples. Ignoring the pain, she slammed her elbow into the man’s solar plexus then reached down and grab for his balls. She squeezed as hard as possible and gave a good twist. She might die, but she wouldn’t go easily.

The man gave a strangled scream, and both Jonah and Riven turned to face him. Jonah roared his rage, but it was too late, her world went dark as the Djinni holding her opened a portal and sucked her inside.

“No!” Jonah screamed. No, the Djinn couldn’t have Athena or his children. He’d kill all of them. He wouldn’t stop until he’d obliterated them all and avenged his mate. She was his. No stupid spell could change that. He loved her.



Riven grabbed him. “Don’t let go of me if you want to live.”

Disregarding the off feeling, he wrapped his arms around Riven and held on for dear life. He couldn’t help wondering if he’d been duped as Riven opened a ward and pulled them inside. The Djinni was taking Jonah exactly where his kinsmen wanted. Right into the Djinn lair.

\* \* \* \*

Athena howled as she came awake. A piece of cloth in her mouth dulled the sound, but nothing dulled the spasms twisting inside her belly. She lay on some sort of stone table. Her hands were tied over her head and her feet tied at the other end of the slab.

She shivered in the cold of the place. It was dark and dank like some sort of subterranean cavern. She remembered Riven telling her of the Djinn living underground. Was this one of their caves? Myriad candles illuminated the space, casting eerie shadows on the rough-hewn walls. The flickering flames lit up the icicle-like stalactites overhead. In the distance, she heard dripping water.

This was the home of the Djinn. No wonder they were so pissed off.

She turned her hands to test the bonds holding her. No dice. She wasn’t getting free, not on her own anyway. The cloth securely held her without cutting off her circulation.

Before she could contemplate escape, another pain knotted in her middle. She screamed into her gag, arching off the table. Something was wrong, terribly wrong. Tears streamed down the sides of her face. How bad would the pain get? What was happening to her body? Because of Riven, she knew the Djinn’s plan to capture, but what had they done to her? She prayed Jonah wouldn’t try a rescue. He couldn’t jeopardize the fate of his people. And she wasn’t his mate any longer...

He needed to just stay away.

“Poor, pathetic Dragon mate.”

Athena twisted to see the woman who mocked her. A few feet away, a female Djinni stood with her arms crossed over her pert breasts. Dressed in a floor-length black dress, she blended into the inky walls of the cavern—well, except for her ghost-like skin, blazing blue eyes and white-blonde hair.

“He’ll come for you, you know,” the woman said as she stepped from the shadows and glided toward the table where Athena was bound, then pulled away the gag. The captor sighed light-heartedly and gave a faint shrug. “Then he’ll come for me.”

She gave a full-bodied shudder of feigned pleasure.

“Who are you?” Athena demanded, her ire spiking at the idea that this *thing* thought to touch her man.

“Someone of more consequence than you.”

Athena fought to remain still and show no reaction as another slash of pain tore through her. “I suppose that’s true. I’m bound and you’re not. But if I were free, I’d show you some consequence,” she growled.

“Would you now?” the blonde asked, her smile lethal. Her hand glowed a faint blue. “Can you do this?”

Burning heat sizzled along Athena’s thigh where the hand touched her. She writhed, animalistic sounds coming from her throat as she fought to keep back her screams. The agony wasn’t as bad as that in her belly, but awful nonetheless.

“Who are you, bitch?” Athena managed through her teeth as she glared at the beautiful sadist beside her.

The woman tsked. “I’m the queen here. Alas, my husband Albus is more interested in the queen of the Elvish—though he can’t have her—so, I play where I can, and I find I like Dragons. They’re ever so manly and strong. I’ve had my eye on yours for quite some time.”

“No Dragon would fuck you, hag.”

“Such language. No wonder he unmated with you—yes, I know all about that. Poor thing, pregnant and unmated. If he really cared for you, he would never have left you and his offspring so unprotected. He would have united with you, whether you were willing or not.”

Pregnant? What?

The queen drew a hand along her side, emphasizing the slim figure within her satin dress. “And I’m afraid, yes, he would fuck this. What man wouldn’t? Especially if he’s nursing his wounds of failure and a beautiful woman comes on to him, promising to make the pain go away even for a little while. See, everyone thinks I want him lured here so we can get to his scion, but really, I just want him.”

“Ain’t happening, lady,” a very pissed, and in Athena’s book, very welcomed voice thundered as Jonah stepped from the shadows in his human form. Athena had never seen him more livid. Outrage lit his face with a danger she wouldn’t want to tempt.

The queen smiled then turned. "Jonah, welcome. Riven," she said as he stepped up beside Jonah, "well done."

"I did nothing for you, Laurinda," Riven growled. "You've gone too far."

"Too far? This is war. I've barely fired a volley." She rolled her eyes. "So far, I haven't even managed to even hurt anyone."

Athena would beg to differ, but she settled for glaring at the queen, her vision somewhat glassy from the torment racking her flesh. She fought to stay conscious through the byplay around her.

"I want my mate released," Jonah demanded.

Her heart leapt. *Mate*—

"Mate? Aren't you forgetting a little something?" Laurinda taunted. Athena yanked impotently on the ties holding her as the woman eyed Jonah. Her lascivious plan was clear in the obvious lust that shone there. A nerve ticked in his cheek, his jaw rigid. Athena wanted to scratch out Laurinda's eyes. She wasn't going down without a fight. She'd had it with being a pawn in a war that wasn't even hers.

"You're awfully cocky for someone so close to death," he replied.

"Says the man within my home, with my guards but a yelp away. I don't think you're in much of a situation to cast judgments."

"I'll fry you before they get through the door."

*Yes, fry her*, Athena thought, barely able to breathe let alone speak. Dots began to speckle her vision, but she struggled to keep conscious.

Laurinda chortled. "But then the little woman might get hurt. You can't kill me and save her, too."

Athena's fingernails sank into her palms, her teeth biting into her lip. She tried to calm her gasping breaths, knowing Jonah could hear them clearly no matter what she did. She didn't want to distract him while he sparred with the female viper at her side.

*Please... she thought. Get me out of here.*

Then as another pain hit, she almost wished the queen would just kill her. Glancing down, she saw spots of blood mark her shirt. She was bleeding!

The queen looked over, and her eyes seemed to widen slightly. “I think she’s pretty close to death already. Just save time and come to my chambers. Riven, you’re free for now. I’ll deal with you later.”

“Touch Jonah and I’ll rip your throat out myself,” Athena promised between pants. Once, pride would have forced her to keep him from knowing her feelings. Now pain and anger overrode that self-preservation. She *wanted* him to know how she felt.

“*Velree*,” he murmured, truly looking at her for the first time. His face went white as he saw her state. Athena watched the muscles in his arms tense, and she knew he forcibly held himself back. That little bit of knowledge shored up her waning strength.

She took deep breaths, determined to fight the bitch as soon as Jonah got her free.

Her arms burned from their position and her straining, but it wouldn’t stop her from ripping out a few hunks of Laurinda’s hair and using some of the self defense moves she knew from her days in New York. No one touched her man.

Laurinda shook her head. “Such a valiant group here. Dragon’s blood must be the elixir of fools. Fine, fine, fine...if you choose that whining snippet over me, go ahead. Free her.”

“I haven’t a doubt that would be a trap,” he replied.

The queen made a disgusted sound, a puff of air blowing through her dainty nose. “Guards!” she bellowed. “Guards!” Her hands glowed. “Free her, you moron,” she rasped in a low voice.

As one, Riven and Jonah leapt into action. Their bodies shifted, their scales sliding into place in a blink. Confusion filled Athena, and she wondered if she were hallucinating. Had the queen just...*helped*?

No, Athena determined, she was imagining things. She flinched as balls of light shot from Laurinda’s hands, going wide and striking the far wall. Rubble rained down on the entering band Djinn. Several more flashes of energy followed suit, streaking through the air like sizzling bolts of lightning.

Jonah ripped free Athena’s bonds while Laurinda scurried to the side, but Riven caught her into his arms as she screeched. In moments, Jonah had Athena in his arms. She curled into him, clutching his shoulders. Blackness was closing in, and she didn’t know how long she could last.

“Relax, little one,” Jonah urged. “You’re safe, and soon all the pain will disappear.”

As if the words were a spell, and knowing she was in the arms of one who would keep her from harm, Athena surrendered to the pain that assailed her and let the accompanying weakness pull her beneath the surface of consciousness.

Some healer he was. Athena should have united with him hours ago. Jonah couldn't stop rebuking himself. How could he have missed that he'd impregnated his mate? How could he cause her such pain?

He was sorely tempted to unite with her here and now, but to do so, without her consent was impossible. She had to agree.

"Jonah!" Riven commanded urgently. He grabbed Jonah's arm, while he kept hold of Laurinda. Apparently, he intended to take her along for the ride.

"You told me *transporation* wasn't safe for Athena," Jonah argued.

"It didn't affect her journey here." In a blink, they were sailing though one of Riven's wards, swirling colors flew past them. Jonah hugged Athena tight, keeping her safe in the magical miasma of energy around them.

The journey was over in minutes, and to Jonah's surprise, Riven materialized them on the enclosed patio outside Jonah's rooms at the Cruentus compound. Without questioning how Riven had known the location, he hurried toward the door leading to his inner chambers. Magic protected the portals, but Riven had no problem following with Laurinda since he was part Dragon.

The queen hissed in anguish as she was dragged through the magic barrier that kept Djinn and Elvish outside the Cruentus walls. Had Riven not kept a firm hold on her, his tacit approval of her entrance allowing the passage, the enchantment would have killed her rather than merely causing pain. Once inside, she seemed to recover quickly. After the energy surge she'd used on Athena's leg earlier, Jonah couldn't feel sorry for her discomfort, though now, after she'd helped them escape, he realized that she'd use the lowest grade power she could. Apparently, her intention hadn't been to harm his mate. So what was her objective? Why had she helped them?

He'd dwell on it later. Athena had passed out, and he needed to attend her quickly. He placed her on a nearby settee. Transforming to human shape, except for one hand, he knelt beside her then slashed a claw over his wrist. He pressed it to her lips. It wouldn't change her. He

needed to ingest her blood within minutes of her taking his in order for that to happen, but it would take away the pain his children were causing within her womb.

Children... He was going to be a father. He'd known all along that this would happen. It was a main purpose to the mating call. Procreation. Furthering his species. The concept was far removed from the terrifying, awe-inspiring reality. His sons grew inside his mate...

He stroked Athena's hair from her face with his free hand. He wanted to share the moment with her, to tell her how pleased he was and how much he wanted to spend eternity with her. His emotions roiled inside him, and there was nothing he could do but wait for her to wake. When she did, he'd beg her forgiveness for being so stupid and for casting that awful spell. He'd destroy it as soon as he dared leave her side. No Dragon would ever again cast such hideous magic.

On the other side of the couch, Riven set the queen on her feet, keeping her within his embrace. She didn't appear overly upset at being ripped from her home. Nor did she seem to care she was in Riven's arms.

"Well played, beloved," she said.

*Beloved?* Had Riven tricked him?

Her head leaning on Riven's chest, she smiled at Jonah. "You are quite safe, Dragon Jonah. I hate this war, and I have no quarrel with the Dragons, save for certain laws..." She sighed and looked up at Riven. "Thank you for saving me from Albus."

"I would not leave you with him."

"You didn't marry him for love?" Jonah asked.

"I didn't willingly marry him at all. I wasn't even there."

Such a thing was a travesty!

"Yes, it is," she agreed.

"You can read my mind?"

She nodded. "And your delightful mate's as well. I'm afraid she may try to kill me at first opportunity. I apologize. I had to make the escape appear real. I would never have involved either of you if I'd had a choice. Riven and I had another plan..."

"Then why? She could have died." Jonah pulled his wrist from Athena's mouth and used his thumb to tenderly wipe away a drop of blood from the edge of her lips.

“Albus learned of her location and he was determined to cripple your clan by making you useless to your leader. You *are* his scion. He needs you, as you need Athena. Bringing her to the warren was the only way I could keep Albus’ army from killing her. He’d sent too many warriors for you to defeat.”

“It makes sense,” Athena said weakly. Her eyelids fluttered then she stared up at Jonah. Her smile warmed his soul. “Your spell didn’t work.”

“It should have.”

“Hmm...” She looked around, her brows drawing together. “We’re back here,” she said with some censure.

“Riven brought us.”

She nodded and made a face, obviously remembered her few hours here. “It needs redecorating...starting with your harems’ quarters.”

“Blood letters’ quarters,” he corrected, referring to the women who fed the Dragons until they were mated. He hadn’t had anyone in residence for years.

She snorted. “Same thing.” She looked at Riven. “You have blood letters?”

“He certainly does not,” Laurinda snapped, giving Riven a glare at the very suggestion. “And he will not.”

“Rinda...”

“Mmm...” Athena sat up straighter. “What’s between you two?”

“Nothing,” Rinda said regretfully. She stepped out of Riven’s arms. They dropped to his side in defeat. Jonah could have sworn he saw the life depart the man. The queen forced a half smile, her own sadness evident. “He’s part Dragon. He must take a Dragon mate. There’s not a prayer for me. I’m a pureblood—pure Djinni to the beginning of our bloodline.” She tilted her head, regarding Athena. “You need to understand how lucky you are—”

The doors to Jonah’s chambers exploded open, halting anything she might have said and sending both men into defensive position in front of their women.

## *Chapter Five*

A huge man filled the doorway. He seemed familiar, but Athena hadn't spent enough time here to learn anyone's face—except Jonah's. His had imprinted on her immediately. Whatever happened, his image would be with her always.

"Janos," Jonah exclaimed. "I thought you were still in New York."

Oh! This was her cousin's mate. Did that mean her cousin was nearby? Athena had sorely missed her—and had a few bones to pick...

Janos shook his head. "Scarlett and I returned as soon as you went after your mate. Preparations for your union ceremony had to be made." He turned to the other pair. "Brother Riven, welcome to the Cruentus Clan's compound. Since you are of Cruentus blood, you will always have a home here. As soon as Behe informed me of your possible arrival, I had rooms prepared for you and your...guest." It was obvious he strove to be cordial to the female Djinni who'd accompanied them.

"Cruentus blood?" Jonah echoed.

It was all very clear to Athena. The resemblance, the identical Dragons...

"He's your..." she looked to Janos, and raised a brow, "brother?"

Janos nodded. "He is." He frowned, surveying Athena. "There is no time for a reunion now. Jonah, the ceremony."

"Athena and I need time—"

"You don't have time," Janos interrupted. "Her condition is obvious, and *I'm* not the healer."



“We need a moment.”

Janos nodded. “Come with me,” he told the other two.

In seconds, she and Jonah were alone. The constant arousal she felt near him had waned, though she still wanted him more than she’d ever wanted another man despite the tingles of pain that were already returning. He pulled her into his arms and carried her from the chamber. His quarters were larger than she’d imagined, and he took her down a wide passageway, past several doorways and into his bedroom. A huge canopy bed dominated the room, the four posts appearing to be actual trees that arched overhead. Gauzy white linen draped over the branches.

Jonah placed her on the mattress and laid beside her. His brow furrowed with concern.

Was this when he told her there would be no joining? He’d seemed so reluctant when Janos had told him the ceremony waited. Jonah *had* ended the mating.

“So...there’s a Djinni in the family,” he started. His fingertips stroked her arm, lifting goose bumps along her skin.

“He’s a good man.”

Jonah nodded, his gaze intent on the path of his fingers. They slid over to her belly and she pressed into his touch.

“How do you feel about this?” he asked as he splayed his fingers.

“I haven’t had much of an opportunity to think about it. I guess I’m relieved that it’s not some fatal attack from the Djinn. I thought at first it was. And...I’m...not freaked out. I mean, it’s kinda cool.” As she spoke, the reality of her condition settled into her awareness. A child with Jonah. She was going to have his baby!

Her hand covered his on her stomach.

“How do *you* feel?” she asked. “I mean...you ended the mating.”

His breath caught and he leaned over her, emotion bright in his eyes. “To protect you. Only to protect you. Athena, I want to...be with you...forever.”

“Forever’s a long time.” She frowned. He seemed to have trouble with that word, forever. Part of her wanted to leap at his offer. But most of her still felt he wanted to be with her from obligation, a forced bond, and now the child. “And if I say no?”

Panic filled his eyes before he quickly hid it. “The pregnancy will likely kill you. At very least, you will lose the children.”

*Children?* Not child, but children. Whether it was one or ten, her answer was the same.

“All right,” she said faintly, eternity looming before her like...well, an eternity. Most people in bad situations had the luxury of a death even fate couldn’t stop, but she and Jonah wouldn’t. She took a shaky breath and looked away. They could discuss living arrangements later.

She didn’t suppose he’d want to be far from his children, but she wouldn’t share a bed with a man who was forced to be with her.

\* \* \* \*

No Dragon bride had ever looked so lovely. As Athena stood across from him on the dais that had been erected in the enormous main hall of the Cruentus compound, Jonah couldn’t help but stare.

Her cousin had produced a white silk and lace dress with a portrait collar that left a good deal of Athena’s neck and shoulders bare. Her hair was swept into diamond-studded clips, and his commitment ring rested on her slim finger. Pain lined her eyes and he knew it was sheer will keeping her upright.

Scarlett stood behind her; Janos then Riven behind him.

Athena’s hand landed on his chest as she swayed. He wore only white pants, inked with Dragon sigils. More sigils had been painted on his torso, spells for happiness, faithfulness, and protection.

He caught his mate to him, knowing it was time. His teeth sank into her shoulder. Athena gasped at the pain of the bite and the instant pleasure of the aphrodisiac he knew flowed through her. She moaned and he felt Janos move up behind them.

Jonah lifted his mouth enough to tell her, “Open your eyes. You want to see this,” then sealed his mouth to her shoulder again, drinking the sweet nectar of her blood.

Janos touched his back. *Ready?*

*Yes. I’ve been ready for this moment for centuries.*

Jonah’s arms tightened on his mate, knowing she’d flinch when she saw the blade Janos drew.

*Tell her she’s safe,* Jonah told him. One hand cupped the back of her neck, readying her.

“You’re completely safe. The knife is for Jonah,” Janos murmured quietly. “Cruentus clan,” he said, addressing the crowd who’d gathered for the ceremony. “We’ve gathered to

witness the final joining of my wingscion, our revered healer, Jonah Genjhury and his chosen mate, Athena Xanthopoulos.”

A cheer went up, and a responding thrill skimmed over Jonah’s skin. A chill followed as Janos drew the blade across Jonah’s chest, inches above his nipple. Jonah pressed Athena’s mouth to his chest. Her eyes were wide as she lapped at his blood. The lap turned to suction as the change began and she lifted on her toes, her eyes half-lidded.

“Here in our sight, these two will be eternally joined.” Janos’ hands landed on both their shoulders. “Be united now. Let the gold show the love in your union.”

He stepped away, and Jonah lifted his head. Gazing up at him, Athena lifted her head as well. Still, holding her, he looked into her eyes, hoping to convey what filled his heart.

“I love you, Athena. You are my perfect mate, and you fill my soul.”

“Jonah...” She felt the joining start in her toes, creeping up her legs and into her groin. He squeezed her hands and the sensation seemed to starburst through her body like an enormous orgasm. The pain in her middle immediately released. Instead, she felt her children moving for the first time. She guided Jonah’s hand to cover the movement, indescribable happiness flowing over her.

A column of gold light swirled around them, blocking out everything but the two of them. This was the joining, the spiral of gold that told of their love. *Was it possible that he loved her so much?* she wondered as the rich, sparkling light enveloped them.

Slowly, the glow dissipated and they were left amidst the congratulations and clapping from their family. Jonah scooped her into his arms and headed through the crowd. She cuddled into him, smiling at the well-wishers and all the Dragons slapping Jonah on the back and offering bawdy advice.

Though the joining light had disappeared, she still saw the world in a golden glow. He loved her. He *really* loved her.

“Don’t we need to stay and join in the celebration?” she asked when she realized he was heading for their chambers on the top floor of the multi-level compound. The dwelling carved inside a mountain housed the entire clan, each family having its own rooms. Multiple stories circled the massive main room where they’d just been united.

“No, we’ll have our own celebration.” He nuzzled her cheek. “They won’t expect to see us for days.”

“Days? Really?” That sounded perfect.

Halfway up the stairs, Jonah paused and pressed her to the wall. “I need a kiss to sustain me.”

She grinned. “It is taking a long time.”

“Wench.”

“Such abuse,” she laughed. “Perhaps if you fly.”

He kissed her, his tongue darting into her mouth as she giggled. She threaded her fingers into his hair and moaned as he ground his hips into her. Arousal seeped through her. Urgent but not dire. She needed him, she wanted him, but she wouldn’t die if he wasn’t in her in the next minute—though the idea of it sent creamy tingles spiking through her channel. Her folds warmed as if she’d been drinking alcohol, but right now, she wasn’t buzzed on anything but Jonah.

They needed to talk, but the truth from the ceremony made it all less imperative.

“If I fly, people will see,” he told her, nipping at her bottom lip.

“Do you care?”

“No. Do you? We’ll get a lot of ribbing.”

She blinked at him. “I’m feeling terribly naughty. You might want to hurry.”

“Sweet heaven!” Jonah stepped backward and a moment later, he’d shifted—slightly.

“You can do that?” she asked in wonder as she stared at the man before her, large wings flapping gently behind his back.

“Just wait until I take you flying while I make love to that sweet body of yours.”

Once more, she was carried, this time, over the railing and into the upper portion of the main hall. A raucous cheer went up, accompanied by a healthy dose of wolf whistles. Jonah just kept flying. He never stopped until he reached the door to their home. They were inside an instant later, the door kicked shut as he continued to the bedroom.

“I can’t believe them,” she laughed.

“They are mostly unmated males. I think they’re a little jealous. Can you blame them?” He dropped her on the bed and immediately straddled her. “You’re so beautiful.”

“Scarlett did pick out a stunning dress—”

“No. You...” His thumbs smoothed over her cheekbones. “I love you, Athena. The thought of anything happening to you, ever being without you again. I thought I was going to lose it when the Djinn kidnapped you. I wanted to rip the world apart.”

“I’m right here forever.” She smiled letting all her love shine through. She couldn’t believe the extreme peace that filled her now that the joining was complete. Finding a place within the Dragon community still loomed ahead of her, but right now, being with her Dragon seemed far more important.

Her hands traveled up his bare chest and traced the sigils that had been drawn there. She circled his small nipples then gave each a light pinch. “I like Dragon wedding garb.”

“Human wedding garb is cumbersome. I can’t get to you,” he complained.

“Hmm...well, is there some sort of rule that says the joining night needs to be all tender and heart-warming?” She blinked sweetly at him. “I think, we should, as they say, start as we intend to proceed. Scarlett told me Dragons never have girls—”

“Almost never.”

“And when our sons get married, I suspect their mates won’t want my dress. It might be horribly out of style by then, if not falling apart. So...rip it. You know what I like. And I’m feeling awfully naughty.”

Jonah grinned wickedly, an expression she knew she’d quickly come to adore. “Are you sure?” he asked. “Speak now or—oops, too late.” The dress split to her waist and his mouth was on her breasts. She moaned as strands of crackling tension zinged to her center. He drew hard on one nipple then the other. She squirmed as he carefully traced each puckered peak with his tongue.

She struggled to free her legs from the skirt of her dress so she could wrap them around Jonah. Reaching between them, he ripped the fabric to the hem, leaving her covered by only her panties, garter belt and stockings. Her shoes had been lost somewhere, but God alone knew where. Frantically, she ground against Jonah’s erection as it strained to be free of his this pants.

“I love your cock,” she moaned. “But you know what the best part of tonight is?”

“Hmm?” he asked as he kissed a line between her breasts to her tummy.

“I can do this every day for the rest of my life.” She stretched her arms over her head, prepping to goad him. “You know, until we get bored.”

“Will never happen,” he said, swirling his tongue around her navel.

“Are you sure? You might want to bring another Dragon into the mix.”

Jonah surged up her body until they were nose to nose. His hands clamped around her wrists, holding them near the headboard. “Will never happen,” he growled, his voice lethal. “No one else will ever touch you. Get that out of your head. You’re mine, *Velree*! Bought by the blood bond.”

Her eyes widened, her grin faltering at his anger. “God, Jonah, I was joking. Being bad.” She looked directly into his eyes so he could see her sincerity. “I can’t imagine ever wanting someone else. You’re everything I want. My body goes out of control whenever you’re near. That’s never happened.”

His wicked look returned. “Leave your hands where they are. I have a few joining presents for you.”

“When...”

“I knew I’d eventually find you. And the others were procured while Scarlett readied you for the ceremony. Flying Dragon Air has its advantages.”

Her dress was still on her arms and laid opened like a coat, the cool air teasing over her skin. Feeling as wanton as any courtesan, Athena waited for Jonah as he left the bed and went to the heavy wood dresser against the opposite wall. As she watched him, she could see herself reflected in the mirror. Had he tilted it that way on purpose? She looked so seductive...hot...like a present partially open and waiting for him.

Jonah caught her eye in the mirror, his smoldering gaze burning over her. Her nipples drew in harder and her panties grew damper.

Turning, he returned to the bed with a wood chest the size of a jewelry box. He opened it and pulled out one of the longest rope of pearls she’d ever seen. He grasped it in his fingers and it seemed pearls dripped from his hand. Slowly, he pulled the mass over her body. The strands spread to tease her skin, to roll over her needy pussy, to catch on her nipples. As he reached her hands, he released the length. Over and over, he wrapped it around her until her hands were bound from wrists to the middle of her forearms. Her breasts strained upward, an offering for him as he forced her into an unaccustomed position.

“Okay?” he asked.

“Yes,” she moaned.

“I thought you might like them.” Next, he removed diamond-encrusted clips. “Know what these are?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“I’ll show you.”

“Oh my God!” she screeched as he attached them to her nipples. An intense biting sting quickly morphed into an ecstasy so sweet she thought she might always beg for these. Tendrils of pleasure-pain streamed down her torso. Her cunt pulsed in reaction, growing so slick, she wondered if her stockings would soon be damp.

Jonah nipped the exposed tips of her breasts, and she screamed. His hands moved between their bodies and he rolled away her panties then dipped his finger into her needy folds. Eagerly, she moved with his touch as he stroked up and down her slit.

“I have another clamp for you,” he told her. He tapped her clit. “For here. Yes?”

“Yes,” she hissed. “Yes...please...”

Her hips shot off the bed as he attached it, her guttural cries unlike any she recognized. He fiddled with it and a buzzing filled her entire sex. Immediately, the walls of her channel pressed in, grasping and searching as they sought for his cock. Pressure built inside her womb, growing until she thought she might explode from the tension. Her entire body was suddenly an arena of sensation, writhing and contracting. Mindless words spewed from her lips as she sank into the morass of pleasure he’d pushed her into.

“One more thing,” he told her. He pulled out a white, leather flogger that had been folded in upon itself within the box.

She licked her lips and eyed the implement with eager anticipation.

“I wasn’t going to use this tonight, just play it over your skin, but—”

“Please...I want it,” she begged.

“So naughty,” he laughed.

“Very,” she agreed.

“All right then. But only a few.” His face grew stern and she shivered as she imagined what was on the way. She was already about to come with the clit clamp jerking away at her.

With one powerful arm, Jonah turned her over then spun her so that she lay sideways on the bed, her legs hanging over the edge and her ass in the air. Her breasts screamed from the

contact with the blankets. She wanted to flick at them with her fingers, to bring even more awareness to the tormented buds and feel the resulting reaction in her pussy.

“Yes,” she whispered. It was so good. Nirvana. How had fate been so smart as to pair her with the perfect man who was unafraid to explore her desires?

The heavy skirt of her dress was flipped up, the hem coming over her head and further heightening her arousal as it obscured her vision. His foot knocked her stance wide then she felt the cool leather dragging along her thigh. The pointed ends tickled her skin, and she ached to know what they’d feel like with a little force.

Shrugging and wiggling her shoulders, she got her head free of the skirt then placed her cheek on her arm. She could see every wanton bit of herself in the mirror, bound, flushed, lust shining in her eyes, naked ass in the air. Her breath caught as she saw Jonah draw back the flogger then land the ends on her behind, the strands splaying wide with the contact. She saw the expression of agonized bliss on her face. The slight sting was nothing compared to the perfect sensation moving through her and warming her pussy. Her teeth sank into her lip as she watched, getting hotter with each stroke. The flogger kissed her skin over and over until her bottom burned, the heat flooding down into her pussy.

Her fingers clenched.

“Fuck me. I need you in me,” she whispered. She barely heard herself, but suddenly, the flogger was tossed beside her. Jonah turned her again and bent her feet to the edge of the bed.

Taking his time, he removed his pants, his sizzling gaze, never leaving her. “So beautiful,” he murmured, repeating his earlier statement.

God, he was too, his large, thick, totally-hers cock rising from a bed of curling dark hair.

“Fuck me,” she begged. “Please, Jonah.”

He nodded and leaned over her. Instead of pushing inside her, he opened the nipple clamps and removed them, then the one on her clit, as well. Her cry at the sudden blood flow tingling to the tips was almost as loud as the screech when he’d attached them. She twisted and arched under him, an orgasm rushing over her. He grasped her hips and drove into her clasp channel. His thrusts were almost violent, and she met him with wild abandon.

To think she could have had this six months ago. She shoved the thought from her head. She didn’t want to think. She only wanted to feel what Jonah brought her. His hands tightened on her hips and she knew he was close. All at once, they reached the pinnacle and went flying over



the edge. His cum flooded her as she clenched around him. Tremors shook them both as she clung to him with her legs and he wrapped her tight in his embrace.

“I like Dragon Air,” she murmured against his temple as they came down.

“I can promise you frequent flyer miles and perks,” he chuckled.

She shifted, enjoying the feel of his hard body against hers. “I have all the perks I need. You love me. And I most definitely love you.” She kissed his jaw then nipped at his shoulder. “But I’ll take those frequent flyer miles.”

He turned his head and kissed her, and she knew she’d never tire of being with this man. How could she? They were made for one another. Bought with their blood and bound by their love.

## *About the Author*

When it comes to books and movies, Brynn Paulin has one rule: there must be a happy ending. After that one requirement, anything else goes. And it just might in any of her books.

Brynn lives in Michigan with her husband and two children, who love her despite her occasional threats to smite them. They humor her and let her think she's a goddess... as long as she provides homemade chocolate chip cookies on a regular basis. Brynn is president of her local chapter of Romance Writers of America and also hosts a weekly writing critique group. She's conducted workshops at several writers' conferences around the country as she enjoys mentoring and meeting new people.

According to Brynn, her writing success can be attributed to an eclectic collection of music, her local road construction crews, a trusty notebook, and of course, her husband, Mr. Inspiration, who puts up with a lot in the name of research. Brynn loves to talk to her readers and can be found at [www.brynnpaulin.com](http://www.brynnpaulin.com).

## ***Thank You!***

We appreciate your purchase of this Resplendence Publishing title. We hope your reading experience was a pleasurable one, and invite you to take 10% off your next electronic book purchase from Resplendence.

Visit Resplendence Publishing, select any title, and enter the following code when you check out: **ReadRP10**. This code is valid only at [www.ResplendencePublishing.com](http://www.ResplendencePublishing.com) for electronic book purchases only.

During your visit to [www.ResplendencePublishing.com](http://www.ResplendencePublishing.com), you can enjoy Free Reads from RP's hottest authors, obtain information on our Read Green charitable donation program, or sign up for our quarterly newsletter and our RP Reader Rewards program, which rewards loyal readers with a \$10.00 gift certificate for every \$100.00 spent.

You can also join us on MySpace and Blogger. You will find regular updates, information on upcoming releases and appearances, as well as contests for free RP titles. We love to hear from our readers, and hope to see you there.

Thank you again for your purchase, and we look forward to becoming your number one resource for high quality electronic fiction.

Best,

*The RP Team*

*Are you hot for teacher?*

**Check out the *Hot for Teacher* Series at Resplendence Publishing**

***Two Plus One* by Brynn Paulin**

College math teacher, Briony Swift, lives life on the straight and narrow. After all, one plus one always equals two. But when two of her adult male students visit her office one afternoon, she soon discovers that one plus two might be a new and better equation to explore...

***Body of Art* by Bronwyn Green**

Art professor Seth Granger has two problems—an absentee life drawing models and a case of unrequited lust. Luckily his troubles have the same answer—his colleague, Dr. Callie Sullivan.

The trick will be getting her out of her clothes and into his studio...and hopefully into his bed. However, she's intent on keeping her mind on her art and ignoring him. Now he just needs to convince her she should be his body of art.

***Sense and Sensuality* by Cara Hart**

Eleanor McLaren leads a subdued life. She hates parties, avoids social interactions, and she cannot talk to men. But within the shell of her timidity lies the heart of a siren. Afraid of her own boldness, she hides her desires. Especially from the man who stars in her dreams of passionate encounters and works in her department.

Eddie Harrington has never lacked for partners in his pleasure games. But for some reason, Eleanor is the one woman he can't get out of his head. She is definitely not the type he usually pursues. Then he sees her at a bar, looking like his wildest fantasy. And one night with her is not going to be enough. The man who never commits just might have met his match-until a mistake from his past forces her to choose between trusting him or walking away.

### ***Sex Ed* by Mia Watts**

Mina Lasky has a pesky crush on Biology professor, Derek Link. They've worked in tandem in the same University facility long enough that even the sound of his voice makes her hot. It's time to put the fantasy to an end. Mina signs up to be his guinea pig in a female sexuality lab for those on the doctorate track. She hopes to work Derek out of her system while enjoying some much needed sexual stimulation.

Dr. Derek Link has been itching to get his hands on the quiet, sexy Chemistry professor. He can't believe his luck when she signs up to be his lab. But one night isn't enough and Mina won't admit they can have something a lot more long term.

And when one of the students recognizes Mina, her heart isn't the only thing on the line. With her career in the hands of a blackmailer, and her heart begging to trust Derek, she's beginning to think the lab was a very bad idea.

**Available at Resplendence Publishing**

***The Hunt for the Elixir Series by Midnight Dupree***

***Blood Quest***

The Assassin was sent to ensure that the Vampire Queen died, and to recover the Elixir that would restore his kind back to their glory. He endured years of training and sexual restraint in order to become the best at what he does.

He is on the hunt for the *Elixir of Life*.

Micah and Sasha are vampire servants to the Queen. When she is murdered they believe their lives are coming to an end as well, but the Queen has left them one special gift and a mission...

***Winter's Blood***

When Angelina's sister is kidnapped, she is forced to steal a much sought-after formula. Fortunately, fate has paired her with a handsome vampire who has promised to help save her beloved sibling.

Dante wants to break through the frozen barriers of Angelina's heart, and will do almost anything to accomplish his goal. But first, he and Angelina must fight the evil and keep the precious formula out of evil hands.

Will Dante and Angelina be successful in their quest? Or will the blood spilled be their own?

### ***Blood Red Rose***

With the threat of danger high, Eli's world is on the verge of being destroyed. The *Elixir of Life* is needed by the Other's now more than ever. Their assassin has Eli in his sights. Eli is ready for this threat, but he finds an unexpected, yet intriguing distraction.

Rose is a beautiful female vampire on the run and doesn't realize how much she will need Eli. Yet, in the end, will she need to save him?

## **Also Available from Resplendence Publishing**

### ***Rules of Fire* by Tia Fanning**

*Once upon time, a long time ago, in a far away land, a young girl journeyed to a magical desert temple and met a handsome prince...*

To most, this sounds like the start of a beautiful fairytale. To me, it's the start of a horrible nightmare.

My name is Angel, and I am that young girl all grown up. You might have noticed me around. I am that "strange chick" everyone talks about—the one who enters a room and somehow causes all illuminated candles to extinguish. The one who has an irrational fear of salamanders. The one who freaks out and runs away every time she sees a large bird with crimson and gold feathers.

But if you knew the rest of the tale, you would understand.

I have spent the last seven years of my life secretly following the Rules of Fire. My family and friends have no idea of the danger I'm in, nor can they fathom how something as simple and elemental as fire can be my undoing. They don't know that, just beyond the flickering flames, *he* beckons me...

And I yearn to go to him.

### ***Red: A Seduction Tale* by Maddie James**



Garnet Boudreaux is going home. Not back to her nice little apartment in New York City, but to her childhood home in the bayou. She doesn't want to go, and isn't certain what will be waiting for her when she arrives. But standing there in the voodoo shop on Bourbon Street, in the middle of one helluva party, she's told by Madame Madeleine Dupuis that she has no choice. She presses two pouches into Garnet's hands, wraps a red cape around her, and tells her she must go—and go now—to see to her grandmother.

Max LeBlanc spies the lovely red-head across the street and knows in a heartbeat she is the one. A rougarou always knows when he's met his mate. Some may call him a lycanthrope, a werewolf if you will, but in Cajun bayou lands he's known simply as *The Rougarou*. He'd waited several hundred years for this moment, and for her. There is nothing left for him to do but mark her and claim her as his mate. Soon.

### ***Extinction* by Carol Lynne**

Professor of Environmental Science/Wildlife studies at UNLV, Jack McBain has spent his adult life trying to track a legend overheard during his youth. Born and raised in the Canadian Province of Newfoundland, Jack remembers his grandparents telling stories of a race of people eradicated by European settlers in 1829. According to the legend, the Beothuk people didn't die out as first thought, but were transformed into wolf shifters.

When Newfoundland wolves began to appear in great numbers, the European settlers began killing them under the guise of population control. In 1910, the last of the Newfoundland wolves was shot, making them one of the few extinct species of wolves in the world.

Following spotty leads, Jack begins to track what he believes are Beothuk/Newfoundland shifter wolves. His search leads him to the Lake Mead National Recreational Area outside of Las Vegas. There, on Spirit Mountain, he finally comes face to face with not only the shifter he's been looking for, but the man of his dreams he didn't know he needed.

### ***What the Cuff?* By Celia Kyle**

God really should have reconsidered making werewolves. That, or Lyssa needed to get better taste in men and stay away from those with wandering eyes—and other things. Drunk as a wolf, she stumbles to her best friend's house to sleep off her whiskey induced haze and wakes to...*cuffs*?

Caleb sees his chance and takes it. His buddies on the force ribbed him but good for buying silver plated cuffs. But with a werewolf in his bed, the woman he's yearned for since they were teens, he wasn't taking any chances. Lyssa was his. She just didn't know it yet.

### ***Oriana and the Three Werebears* by Tia Fanning**

Oriana Ricci has taken over the family business—flying cargo and rich tourists around Alaska's barely inhabited Kodiak Archipelago. When her plane malfunctions and she's forced to make an emergency landing, she finds herself stranded in the middle of a National Wildlife Refuge. With no civilization for miles and no hope of rescue, she thinks all is lost...

Until she stumbles upon the entrance to an underground bunker.

Jack, Jordan, and Jonathan McMathan own and operate a secret intelligence firm contracted by the US Government. Hidden away in an old Cold War spy station located the middle of the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge, the brothers are not only able to do their top secret jobs safely without fear of discovery, but are better to protect their other, more personal secret: They have the ability to shift into Kodiak bears.

Like a fairy tale gone bad, the brothers return home to find their lunch tasted—or eaten, their

computer chairs adjusted—or broken, and a beautiful blonde sleeping in one of their beds. This situation poses a big problem for the brothers...

Their location is now compromised. But more importantly, what are they to do with the lady?

Find Melinda Barron's *Desires of the Lamp Tales* at

[www.ResplendencePublishing.com](http://www.ResplendencePublishing.com)

### ***Wish Me Up, Rub Me Down***

With no love life to speak of, BBW Anya Bartholomew lives only for her job. This dedication has paid off. As a successful advertising agent, she has risen in the ranks of her firm to be the top money-maker.

But at the insistence of her two best friends, who claim she needs a break from work, Anya takes a weekend vacation to the small town of Pleasant, Maine. While shopping at an antique shop, she rubs a lamp that looks as if it could belong to Aladdin himself.

Things will never be the same.

Back at work on Monday morning, Anya finds that her boss has given her a new account...for a lamp factory. However, her clients—two very handsome, very sexy men—are more than what they seem.

They're Pleasure Djinn. And they have come to fulfill five of Anya's most secret sexual wishes.

### ***Aliya Baban and the Cave of Pleasure***

Advertising agent Aliya Baban is beautiful with a capital B. Unfortunately, she's also a witch

with a capital B. In her twenty-eight years of life, she's managed to offend almost every woman she has ever met.

But she doesn't care, really. That's just the way life is.

When her boss tells her to get the *Cave of Pleasure* account, or else get a new job, Aliya takes her party invitation—and the strange lamp she's received—and attends the nightclub's grand opening, ready to do battle for her livelihood.

Matuse is more than just the owner of the *Cave of Pleasure*...he's a pleasure djinni. And Aliya has rubbed his lamp. For the next thirty days, she belongs to him. Though he intends to bring intense pleasure to her body, it's also his job to make sure his "she-devil" changes her wicked ways.

Will Matuse be able to help Aliya overcome her painful past? Or will Aliya fail to make the five heartfelt apologies she needs to make to the five women she has hurt the most.

### ***To Rub, Honor and Obey***

Moreen McGee is a perfect example of how poor decisions made in youthful rebellion can haunt someone for life. Now on probation for ten years, she serves her court-ordered community service at a center for troubled teens, in the hopes of stopping other kids from taking the wrong path.

But when one of her young charges pickpockets a wallet from her high school nemesis, Aliya Baban, Moreen decides to put the illicit skills she learned as a teenager to good use...by breaking into Aliya's apartment to return the stolen wallet, thus keeping the kid who stole it out of trouble and out of jail.

However, once she's in the opulent Manhattan flat, Moreen can't resist the urge to take one small

token from the woman she still blames for her own downfall—an old, neglected oil lamp that she's sure Aliya will never miss.

Moreen accidentally summons a gorgeous demon-turned-pleasure djinni named Paran...and he's not too thrilled with the theft of his property. Moreen has rubbed his lamp, the contract is sealed. For the next thirty days, she belongs to him. And Paran intends to use this time to help his little felon learn some very important lessons, including the true meaning of the words *honor* and *obey*.

### ***Smoke, Fire and Desire***

Scientist Rhylie Dawson works hard, but when it comes to play she's pretty reserved. Until her friends take her to the *Cave of Pleasure* in New York City. She's there to celebrate her birthday, and maybe, just maybe, get lucky.

What Rhylie doesn't know is the *Cave of Pleasure* is run by Pleasure Djinn, and they're eager to show her that there's more to life than just work. On stage in front of a bevy of male dancers, Rhylie is told to choose one for her special birthday dance.

She picks the fireman, and quickly learns that where there's smoke, there's fire, and a great deal of desire.

***Find Resplendence titles at the following retailers***

***Resplendence Publishing***

[www.ResplendencePublishing.com](http://www.ResplendencePublishing.com)

***Amazon***

[www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com)

***Barnes and Noble***

[www.BarnesandNoble.com](http://www.BarnesandNoble.com)

***Target***

[www.Target.com](http://www.Target.com)

***Fictionwise***

[www.Fictionwise.com](http://www.Fictionwise.com)

***All Romance E-Books***

[www.AllRomanceEBooks.com](http://www.AllRomanceEBooks.com)

***Mobipocket***

[www.Mobipocket.com](http://www.Mobipocket.com)