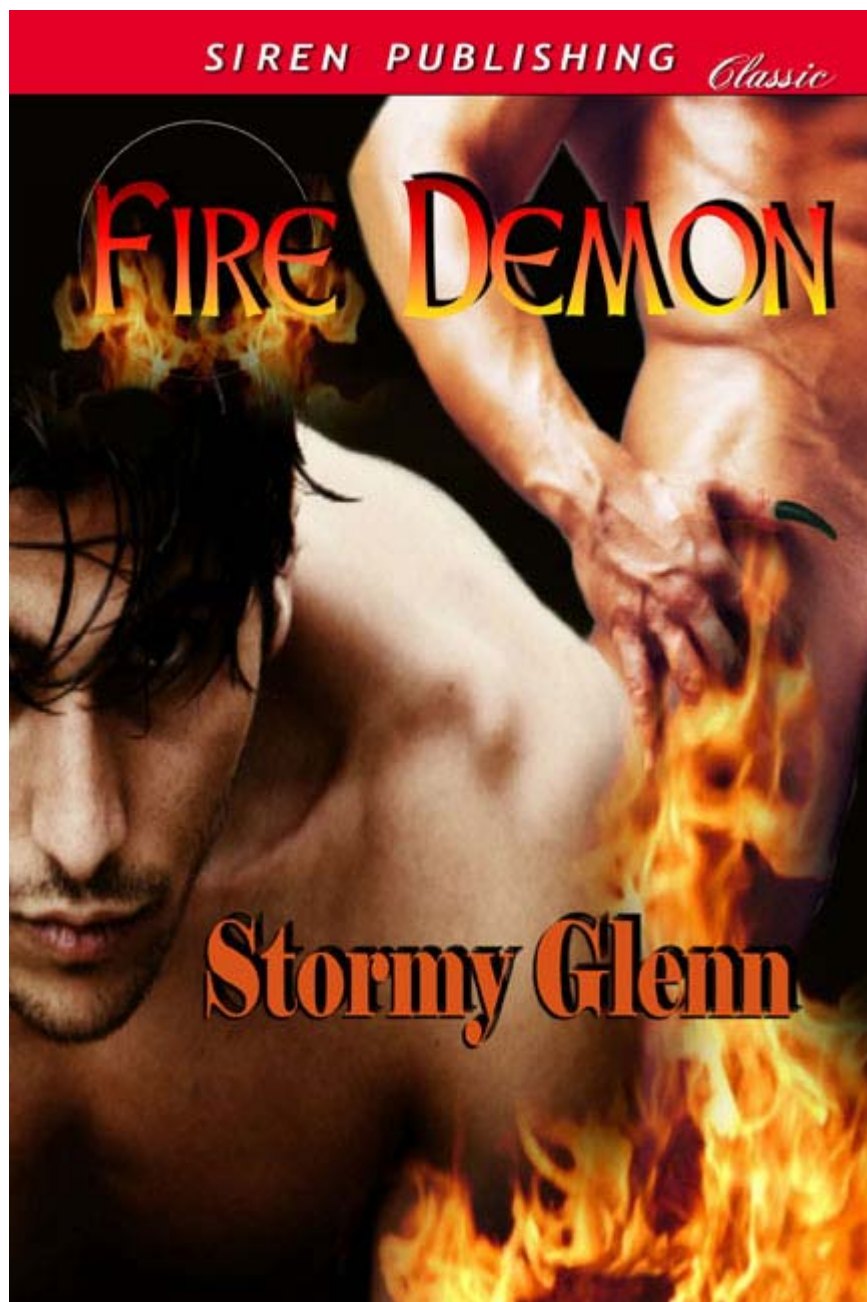


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FIRE DEMON

Stormy Glenn

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A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Erotic Romance

FIRE DEMON

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Regarding Ebook Piracy

Dear Readers,

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With deep gratitude,

Stormy Glenn

FIRE DEMON

STORMY GLENN

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Chapter 1

Detective Gabe Moretti rolled his head until he heard a distinct pop. He rubbed the sore muscles at the back of his neck with his hand. He hated stakeouts. It was the same thing every damn time—hurry up and wait. And he'd been waiting for his suspect to appear for the last six hours. Not too much longer and the next shift would be taking over and he could go home to bed.

“You want some more coffee?”

Gabe turned to look at his partner, Nick, and shook his head. “Naw, if I have any more coffee my back teeth are going to start floating.”

Nick snorted and poured himself a cup of the hot brown liquid from a Thermos. “Oh, hell, if I don't have some more it's not going to matter. I'll be unconscious from lack of sleep. I'm telling you, Gabe, these late-night stakeouts are going to kill me.”

Gabe chuckled as he looked back out the front window of the vehicle they sat in. “You're just pissed because this stakeout interfered with your booty call down at the bar.”

“I had a good one on the line, too,” Nick said. “He was sweet, Gabe. I'm telling you, young, tight ass, and lips that could suck the chrome off a trailer hitch.”

“Eeew,” Gabe said, wrinkling his nose in disgust. “I don’t need to hear about your sexual escapades.”

“You’re just upset because you’re not getting any.”

“I can get some if I want to.”

“Uh-huh, and when was the last time you got laid?”

Gabe rolled his eyes. “Just because I don’t kiss and tell does not mean I’m not getting any.”

Nick snickered. “That’s what I thought.”

“Just watch for the damn perp, Nick.” Gabe crossed his arms over his chest and continued to watch out the window. Nick was right. He didn’t have much of a sex life to talk about. He just never saw what the big deal was. Sex was sex. It wasn’t the be-all and end-all of the world. It had just never been that exciting for Gabe. It was more of a chore than anything else.

Gabe could probably count his boyfriends on one hand. He just never had that much interest in sex, and once his boyfriends found out, they usually left for greener pastures—or at least for guys who put out more than he did.

It left Gabe lonely, but recently he’d begun to think that being lonely was better than having to put out when he really didn’t want to. He liked spending time with male friends. He just didn’t really get that excited about the more physical side of things.

“Would you look at that?”

Gabe turned to see what Nick was talking about, his mouth dropping open as he watched four of the biggest, meanest-looking men he’d ever seen walk out of an alley halfway down the street. It wasn’t so much that they were big, but more that all four men were dressed all in black, right down to black leather dusters that nearly reached the ground.

“I don’t think they’re from around here,” Nick snorted.

It was true. They didn’t fit in with the local scenery. Besides the fact that these guys were wearing long leather coats in the middle of summer, people in the neighborhood tended to wear more casual

clothing. The southeast side of town wasn't one of the best neighborhoods to live in, let alone walk through. It was filled with gangs, drugs, and street walkers. However, it was the perfect place for their suspect to hide out.

Bobby G was suspected of masterminding a series of armed robberies in and around the local neighborhood. The thefts probably would have gone unreported if a little girl hadn't been shot in one of the robberies.

Most people in this neighborhood didn't have much faith in the local police department, but the shooting of an innocent seven-year-old girl changed all that. The neighborhood was up in arms and calling for blood.

Nick and Gabe got a tip that Bobby G was holding out in an apartment above the local Chinese restaurant. They'd been staking out the place for the last several hours for any sign of their suspect.

"What in the hell are they doing?" Nick asked.

Gabe shook his head. He didn't have a clue, but whatever it was made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. He watched as two of the men broke off from the group and walked down the street, away from where Gabe and Nick sat. The other two started toward them.

One man, the tallest in the group, caught Gabe's eye. He couldn't make out much of the man's features, but he was built like a brick shit house. Gabe wouldn't want to meet a man like that in a fight. He'd lose. In fact, he didn't know of anyone who wouldn't lose unless they had a bazooka or something. The man was huge. And it wasn't just his impressive height, which had to be several inches taller than Gabe's own six foot three. Even under the black leather of the man's duster, Gabe could see that he had wide shoulders and thick, muscular arms.

For the first time since he discovered what his dick was for, Gabe felt himself become aroused just from looking at someone. It stunned him so much he almost missed the sight of the suspect sneaking out

the door of a building just down the block then around the corner to the alley.

“Shit!” Gabe said as he reached for the door handle. “There goes Bobby G. The little shit is trying sneak down the alleyway.”

Gabe jumped from the car and started toward the alley. Nick joined him before he even got halfway across the street. They both ran toward the alley, drawing their guns before they reached the corner of the building.

“I’m going to head down the alley,” Gabe said. “You go through the Chinese restaurant and meet me out back. There’s a door through the kitchen that leads to the alley. You can come out in front of him. We’ll surround the little fucker.”

Nick nodded and ran toward the restaurant. Gabe gave him a minute then turned the corner. One of the reasons Gabe didn’t like alleys was the lack of light. He couldn’t see shit when he first turned the corner. It took him a moment for his eyes to adjust, and when they did, his jaw almost dropped to the ground.

A large man, almost as large as the four men he’d seen out on the street, held Bobby G against the alley wall. Bobby G’s feet dangled several feet off the ground. To anyone looking, the two men could have simply been making out in the alley. But Gabe knew better. He could see the life draining from Bobby G’s eyes.

Gabe knew the man holding Bobby G was killing him. It might have been the way Bobby G looked at him so desperately. It might have been the way the bigger man’s face was buried in Bobby G’s throat. Whatever it was, Gabe knew he needed to do something.

“Freeze! Police!” Gabe shouted as he walked farther into the alley. He crossed his fingers and prayed that Nick would hurry the hell up and give him some backup before the large guy ripped Bobby’s head off. Because when he lifted his head from Bobby G’s neck, that’s exactly what he looked like he wanted to do. “Why don’t you just put him down, okay?”

The eerie red eyes that glared at him from several feet away gave Gabe such a chill he almost backed out of the alley. The blood dripping down the man's chin didn't help. Unfortunately, being a cop meant he couldn't just leave Bobby G there to die, as much as he'd like to.

Gabe gestured with his gun. "Come on, put him down, dude."

Bobby G was put down, but not quite in the manner Gabe meant. He watched in astonishment as the large man flicked his wrist and Bobby G went sailing through the air. He hit the alley wall opposite from where he had been and slammed to the ground with a sickening thud.

Gabe could tell from the odd angle of Bobby G's neck that he was dead. His head was practically turned around backwards. Gabe took a step closer, his eyes widening when he saw the large, bleeding gash in Bobby G's throat. It looked like it had been ripped out.

"Dude!" Gabe said as he looked back at the other man. "Put your hands up nice and slow. I don't want to shoot you." The man started in Gabe's direction. Gabe waved his gun at the guy. "Hands up! I have a gun. I do not want to shoot you. Put your hands up!"

Nothing he said seemed to work. The man just kept coming toward him. Gabe grimaced. He didn't want to shoot the man, but there seemed to be nothing else to do. The man was not listening at all.

"Stop where you are and put your hands in the air, or I will shoot you!" Gabe tried one last time. When the man continued to advance on him, Gabe regretfully pulled the trigger. He hoped to only wound the guy, but when the shot to the man's shoulder didn't even slow him down, Gabe shot again.

This bullet entered the man's leg. He stumbled a bit but continued to stalk toward Gabe.

Geez, this guy has to be on PSP, LSD, or some sort of drug, Gabe thought to himself as he unloaded his gun into the man.

Six rounds and the man still walked as if unaffected. He should have been dead after four—at the very least.

The man growled as he reached for Gabe. Glowing red eyes bore into Gabe as a hand wrapped around his throat. Gabe was lifted off the ground by several inches.

Not one to give in easily, Gabe grabbed at the tight grip around his throat with one hand to free himself and with his other hand beat the guy over the head with his gun. He also used his legs to kick out at the guy, aiming for any part of the man's body he could reach.

Gabe almost winced when one lucky kick caught the man right between his legs. If it wasn't for the fact that the man was trying to kill him, Gabe might have felt sorry for him when a long, painful groan fell from the guy's lips.

Since the man *was* trying to kill him, Gabe aimed another kick in the same place. The hand around his throat loosened enough for Gabe to pull away. The man dropped to his knees. Gabe grabbed the stranger's head and brought his knee up as hard as he could into the man's face. He went down like a ton of bricks.

Gabe rested his hands on his legs and took several deep breaths. He was pretty sure he'd have hand-sized bruises on his throat by morning. Good thing he didn't have to go see his parents until next week, because there would be no way to explain them to his over-protective mother.

Replacing his gun in his holster, Gabe stepped closer and rolled the man onto his back, not an easy feat considering the man's size. He grabbed both of the man's arms and handcuffed them behind his back. Rolling the man back over, Gabe began searching him.

He wanted to know if this guy had some connection to Bobby G. He wanted to know if this was just some random killing or if someone put a hit out on Bobby G. And he wanted to know why the guy didn't go down under all of the bullets Gabe put in him. He should be dead right now, not unconscious.

Gabe's eyes widened with each item he pulled out of the man's pockets—several knives, a couple of ninja-type stars he'd seen in movies, and, most peculiarly, a bag of salt. Gabe frowned as he looked down at the items then at the unconscious man.

Just who the fuck was this guy?

Gabe froze when dark shadows suddenly blocked the street lamp. He glanced up to find the four men he'd seen earlier standing in a circle around him and the man on the ground. Cursing himself for not being more aware of his surroundings, Gabe slowly stood to his feet.

"This is a crime scene, gentlemen," Gabe said evenly, which surprised him considering the size of the lump in his throat. "I'll need you to step back, please." Gabe wasn't stupid. He knew when he was outnumbered.

Gabe wished he'd remembered to reload his gun. The largest of the four men, the one who caught his interest earlier, suddenly grabbed him and slammed him against the alley wall. Gabe grunted when his back made contact with the hard brick. He'd have bruises for sure.

He glanced up to see pure black eyes staring down at him intently, and he needed to look quite a ways up. This stranger was several feet taller than Gabe, just as he thought. Gabe felt positively puny next to him.

"You vanquished Tuloq," the man growled as he began to sniff the curve of Gabe's neck. The heat emanating from the man's skin almost burned Gabe alive. Instead of being afraid, Gabe wanted to climb into the stranger's skin and cover himself in his warmth. "You are worthy of my mark."

Gabe blinked.

A moment later, he cried out as pain exploded in the skin between his neck and shoulder. He grabbed at the man holding him, his hands sinking into long, thick strands of silky black hair. Before he could pull the man off, the pain radiating in his shoulder turned to pleasure so intense he thought he might pass out.

“Oh, God!” Gabe wailed as he felt his cock harden and then erupt at almost the same instant. Hot cum filled his jeans as the most forceful orgasm Gabe ever experienced rocketed through his body. Gabe felt like he’d finally discovered why people had sex.

“Not God, *Demonas Amaté*,” the man growled into Gabe’s ear just before he gave into the blackness surrounding him. “Tehmper.”

Chapter 2

Tehmper slowly lowered his *Demonas Amaté* to the ground and squatted down next to him. He reached out and stroked the back of his hand across the bloody puncture wounds in the man's neck, smiling at how deep they were. They would not heal easily. This was good.

While he did not wish to inflict pain on his *Demonas Amaté*, the deep wound would ensure that no one approached his mate in a manner that was not wanted. He would be safe until Tehmper could return for him.

"Tehmper."

Tehmper acknowledged Zayne with a small inclination of his head, but he was loath to take his eyes off the other half of his soul. He'd waited years to meet his *Demonas Amaté*. He didn't want to leave him so soon, even if he knew he needed to.

"We must go before more surface dwellers arrive," Zayne said. "I can hear them coming."

Tehmper nodded. He could hear sirens coming in their direction and knew they didn't have much time. "Did you gather the body of the surface dweller?"

"Clagh and Storym took the body through the portal with Tuloq."

"Very good." He did not want his *Demonas Amaté* to be blamed for the killing. He knew how the surface dweller's laws worked. With a dead body and an unconscious man, both found in an alley with signs of a struggle, he had no doubts his *Demonas Amaté* would be suspected of the killing. Tehmper couldn't allow that.

Tehmper gently caressed his *Demonas Amaté's* face one last time and then reached for the necklace around his neck. He placed the

golden chain around the man's neck and smoothed it down his chest. The red stone in the center of the intricate pendant glowed brightly for a moment, then slowly faded to a dull red.

Satisfied that his mate was safe and that he'd be able to find him anywhere on the surface world, Tehmper stood to his feet. He took one last look at the gorgeous man at his feet, then turned to join his clan brothers.

As he walked toward the temporary portal erected by one of his brothers, Tehmper could feel Zayne's eyes on him. He turned to look at him. "What?"

"You have claimed the surface dweller?"

"He is my *Demonas Amaté*."

Nothing else needed to be said. Even Zayne would understand what that meant. They were warriors, demon hunters. They spent their entire lives hunting and either killing or capturing rogue demons. Their one solace in their battles was their *Demonas Amaté*, their demon mates. Tehmper just found his.

"And you choose to leave him on the surface?"

"You doubt my loyalty to this mission?" Tehmper snapped. He clenched his fists at his side and glared at his brother.

"No, of course not," Zayne said quickly. "I doubt the merit of leaving your mate on the surface. He should be brought to our world where he will be safe, not left here for any *Shayatin* to find."

"I have marked him and given him my amulet," Tehmper said. "He will be safe until I can return for him. No rogue demon will get to him." Tehmper smiled. "Besides, he vanquished Tuloq. He can hold his own or he would not be a fit mate for me."

"He will not be truly safe until you claim him fully and bring him below to Jinnistan."

Tehmper stopped suddenly and turned. He grabbed Zayne by the front of his shirt and slammed him against the nearest wall, lifting him a few inches off the ground. "He is my mate. I decide when he comes below and when I will fully claim him."

“Tehmper.”

Tehmper dropped Zayne back to his feet and let go of him. “My *Demonas Amaté* is not your concern.”

“You are my brother, Tehmper,” Zayne said as he smoothed his shirt down, sending Tehmper a small glare. “Of course your *Demonas Amaté* is my concern. He became part of our clan the moment you marked him.”

“Then let us finish this mission so that I may return to claim him.”

Tehmper could hear Zayne chuckle as he followed behind him. He frowned. Zayne was the comedian of their little group. He was always cracking jokes of one sort or another. While Tehmper usually found it amusing, this time his mate was involved. And that was never a joke.

He could feel the curious gazes of his brothers as he stepped through the temporary portal and into their world. Tehmper ignored them. He had a mission to complete and a mate to claim. He did not have time to assuage their curiosity.

Tehmper nodded to the guardians who watched over the portal in Jinnistan. “Please inform the council that we have retrieved Tuloq, and he is alive to stand judgment.”

“Very good, *Djini*,” one of the guardians said before turning away and taking off down the large stone steps to the portal gate.

Tehmper turned back to the gate and watched as Clagh and Storym passed their prisoner off to the guardians. Tehmper wasn’t surprised when Clagh followed after them when they left with Tuloq to take him to his cell where he would await judgment. Clagh didn’t like leaving things for others to handle.

“Please inform the Amir that I wish an audience with him,” Tehmper said to another guardian. The man nodded and walked away. Tehmper turned back to face Storym and Zayne. “Will you join me, brothers?”

Storym cocked his head to one side, looking confused. Zayne just grinned as he crossed his arms over his chest. “Our illustrious

Tehmper has found his *Demonas Amaté*, and he left him on the surface.”

Tehmper knew demon hunters were taught not to show emotion from an early age. They were warriors. They couldn’t afford to show emotion. It is almost a point of honor with them, which was why the stunned expression on Storym’s face surprised Tehmper so much.

“You left your *Demonas Amaté* on the surface?” Storym asked.

“I couldn’t very well bring him below, considering the situation,” Tehmper replied. “We had a mission to complete. Now that Tuloq is secure, I have requested an audience with the Amir. I will petition for formal admission of my *Demonas Amaté* into our clan.”

“You know that if this man is your *Demonas Amaté*, his joining our clan is the only acceptable solution,” Storym insisted. “You cannot be separated from your *Demonas Amaté* once you’ve claimed him.”

“I am aware of this.” Even now, Tehmper could feel the need to claim his mate crawling through his body like a hundred little ants scurrying about under his skin. He itched, ached. He gritted his teeth to retain his control. “I will have my *Demonas Amaté*, but I will have him in the proper manner.”

“You really want to wait for the formal ceremony before you claim him?” Storym asked. “Can you wait that long? Your craving for him will start interfering with your judgment if you don’t claim him.”

“I will make no mistakes where my *Demonas Amaté* is concerned.”

“I do have one question,” Zayne said. “He is a surface dweller. Do you think he will willingly accept your claim?”

“He is my *Demonas Amaté*,” Tehmper replied. “I have already given him my mark. He does not have a choice.”

* * * *

Tehmper knelt at the bottom of the dais where his Amir sat, his head bent in respect. As much as he wanted to get this meeting going, he kept his mouth closed and waited to be acknowledged by his leader.

“Tehmper,” the Amir said after several silent moments, “what brings one of my most feared warriors before me?”

Tehmper finally raised his head and looked up at the Amir. “I beg your indulgence, Amir. I have come to formally request admission of my *Demonas Amaté* to my clan.”

“Your *Demonas Amaté*?” The Amir chuckled. “Congratulations are in order, then.”

“Yes, Amir.”

“And just where is your *Demonas Amaté*?”

Tehmper swallowed past the lump in his throat. Here was the hard part. Those within Jinnistan pretty much disdained any surface dweller. Tehmper hoped that the Amir would overlook this one little thing and grant him his request.

“My *Demonas Amaté* is on the surface, Amir.”

“A surface dweller?”

Tehmper winced. He could hear the outrage in the Amir’s voice. He bowed his head respectfully, even though he wanted to rage against the Amir. His mate was an honorable man. He knew that. If he wasn’t, he wouldn’t have tried to take Tuloq in without hurting him.

“Yes, Amir.” Tehmper swallowed again. His throat was so dry he wondered that he could make any sound at all. “He defeated Tuloq and enabled us to capture him alive.”

“What’s this?” the Amir asked. “A surface dweller defeated a *Shayatin*?”

“Yes, Amir.” Tehmper felt great pride that his mate defeated one of the *Shayatin*. Even demon hunters had a hard time defeating rogue demons. For a surface dweller to do so was a great feat.

“I would like to meet this surface dweller, Tehmper, before I make my decision.”

As much as he wanted to argue, Tehmper knew he could not. The Amir was the chosen leader of their people. His word was law. To go against the Amir's word was to invite his own death.

"As you wish, Amir."

"Bring this surface dweller before me so I may see the one who defeated Tuloq."

"Yes, Amir." Tehmper rose to his feet, clasped his hands together, and bowed over them before turning to walk out of the throne room.

"And, Tehmper," the Amir said just as Tehmper reached the large double doors, "do not claim this man until I have met him. I have not yet decided if he will be allowed to join your clan or not."

Tehmper gritted his teeth. He took a deep breath before turning to bow to the Amir again. "As you say, Amir."

Tehmper waited until he walked out of the royal palace and down the roadway to his clan compound. He passed by everyone he came across, ignoring their greetings as he entered the compound, and went straight up the stairs to the highest point in the building that housed his clan, the lookout point. He arched his head back, clenched his fists in the air, and roared out his rage. How dare the Amir forbid him to claim his *Demonas Amaté*. It was unheard of for a demon hunter to be denied his demon mate. It just didn't happen.

A *Demonas Amaté* was the other half of his soul, his reason for living. As a demon hunter, Tehmper fought every day to keep his kingdom and his people safe from the *Shayatin*. His reward for years of fighting was the solace he would find in the arms of his *Demonas Amaté*.

Tehmper's rage left him, only to be replaced by heartache so deep it felt like his chest was going to rip in two. He sat down on one of the stone steps and buried his head in his hands, despair and anguish the only emotions he could feel.

"Tehmper."

"The Amir forbade me to claim my mate until he could meet him," Tehmper said quietly.

“Surely, you jest,” Clagh snorted.

Tehmper raised his head and glared up at his clan brother. “Do I look like I am joking?”

“But he can’t do that.”

Tehmper snorted. “Well, he did. He wants to meet my *Demonas Amaté* before he will grant him admission into our clan. In the meantime, he has forbidden me from claiming him.”

“No, you don’t understand, Tehmper. It is against our laws for anyone to interfere in the mating of a demon hunter with his *Demonas Amaté*. It’s written in our ancient scrolls. No man, woman, or child may interfere with a demon hunter claiming his rightful mate.”

Tehmper frowned. His eyebrows drew together in confusion. “Then why would the Amir forbid me from—” Tehmper suddenly sucked in a quick breath. “You don’t think he means to choose my mate for his own, do you?”

“I don’t see how,” Clagh replied. “If you’ve claimed him, then he is yours.”

“I’ve only given him my mark.”

“Then he is still fair game until you finish the claiming.” Clagh rubbed his hand over his chin as he began to pace around the small balcony. “If your *Demonas Amaté* is worthy of being claimed by a demon hunter and he is yet unclaimed, then I imagine the Amir would be interested in him. Anyone that can defeat a *Shayatin*, surface dweller or not, would be a fit consort for the Amir.”

“He is *my Demonas Amaté*!” Tehmper growled. “The Amir will not get him.”

“Then I suggest that you have someone search the ancient scrolls for the laws pertaining to a demon hunter claiming his mate, and I’d do it before you go back to the surface and claim him. Once he is in Jinnistan, he falls under the rule of the Amir.”

Tehmper fumed and clenched his fists. What did he know about ancient scrolls? He was a demon hunter. He knew how to hunt, how

to defend, and how to kill. He didn't know how to go through ancient scrolls searching for some obscure law.

He finally looked up at his clan brother. "Can you help me? You seem to know more about these ancient scrolls than I do. I wouldn't know the first place to look, and even if I did, I wouldn't know what I was looking for."

"I'd be happy to assist you, Tehmper, you know that."

Tehmper nodded. He did know that. Clagh was his clan brother, along with Storym and Zayne. Together, the four of them made up their clan. They worked together, lived together, and trained together. They trusted their lives to each other.

Each demon hunter clan was made up of four warriors, each demon having a control of a different element. Tehmper was a fire demon, Zayne a water demon, Storym an air demon, and Clagh was an earth demon.

They were all born half-breed demons. If they were one of the lucky ones, they underwent a transformation when they reached maturity. Their elemental ability would manifest and they would join the ranks of the demon hunters. If they didn't transform, they were just regular citizens of Jinnistan, or *Afrit* as they were called. They could join the imperial guards and protect the royal family or become guardians and safeguard the citizens of Jinnistan. But only the transformed became demon hunters.

"Do you really think that the Amir would try to take my *Demonas Amaté*?" Tehmper asked as he regarded Clagh's grim features.

Clagh shrugged. "The Amir wishes to find his mate just like we do."

"But this man is my *Demonas Amaté*, not the Amir's."

"He also defeated a *Shayatin*," Clagh said. "That says a lot about his strength. I've never heard of a surface dweller defeating a *Shayatin* before. I'm sure that is an attractive trait for the Amir."

“Doesn’t matter,” Tehmper snapped. “He is my *Demonas Amaté*. I gave him my mark and my pendant. The claiming is all but accomplished. It’s just a matter of bringing him back to Jinnistan.”

“And exchanging blood with him during sex.”

Tehmper’s groin tightened at the thought of claiming his mate in a sexual manner, of drinking his sweet blood again. “That, too.”

Chapter 3

“Would you stop staring at me?” Gabe snapped for the hundredth time. “I’m not dying.”

“Dude,” Nick said, “you, like, had your throat nearly ripped out.”

“Well, I didn’t.” Gabe absently rubbed the wound healing on his shoulder, just at the curve of his neck. It was weird, but every time he rubbed the spot, it sent a tingle down his spine. It wasn’t a bad tingle but almost an arousing one.

It felt almost like the wound had a direct connection to his cock. Gabe had been mortified when he got home from the crime scene to find dried cum all over his groin. He didn’t remember how it happened, and that freaked him out even more. The paramedics tried to get him to go to the hospital, but he refused. He didn’t want anyone touching him. For some reason, the mere idea of someone putting their hands on him made his skin crawl. He didn’t even want Nick touching him and they’d been friends forever.

Gabe’s hand trailed down to the necklace around his neck. He wrapped his fingers around the intricate pendant and immediately felt better, warmer. Gabe couldn’t remember where he’d gotten the necklace, much like he couldn’t remember who attacked him. He just knew he couldn’t take it off. He had a fit when the paramedics tried to take it from him, not calming down until they promised to leave it on him. Holding it or having it pressed against his naked skin made him feel better, protected. Gabe just couldn’t explain it. He also couldn’t explain the strange dreams he’d been having every night since the attack—eerie, glowing, red eyes that promised his death, black eyes

that seemed to see into his soul, and a fog that seemed to cover all of his memories.

Gabe woke up in the mornings with cum all over his abdomen and groin. He hadn't had a wet dream in years, and now he'd had one every night for the last week. He seemed to get aroused from the littlest thing but had no desire to have anyone relieve his problem.

He'd already tried that, and it was a colossal disaster. Gabe called an old boyfriend and went out on a date with him last night. He'd been hard the entire night. One touch of the man's hand on his cock and any desire he felt slid away, only to be replaced with a revulsion so strong he had to run to the bathroom and throw up.

Gabe had attributed it to his recent injury, but he was skeptical. Something had happened in that dark alley a week ago, and he didn't have a clue what. He just knew he had a huge bite mark in his neck, a necklace he couldn't remember receiving, and a missing suspect.

Gabe remembered following Bobby G into the alley and he remembered waking up with Nick hovering over him and paramedics on the way. He had no idea how he got there or what happened. There were about ten minutes of time missing from his memory.

"Are you sure you're okay?" Nick asked. "You've been acting kind of squirrely all night long." He snorted. "Hell, you've been acting squirrely for the last several nights."

Gabe shrugged. He couldn't explain it. He felt like he was waiting for *something* to happen, only he just didn't know what that *something* was. But the waiting was enough to make his skin itch. Several times he found himself rubbing his hands up and down his arms and walking back and forth across the room.

"You don't think that thing on your throat got infected, do you?"

Gabe paused his pacing, realizing that he was rubbing at the spot again. He shoved his hands in his pockets and resumed stride. He felt cold, a constant freezing, bone-deep cold. He hadn't been able to warm up since the alleyway. He wore long-sleeve shirts, drank hot

chocolate and tea, and had even tried hot showers, but nothing he did seemed to work.

“No, it’s not infected,” Gabe said. “It’s fine. It itches, but that’s because it’s healing. That’s all.”

Nick didn’t look like he believed him. Gabe rolled his eyes. He walked over and sat down on the couch next to Nick. He pulled his shirt off over his head, yanked the bandage off, and then leaned toward Nick. “See, it’s fine.”

Nick was silent for a moment, almost too long. Gabe started to turn toward Nick when the man whistled low under his breath. “Gabe, have you actually looked at this thing in the mirror?”

Gabe frowned. “No, why?”

“It looks like a puncture wound.”

“A what?”

“You’re going think I’ve lost my mind, but this looks like a bite wound. It’s just two teeth marks, like a vampire bit you.”

“Wha—” Gabe jumped to his feet and raced into his bathroom, slamming the door behind him. He flipped on the light, then leaned over the counter and looked in the mirror. Gabe felt like he couldn’t breathe, like someone was sitting on his chest.

Nick was right. Two small, even puncture marks marred his skin. There were no other visible marks on him. Gabe reached up and ran his fingers lightly over the small holes, his skin tingling with the caress.

“What the fuck happened to me?” he whispered softly. Gabe closed his eyes and gripped the counter top, overcome with confusion, bewilderment, and puzzlement.

“I believe I happened.”

Gabe’s eyes snapped open to see pure black eyes staring back at him in the mirror from a tall figure standing behind him. His heart thundered. His hands clenched on to the edge of the countertop to assure himself that he was still in reality.

Gabe frowned as he noticed the room growing warmer. He actually felt warm for the first time in days. That, more than anything, told him that the gorgeous man standing behind him had to be an illusion. Nothing made him warm these days.

Gabe closed his eyes and slowly turned around, positive that when he opened them, the man would be gone. Gabe counted to ten, then slowly opened his eyes. He felt the blood rush from his head, and he almost collapsed back on the counter.

“You—you’re real,” he whispered.

“I am very real.”

“Wha—Who are you?”

“I already told you who I was, *Demonas Amaté*.”

“Demo what?”

Gabe jerked back from the large hand that moved in his direction. The man paused, then slowly continued to reach out for him. Gabe cried out as fingertips brushed the two puncture wounds on his shoulder.

“I am Tehmper. You are *Demonas Amaté*. My demon mate.”

Gabe wanted to protest. He wanted to scream and yell and tell this stranger that he was out of his mind, but his body just wouldn’t move. He was frozen in place from the pleasure of Tehmper’s touch sent tingling through his body.

Suddenly, he was hard and achy. “Oh, God, please bite me,” Gabe pleaded, suddenly free of his paralysis. He gripped Tehmper’s shirt in his hands and pulled him closer, angling his neck to the side.

“Not God. Tehmper.” He leaned forward and sank his fangs into the wound on Gabe’s neck. Strong arms wrapped around Gabe, pulling him closer until his body was plastered against Tehmper’s.

Gabe could feel every rippled muscle, every dip and ridge. He could feel the hard shaft pressed against his abdomen, and it made his mouth water. Gabe never felt this level of arousal in his life. He wanted to rub himself all over the man holding him. It was more important to him than breathing.

Whimpers of need escaped Gabe's lips when Tehmper grabbed his ass. He didn't even protest when he was lifted up onto the counter and Tehmper stepped between his legs. Desire so intense it made his body shudder rocketed through Gabe. He could feel every pull of Tehmper's mouth on his neck. He knew Tehmper was drinking his blood, and all he wanted to do was give him more. Gabe would gladly let the man drink him dry if it meant the pleasure would go on.

Gabe wrapped his arms around Tehmper's head and his legs around his waist. He groaned in protest when Tehmper pulled his fangs free. His groan was smothered by hard, searching lips that demanded a response he willingly gave.

The kiss sent the pit of his stomach into a wild swirl. It was hard and demanding, exploring, leaving Gabe's mouth burning with fire. His emotions whirled as he felt his cock throb. Sensation exploded through Gabe, pushing him over the edge into his release.

Gabe pulled away from Tehmper's mouth and dropped his head back on his shoulders as he cried out, shots of cum filling his pants.

"*Demonas Amaté*," Tehmper said, his voice low and rough. Gabe whimpered when he felt a hand push inside his pants and brush against his sensitive cock. He raised his head just in time to see Tehmper lick the spunk off his hand.

"Oh, my God," Gabe murmured almost silently. His eyes widened when Tehmper grinned.

"No, not God. I am Tehmper, and you are my *Demonas Amaté*."

Gabe's heart pounded, but he didn't know if it came from the man's words or the intense orgasm that had just swept through his body. "I'm your what?"

"My *Demonas Amaté*, my demon mate."

"And what exactly does that mean?" Gabe asked, but he wasn't sure if he wanted to know.

"You belong to me."

"The hell I do," Gabe snapped as his passion of moments ago turned into a red haze of rage. He slammed his hands into Tehmper's

chest, the man taking an involuntary step back under the hit. Gabe didn't know who this guy was or what his game was, but he belonged to no one.

"Now, *Demonas Amaté*, there is no reason to—"

"My name is Gabe. Gabriele Antonio Moretti, not *Demonas Amaté* or demon mate or whatever else you want to call it." Gabe pushed again until Tehmper's back hit the door. "And I do not belong to you."

"You do belong to me," Tehmper snapped right back. "You wear my mark. You wear my necklace. You are mine."

Gabe drew back his fist and let it fly. It connected right in the middle of Tehmper's face, much to Gabe's surprise. Tehmper grunted and grabbed his face. Gabe used the counter as his perch to kick out with his legs. His feet landed right in the middle of Tehmper's chest.

Gabe's mouth dropped open when Tehmper flew backwards and crashed through the door, landing on the floor of the hallway. Gabe wasted no time. He jumped down from the counter and raced to the doorway, pausing to look at the splintered wood frame before rushing through it.

He jumped over Tehmper's body and ran down the hallway toward the living room. The exhilaration of the fight, the blood pumping through his veins, all of it froze when he stepped into the living room and found Nick flanked by two of the largest men he'd ever seen—with the exception of Tehmper.

Gabe quickly backpedaled and ran down the hallway toward his bedroom. Tehmper was just coming to, shaking his head as if confused, when Gabe jumped over him and continued on to his bedroom.

Gabe ran to his nightstand, pulled out his gun, and checked it to make sure he had a full clip. He started to go back to the other room when some inner instinct told him to grab another clip. Gabe did, then turned and raced down the hallway.

Tehmper was no longer in the hallway, but Gabe wasn't surprised. A man that size wouldn't stay down for long. Gabe ran back into the living room to find three men now surrounding Nick. He carefully aimed his gun at all of them.

"I'm a police officer," Gabe said slowly.

"I don't think they care, Gabe," Nick snipped.

"Shut up, Nick, you're not helping here." Gabe kept his gun on the three men as he slowly made his way over to the phone. He noticed that they made no threatening moves toward either him or Nick.

Gabe picked up the phone and started to dial just as the front door flew open with such force that it slammed against the wall. He dropped the phone on the floor and whipped around, gun aimed and ready to fire at whoever just crashed into his house.

Several men who rivaled the ones already in Gabe's house came through the door. There was something different about these men, though. For the first time since he discovered Tehmper in his bathroom, Gabe felt true fear.

It might have been the glowing red eyes aimed in his direction. It might have been the sharp fangs each man had. It might have been the way they wailed, as if howling like a dog. Whatever it was, Gabe knew the new visitors were the bad guys.

Gabe raised his gun to fire, but before he could pull the trigger he was grabbed and pulled back until he stood behind a wall of men. Nick was pushed back to stand next to him. Nick looked as confused as Gabe felt.

Before Gabe could figure out exactly what was happening, World War III started in his living room. Gabe and Nick continued to be pushed back until they hit the wall. The men who were with Tehmper took on the bulk of the fight, leaving Tehmper to guard Gabe and Nick.

Gabe watched the fight, wincing when his dining room table splintered and crashed to the ground under the weight of two of the

fighting men. Damn, he loved that table, but it wasn't as bad as watching his big screen television crash to the floor.

Gabe's stunned confusion swirled around him until one of the newcomers took aim at Tehmper. He watched as the sexiest man he ever saw was ripped away from his position in front of him and Nick and tossed through the air like a feather.

The monster that did the deed turned toward him almost immediately. "*Demonas Amaté*," it growled.

As far as Gabe was concerned, it was an *it*. Nothing he knew of with long fangs, sharp claws, and a body the size of a truck could be human. The monster took a step toward them, and Gabe took a step in front of Nick. Tehmper called him *Demonas Amaté*, so Gabe knew that this thing was after him and not Nick. He didn't know what the monster wanted, but he didn't have any plans on letting the thing have it.

Gabe aimed his gun at the monster and pulled the trigger. He didn't even call out or give a warning. He just pulled the trigger over and over again until his gun clicked empty. Moving on auto pilot, Gabe quickly replaced the clip and started shooting some more.

Gabe's gun clicked empty again. The monster just grinned, his fangs shining in the living room light. Gabe swallowed and prayed he wasn't about to die. As the thing in front of him took a step closer, Gabe wondered if death would be preferable.

"We are so fucked!" Nick whispered.

Gabe nodded. He had no doubt that they were going to die. The evil rolling off the monster stepping toward them was so thick that Gabe could practically see it. It was like a haze of black smoke around the man's body. It gave the air a slight chill and made Gabe's skin crawl.

The monster raised its hand and bared its fangs, hissing. Gabe braced himself, knowing he was about to die, when a ball of fire flew through the air and hit the monster in the back. It screamed a

harrowing shriek that sent chills up Gabe's spine and then went up in a blaze of orange and red flames.

Before Gabe could process his shock, someone grabbed him. He started to struggle, thinking another one of those things had him, when he suddenly felt warmth tingle along his skin, chasing the chill away.

Gabe looked up, relief flooding him when he found Tehmper holding his arm. "Tehmper, what in the hell is going on here?" he asked as he gestured around his destroyed living room and the bloody and burned bodies on the floor. "What are those things?"

"They are *Shayatin*, rogue demons,"

"*Shayatin*? Rogue demons?" Gabe repeated slowly. "But I thought...I thought...You said I was your demon mate. Doesn't that make you a demon?"

"Yes, but I am *Djini*. I am a demon hunter."

"And that means what?"

"The *Shayatin* are demons that have turned rogue. They are malicious and have become evil, breaking our most sacred laws. They are your vampires of legend come to the surface to feed on humans."

"Feed?" Gabe swallowed hard. "Like you fed on me?"

"You are still breathing, are you not?"

"Yes, but—"

"*Shayatin* do not leave their victims alive."

"Okaaay..." Gabe looked around the room. "Has anyone seen the bottle of scotch that was sitting on the coffee table? I could really use a drink right about now." Gabe grunted when Tehmper pulled his arm and jerked him around.

"You will not pollute your body in this manner."

"You don't get a say in the matter."

"You are my *Demonas Amaté*," Tehmper growled.

"I don't give a shit!"

“Gabe,” Nick whispered, pulling on Gabe’s free arm. “Do you really think you should be arguing with a man that can turn you into a pretzel?”

Gabe shook Nick’s hand off of his arm, then tried to do the same with Tehmper. When he couldn’t, he sighed and glared up at Tehmper.

Gabe wiggled his fingers. “Do you mind?”

“We must leave this place, *Demonas Amaté*,” Tehmper said. “More will come.”

“You’re out of your mind,” Gabe snapped. “I am not going anywhere with you.”

“You must,” Tehmper said. “More will come.”

“More what?”

“More of them.” Tehmper pointed behind Gabe. He turned, his jaw dropping open when he saw three more of the *Shayatin* coming through his doorway. He saw the two *Djini* with Tehmper jump into action but was unable to move.

“How do they keep finding us?” Gabe whispered. “*Why* do they keep finding us?”

“They want you,” Tehmper growled as he pulled Gabe back into his arms. “You are *Demonas Amaté*.”

Chapter 4

Tehmper's natural protective instincts were screaming at him to get his *Demonas Amaté* to safety. He was even willing to take the other human along if that's what it took to get Gabe somewhere safe.

"We must go," Tehmper said as he tried to herd Gabe and his human toward the hallway and away from the fighting. Storym and Zayne could take care of the new *Shayatin* who showed up. Tehmper would care for what was most important, his *Demonas Amaté*.

"Gather what you need and be quick about it," Tehmper said as he ushered Gabe and Nick down the hallway. "We don't have much time. We must go."

Gabe stopped in mid-stride and turned. "Go where?" he asked. "We need to call the police."

"Your human law enforcement cannot battle the *Shayatin* and live, *Demonas Amaté*."

Gabe's hands landed on his hips and glared up at Tehmper, who almost smirked at the little display of temper from the man. His mate was not a pushover and seemed to have quite the temperament. Tehmper foresaw many great battles with his mate ahead of them.

"I seemed to do pretty well with your demon ass."

"A lucky coincidence, to be sure."

"A lucky coincidence?" Gabe snapped. "I knocked you out cold. There was nothing lucky about it."

"We shall see, *Demonas Amaté*." Tehmper crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back against the door, putting himself between the danger outside of the door and the treasure inside.

Gabe stomped his foot. "My name is Gabe!"

Tehmper arched an eyebrow. He supposed that in some cosmic way it made sense that the *Demonas Amaté* of someone named Tehmper had a temper. It amused him, but it also made him grateful to the Gods. He didn't want a doormat as a mate.

"We must go, *Gabe*," Tehmper said. "Please gather your possessions."

"What in the hell are you talking about? Where are we going?"

Tehmper rolled his eyes. "We must leave this place before more *Shayatin* come. I told you that. They are attracted to your scent."

"My scent?" Gabe frowned. He tilted his head down just a bit and raised his arm, sniffing.

"Demons smell blood scents. This is the scent everyone gives off from the mixture of the chemicals in their blood stream. It is different for each person, much like a DNA code. Demons do not desire people by their looks alone, as you humans do, but by their blood scent. A human could be beautiful by your human standards and be ugly by demon standards."

"Are you saying I am ugly?"

"Your scent is like ambrosia to demons, the perfect combination of chemicals." Tehmper drew in a deep breath. He grinned as a small shudder of lust raced through his body. "You're perfect."

Tehmper was a powerful fire demon. He hunted *Shayatin*. He fought more battles than he could remember. Not much surprised him, which was why he felt such shock when Gabe suddenly jumped across the space between them and grabbed Tehmper's shirt.

"How do you do this to me?" Gabe hissed as he pressed his body against Tehmper's. "I'm angry at you. I want to kick the shit out of you, but all I can think about is your hands on me."

Tehmper leaned down and raked his tongue across the bite mark on Gabe's neck. He could feel Gabe's response in the trembling of his body and the soft moan that fell from his mouth as his tilted back against his shoulder.

“You are *Demonas Amaté*. You have been marked. You crave the touch of your demon. You crave me.”

“I’m going to fucking kill you when this is over,” Gabe growled.

Tehmper grinned when he felt Gabe’s hands dig into his hair and pull him closer. He licked at the bite mark again, then sank his teeth in. Hot, sweet blood filled his mouth, fueling his desire to fully claim his mate. It was all he could do to resist fucking Gabe into the nearest wall.

But resist he had to. If he fully claimed Gabe before bringing him before the Amir, he could lose his *Demonas Amaté* before he even had him. The Amir had the ability to deny Gabe admission into Tehmper’s clan. If that happened, Tehmper could only see Gabe when he returned to the surface, and that wasn’t nearly often enough for a mated demon.

“Okay, can you two knock that shit off?” Nick asked. “My eyeballs are burning.”

Tehmper’s eyes snapped up to see Nick standing across the room from them, rolling his eyes. He forgot that he and Gabe were not alone. Regretting it greatly, Tehmper withdrew his fangs and licked the bite mark closed.

He held Gabe’s body to him for a moment longer, then set him a step away. Gabe’s eyes were unfocused, bewildered. His skin was flushed. He looked gorgeous to Tehmper, the most breathtaking thing he ever saw.

“Gather your things, Gabe.”

Gabe seemed to be in a daze as he moved around his room. Tehmper crossed his arms over his chest again and leaned back against the door as he watched Gabe dress, then begin gathering a few items here and there, shoving them into a backpack.

“Am I coming back?” Gabe suddenly asked.

“When it is safe, you may visit, but your place is at my side now.”

Tehmper would never admit it to Gabe, but he adored the angry little frown that drew the man’s eyebrows together. It added

something to his features, something arousing and hot. Tehmper already knew he would often poke at his mate to see just that expression.

“You do realize that I have a life here, right? A job and a house and friends? I even have family here. Do you really expect me to leave all of this and go off somewhere with you just because you say we have some sort of connection?”

Tehmper smirked. “Yes.”

Gabe’s mouth dropped open. “You’re serious.”

“Perfectly.”

“You’re out of your mind!”

“Not at all,” Tehmper replied. “As one of the *Djini*, I have searched my entire life for you. Our union is sacred. When a *Djini* finds his *Demonas Amaté*, they are mated eternally, in heart, mind, body, and soul.”

“What if I don’t want this?”

As much as those words pained Tehmper, he knew it was just Gabe’s way of protesting the sudden turn his life had taken. He tried not to take Gabe’s words personally. He knew he and Gabe were just getting to know each other and that they had a long way to go, but it still hurt.

“Our mating is a compulsion, an instinctive attraction. We have an obsessive need to bond, and bond often. If left unfulfilled, this obsession can become painful in its intensity.”

“Painful?” Gabe whispered.

“You itch like a hundred little ants are crawling under your skin,” Tehmper began. “You feel unsettled, anxious. You find yourself pacing a lot, as if you’re waiting for something to happen. And, as the mate of a fire demon, you’re cold, bone-deep cold, unless you are near me.”

Gabe shuddered as he rubbed his hands up and down his arms. His face paled in his shock. “How do you know this?”

“You are my *Demonas Amaté*, the other half of my soul. You are my salvation, the light to my darkness. Without you I am only half a man.” Tehmper stepped forward and stroked his hand down the side of Gabe’s face. “I have never desired another as I do you. The need to be with you interferes even with my duty as a *Djini*. I think of nothing but touching you, tasting you.”

“Damn,” Nick whistled softly, “you’re good.”

Tehmper’s gaze flickered to Nick, silencing him with a glare, then back to his mate. Gabe stared at him like he had two heads. Tehmper rubbed his hands down Gabe’s arms, watching the man shudder at his touch and lean toward him.

“I need you. You are my other half, my very next breath. I will love you and protect you until my death, because you are more than my lover and mate. You are my salvation. I will never want another.”

“You don’t even know me,” Gabe whispered.

“You are a man of honor, a protector. You fight for those that are unable to fight for themselves. You are a strong man, both physically and mentally.” Tehmper pushed a stray lock of dark brown hair back from Gabe’s stunned face. He chuckled lightly. “You do, however, have a temper, which is a good thing when mated to a fire demon. We are both very stubborn. Ours will not be an easy mating, but it will be the greatest joy of our lives.”

“How can you know this?” Gabe whispered.

“Do my words not affect you?” Tehmper asked. “Does my presence not make you feel warmer?”

“Yes, but—”

“When I touch you, not only do you feel warmer but you crave more. You need the heat my presence gives you. As strange as the idea may be to you, the thought of my bite excites you. You’ve never been that interested in the sexual side of your relationships, but you need my touch like you need your next breath.”

Gabe’s head dropped down to lean against Tehmper’s chest. Tehmper shivered at the feel of the soft, warm breath that blew from

Gabe's lips, the small kiss Gabe placed against his skin. Gabe wasn't as immune to him as he was trying to make him believe.

"You are my *Demonas Amaté*, Gabriele Antonio Moretti." Tehmper gripped handfuls of Gabe's hair and yanked his head back so he could look down into his pale-green eyes. "And I will not give you up," he whispered harshly as he gave Gabe a little shake. "You are mine."

Silence filled the room as Tehmper waited for Gabe's response to his words. He knew the situation was confusing for the man. Until last week, Gabe never even knew a world existed beyond his own. Tehmper had to hope that Gabe was strong enough to explore what could be between them.

Gabe finally let out a long, audible breath. "So, what now?"

Tehmper smiled. "Finish gathering your possessions. Take only what is most important to you. I can't promise we will be able to return right away, but I promise to try and make it happen."

Gabe nodded. Tehmper wasn't sure Gabe fully understood, but at least his mate was willing to try. That was good enough for now. Once he got Gabe home and took him before the Amir, they could spend all the time they needed talking. Until then, time was of the essence.

"Friend of Gabe's, do you have what you need to accompany us?"

"Friend of Gabe's has a name, you know? It's Nick," Nick snorted. "And who says I'm going anywhere with you?"

"Do you wish to remain here for the *Shayatin*?"

"Um, not really, but it would be nice to know where we are going."

Tehmper watched Gabe hurry around the room and finish gathering his possessions. He kept his eyes on his mate even as he answered Nick. It was nearly impossible to tear his eyes away from the sexy man.

"We will return to my world."

“Your world?” Nick squeaked. “Just where is your world? Are you an alien? Are we going to be beamed up onto a spaceship and taken to another planet? Do you have a probe?”

Tehmper’s eyes swung away from his mate to settle on Nick, his astonishment making him speechless for a moment. Gabe’s friend was a weird one. “Jinnistan is below the surface, near the center of the earth.”

“Oh, God,” Nick groaned, “we’re going to hell.”

“No, it is not hell,” Tehmper said. “It is Jinnistan, the world of the Jinn.”

“An entire world of demons?” Nick shouted. “And you want us to go there?”

“Our world is not that different from yours. We eat, marry, have children, and die, just as those in your world do. Our people are accountable for their actions. We have laws, punishments if those laws are broken, and *Djini* like me who enforce those laws.”

Nick nearly choked on his chuckle. “You’re a cop!”

Tehmper bristled. “I am *Djini*.”

Nick started counting off on his fingers. “You enforce the laws, you track down those that break your laws, and you administer their punishments or return them to stand trial. Is all of this correct?”

“Yes, that is true.”

“Ha! You’re a cop!”

“Nick, stop egging him on,” Gabe said as he stepped up to stand beside Tehmper. “He can turn you into a pretzel, remember?”

Nick swallowed hard. “Yeah, okay.”

Tehmper tried to hide his smirk, but it was hard to do when he wanted to laugh at the stricken look on Nick’s face. He’d be interested to see what the others in his clan thought of this strange surface dweller. He felt sure they would find him amusing. He did.

“Come, we have run out of time,” Tehmper said when he heard the commotion in the other room go silent. Either his clan brothers

had won the fight and they were safe or the *Shayatin* won, in which case, they were in deep shit. “We must go now.”

Gabe nodded and grabbed his backpack, tossing it onto his back. “I’m ready.”

“Friend of Gabe’s, are you ready as well?”

Nick rolled his eyes. “My name is Nick. Nicholas Patrick Dane. Not friend of Gabe’s.”

Tehmper arched an eyebrow. He extended his claws and flicked them at Nick. “You are not a friend of Gabe’s?”

Nick’s eyes narrowed in on Tehmper’s sharp claws. He swallowed audibly. “Yeah, so friend of Gabe’s works for me.”

“You know, I have a lot of other shit to deal with right now other than the pissing contest going on between the two of you,” Gabe snapped. He gestured toward the bedroom door. “Can we just go?”

“Of course, *Demonas Amaté*.” He stepped over to the door and listened. When he heard nothing from beyond the door, he opened it cautiously. Beyond the hallway was utter chaos—overturned chairs, ripped cushions, pictures shattered on the floor.

As Tehmper walked toward the mess, his heart squeezed in his chest at the destruction of all that was Gabe’s home. They might have been material possessions, but they were Gabe’s material possessions. Pausing at the entrance to the living room, Tehmper gazed around and winced at the devastation. Bodies littered the floor, though luckily not one of them was Storym’s or Zayne’s. Storym and Zayne, even though they remained on their feet, showed their exhaustion as they leaned against the walls.

Tehmper heard a slight inhale of breath. He turned to see Gabe staring around his living room, horror written all over his face. He reached out to him, pausing when Gabe recoiled from him. He let his hand slowly fall back to his side.

“I am sorry for the loss of your possessions, Gabe,” he said softly. He looked around, waving his hand at the destroyed and broken items. “Can they be replaced?”

Gabe squatted down and picked up a broken picture frame. Tehmper could see that the frame held a picture of a much younger-looking Gabe and several other people. His heart ached for his mate when Gabe's thumb traced over the picture.

Gabe dropped the frame back onto the floor, the sound of shattering glass filling the room. Tehmper couldn't tell what his mate thought. A stone mask seemed to have dropped over his face.

"No," Gabe replied as he stood up. "Some things can never be replaced."

Tehmper was confused when Gabe walked away. He could see that the picture held meaning for Gabe. He didn't understand why Gabe just left it lying on the floor. Tehmper reached down, grabbed the frame, and shook the photo free. He quickly shoved it into the pocket of his duster.

Glancing around, he could see several other pictures lying on the floor, some torn, some with bloody footprints on them. Tehmper cast a glance at his mate. Seeing Gabe occupied in the kitchen area, he grabbed the rest of the pictures and put them in his duster, shoving the empty, broken frames under an overturned table nearby.

Gabe seemed to be particularly upset at the destruction of these items. Tehmper would have to see what he could do to fix them or replace them. The transition from the surface world to Tehmper's world would be hard enough on the man. If there was any way Tehmper could make it easier, he would.

"What about these bodies?" Gabe asked as he walked back into the living room. "We can't just leave them in my living room. Somebody will discover them, and I don't think the police will believe my explanation."

"They will be removed," Tehmper said. "They must be returned to our world, dead or not. Proof must be taken before the council that they have received the judgment meted out to them."

"Haven't you ever heard of digital cameras?" Gabe snickered.

“Digital cameras?” Tehmper asked in confusion. “What is this *digital camera* you talk of?”

“Good God, what planet are you—” Nick started to snicker but suddenly stopped. “Never mind. A digital camera takes pictures so you can see something even if you are not there. Like the pictures of Gabe’s family? Those were taken with a camera.”

“They were not painted?” Storym asked as he stepped forward. “You do not have artists that paint your pictures? How do you know what your family looks like?”

Nick went into peals of laughter. “Dude, you need to get out more—or *up* more in your case. We might not have demons, but us *surface dwellers* have progressed past rocks and clubs. We even have fire and the wheel.”

Tehmper didn’t like the frown that covered Storym’s face. He’d seen it once or twice, usually right before Storym punched someone. He wasn’t sure Nick could take it. For a surface dweller he might be above average in size, but to a demon hunter he was practically a shrimp.

“We need to get going,” Tehmper said, stepping between the two men before Storym could do any damage to Nick. “There might be more *Shayatin* coming. Gabe will not be safe until he is in Jinnistan.”

Storym glared at Nick for a moment, then stepped back. He walked over to the middle of the room and pulled out a small bag. When Nick went to step forward, curiosity written all over his face, Tehmper reached out and grabbed his arm.

“You must not interfere,” Tehmper said. “If you break the circle we cannot activate the portal.”

“Circle? Portal?”

“We use salt blessed by our priests to create a sacred circle. This circle creates a portal to our world.”

“Dude, this is seriously cool.”

Storym sprinkled the salt into the shape of a circle, then began a series of incantations. Tehmper chuckled when a large brush of air passed over the circle and Nick jumped back.

The sacred circle was always such a surprise to surface dwellers, although Tehmper didn't know why. The ancient druids used them all of the time in the past. How else was a demon supposed to be summoned back then? A wish?

"Is that thing safe?" Nick asked as the circle of salt on the floor began to glow white.

"It's perfectly safe," Tehmper replied. "Just don't smudge the salt."

He turned to look at his mate, finding Gabe as enthralled with the glowing circle as Nick. Stepping over to him, he wrapped an arm around Gabe's shoulders. "Are you ready to see my world, *Demonas Amaté*?"

"I don't suppose you'd accept no, would you?" Gabe asked as he tilted his head back to look up at Tehmper.

"I wouldn't want to, but ultimately this has to be your choice." Tehmper grimaced at the mere thought. "I will not force you."

"But what about the bite mark?" Gabe asked as his hands brushed the wound on his neck.

Tehmper's lips thinned as he tried to suppress his growl. "If you do not wish to accompany me, the mark will fade with time. Our mating has not been completed, and until it is, either one of us can back out."

"I thought we basically lose our minds if we don't mate."

Tehmper would lose his mind if he lost his mate, not Gabe. Gabe was not a demon. He was a surface dweller. He would be uncomfortable for a while, but the feeling would slowly fade away. Tehmper would most likely kill himself from grief. Already the bond building between them was making it hard for Tehmper to be away from Gabe.

"It would not be easy, but you are strong enough to survive it." Tehmper could tell Gabe the truth, but he wanted Gabe to accept him as mate because that's what he wanted, not because Tehmper might not survive their separation.

"What about my scent and the *Shayatin*?"

"As the mark fades," Tehmper said, his eyes going to the proof of his bonding with Gabe, "so will the strength of your scent until you return to what you were before. Once the scent is gone, the *Shayatin* should not bother you anymore."

"So, none of this would have happened if you hadn't bitten me?"

Tehmper swallowed hard. He could see the anger building in his mate's eyes. He wished, more than almost anything in the world, he could tell Gabe he had nothing to do with this, but that would be a lie, and he wasn't going to start their life together with a lie.

"No."

Gabe's mouth dropped open for a moment, then snapped shut. He pushed himself away from Tehmper and started pacing around the kitchen, muttering to himself. He wasn't talking loud enough for Tehmper to understand the words, but he felt pretty sure they were not complimentary.

"Tehmper, we need to go," Storym said.

Tehmper nodded and looked back at Storym. "Take the *Shayatin* through the portal, and I will be along in a moment."

"And your *Demonas Amaté*?"

Tehmper pressed his lips together and shook his head. He was strong enough to force Gabe to go with him, but he wouldn't. If Gabe truly did not want to be his *Demonas Amaté*, Tehmper wouldn't make him. He wanted a willing mate, even one that would grow to care for him in time. He didn't want someone he had to fight all of the time.

Tehmper watched as his clan brothers gathered the dead bodies of the *Shayatin* and took them through the portal. When the last body had been transported, he turned to face his mate one last time.

"I am going now, Gabe," he said softly. He drank in as much of Gabe's beautiful features as he could before slowly turning away. "Please forgive me for what I have brought into your life. I meant you no harm."

Tehmper could barely swallow past the burning lump in his throat as he walked toward the sacred circle. He purposely faced the hallway as he stepped over the salt, unable to bear seeing his mate as he left. He did not want Gabe to see the tears burning in his eyes and think him weak. That was not how he wanted his *Demonas Amaté* to remember him, if he remembered him at all.

"That's it?" Gabe shouted. "You're just going to bite me on the neck, turn my world upside down, and leave?"

Tehmper's head whipped around, shock freezing him to his spot as he watched Gabe storm toward him. The man was pissed, and he never looked more stunning. His face was flushed and his lips pressed tightly together. His hands clenched into fists at his side.

"I thought this was what you wanted, Demona—Gabe," he whispered, afraid to say more.

"I want my life to be like it was," Gabe snapped. He waved his hands around at the destruction of his house. "I want my things to be back the way they were."

Tehmper's heart ached when Gabe's shoulders slumped, and he almost wished he'd never spotted his mate that fateful night last week. Gabe wouldn't be in so much anguish if Tehmper hadn't interfered in his life.

"I cannot change the past, Gabe, but I can change the future."

"How?" Gabe asked. Tehmper saw him shudder as he drew in a deep breath. "How can you make this right? Everything I own is destroyed, my house is in pieces, and I'm freezing right down to my bones. How can you fix that?"

Tehmper felt guilty and selfish for not considering that Gabe might have a life he wouldn't want to leave. He shouldn't have claimed him, not without asking. He had just been so overwhelmed

when he caught Gabe's scent. His natural instinct to claim his mate overrode everything else.

A bitter, cold despair took root in the caves of Tehmper's soul, knowing he faced a lightless future without his *Demonas Amaté*. He closed his eyes for a moment, his heart aching with pain. He tried to clear the anguish from his eyes as he opened them back up to look at Gabe.

"I cannot replace that which has been taken from you in the past, but I can prevent it from happening in the future." He quietly said the words that ripped his soul apart. "Your life will return to what it once was when I leave."

"And if I don't want you to leave?"

The words were spoken so softly that Tehmper almost missed them. He started to step toward the middle of the circle before they made sense in his grief-stricken mind. Tehmper swallowed with difficulty, then found his voice. "You don't want me to leave?"

Gabe crossed his arms over his chest and looked anywhere but at Tehmper. He was puzzled by Gabe's abrupt change of mind. He didn't understand it. "I cannot stay on the surface for long periods, Gabe. I cannot even go out in your daylight. I have to return to my world."

Tehmper's stomach churned with anxiety as Gabe finally looked up at him. The waiting was excruciating. He didn't know what Gabe would say, whether he needed to leave or whether he should stay, even for a while.

Gabe suddenly crossed the room and picked up his backpack, swinging it up onto his shoulder. He reached over and grabbed Nick by the arm, pulling him closer. "Fine, then, let's go."

"Go?" Tehmper asked in confusion.

"Yes." Gabe nodded, looking very serious. "Let's go to Jinnistan."

Chapter 5

Gabe couldn't believe the words came out of his mouth, but he heard them himself. He had just agreed to go to some alien world with a demon.

A demon!

And he was pretty sure that by agreeing to go to Jinnistan, he also agreed to be Tehmper's mate.

What confused Gabe more than anything was that he didn't mind the mate part of the situation. He actually kind of looked forward to being mated to the big man. Tehmper certainly was sexy enough to give Gabe more than a few wet dreams.

"Are you sure this is what you want, Gabe?"

"No, not really," Gabe replied. He could see the way his words affected Tehmper by the pain he could see in the man's dark eyes. He didn't want to hurt Tehmper, but he was so confused about everything.

Until Tehmper came along and did whatever he did, Gabe just wasn't that interested in sex or relationships beyond not being lonely. Now all Gabe could think about was being with Tehmper, even when he was angry with him.

"I'm not really sure of anything, Tehmper," Gabe said slowly. "I just know that I've never felt like this before, and as much as you piss me off—and you do—I can't let you go without finding out what this is between us."

Tehmper opened his mouth to speak, but Gabe held his hand up to stop him. "I'm not saying I agree to be your *Demonas Amaté*. And

I'm not disagreeing either. I just need some time to consider all of this."

Tehmper looked like he wanted to say something else, but he pressed his lips together instead, nodding his head. He gestured with his hand for Gabe and Nick to come forward. "Don't smudge the salt."

Nick and Gabe stepped over the salt and stood beside Tehmper. Gabe took a deep breath when he felt a wind come out of nowhere and begin swirling around them. The wind grew thicker, like a tornado, until Gabe couldn't see his living room anymore.

Then, suddenly, it stopped. It stopped so fast Gabe fell to his hands and knees. As he lifted his head, he noticed Nick beside him on the hard ground. Gabe lifted his hands and looked down. It wasn't the tan carpet of his living room but rather a hard, white stone of some sort.

He lifted his head even more to search for Tehmper, his port in the confused storm he swam in. Tehmper stood right behind him, his hand reaching out. Gabe raised his hand to clasp Tehmper's, but before they could touch, a voice called out.

"How wonderful, Tehmper, you've brought me my new mate, just as ordered."

Gabe's shock held him immobile for a moment as he looked up into Tehmper's fierce features. The man looked ready to tear someone apart. Gabe could swear he saw little wisps of flames sparking along his hands.

"Tehmper?" he whispered.

Tehmper's eyes dropped down to meet Gabe's. They softened briefly before turning angry again as he looked up to the man who spoke. "Gabe has been marked as my *Demonas Amaté*."

"Well, that will fade once he is in my harem." The man clapped his hands together. "Guards, escort my new consort to the harem. He must be prepared for tonight as befitting my mate."

As footsteps pounded toward him, Gabe turned to get his first real look at the man speaking. He wasn't a bad looking man, just not of Tehmper's caliber. He wore flowing, white silk pants and a tunic that came down to nearly his knees. He wore a golden belt around his waist and rings on nearly every finger.

As the guards started toward him, Gabe scrambled to his feet and moved toward Tehmper. He yanked on Tehmper's arm without taking his eyes off the guards, who paused a few feet away when Tehmper growled at them.

"When I petitioned the Amir for your admission into my clan, he said he wanted to meet you first as you are the only known surface dweller that has defeated a *Shayatin*. I did not know he would use the meeting as an excuse to steal my *Demonas Amaté*."

The Amir wiggled a finger back and forth. "Uh-uh-uh, Tehmper," he said. "Until you have completed the mating bond, he is not your *Demonas Amaté*. As such, he can be claimed by another."

"What in the hell is he talking about, Tehmper?" Gabe asked out of the corner of his mouth, keeping his eyes on the long, curved swords in the hands of the guards.

"I was ordered by my Amir not to complete our mating bond until such time as he could meet with you. As I am loyal to Jinnistan, I did not. If I had known what the Amir planned—"

"What didn't you do?"

"To complete a mating bond, you must exchange blood while engaged in sexual intercourse," the Amir said. "But not to worry, my dear consort, I will not wait to claim you as our dear Tehmper has."

Gabe started shaking his head as the guards stepped toward him. "I'm not going with you. You can't make me do shit! And there is no way in hell that I am having *sexual intercourse* with you."

"I'm afraid that is not up to you," the Amir said. "I am the ruler of Jinnistan, and what I say is law. Therefore, you will do as you are ordered. Guards, take him to my harem. I am tired of waiting."

“Amir, he has been marked by Tehmper,” one of the guards said.
“Surely—”

“Now!”

“But, Tehmper...Amir, he will—” the guard stammered.

“He will die if he interferes in the Amir’s orders.”

Gabe could see that the Amir was perfectly serious by the smirk on his face. He could also see that the guards were terrified and more were coming. The burning muscles bunching under his hand didn’t help the situation. Tehmper was getting ready to attack.

Gabe tossed his backpack at Nick, wincing when the man let out a small grunt, and turned to step between Tehmper and the advancing guards. He grabbed Tehmper’s arms and gave him a small shake, which was no easy feat considering the man’s massive size.

“Tehmper, I don’t know what the fuck is going on, but you’d better get my ass out of this mess. If you don’t, the destruction you saw in my living room will be nothing compared to what I will do to you. Do I make myself perfectly clear?”

Tehmper’s dark eyes flickered down to Gabe’s. They were filled with rage and anguish. “I can’t let him take you, *Demonas Amaté*. I promised to love you and protect you until my death.”

“Well, that day will not be today, do you understand? You go talk with your friends or do whatever you need to do to figure this out, but I expect you to do it in one piece. If anyone is going to take a chunk out of your ass, it’s going to be me.”

Gabe knew this was probably a really big mistake, but he couldn’t think of any other way to keep Tehmper safe. He gave Tehmper a push big enough to cause the man to step back and let go of his arms. Gabe slowly back away from him.

“Nick, I need you to keep Tehmper safe.”

“I hear ya.”

Gabe took another step away. Tehmper’s pain-filled eyes followed his every step. Gabe pointed a finger at him. “I expect you to fix this,” he said, then turned and hurried to the other side of the guards.

Tehmper roared. Flames licked along his shoulders and arms. His eyes blazed with fury. Nick tried to grab Tehmper's arm but was thrown back several feet. Gabe watched as several guards rushed Tehmper all at once. He was really glad that they were just trying to subdue Tehmper and not hurt him.

He watched them fight for a brief moment, grimacing when several guards went down and didn't get back up. He really hoped Tehmper didn't kill anyone. Figuring the best thing he could do at that moment was get out of there, he turned toward the Amir and the guards surrounding them.

"I suggest that we get out of here before he kills all of your guards."

"Yes, he does seem a bit upset," the Amir said. "Very well, let's be on our way, then."

The Amir walked beside Gabe, with two guards in front of them and two guards behind them. Gabe wasn't sure what to think of the Amir beyond the fact that he seemed like a spoiled little rich kid. He wanted his way at all times and he didn't care what he had to do to get it.

"I'm so glad you decided to be my consort," the Amir said, his voice sounding excited, almost like a kid's.

Gabe frowned. "I never agreed to be your anything."

"But of course you did," the Amir insisted. "You left Tehmper and came with me. You'll be escorted to my harem, where you will be bathed and then have scented oils rubbed into your skin." The Amir clapped his hands together. "We will have a formal dinner tonight. I'll invite all of the royals and we will celebrate our mating."

Gabe stopped walking to stare at the Amir in astonishment. "There's some part of this that you are not getting. I don't want you."

The Amir stopped walking to turn back and stare at Gabe. His laugh sent a cold chill down Gabe's spine, one he wasn't sure he'd ever get warm from. "I don't care."

* * * *

Gabe felt like an idiot as he was escorted through two large doors. He should have listened to Tehmper because he wasn't sure he would get out of this mess with all of his parts intact. The Amir was nuttier than a bed bug.

Gabe had no idea how a man as crazy and power hungry as the Amir gained his seat as the ruler of Jinnistan. It was clear to him that the man had no business being in charge. The Amir couldn't care less about his people, only about what he wanted.

"Amado," one of the guards called out, "the Amir has ordered his new consort to receive the full treatment—bath, scented oils, and dressed for tonight's royal dinner."

Gabe watched a small, dark-haired man rush forward. "As the Amir wishes, so shall it be," the man said as he clasped his hands together, fingertip to fingertip and palm to palm, and bowed over them several times.

Gabe stood there in bewilderment as the guards left, the large doors closing behind him and leaving him alone with the small man. His eyes nearly popped out of his head when Amado stuck his tongue out at the closed doors before turning to look at him.

"My, you are a big one, aren't you?" Amado gestured with his hand. "Well, come along. The Amir will not like to be kept waiting. He does tend to get a bit testy when that happens."

Gabe stood his ground, crossing his arms over his chest as he regarded the shorter man. "I don't really care what the Amir wants. I am not his."

"Dear man, we are all his," Amado said as he waved his arm around. It was only then that Gabe noticed the others in the large room. More and more seemed to be coming out of the woodwork, or at least the dark corners of the vast room.

Gabe dropped his arms and started walking slowly forward, taking in everything around him. The room they inhabited was huge. The

ceilings alone seemed to be ten feet tall. There were several alcoves around the room, and smack-dab in the center of the room sat a large pool with blue tiles.

“What is this place?”

“This is the Amir’s harem.”

“Are you all his consorts?”

“Yes,” Amado replied. “We have only to spend a single night with the Amir and then we are able to live out our lives in the harem. No one has ever spent more than one night with the Amir.”

Gabe stopped. “Wait, you’re telling me he has a new consort every night?”

“No, he only chooses a new consort every week,” the man said. “But not to worry, we only spend one night with him. After that we are free to live our lives here in the harem. It is not a bad life, really. You will see. A man of your size and build, you will make friends fast.”

“And you never leave the harem, even after that one night? You spend your entire lives here? Can’t you go home to your families?”

Amado’s face paled. “No, it is forbidden. Any consort attempting to leave the harem is immediately put to death.”

“Hasn’t anyone ever protested?”

“Protested?”

“Said no?”

Amado looked confused for a moment, then started to chuckle. His chuckle soon moved into a full belly laugh. “We cannot protest. He is the Amir. If we do not agree, he puts our families to death or worse.”

“There’s something worse than having your families put to death?”

Amado nodded rapidly. “Being given to the Amir’s personal guards. No one has ever come back from that a whole person.”

“Do the *Djini* know of this?” Gabe had to ask. He had to know if Tehmper knew of this practice and did nothing about it. He wanted to believe that Tehmper didn’t know, but he hardly knew the man.

“Why would the *Djini* know of this?” Amado asked. “This is none of their concern.”

“It is now,” Gabe said. He pulled his shirt to the side and tilted his head. “I was marked by Tehmper before the Amir stepped in and separated us.”

Amado inhaled deeply. “You have the mark of a *Djini*.” He said the words softly, but they echoed throughout the room. Gabe could see several more people beginning to come out of the alcoves, watching him, staring at him.

“Yes, Tehmper marked me. I am his *Demonas Amaté*.”

Amado’s hand fluttered at his throat. “Oh, this is not good, not good at all.”

Gabe started to feel a little claustrophobic as more and more scantily dressed men started surrounding him. They stroked their hands over his arms, his chest, his back. They seemed fascinated by him.

“You are all consorts of the Amir?” Gabe asked as he looked at the men filling the room from what seemed like every nook and cranny. There had to be at least a hundred men and women.

Amado nodded. He grinned as another dark-haired man stepped over to him. “This is my Galan. He was the Amir’s 117th consort. We’ve been lucky enough to be together for just over two years now.”

Gabe nodded and held his hand out to the man, chuckling when Galan just stared at it. “It’s a way of greeting someone on the surface world,” Gabe said. “We shake hands.”

Galan nodded and held his hand out, shaking it. Gabe burst out laughing. “No, no, you hold my hand like this,” he said as he clasped Galan’s hand in his, then shook it. “Hello, it’s nice to meet you, Galan.”

“Yes, yes, thank you.”

“Come,” Amado said, “we must get you ready for your night with the Amir.”

Gabe gapped at Amado. “I am not spending the night with the Amir.”

What part of no did these people not understand?

Gabe was having a hard time wrapping his head around being with Tehmper, and he really liked him. He couldn’t stand the Amir. There was no way in hell he was going to let that man touch him.

Amado frowned, as did several the people surrounding them. “But you must. The Amir has decreed that you are his consort, and no one says no to the Amir.”

Gabe snorted. “I do.”

“But you can’t,” Galan said, looking visibly pale. “You will be put to death if you refuse the Amir, or...or...”

“Or given to his personal guards?” Gabe asked. “Amado already told me that.”

Galan shuddered. His eyes flickered past Gabe to someone who stood in the shadows. “It’s better to just do as the Amir wants,” he said quietly. He looked back at Gabe. “Or die.”

Gabe frowned. That didn’t sound good. He turned to look at whoever stood in the shadows. He could just see the outline of a small figure, smaller than even Amado. Gabe walked slowly forward, not wanting to scare the man.

“My name is Gabe,” he said softly. He held his hands out, palms up in a submissive gesture. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

Gabe’s breath caught in his throat when the man stepped forward. A shaft of light fell across the man, highlighting the mass of scars on his body. He was dressed simply in a pair of loose pants and a vest, much like the others, but even his clothes didn’t hide the horrid scars covering the man.

“What happened to you?”

The man’s eyes dropped down quickly, and he shrugged his shoulders. Gabe was horrified by the cruelty he saw. In all of his years

as a police detective, he didn't know if he'd ever seen anyone who had been so terribly abused.

"Did the Amir's personal guards do this to you?"

The man's eyes flickered up briefly before falling back down to the floor. He nodded without saying a word, but his defeated posture spoke volumes to Gabe and made him angrier than he could ever remember being.

"Come on," Gabe said as he gestured with his hands for the man to step forward. "I'm not going to hurt you. You have nothing to be ashamed of. It was wrong for this to be done to you, very wrong. No one should force you to do anything or hurt you when you refuse. You do know it was wrong, right?"

"Please," Amado said as he quickly raced over to Gabe, "you cannot say these things. If the guards were to hear you, we...we could all be punished."

"This is wrong, Amado!"

"Please, it's—" Amado's hands started fluttering again.

"Look, I don't care what world this is or who is in charge or whatever," Gabe said. "This is wrong. No one has the right to force you to have sex or punish you if you refuse. Not even Tehmper hurt me when I said no to him."

Amado's eyes widened.

"You refused a *Djini*?" said a small, quiet voice beside Gabe. He turned to find the disfigured man stepping closer, a look of wonder on his face as he stared up at Gabe.

"I didn't exactly refuse him," Gabe said. "I just told him I needed some time to think about it and that he needed to let me have that time." Gabe shrugged. "He agreed."

"A *Djini* agreed?"

Gabe couldn't understand the astonishment on the man's face. Tehmper was a man of honor. He would never force anyone to...Gabe inhaled sharply when his train of thought brought him to a strong conclusion.

Tehmper would never force him. Gabe had the power to say yes or no to the man, *Djini* or not, and Tehmper respected that. Gabe's growing feelings for the man suddenly grew in leaps and bounds until he wanted to be wrapped in the man's arms again. He ached for it.

"Tehmper would never force anyone to do what they didn't want to do."

"But he is a *Djini*," Amado said. "He enforces the laws."

"Look, I don't know what laws Tehmper enforces, but he would never agree to enforce something like this if he knew about it. I promise you, if Tehmper knew what the Amir was doing, he'd put a stop to it."

The scarred man looked excited for a moment, and then his shoulders slumped.

"What?" Gabe asked.

"I just thought...I thought if maybe we got word to Tehmper he might be able to...but it's too late for that."

"Too late for what?"

"It's too late for Tehmper to save us."

Gabe reached down and gently grabbed the man's hand. "What is your name?"

"Brayan."

"I'm Gabe, Brayan, and I promise you, as the *Demonas Amaté* of Tehmper, that we will find a way out of this." Gabe waved his hand around to encompass the entire room. "All of us."

"You can't promise that," Brayan said. "You're in the same position as we are all in. There's no one to save us."

Gabe smirked. "Do you know what a *Shayatin* is?"

Brayan nodded, giving a little shudder of disgust.

"My understanding is that I am the only surface dweller that ever defeated a *Shayatin*. I also knocked Tehmper on his ass when he pissed me off." Gabe smiled at the gasps of awe he heard around him. "I promise you that I will do everything within my power to see you freed and safe. And I know Tehmper will help me."

“Do you really think a *Djini* will help us?” Brayan asked. “Even me?”

“Tehmper is a good man,” Gabe said. “I have no doubt that he will help us.”

“How?” Amado asked.

“That part I haven’t figured out,” Gabe admitted. “We need to get word to Tehmper somehow, let him know what is going on here.” Gabe glanced around at the people staring at him. “Is there a way to do that?”

Amado looked at Gabe for a moment then at a couple of the others. He finally nodded. “There is a way, but it’s dangerous. If we are caught, we could be executed.”

“Look, I don’t want anyone to put themselves in danger, but it’s really important that we get word to Tehmper. He can’t help us if he doesn’t know about this.”

Amado glanced at his lover, who nodded. “Okay, we’ll get word to Tehmper, but in the meantime you have to at least pretend like you are following the Amir’s orders. If we don’t prepare you for him, he will have us punished.”

Gabe didn’t want to do anything that the Amir wanted, but he also didn’t want anyone else pay for his refusal. He nodded, wishing he was almost anywhere except where he was. Being back in his trashed living room was better than this situation.

“All right, what do I need to do?”

Chapter 6

Tehmper stormed into his clan compound, Nick fast on his heels. Flames of rage licked along his arms. Smoke swirled around him. The scent of sulfur filled the air wherever he walked. Tehmper was enraged.

Gabe had been taken from him, and not by honest means. The Amir knew exactly what he was doing when he forbade Tehmper from claiming his *Demonas Amaté*. He had every intention of claiming Gabe when he ordered a meeting. Tehmper knew it deep down in his bones.

“Clagh!” he shouted at the top of his lungs. He needed to know what Clagh discovered in their ancient scrolls. There had to be something that would return Tehmper’s *Demonas Amaté* to him. It was wrong for the Amir to take Gabe.

The concept of the *Demonas Amaté* was written in the Jinnistan’s most sacred scrolls. They were the salvation of the *Djini*, the light to their darkness. *Demonas Amaté*s grounded *Djini* and kept them safe from the uncontrollable rages that overtook them during battle.

“You bellowed?” Clagh asked as he walked out of the study.

“The Amir has taken my *Demonas Amaté* as his own.”

“Did you mark Gabe?” Clagh asked.

“Yes, of course,” Tehmper said. “I marked him when we went after Tuloq. I gave him my pendant, too.”

“Then the Amir can’t take him.”

Clagh said the words so simply that Tehmper just stared at him for a moment, feeling totally at a loss as to how to respond. Clagh seemed

so sure of his words, but Tehmper wasn't confident. The Amir was, well, the Amir.

"Well, he did," Tehmper said. "As we speak, Gabe has been escorted to the royal harem to be prepared for his night with the Amir. There's going to be a royal dinner tonight to celebrate their mating."

"Even better."

"Even better?" Tehmper shouted. He clenched his fists at his side to keep from punching Clagh right smack in the face. He knew Clagh stayed behind on their last mission to research the ancient laws, but he seemed to be taking the situation too lightly, especially considering Gabe was involved. "How can you say that? The Amir took my *Demonas Amaté*."

Clagh arched an eyebrow, getting that I-know-something-you-don't look on his face that drove Tehmper nuts. "I say even better because we can confront the Amir with the ancient laws that he is violating and return your *Demonas Amaté* to you."

So much relief flooded Tehmper that he felt weak in the knees. He was surprised when his legs shook and the room swam around him. Tehmper took a deep breath to clear his head, then let it out slowly.

"You found the ancient laws, then?"

"Well, I know once a *Demonas Amaté* has been marked it violates our laws for anyone—man, woman, or child—to interfere in the continuation of that mating. The laws do not state that the Amir is exempt."

"Are you sure?" Tehmper had to be sure. He didn't know what he would do if Gabe was forced to mate with the Amir. His horror at the thought went way beyond his own knowing that he would lose his mind if Gabe was taken from him. It was the thought of what Gabe might be forced to do against his will that angered him. And Tehmper had no doubt the mating would be against Gabe's will. The man was pissed enough at Tehmper for the bite mark on his shoulders. Gabe would be even more pissed if the Amir forced something more intimate on him.

Clagh crossed his arms over his chest. "Oh, I am very sure," he said. "The ancient laws are very clear on the matter. *Djini* must have their *Demonas Amaté*s. No one, and I do mean no one, may interfere in that."

Tehmper's knees weakened, and he sank down onto the hard, stone floor. He fisted his hands on his thighs and dropped his head back, drawing in several deep breaths.

"Thank the Gods," he whispered.

"No, thank the ancients who wrote down the laws." Clagh chuckled.

"Tell him what else you found, brother," Storym said as he walked into the room to stand beside Clagh. "He's never going to believe it." Storym snickered. "Hell, I barely believe it and I read it myself."

Tehmper frowned and slowly climbed to his feet. "What else did you find? Will it affect Gabe?"

"It might," Clagh said, "but I'd rather show you than tell you. I'm not exactly sure what it means, but I think it's important."

Tehmper was going to lose his mind. He just knew it. Clagh was beating around the bush. If it involved Gabe, Tehmper wanted to know and he wanted to know now. "Clagh, so help me, if you don't speak—" Tehmper let flames lick across his fingertips.

Clagh instantly lost his lighter mood and became serious, holding up his hands. "Calm yourself, Tehmper."

Tehmper let the flames flickering at the end of his fingertips roll into a ball of fire.

"Look, it's real simple," Clagh said quickly, his eyes going between Tehmper's and the flames burning at his hands. "I don't think there is supposed to be an Amir. From everything I read in the ancient scrolls, a clan of four *Djini* is supposed to be in control of Jinnistan."

Tehmper frowned and let the flicker out. "What are you talking about? We've had an Amir for as many years as I can remember."

“True, but that is not the way Jinnistan was originally ruled. From what I’ve read, the clans ruled the land, with a new clan taking over every forty years. Each clan member worked together to rule the land and make decisions. There was no one man in charge.”

“But how can that be?” Tehmper asked. “If the clans are supposed to rule Jinnistan then why is there an Amir at all?”

Clagh shrugged. “I haven’t been able to figure that part out, but I think it has something to do with the Great War a few decades ago.”

“What makes you think that?” Tehmper asked.

“All the records I could find pertaining to who ruled before that have been removed from the ancient scrolls. They are just gone, as if they were stripped away. No one reading through our recent history would notice.”

Tehmper grinned. “But you did.”

Tehmper had no doubt that Clagh would notice something like that. Clagh was the teacher of their group, as well as being the comedian. He was always reading one book or another, telling the rest of them about what he read or discovered.

“But I did,” Clagh said. “I read the recent history first, but something was off. I can’t tell you what it was but...well, I started reading the history from the very beginning. It was only then that I noticed a huge gap in our history.”

“So, what exactly does this mean?”

“It means you need to find copies of those damn scrolls!”

Tehmper looked over at Nick when he spoke, forgetting that the man was even there until then. “What would you know about it?” he asked. “You’re a surface dweller.”

“Contrary to popular belief, surface dweller does not mean stupid,” Nick said. “There is always a record somewhere. If the ancient scrolls you keep talking about have missing pages, who else would have copies? Someone has to.”

“He does have a point, Tehmper,” Storym said. “It would only make sense that someone would have a record somewhere, maybe one

of the clans? Most of them are pretty meticulous about keeping records. Wouldn't there be something somewhere that stated something about one of the clans ruling Jinnistan?"

"Contact the other clans, Storym," Tehmper said. "Find out if they have any type of ancient records. If they do, ask them to bring them here for Clagh to look over."

Storym nodded and headed out the front door. Tehmper turned to Clagh. "Can you continue to look through the ancient scrolls? See if you can find something—anything—that will bring my *Demonas Amaté* back to me?"

"I'll be in the study," Clagh simply said, turning and walking back through the door he'd come through earlier.

Tehmper finally turned to Nick. He wasn't quite sure what to do with the man. He knew Nick was important to Gabe, and for that reason alone Tehmper would do everything in his power to keep the man safe. He just didn't know what to do with him.

"I, uh..." Tehmper glanced at Nick then quickly looked away. "Are you, uh..."

Nick snickered. "Just point me in the direction of the kitchen, dude. I'm starved."

Tehmper grinned. "Come on," he said as he started across the room. "I'll show you to the kitchen and then have a room readied for you. I imagine you could use some rest. You've had a very eventful day."

"Can't remember one quite like it."

Tehmper glanced down at Nick, concerned by the worry he could hear in the man's voice. "I will get Gabe back, Nick, I promise you."

"I know," Nick replied. "I just worry about what will happen to Gabe in the meantime. The man is known far and wide for his temper."

Tehmper chuckled. "Yes, I experienced that side of him a couple of times. I think it's rather enchanting."

“Enchanting?” Nick stopped walking and stared at Tehmper like he had two heads. “You think his temper is enchanting? Oh, now I *know* you’ve got the hots for the guy.”

“The hots?” Tehmper asked in confusion. “I have not heard of this term. Is this anything like your digital camera?”

Nick laughed. “No, dude. A digital camera is a small device that you hold in your hands to take pictures, like your artists paint, only instantly. Having the *hots* for someone means you’re into them, you like them.”

Tehmper cocked his head to one side. “Of course I like Gabe. He is my *Demonas Amaté*.”

“No, dude, that’s not exactly what I mean,” Nick said. Tehmper pressed his lips together to hold his tongue when he noted the amusement in Nick’s face. “Having the hots is like, well, he turns you on.”

“Turns me on?”

“Fuck!” Nick pushed his hand through his hair. “He makes your dick hard.”

“Oh, yes, that is true,” Tehmper said. “Gabe makes me hot.”

“God, you guys are too funny,” Nick said. “Haven’t you ever heard of these things before?”

“No, not really.” Tehmper shook his head. “Except for missions, we do not spend much time on the surface. Your sunlight is deadly to us, which means that we can only come out at night. Add in our size, and most people look at us as monsters.”

“Seriously, dude, you are a freaking mountain. Of course people look at you weird, although I don’t think they see you as a monster, just as really, really huge.”

“Being big is not that unusual in my world.”

“Yeah, I kind of figured that out. I’m not sure I’ve seen a single person my size since I’ve been here.”

“Only the *Djini* are my size, but we need to be bigger in order to fight the *Shayatin*. The Afrit are mostly about your size.”

“Afrit?”

“Our citizens. They are called the Afrit.”

“You have regular citizens?”

“Of course we do.” Tehmper chuckled. “Like I said before, the world of Jinnistan is not that much different than your surface world. We have friends and families, businesses and leisure. However, we do not have digital cameras.”

“Yeah.” Nick laughed. “I’ll have to get you one of those.”

“Tehmper,” someone said from behind them. Tehmper turned to see Zayne standing at the end of the hallway. The tension in his face sent Tehmper’s pulse skyrocketing. Something was very wrong.

“What is it?”

“There’s a man here to speak to you,” Zayne said. “He says that your *Demonas Amaté* sent him.” Tehmper really didn’t like the way Zayne’s hands clenched into fists at his side. “Tehmper, he’s been badly abused so go easy on him, okay?”

Tehmper nodded as he followed Zayne back down the hallway to a small sitting room off the entrance into the building. It was more of a waiting room than anything, filled with low sitting couches and a few tables and not much else.

Tehmper knew immediately when he stepped into the room what Zayne meant about the poor man having been abused. Scars covered his body. Still, beneath it all, Tehmper saw a glimmer in the man’s eyes that gave him hope. He might be down, but he was not beaten.

“I am Tehmper,” he said gently, sitting down quickly in one of the couches so he didn’t stand so much taller than the other man. He didn’t want to intimidate him. “You have a message from my *Demonas Amaté*?”

The man’s eyes looked wildly around the room, landing on Tehmper, Zayne, and Nick. “I am Brayan. Your *Demonas Amaté* said I needed to come to you, that you and your clan brothers could help us.”

"If my *Demonas Amaté* said it, then it is true," Tehmper replied. "How can I help?"

"I am..." Brayan swallowed hard. "I am one of the Amir's consorts. There are over one hundred and thirty of us that live in the harem. The Amir chooses a new consort every week. We only need to spend one night with him before we are returned to live out our lives in the harem."

Tehmper's brows drew together in confusion. "You are telling me that the Amir has over one hundred and thirty consorts? And he chooses a new one every week?"

"Yes. He prefers to never have the same consort twice, always a new one, but he only chooses one a week, and only on the fourth day of the week. After we have spent our night with him, we are returned to the harem."

"You said that, but if the Amir only has you for that one night, why do you not return to your families?"

Brayan smiled for the first time. "Your *Demonas Amaté* asked the same question. Once we have been with the Amir we are not allowed to leave. We must live out our lives in the harem."

"And if you try to leave?" Zayne asked. Tehmper could hear the rage in Zayne's voice and knew the man was on the verge of exploding. Thunder could be heard crackling outside the windows.

"If we try to leave we are put to death. If we refuse the Amir we are given over to his personal guards." Brayan stroked the side of his scarred face with the back of his hand. "This is what happens after the guards get you."

"And there are one hundred and thirty of you?" Nick asked.

Brayan nodded. "Gabe makes that number one hundred thirty-one."

"You do know this is wrong, don't you?" Tehmper asked. "No one has the right to keep you from your families."

"Again, a point your *Demonas Amaté* made," Brayan said. "He said that no one had the right to make us do what we did not want to

do, that what the Amir did to us was wrong. He said you would help us.”

“I will but first I need to know how Gabe is doing. Did you see him? Is he okay?”

Brayan nodded. Tehmper breathed a sigh of relief and felt some of the tension in his shoulders loosen. At least Gabe was safe for the moment.

“He is being prepared for his night with the Amir, as is the custom. He is...he is not happy about being chosen by the Amir, and I fear he will do something to bring more trouble down on his head.”

Nick snickered. “That sounds like Gabe.”

“I have relayed the information as your *Demonas Amaté* requested, but I am afraid I must return to the harem now,” Brayan said as he backed toward the door. “If I am discovered missing, I will be executed or given to the guards again.”

“No!” Zayne shouted.

Brayan jumped and paled. Even Tehmper was surprised by the vehemence in Zayne’s voice. He turned to look at his clan brother, shocked by the dark clouds he could see gathering outside the window just beyond Zayne’s shoulder.

“You must not leave,” Zayne said. “You must stay here where you will be safe from the Amir and his personal guards.”

“Bu—but I ca—can’t stay,” Brayan stammered. “I don’t know what will happen to the others if I stay away too long. I couldn’t live with myself if someone else was punished for my actions.”

“Honor is a commendable trait, Brayan, but your returning to the harem will only give the Amir and his guards more ammunition,” Zayne said. “It will not assist anyone.”

“But—”

Tehmper stood up and grabbed Zayne by the arm. “May I speak to you for a moment?”

He dropped Zayne’s arm and walked out of the room. He could hear Zayne’s heavy footsteps behind him. Tehmper walked several

feet down the hallway so that they might speak alone, then turned to face his clan brother.

“Have you lost your mind?”

Zayne’s face had taken on a flushed, desperate look. His forehead wrinkled as he grimaced. He paced back and forth. His hands clenched and unclenched into fists. Tehmper was afraid the man was going lose control.

“Brayan is my *Demonas Amaté*, Tehmper,” Zayne finally murmured. “I cannot let him go back there to be abused even more. Surely you can see that?”

“By all that’s holy!”

“After seeing what has been done to him and knowing he has been denied me by the Amir and would have continued to be denied me but for your Gabe’s interference, it is all I can do to retain my control. If he returns to those that may harm him, I cannot say what I will be capable of.”

Tehmper dragged his hand down his face and took in a deep breath. If Brayan did not return to the harem, those who there, including Gabe, might be harmed. If he went back, Tehmper would be denying Zayne his *Demonas Amaté*, the very thing Tehmper fought against.

“Please, Tehmper, I cannot let him—”

Tehmper held up his hand to stop Zayne’s words. “No, I understand, and I agree with you. If I made Brayan return to the harem, I would be giving you the fate I fight so hard against. He is more than welcome to stay, and I am sure Storym and Clagh would agree.”

“Would agree to what?” Storym asked as he walked into the hallway.

“Zayne has found his *Demonas Amaté* and wishes for him to stay here,” Tehmper said.

Storym frowned. “Of course he can stay here. Where else would he stay?”

Tehmper drew in another deep breath, then let it out slowly. He pushed his hand through his hair as he regarded both of his clan brothers. “That’s a long story.”

Chapter 7

Gabe felt ridiculous. His body had been bathed and rubbed with scented oils until he sparkled or gleamed or whatever it was that made his skin shine in the low lamplight of the room he currently stood in. And the outfit he'd been dressed in made things even worse, if he could consider it an outfit. He wore the shortest white *something* he'd ever seen. He just knew it was exposing. It was like a perverted version of underwear. Gabe wasn't even sure the strip of material that went between his butt cheeks could be considered a string.

The white silk vest he wore didn't even come together until it reached below his bellybutton. It barely qualified as covering, as sheer as it was. Gabe could see his own brown-hued nipples through the thin material.

Add in the other things that Amado insisted be done to his body and Gabe felt downright used, abused, and defiled. It felt like a hundred hands had touched his body while bathing him, massaging warm oils into his skin, and then the really embarrassing stuff started. He'd been stroked and massaged until his balls ached. Then his hole was stretched to accommodate the Amir, because apparently, as Amado stated, he did not like to take the time to prepare his consorts. It was for Gabe's protection and comfort during the mating.

Gabe kept trying to tell Amado and anyone who would listen that he was never going to have sex with the Amir. They all just nodded as if they understood, then went about preparing him. It was aggravating.

So, here he stood, bathed and oiled and dressed like a street walker who waited for his next trick. He could only hope that Brayan got through to Tehmper before the Amir arrived, because Gabe told

the truth when he stated he had no intention of having sex with the man, ruler or not.

Gabe's hope died when the massive doors to the bedroom chamber opened and the Amir walked in. Gabe could barely suppress his growl. He didn't try to hide the shudder that raced through his body when the Amir looked him up and down.

"Oh my, yes, you will make a perfect consort," the Amir said. He clasped his hands together and rested his fingertips on his lips. "I might even keep you longer than one night."

"So not going to happen."

The Amir's eye roll was so dramatic his entire head moved. "Oh, please. You're not still going on about that, are you? You're here. I'm here. Why shouldn't we have a little fun?"

"I don't want you."

The Amir waved a dismissive hand at Gabe and walked over to a small crystal decanter on a sideboard. "Like that's ever stopped someone before. You're from the surface, Gabe. You know how these things work. I rub your back, you rub my mine."

Gabe's forehead crinkled in confusion. The Amir he'd met earlier did not act like the one who stood before him now. This one didn't even talk like the one before, but he knew they were the same person.

"I'm not rubbing anything of yours, and you sure as hell aren't going to rub anything of mine."

The Amir chuckled and poured two drinks. He put the lid back on the decanter and walked back to Gabe, holding one of the glasses out to him. Gabe crossed his arms over his chest, refusing the drink. He wasn't going to eat or drink anything the Amir gave him.

The Amir simply shrugged his shoulders, then downed one of the drinks. He set the empty glass on the table and then sauntered slowly around the room. "We could be good together, Gabe. I have the connections, the clout, and the money. You have the reputation of being the only surface dweller to ever defeat a *Shayatin*. We'd make a formidable team."

"I've met your kind before, Amir," Gabe said, "and I wouldn't cross the road to piss on you if you were on fire."

"You're not getting into the spirit of this, Gabe," the Amir snapped, his eyes suddenly going angry. "I am the Amir of Jinnistan, just as my father was and his father before him and his father before him. My family has been on the throne for years."

"I really couldn't give a shit."

Gabe jumped when the glass in the Amir's hand suddenly flew across the room and smashed against the wall. He looked over at the Amir, an eyebrow arched. "I'm thinking you don't get told no very often."

"I am never told no!" the Amir shouted. "I am the Amir. I am the ultimate law in Jinnistan. I could have your life taken from you just like that." The Amir snapped his fingers.

Gabe wasn't impressed. The Amir was a bully, plain and simple. But there was something else about the Amir that bothered Gabe. He just couldn't quite put his finger on it.

"You don't scare me."

"I will," the Amir snapped. Gabe's eyebrows shot up in shock when the Amir walked over to the broken glass on the floor. He leaned down and grabbed a piece, then stood back up. Gabe suddenly knew what he was going to do and raced across the room to stop him.

Before Gabe could reach him, the Amir scraped the piece of glass across his throat, leaving a small thin line of blood that immediately started dripping down his neck. Gabe reached him just a moment later and smacked the glass out of the Amir's hand. He could see that the wound wasn't lethal, just messy.

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Last chance, Gabe," the Amir said. "Willingly give me what I want and I will give you a life of luxury. You'll never want for anything."

"And spend the rest of my life in your harem?" Gabe snapped. "No, thank you."

“Guards!” the Amir started shouting, pushing away from Gabe. “Guards!” The bedroom doors flew open and several guards came running in, swords in hand. The Amir pointed at Gabe while holding his hand over his bloody neck. “He tried to kill me. He tried to kill the Amir. Take him away.”

Even as Gabe tried to fight off the guards grabbing at him he realized he’d been had by a master con artist. It was only then that Gabe clued in to what had bothered him about the Amir since the man walked into the room.

Everyone he’d met since this whole situation started talked strangely and didn’t know *surface dweller* slang. But the Amir did. He talked just like every other jackass on the street. The Amir was human.

Gabe glared at the Amir’s smirking face as two guards held him securely by his arms. “I know who you are,” Gabe said. “I know what you are. And I’ll make sure everyone in Jinnistan knows before I’m done.”

“You’re done now.” The Amir laughed hysterically. “Harming the Amir in any way is punishable by death. You will be executed in the morning. In the meantime, you will be escorted to a solitary cell where you won’t be able to tell anyone anything.”

Gabe realized that once again his temper had gotten him into a shitload of trouble. He should have kept his mouth shut until he could talk to someone instead of showing the Amir his hand. Now, he’d never be able to tell a soul.

A panic set in, Gabe started to struggle against the hands that held him. He might be forced to go with the guards, but he wasn’t going to go easily. Gabe pulled one hand free and swung it at the nearest guard. His hand pained him, but it was worth it when he heard the guard grunt.

He started hitting at the head of the other guard as he tried to pull his arm free. The guards weren’t that much bigger than Gabe and certainly not as big as Tehmper or one of the *Shayatin*. Gabe could

beat them. He knew he could. At least he thought he could before several more guards ran into the room. Enraged and panicked, Gabe made one last mad lunge for the Amir. He figured if he was going down, maybe he could take the Amir with him.

Before he could reach the man, a mountain of men landed on top of him. Gabe grunted in pain as he hit the hard, marbled floor. He felt someone grab his arms and yank them behind his back. A moment later, something metallic snapped around his wrists.

Gabe gritted his teeth as his forearms were grabbed and he was hauled to his feet. He hurt like hell. Every muscle in his body felt like it just got crushed under a ton of weight. Gabe still lunged in the Amir's direction when he walked past, laughing when the man jumped back.

"I will see you removed from your throne if it's the last thing I do."

* * * *

Gabe stared at the ceiling of his cell, wishing he'd kept his mouth shut for the hundredth time. While he would never have agreed to be the Amir's little sex pet, he probably shouldn't have provoked the man so much.

The Amir's personal guards had not been kind when they delivered Gabe to his windowless room. His ribs ached, his back ached, and his face ached. Gabe grinned and then winced when his split lip began to bleed.

He licked the small drop of blood away and grinned again, being a little more careful with his enthusiasm this time. While he received more than a few bruises at the hands of the guards, he wasn't the only one limping away from the fight. Gabe got in a few punches of his own.

Gabe honestly didn't know how he was going to get out of this mess. He just had to hope that Tehmper and the other demon hunters

could do something for the others left in the harem. He certainly didn't seem to be doing a bang up job. So far he'd screwed everything up. He even screwed things up with Tehmper. Gabe knew now that if he had the chance to go back in time he would have demanded that Tehmper claim him in every way possible. Denying the *Djini* had to be the stupidest of all of his moves.

Gabe felt an acute sense of loss that Tehmper would never truly be his. He'd never even be able to experience one of Tehmper's kisses again. Gabe rubbed his fingers over his eyes to wipe away the tears that gathered in them and then pinched the bridge of his nose.

"God, I am such a stupid fuck," he whispered into the silence of the cell.

"I couldn't agree more."

Gabe dropped his arm and quickly sat up. His eyes zoomed around the room as he looked for the man who spoke, knowing who he would see before he even spotted Tehmper leaning against the cell door. He hadn't even heard it open.

"Tehmper, fuck, how in the hell did you get in here?" Gabe said as he got up and raced across the room, jumping into the open arms Tehmper held out to him. He closed his eyes and leaned his head against the big man's chest, inhaling his strong, masculine scent. "I thought I was going to die without ever seeing you again."

"Never going to happen, *Demonas Amaté*," Tehmper whispered.

Gabe leaned his head back to look up at the man. "You don't understand, Tehmper. The Amir has ordered me executed in the morning. He said I tried to kill him."

"Did you?"

"No, but I should have. The man deserves it."

"So I've heard," Tehmper said. "I met a friend of yours named Brayan. He had a lot to say about the Amir and his harem."

Gabe closed his eyes again and leaned his head against Tehmper's chest. "Thank God. I had no idea if he was able to reach you or not. I

was moved to the Amir's chambers before he came back to the harem."

"Um, well, Brayan didn't exactly go back to the harem."

"What?" Gabe exclaimed as he opened his eyes and pushed away from Tehmper. "He has to go back. If the guards discover that he's missing, he'll be in the cell right next to me, and on the chopping block."

"I know the danger he is in, Gabe, but I couldn't send him back. He's Zayne's *Demonas Amaté*."

Gabe blinked.

"How could I do to Zayne and Bryan what I am fighting so hard against for us?"

"So, what is he going to do?"

Tehmper shrugged. "I am unsure at the moment. We've invited him to stay at the clan compound until he decides."

"Does he know he's Zayne's *Demonas Amaté*?"

"He knows something but what exactly that is I couldn't say. And Zayne's too afraid to say anything to Brayan because of what he's been through. He doesn't want to cause Brayan any more misery."

Gabe snorted. "I don't think having a *Djini* for a mate is cause for misery."

"No?"

Tehmper's words were spoken so softly that Gabe's eyes snapped up to the man to make sure he was the one who spoke them. He never heard Tehmper's voice so gentle or filled with such uncertainty.

"No," Gabe said.

"Then you—"

"I wish I agreed to be your *Demonas Amaté* before we ever came to Jinnistan," Gabe said. He waved his hand around the cell they were in. "Then maybe none of this would have ever happened. Maybe we could have completed the mating thing."

“You...You’d do that?” Tehmper asked. “You’d let me complete the mating even after everything that I have brought into your life, all of the horrible things that have happened to you because of me?”

“Oh, Tehmper, they didn’t happen *because* of you,” Gabe said. “They just happened since you were involved. None of it was your fault, not really.”

“But if I had never marked you, none of this would have happened. The Amir did what he did because of me. The *Shayatin* went after you and destroyed your house because I marked you. This is all because of me.”

“So is the heat I feel every time you touch me, the pleasure I receive at your hands.” Gabe threw his hands up in the air and spun around to walk back over to the bed he’d been lying on before, sitting himself down. “It’s like I was asleep before you came along and now suddenly I’m awake for the first time in my life. I’m feeling things, wanting things, and I want them with you.”

Tehmper seemed to be paralyzed for a moment, just staring across the room at Gabe, and then suddenly he walked over to kneel on the floor between Gabe’s legs. Gabe was surprised at the slight tremble he saw in Tehmper’s hand as the man reached over to brush his cheek.

“You are my salvation, the light to my darkness. Without you I am only half a man. I will put no other before you, I swear. I will love you and protect you until my death if you consent to be my *Demonas Amaté*.”

Gabe grinned and reached up to caress the side of Tehmper’s face. “I think I’d like that.” Gabe’s eyebrows shot up when little flames started flickering along Tehmper’s arms and hands. “Uh, Tehmper?”

“It is impossible for me to hurt you, *Demonas Amaté*.”

“You’re on fire, Tehmper.”

“Give me your hand, please?” Tehmper said, holding his up. Gabe slowly raised his hand and pressed it against Tehmper’s, fingertip to

fingertip, palm to palm. He watched as the flames licking along Tehmper's skin moved over to encompass his hand, as well.

He was fascinated and a little unnerved all at the same time. Red and orange flames sparkled along their clasped hands, warming Gabe's skin but not burning him.

"How is this possible?" Gabe whispered. "It doesn't even hurt."

"You are the *Demonas Amaté* of a fire demon. Fire can no longer hurt you."

"But I thought we hadn't completed the mating yet."

"We haven't, but my bite mark started the process. It also makes you immune to the flames. It wouldn't make much sense for you to be burned every time I touched you, would it?"

Gabe chuckled. "No, I guess not."

"The stronger our bond becomes, the stronger you will become."

Gabe frowned. "And that means what?"

"I am a fire demon, which means I control the element of fire. I am also the strongest of all of the *Djini*. As we bond, you will be become stronger—not as strong as I am, but stronger. You will be immune to fire and you might even be able to create it on your own after a while."

Gabe's jaw dropped, and a soft gasp escaped him. "You're telling me that I might be able to create fire like you do?"

"Yes, the possibility grows as our bond does." Gabe felt Tehmper shudder as he drew in a deep breath. "That does not frighten you, does it? It is part of being mated to a *Djini*. I cannot change this."

"I'll admit it's a little weird, but I suppose it's something I can get used to," Gabe said, smiling when he saw the relief that flooded Tehmper's face. "Of course, you need to fill me in on the rest of it, the rules and such. Do you think you could do that?"

Tehmper licked his lips. "Now?"

"No, not now." Gabe laughed. "Right now you have some claiming to do. We can talk later." Gabe's eyes roamed over as much of Tehmper's gorgeous body as he could see. "Much, much, later."

Gabe scooted back on the bed and crooked his finger at Tehmper. The flames that licked along Tehmper's arms darkened to a deep scarlet red. Gabe could only hope that it meant Tehmper was aroused. He certainly was.

Tehmper climbed onto the bed. Gabe groaned and dropped his head back against the pillows when Tehmper started to lick up the inside of his calf. Tehmper's tongue felt hot against his skin, smoldering, like an actual flame flickering along his body. And Gabe loved it.

He gripped the sheets in his hands and spread his legs wider as Tehmper climbed farther up between his legs. He could feel Tehmper's lips move along his knee. His body trembled as Tehmper licked his thigh, moving closer to Gabe's aching cock.

Gabe almost cried out in protest when Tehmper moved beyond his cock and started licking around his abdomen and bellybutton. Each touch of Tehmper's lips on his skin made Gabe tremble. He ached.

"Tehmper," he whimpered.

A hot ache grew in the back of Gabe's throat as Tehmper raised his head and looked up at him. His cheeks heated under the heat of Tehmper's gaze. His heart took a perilous leap at the deep need he could see in the dark depths of Tehmper's eyes.

"Tehmper," Gabe said as he held out a hand to the man.

Tehmper moved up the bed until his body covered Gabe's from head to toe and then some. There seemed to be a sort of awe in Tehmper's eyes as he brushed the hair back from Gabe's face. His touch was oddly soft and caressing.

"My *Demonas Amaté*," he whispered almost reverently.

Gabe's heart pounded in an erratic rhythm. "Yes."

Tehmper's mouth covered Gabe's hungrily. It was surprisingly gentle for all of its furiousness. Tehmper moved his mouth over Gabe's, devouring, demanding a response that Gabe gladly gave.

Gabe was conscious of every spot Tehmper touched. Gabe's hands slipped up Tehmper's arms, bringing him closer. He tugged on

the buttery-soft material of Tehmper's shirt. He wanted it gone. He wanted to feel their bodies press together with nothing between them.

Tehmper grinned and moved to the side of the bed. Gabe's breath hitched in his throat as Tehmper stood up and started taking his clothes off. The man was simply magnificent, all hard body and lean muscle.

Each patch of skin revealed made Gabe's heart hammer faster. When Tehmper stood naked before him, Gabe could only stare in wonder. He couldn't believe a man so beautiful could be all his.

Tehmper pointed to the white silk outfit that Gabe wore. "Are you going to keep wearing that?" he asked. "While I am pretty sure I could work around it, it might interfere with our plans."

Gabe chuckled and sat up. He quickly pulled the vest off and tossed it over the side of the bed. His face flushed as he reached for the nearly none existent underwear he wore and pushed them down his legs.

Tehmper growled and launched himself back onto the bed. The small flicker of scarlet flames along his body grew larger. Gabe took that as a good sign. At least, he hoped it was a good sign.

Gabe grunted when Tehmper pulled him roughly, almost violently, to him. He felt his body molding to the hard contours of Tehmper's body as if they were made to go together. Two halves of the same whole, as Tehmper said.

Tehmper's hands were everywhere, moving along Gabe's body and leaving a scorching fire behind. Gabe felt his blood surge from his fingertips to his toes. His heart thudded noisily within him.

Tehmper's hand moved down between Gabe's thighs, his fingers brushing against Gabe's puckered entrance. "You will have me?" Tehmper whispered. He seemed to be peering at Gabe intently, as if his entire world hung on Gabe's answer.

Gabe's only response was the rapid beat of his pulse and spreading of his thighs even farther apart. The next time Tehmper's fingers moved over him, Gabe lifted his hips. Tehmper's touch was

light and painfully teasing as he pressed one finger into the sensitive hole, sending currents of desire through Gabe.

“Oh, yes, yes,” Gabe groaned, his body instinctively arching toward Tehmper as he felt another finger push into him. “More.”

Gabe reached for Tehmper, one hand caressing the strong tendons at the back of Tehmper’s neck. The other hand moved over Tehmper’s chest. The flames that leaped along Tehmper’s body moved to him, flickering along his hot skin.

Gabe knew he was already stretched enough to take Tehmper. That had been seen to in the harem. With Tehmper’s added touch, he was raring to go. Gabe gripped Tehmper’s shoulders and pulled on them.

“Please, now, Tehmper,” Gabe pleaded. “Take me now.”

He gasped as Tehmper pulled his fingers free and lowered his body over his. Tehmper’s eyes stared into his as the flames leaping between them grew. Gabe inhaled softly when he felt Tehmper’s thick cock start to slowly push into him.

Time stood still, the world around them disappearing. Gabe held Tehmper’s gaze as he was slowly impaled on the thickest, longest cock he ever remembered having—not that he had that many, but damn!

Finally, Tehmper seemed to be in all of the way. Gabe grew worried when Tehmper’s eyes closed. His face looked agonized, as if he were in pain.

“Tehmper?” he murmured.

Tehmper’s eyes opened and Gabe gasped. They were bright, shining red, the whites of Tehmper’s eyes totally gone.

Gabe worried that something was wrong until Tehmper growled and grabbed his hips, lifting Gabe’s back end off the bed. There were no slow loving or gentle movements. One moment Tehmper seemed frozen in place, and the next he pounded into Gabe like he had suddenly been released from his paralysis.

Gabe could barely catch his breath. His entire body hummed with the need for release. Every time Tehmper looked at him, Gabe's heart turned over in response. The desire burning in Tehmper's gaze blazed red hot, and it was all for Gabe.

"*Demonas Amaté*, I must...I must bite you to complete the bond."

Gabe groaned, knowing what was coming, and arched his head back, baring his throat to Tehmper. He felt Tehmper's hands tighten on him just as sharp fangs sank into his body. The sweet pull of Tehmper's mouth matched the thrust of his cock.

Gabe was overwhelmed in moments, the twin sensations racing through his body. He could see a red haze of flames surrounding their bodies. Each little flame licked at his skin like the soft touch of a lover.

He started panting heavily, unable to catch his breath. Gabe clenched his hands in Tehmper's long, black hair. His entire body seized as the lust burning in his body exploded in a fiery haze of sensation. Gabe cried out as cum shot from his cock.

He heard a loud roar above him and felt a throbbing in his ass as Tehmper released inside of him. The man's fangs remained in Gabe's throat as his body collapsed down on top of him. Gabe just wrapped his arms around Tehmper and rubbed his hands up and down his naked back.

"Desmonis, my power name is Desmonis," Tehmper whispered.

Gabe had no idea what Tehmper was talking about, but he felt too melty to care. He could feel Tehmper's heavy breathing, feel the slow, gradual lessening of Tehmper's drinking. When Tehmper extracted his fangs and licked at the bite wound, Gabe almost cried out in protest.

"I'm sorry, *Demonas Amaté*," Tehmper said. "I do not want to take too much and leave you weakened."

Gabe's head whirled. He loved the feeling of Tehmper biting him. He had from the very beginning. He didn't want to give the biting up.

"How often can you bite me?"

“At least once a day if you’ll let me.” Tehmper raised his head and grinned. Gabe yelped when Tehmper suddenly rolled them over until he lay on top of him. “Now it is time for you to take from me.”

“What?”

“We need to exchange blood, *Demonas Amaté*,” Tehmper said. “You must bite me.”

“Tehmper, I don’t have fangs.”

Tehmper chuckled. “You have teeth, don’t you?”

“But that will hurt.”

Tehmper grabbed Gabe’s face with both of his hands. “I do not care, Gabe. It is the last step in claiming you as my *Demonas Amaté*.”

“Where...Where do you want me to bite you?” Gabe glanced down at Tehmper’s neck and chest. He didn’t want to hurt Tehmper. His blunt teeth were nothing compared to Tehmper’s sharp fangs.

“That I will leave up to you, *Demonas Amaté*,” Tehmper replied.

Gabe’s eyes flickered down to Tehmper’s chest again, to the thick muscles right over his heart. Something inside of him told him that he needed to leave his mark on Tehmper over the man’s heart. “You know this will probably leave a scar.”

“Any bite you give me I will wear with honor.”

Gabe leaned down and dragged his tongue along one of Tehmper’s torso muscles. He could feel the muscle jerk, and he grinned. He had as much of an effect on Tehmper as Tehmper had on him.

Gabe paid special attention to the small brown nub that marbled under his tongue. He nibbled at the nipple, pulled and sucked on it until he felt Tehmper’s cock begin to harden inside of his ass. Gabe’s pulse quickened.

Looking at the spot he knew he needed to leave his bite mark on, Gabe scraped his teeth over it. With one quick glance up at Tehmper, Gabe bit down as hard as he could on the skin over the man’s chest.

Tehmper yelled out, but Gabe refused to let go. Sweet, hot blood filled his mouth. Gabe absently wondered if this was why biting was part of the mating, because Tehmper's blood tasted like ambrosia.

"*Demonas Amaté!*" Tehmper shouted.

Gabe felt Tehmper grab his hips, and then the man slammed up into him so hard that Gabe's bones rattled. He gasped around the skin in his mouth as lava-hot seed filled him again.

Tehmper's body trembled beneath Gabe's. He panted heavily. Gabe let go of the flesh in his mouth and licked the remaining blood away. When Gabe looked up, he found Tehmper staring at him with flames in his eyes.

"Does that work for you?"

Tehmper let out a broken chuckle as his hands moved gently up Gabe's sides to his arms. Gabe easily gave in when Tehmper pulled him down for a soft kiss. When Gabe lifted his head a moment later, the flames in Tehmper's eyes had lessened.

"Yes, *Demonas Amaté*, that was wonderful. I will wear your mark with pride."

Gabe was slightly confused when Tehmper reached over the side of his bed and grabbed a small black bag out of his pants pocket. He watched as Tehmper opened the bag and poured a small amount out into the palm of his hand.

"Would you help me?" Tehmper asked.

"Help you what?"

"Sprinkle this on your bite mark."

"What is it?"

"Sacred salt."

Gabe's eyes widened. "Tehmper, salt will make the scar worse. It won't go away. You'll have it for the rest of your life."

"I hope so," Tehmper said as he held up his palm. "That would bring much joy to my life."

Gabe shook his head at Tehmper's words but grabbed a pinch of salt, spreading it out over the bite mark he'd left on Tehmper's chest.

Gabe knew the salt hurt when Tehmper hissed and his body tensed.

“Do you want me to continue?”

“Yes, please, *Demonas Amaté*.”

Gabe rolled his eyes and continued until Tehmper seemed satisfied and then put the bag of salt away. “Happy now?”

“Yes, *Demonas Amaté*, very.”

Gabe grinned, then laid his head down on the other side of Tehmper’s chest. He could hear the solid beat of his heart, and the sound gave him great comfort. He started to fade off to sleep, the sweet sound of Tehmper’s heart lulling him, when a sudden thought entered his head.

“You never told me, Tehmper,” Gabe said as he lifted his head and looked up at the demon hunter. “How in the hell did you get into my cell?”

Chapter 8

Tehmper smiled. “The guard is my little brother.”

“Your little brother?” Gabe asked, frowning. “Little would be right. He doesn’t look anything like you. He’s no taller than I am.”

“He didn’t go through the transformation like I did, so he became a guardian instead of a *Djini*.”

“Transformation? What transformation? And how is being a guardian any different than being a *Djini*?”

“All these questions, *Demonas Amaté*.” Tehmper chuckled lightly when Gabe pinched his nipple. “Okay, okay, when we reach the age of maturity, we may or may not go through a transformation. I did, becoming what I am today. Stayrr did not go through the transformation, so he became a Guardian, one that guards Jinnistan.”

“Does it hurt?” Gabe asked, his hand rubbing up and down Tehmper’s chest.

“It doesn’t hurt exactly, but it is not comfortable. We practice a form of meditation that puts us into a trance-like state. Most of the transformation passes by us while we are unaware of it happening.”

“Is your brother upset because he didn’t transform?”

Tehmper shrugged. “I don’t think Stayrr was upset because he always wanted to be a guardian and keep Jinnistan safe like our father. But I suppose there are others that have been. Being *Djini* is a great honor, but it is also a dangerous thing, as you are well aware.”

“Can you refuse to be a *Djini* even if you transform?”

“Why would you want to?” Tehmper asked. He frowned at Gabe, not understanding why it would even be a question. “Like I said, being a *Djini* is a great honor. We hunt down the *Shayatin* that prey on

surface dwellers. In doing so, we protect our world as much as yours. Why would we not want to do that if we could?"

"Tehmper, not everyone is cut out to be a protector, no matter how much they wish they were. Some people just don't have the temperament for the job. Just like not everyone can be a police detective."

"I suppose that's true, but I've never heard of anyone not becoming a *Djini* after being transformed. I guess maybe they don't go through the transformation if they're not cut out for the position."

"That would make more sense to me."

Tehmper chuckled again. His *Demonas Amaté* was always thinking. That inquisitive mind might drive him nuts over the years ahead, but at least Gabe wasn't stupid.

"Any idea how we're going to get me out of this mess?" Gabe asked a moment later. "The Amir is out of his mind, but he does have the power to have me executed in the morning."

"I'm working on a plan with my clan brothers," Tehmper said as he smoothed his hand down Gabe's back. "Not to worry, *Demonas Amaté*, I promised to protect you. I will not let you be executed."

"Tehmper, has the Amir been in his position long?"

"The Amir took over when his father passed away a few years ago. Why?"

"He's a surface dweller," Gabe said. "I'd bet my life on it."

"A surf—you've lost your mind," Tehmper snapped as he sat up. "The Amir was raised right here in Jinnistan. Everyone knows that. He was presented to all of Jinnistan on the day of his fifth birthday, as is custom."

"And before that?" Gabe asked as he scooted back to lean against the wall. "Where was he when he was growing up? Where was he before he turned five? Here in Jinnistan? Did anyone see him?"

"Well, of course people saw him. He had a tutor, personal guards, his father."

“Uh-huh, and did anyone outside of his personal entourage see him? Was there a little Amir running around the palace? Or was he only presented when there was some sort of royal function?”

Tehmper shook his head. “You don’t understand. The Amir’s mother died giving birth to him. His father was very protective. The Amir was guarded twenty-four hours a day so that nothing happened to him. He wasn’t allowed out in public.”

“Well, that was mighty convenient, don’t you think?”

“Gabe—”

“No, listen to me for a moment,” Gabe said as he held up a hand. “The Amir was hardly ever seen by the public, just those that were ordered to care for him by his father, and then just a few people at that. Correct?”

“Yes.”

“And you can create a portal to the surface world, correct?”

“Yes.”

“Then who says that the Amir wasn’t raised on the surface and brought back to Jinnistan if there was a royal function or something.” Gabe shook his head. “You didn’t talk to him last night. I did. He doesn’t talk like you do at all. He talks like me.”

“What does that matter?”

“Because so far I haven’t met a single person from Jinnistan that talks like me. Everyone talks like you do.”

Tehmper frowned. “How do I talk?”

“Very proper.”

“And that makes you think that the Amir is a surface dweller? Because of the way he talks?”

“Do you remember your curiosity about the digital camera?”

Tehmper nodded. He still wanted to see this small device that he could use to take instant pictures instead of waiting for the artists to paint one. It sounded like a marvel.

“I’ll bet you anything that the Amir not only knows what a digital camera is, but that he has one as well.”

Tehmper reached over and grabbed Gabe's hand. "I would like to believe you, *Demonas Amaté*," he said. "And you have a very good argument, but I do not understand how the Amir could be a surface dweller and no one know about it."

"I don't know. Maybe that's something you should look into." Gabe shrugged. "I'm telling you, Tehmper, I've been a police detective for a lot of years and I know when something is not right. This guy sets off every alarm I have."

"I believe you." Tehmper didn't know why he believed Gabe, but he did. Granted, Tehmper didn't like the Amir, but he didn't think that's what made him believe Gabe. There was something in the tone of Gabe's voice that told him the man told the truth.

"I'm just asking you to look into it, Tehmper," Gabe said. "Don't do anything that gets you into trouble or makes you feel uncomfortable. This guy just screams con man to me."

"Con man?"

"Um, con man, charlatan, a fraud. He's not who he pretends to be. He offered to keep me in the lap of luxury if I agreed to be his sex toy. If he was really the Amir, he wouldn't ask. He'd demand and he wouldn't care about making any type of deal with me."

"He asked you to be his sex toy?" Tehmper took a deep breath to keep control of the flames that instantly started sparking along his arms. He didn't like the idea of anyone propositioning his *Demonas Amaté* for anything, especially to be a sex toy.

"Basically, he told me, and I quote," Gabe made quote marks in the air with his fingers, "you rub my back and I'll rub your back."

"He wanted you to rub his back?" Tehmper frowned. "I thought you said he wanted you to be his sex toy?"

Gabe rolled his eyes. "That's what I've been trying to tell you, Tehmper. That's surface dweller speech. It means that if I give him what he wants, he will give me what I want."

"Then why not just say that?"

“He did, Tehmper, in surface dweller speech. And if the Amir has never been to the surface, he wouldn’t know how to say that, which tells me that he is not from here.”

“And this makes him a *con man*?”

“Well, I don’t know what you call it in Jinnistan, but it makes him someone from the surface that is pretending to be the Amir.”

“Damn, do you know what you’re saying, Gabe?” Tehmper asked. He rubbed his hand down his face. “If the Amir is not the Amir...”

Tehmper could feel Gabe’s gaze on him as he tried to process everything that he was just told. It was a lot to take in. If Gabe was right, and Tehmper was beginning to think he was, then the man in control of Jinnistan was a fraud. Add in what Clagh found concerning the clans ruling the land and there was something very wrong going on.

Before Tehmper could say more about the thoughts going through his head, there came a soft knock on the door. Tehmper sighed, knowing his time with his *Demonas Amaté* had come to an end.

Tehmper wrapped his hand around the back of Gabe’s neck and pulled him forward for a quick kiss. “I must go, *Demonas Amaté*,” he whispered against his lips. “I will return if I can. If not, I will see you tomorrow.”

“Tehmper, tomorrow they’re going to chop my head off.”

Tehmper smiled and rubbed his thumb along the side of Gabe’s face. “No one will harm you. This I swear, *Demonas Amaté*.”

“But what—”

Tehmper pressed his finger against Gabe’s lips. “You are my *Demonas Amaté*. It is my duty and my honor to keep you safe from all harm.”

It was with a great deal of regret that Tehmper rolled to the side of the bed and got up, reaching for his clothes. It didn’t take him more than a few moments to get dressed. He felt Gabe’s eyes on him the entire time.

He walked slowly to the door, then turned to face Gabe. "If I do not see you again tonight, know that I am doing all that I can to free you and bring you back to my side."

The stricken look in Gabe's face as he turned away burned a hole in Tehmper's heart. It was all he could do to knock on the door and walk out when his brother opened it for him. When the door closed again, locking Gabe inside, Tehmper rested his hand on Stayrr's shoulder.

"Take care of him, brother," Tehmper said. "If anything changes, get word to me as soon as you can. I will be at the clan compound."

"Yes, brother."

"He is my *Demonas Amaté*, Stayrr."

"I understand, Tehmper."

Tehmper nodded and walked quickly toward a hidden set of stairs off in one corner of the room. Not many people knew of the stairs, which were a quick exit out of the dungeon section of the palace.

Tehmper wished he could have Gabe by his side as he left the building, but at the moment it wasn't an option. Gabe needed to stay where he was until Tehmper could figure a way out of the mess they were in. If he couldn't, Tehmper would use the hidden escape route to take Gabe out and hide him or take him back to the surface, to wherever he would be safe.

It was a short trip from the palace to the clan compound that took just a few minutes. He rushed through the large double doors and went straight to the study. Tehmper prayed that Clagh had found something in his absence.

Tehmper found his clan brother bent over an ancient parchment. He seemed to be examining it carefully, scribbling notes on a piece of paper. Tehmper walked over and stood next to Clagh, staring down at the old brown paper.

"Well, what have you found?"

Clagh held up his hand. "Give me a moment."

Tehmper rolled his eyes and walked over to stare out the window. He didn't want to give Clagh even a second, but he knew he needed to. Clagh was the teacher, the researcher. He was good at what he did. If he said he needed a moment then he was most likely on to something.

"Tehmper, come look at this," Clagh said into the silent room.

Tehmper jumped a little, then hurried over to see what Clagh pointed at.

"What am I looking for?"

"This scroll was brought to me by one of the other clans," Clagh explained. "They only agreed to loan it to me if I didn't tell anyone where I got it and returned it as soon as I was done. It seems they had it hidden in a vault in the middle of the compound for the last couple of centuries."

"What is it, Clagh?" Tehmper really couldn't have cared less where the ancient scroll came from. He wanted to know what it said.

"During the Great War almost all of the clans were wiped out. What clans remained did not have all of their members. It was decided by the council that an Amir would be appointed until such time as the clans could be rebuilt."

"Okay, and this means what?"

"Tehmper, the clans have been rebuilt for over a hundred years. Control of Jinnistan should have been returned to the clans by now. Instead, we still have an Amir in control of our homeland. Doesn't that seem wrong to you?"

"Does it say anything about who they chose as the first Amir and why he was chosen?"

"He was a council member. Why?"

"Because Gabe believes the present Amir is a surface dweller."

"That would make things very interesting if it's true."

Tehmper nodded.

"No, you don't understand, Tehmper," Clagh said as he started searching through the stack of parchments in front of him. "When the

council decided to have an Amir they specifically stated that he had to be of Jinnistan birth. He could not be a surface dweller.”

“Even if that’s true, I’m not sure there is a way to prove that the Amir is a surface dweller. Gabe is going on his suspicion because of the way the Amir talks. That wouldn’t stand up before the council.”

“No, but as Nick said about these documents, there has to be a record somewhere, or someone that knows the truth.”

“What about the Amir’s tutor? Or his wet nurse?” Tehmper asked. “I wouldn’t trust the Amir’s personal guards as far as I could throw them, not after I saw what they did to Brayan.”

“Yes, I did see that as well,” Clagh said. “As for these other people, I wouldn’t know the first place to look for them.”

“Maybe the other clans would know or could start looking.”

“I’ll have Storym ask. They are as interested in this as we are.”

“Just tell them to keep quiet about it,” Tehmper said as he started toward the door. “If the Amir gets wind of our investigation, he could have us imprisoned. And we only have until tomorrow morning to get Gabe cleared. The Amir has ordered his execution for then.”

“I will see to it, but if what I found is true then the Amir cannot take your *Demonas Amaté*. You know that, right? I mean, besides the scrolls that I found that state no one may interfere in your mating, this new information could remove the Amir from office.”

“You have until dawn, Clagh,” Tehmper said, “before I remove Gabe from the Amir’s dungeon through the hidden stairwell. I don’t care if I have to take him to the surface. I will not let him be harmed.”

“I’ll have whatever documents and witnesses we can find ready to present to the council by then, Tehmper. We will free your *Demonas Amaté*.”

Tehmper nodded and headed out of the study. He paused outside the study door, not sure of where he needed to go next. Clagh would look over their ancient text. Storym would talk to the other clans, and Zayne was occupied with Brayan and Nick.

He clenched his fists at his side and paced quickly back and forth. His mind swirled with part fury and part grief. Every minute he spent separated from Gabe was agonizing. Knowing Gabe's life hung in the balance if Tehmper didn't "fix things," as the man said, was the most horrible of all.

"Tehmper, dude, you look like you need a drink."

Tehmper turned and glared at Nick. "I will not pollute my body in that manner."

Nick cocked his head a little. "You don't know what you're missing, my man," he said. "I know I could use a drink right about now. Maybe that's one of those things we need to bring from the surface along with your digital camera."

At the mention of the instant picture taker, Tehmper suddenly remembered the pictures he had taken from Gabe's house. He reached into his pocket of his duster and pulled the small bundle out.

"If I gave these to an artist, could you help me have them restored?"

Nick took the pictures and looked through them carefully. "There's a couple here that might be able to be repaired, but I think the rest of them are toast—uh, broken."

"Yes, I understand that," Tehmper said. "I wanted the artist to recreate them, paint them—maybe even paint pictures of the people in the pictures so that Gabe will always have pictures of his family to look at."

Nick chuckled. "You have it so bad, man." Tehmper frowned in confusion, which seemed to amuse Nick greatly. He started laughing. "You have the hots for Gabe a lot. You really, really like him."

"Yes, he is my *Demonas Amaté*."

"Dude, you keep saying that," Nick said. "You do know he's more than that, right?"

"He is my *Demonas Amaté*."

"Look, Tehmper, I'm going to let you in on a little secret. If you keep saying just that Gabe is your *Demonas Amaté*, he's going to get

pissed after a while. Believe me. I know the guy, and he won't be happy about it."

"Why?" Tehmper asked. "It is a great honor to be a *Demonas Amaté*."

"Because if you have any hope of being more than just friends with benefits, Gabe needs to be more to you than that. He needs to know that he's important to you, that you would want him even if he wasn't your *Demonas Amaté*."

"I have said that I will love and protect him until my death." Tehmper pulled his shirt aside to show the bite mark on his chest. "I have ensured that his bite mark will never fade. What more is there?"

"Don't you want him to fall in love with you? Don't you want to fall in love with him?" Nick frowned. "Do demons even believe in love?"

"I have just said that I will love him until my death," Tehmper shouted. "Did you not hear me?"

"Seriously, dude? You've said that almost from the moment you two met. You can't just say the words and have them be true. You have to mean them."

"I never would have spoken the words unless I meant them."

"After just meeting the guy?"

As much as he would have liked punching Nick in the face, Tehmper thought he finally understood what the man was trying to say to him. While a large part of him was mad at Nick for being a pain, he was also thankful that Nick looked out for Gabe.

"You do not understand, friend of Gabe's," Tehmper said, grinning when the man bristled at his words. "A demon is only half a soul without his *Demonas Amaté*. When I found Gabe and gave him my bite mark, I gave him my heart. Yes, it seems fast, and maybe for surface dwellers it is, but for *Djini* there is no question for us. Our *Demonas Amaté* becomes the most important thing in our lives from the moment we mark them."

“That’s it? You just bite him and then you are devoted to him for life?”

“Yes.”

Nick stared for about half a second then started snickering. “You might want to fill Gabe in on that little tidbit of information. I don’t think he realizes that you love him.”

“But I have told him this many times.”

“Won’t matter, man. If you don’t tell him outright, he’s never going to believe you. He’ll just think you’re stating words from your world that hold no significance for him. You have to actually tell him that you love him.”

Tehmper frowned, not quite understanding, but if Nick said it was so, Tehmper guessed it probably was. “Then I will state the words so that there is no misunderstanding. I have given Gabe my heart and devotion, marked him as my own as he has marked me. We are mates.”

Chapter 9

Tehmper didn't come back. Gabe waited up all night hoping to see the man again, but he never returned. By morning's light, Gabe's spirits sank to an all-time low. He was facing his execution, and he didn't know if he would ever see his lover again.

It was mere hours since Tehmper left, but it felt like forever. Gabe felt the separation like a hole in his heart. He wanted to see Tehmper, hold him, and let him know he cared for him. He didn't want one night together to be the only thing Tehmper remembered of him.

The longer Gabe sat there alone, the more he started to think he should have taken the Amir up on his proposal. At least then, even from the harem, he would have had more time to find a way back to Tehmper.

Gabe just hated the thought of the Amir's hands on him. Maybe he had too much pride. Maybe he was too picky. Maybe he should have kept his mouth shut. And maybe it would have been the biggest mistake of his life.

Gabe just didn't know. Even considering the Amir's proposal felt like he was being unfaithful to Tehmper, and they'd only slept together once. He couldn't even imagine how he'd feel if they spent more time together. Of course, he could hope, though.

Gabe started to roll over when he heard the cell door open. He clutched the pendant he wore around his neck, the one that Tehmper gave him and he refused to take off, and faced whoever came through the door.

He was surprised when he recognized the young guard, not because he knew who he was but because of how much the man

looked like Tehmper. They were just a larger and smaller version of the same man.

“I am sorry, *Demonas Amaté*, but it is time to go,” the man said. He handed Gabe a small stack of clothes. “I’ve brought you something a little more appropriate to wear than what you arrived in.”

Gabe nodded and got to his feet. He quickly dressed in the loose cotton pants and vest Stayrr gave him, then walked over to join him. He glanced around to make sure that no one could hear them before looking at the small version of his lover.

“Can you give Tehmper a message for me?”

Stayrr looked saddened when he nodded his head. “I will see that he gets it.”

“Tell him...tell him that I love him.”

Stayrr looked surprised. “Yes, of course. I will tell him if you do not yourself.”

“I’m headed to my execution,” Gabe said. “I don’t think they will give me time to say anything before they take my head.”

Stayrr smiled for the first time. “You do not know my brother. He will not let you go under the executioner’s blade. He will find a way to stop this, *Demonas Amaté*.”

Gabe wasn’t so confident. He trusted that Tehmper would do everything within his power to try and stop the execution, but Gabe didn’t hold out much hope that the man would be able to change anything. The Amir had his claws too deep into the Jinnistan society.

“You know, my name is Gabe,” he said as he started walking along side of Stayrr.

“Yes, *Demonas Amaté*, but it is not proper for me to address you as such without Tehmper’s permission.”

“You’re his brother.”

Stayrr smiled. “Yes, but it’s the way of our society. During the Great War, people started addressing *Demonas Amaté* as such instead of their birth names so no one could take revenge on a certain *Djini* by going after his mate.”

“Why would someone go after a *Djini* or his mate?”

“Revenge,” Stayrr said. “The Great War was not a time that paints Jinnistan in a good light. It was the beginning of the war with the *Shayatin*, those that flaunted the rules and killed to feed.”

“Sounds lovely.”

“Many were killed. It almost devastated Jinnistan. That’s why you are only allowed to be referred to as *Demonas Amaté* until I am given permission by Tehmper to call you by name. If I don’t know your true name, I do not know who your demon is and I cannot take revenge upon your demon through you.”

“That sounds a little strange. I mean, wouldn’t you see me with my demon and know I belonged to him?”

Stayrr nodded as he unlocked a door and led Gabe through it. He locked it behind him and then continued down the hallway. “Before the Great War, no one went to the surface. It was forbidden. If you had a *Demonas Amaté*, that meant he or she was from Jinnistan. If the mating is completed, then the mate of a demon can summon his or her demon.”

“Summon?” Gabe gasped. “Like, cast some sort of spell and make them appear out of thin air?”

“Yes, but only if the mating was completed and Tehmper gave you his power name.” Stayrr looked confused for a moment, his eyebrows drawn together in a frown. “Surely Tehmper gave you his power name when you mated.”

Gabe started to shake his head when he suddenly remembered Tehmper whispering a name into his ear. He opened his mouth to say something about it when Stayrr held up his hand.

“Please, do not tell me. Do not tell anyone. That knowledge is for you alone. It means that Tehmper has given you his complete trust, his heart, and his soul. The mating was completed once he placed his complete trust in you, gave you his power name, and then exchanged blood with you while having sexual intercourse.” Stayrr pointed to the

necklace Gabe wore. "And he must give you a symbol of his devotion, something made by his own hand."

Gabe remembered the night before. He remembered the sex, the bite, the exchanging of blood, the name Tehmper whispered in his ear, and he remembered the necklace Tehmper gave him all those days ago.

"How does my knowing his power name mean he can be harmed through me?"

"Like I said, the mating was only completed when Tehmper placed his complete trust in you. He can no longer be summoned by anyone except you. If someone wanted revenge on Tehmper, they could torture his power name out of you or force you to summon him, putting Tehmper's power into their hands. Imagine what a *Shayatin* could do with that kind of power?"

"If I summon Tehmper, do I have control of his power?"

"No. You can summon him, but you will not have power over him. However, as long as you are alive, he cannot be summoned by anyone ever again unless you do it. The longer you are bonded the stronger he grows." Stayrr shrugged. "If you are bonded for years, then the likelihood of him ever being summoned by anyone except you is nil, even if you die."

Gabe rubbed his forehead. "This is all pretty weird to me. You know that, right?"

Stayrr chuckled. "I imagine so."

"I wish I could just summon Tehmper right now and get the hell out of here."

"You don't have any sacred salt."

"Yeah right, sacred salt," Gabe mused. "I wonder if table salt would work in the same way."

"Not likely. It has to be sacred salt blessed by our priests."

"Just my luck."

Gabe stopped when they came to a large set of doors. His breath suddenly left his chest as he realized from the chanting that the

executioner's chambers were just on the other side. He glanced over at Stayrr.

"Do you think Tehmper is in there?"

"I do not know, *Demonas Amaté*, but I know he will be here at some point. He will not let you go through this alone." Stayrr patted Gabe on the back. "Have faith in Tehmper. He will come through for you. You are his *Demonas Amaté*."

Gabe nodded but could feel his panic rising as the large doors were opened and he was ushered inside and onto the floor of a large arena. Surrounding him on every side were seats filled with hundreds of people chanting loudly.

At one end sat a large balcony. The Amir sat there in a throne-like chair, looking smugly down at Gabe. Refusing to be cowed by the Amir and knowing in his heart that the Amir was a surface dweller, Gabe held up both of his middle fingers and flipped the Amir off. He laughed when he saw the Amir's eyes narrow.

The Amir jumped to his feet and walked to the edge of the balcony railing. He held up his hand for silence. It took a moment for the crowd to quiet down, but once they did, the Amir glared down at Gabe.

"You have been brought before the people of Jinnistan to answer for your crimes against Jinnistan."

"Oh, please," Gabe snapped loudly. "You're trying to execute me because I wouldn't be your little sex toy."

"Silence!" the Amir shouted as he slammed his hand down on the stone railing.

"Why?" Gabe asked. "So you can execute me without telling all of these good people," Gabe gestured to the crowd as he turned in a complete circle, "what a complete and utter ass you are?"

"You dare speak of the Amir in this manner?"

"I would consider that position with a little more respect if I didn't know who and what you are, Amir." Gabe glanced around the room, which had gone totally quiet. He couldn't hear anything except the

rapid pounding of his heart. “Do your fine citizens know that the man pretending to be the Amir is a surface dweller?”

The sudden gasps that filled the room drowned out Gabe’s racing heart. He really had no way of proving his belief that the Amir was a surface dweller, but if he could put doubt into the minds of Jinnistan’s citizens, it would at least be a start.

“Go on, Amir, tell the good citizens of Jinnistan how you pick a new consort every week, even those mated to other demons. Tell them how you force your new consorts to spend the night with you under threat of death, after which they have to spend the rest of their lives locked up in your harem.”

“You don’t know what you speak of.”

“Really?” Gabe sneered. “Shall we ask one of the over a hundred consorts in your harem how they feel about being there? Maybe we should ask Brayan what happened to him when he refused you.” Gabe planted his hands on his hips and glared at the Amir. “I’m sure he was thrilled to be handed over to your personal guards. The scars that litter his body tell how much he enjoyed himself.”

Gabe pulled his vest off and grabbed the necklace around his neck, holding the pendant up for all to see. “I’m sure everyone would like to know how you stole the *Demonas Amaté* of a *Djini*. I was marked. I was given my mate’s pendant. And still you forced me to be your consort, threatening to kill my *Djini* if I did not agree. And why? Because I am the only surface dweller to ever defeat a *Shayatin*.”

“You dare question me?” the Amir snapped. “Guards, seize him and carry out his punishment immediately. He tried to kill me and that is an instant death sentence.”

“Amir, if I tried to kill you, you’d be dead.”

Despite his words, Gabe could see a few of the Amir’s personal guards heading in his direction. He spotted a couple of the guardians start toward him, but they stopped the moment Stayrr lifted his hand and shook his head. Apparently, not all of the guards listened to the Amir.

Just before the guards reached him, Gabe shouted out, "I never touched you, Amir, and you know it. You just want to shut me up before I can tell the world what a slimy scumbag you are."

"How dare you!"

"Uh-huh. Why are you so upset, Amir?" Gabe asked. "If you weren't a surface dweller, you wouldn't know what scumbag means." Gabe turned in a circle, avoiding the guards trying to grab him. "I ask you, citizens of Jinnistan, do you know what scumbag means? Have you ever heard of the term before?"

Gabe could hear the low murmuring from the crowd. He could feel the unrest. They didn't want to believe the worst of their Amir, but Gabe's words sparked curiosity in them. All eyes seemed to turn toward the Amir.

"It's a surface dweller term, one from my world, not yours."

A guard reached for Gabe. He dodged, moving around Stayrr, who tried to smother a laugh by biting his lip. Gabe would have shot the man a grin if he wasn't busy dodging another one of the Amir's personal guards.

"Can't you do anything right?" the Amir shouted. "Grab him. He's one man."

"Why don't you come down here and get me yourself, Amir," Gabe shouted. "Or are you too scared of me, a simple surface dweller?"

Gabe knew his words provoked the Amir when he growled loudly and started down a set of stone steps off to one side. The Amir's face was red with rage. If Gabe had anything to do with it, the rest of the Amir's body would soon be red. He intended to piss the man off so bad that he lost total control.

"I have never been scared of a surface dweller," the Amir shouted as he advanced on Gabe. "You are nothing but lazy slugs."

"Oh, really?" Gabe asked. "Then why did you want me to be your consort so much if I am just a lazy slug? Your personal guards were

there when you took me from my *Djini*. They can testify to the fact that you threatened to kill Tehmper if I did not go with you.”

Gabe grunted when two guards finally caught up with him and grabbed him by his arms. He struggled with them briefly until he felt a blade press across his throat. Gabe froze, trying not to swallow too hard. He wanted to keep his head right where it was.

“Was it something I said?” Gabe asked.

The Amir stopped right in front of Gabe, looking quite pleased with himself. “You will pay for your disrespect with your head.”

“I can’t respect someone that doesn’t deserve it.”

The Amir grabbed the sword off the nearest guard and raised it over his head. “I will take great pleasure in this.”

Gabe pulled against the guards as they tried to force him down to his knees. He could feel the warm wetness of blood dribble down his throat from the blade held there. He closed his eyes for a moment and sent up a prayer that it would be quick.

Opening his eyes once again, Gabe raised them to meet the Amir’s. He spit toward his feet. “Tehmper will kill you for this.”

“He will die before your blood is cold.”

The savage gleam in the Amir’s mad eyes told Gabe that the man wasn’t joking. He had every intention of killing Tehmper at the first opportunity. Gabe felt an uncontrollable rage flare through his body. He didn’t care if he did lose his head. He would not let anyone kill the man he loved.

Gabe knew he had a temper. He always had. He spent his life trying to control it and keep it under wraps. With the Amir’s words, Gabe gave in to the anger building inside of him and let it free, turning it into a scalding fury.

Flames ignited along the skin of his arms, fueled by his rage. The guards holding Gabe down on his knees screamed and leapt back as their clothing caught fire. Gabe stood slowly, keeping his eyes directed at the Amir.

A part of him gloried in the abject fear he could see growing in the man's eyes. Another part of Gabe feared what he was becoming, feared the fury he had unleashed. Gabe pointed his flaming finger at the Amir.

"You will not touch a hair on Tehmper's head," Gabe said gravely. "I am his *Demonas Amaté*, and I will see you dead before you harm him."

Gabe felt something strike him across the back. The crowd gasped. Gabe turned to see one of the Amir's royal guards standing behind him, sword in hand. Gabe knew the man had struck him with the sword, but he felt no pain from the wound, only a burning anger.

The horror on the man's face as he backed away from Gabe was almost laughable. Gabe wasn't a cruel man, even in his anger. He would give the guard one chance and then all bets were off.

"If you drop your sword now and leave, I will not harm you."

The guard dropped his sword and ran before Gabe even finished speaking. Gabe turned toward the other personal guards. "You have one choice," Gabe said. "You can follow your comrade or you can stay here and fight me. Do not lose your life because you feel an obligation to support a man that has no business being the Amir. He is a liar and a cheat and uses people for his own personal gain. He cares nothing for you."

Two more of the guards dropped their swords and fled the arena. Three stayed behind. They held their swords in their hands as if ready to strike at any moment. Two of the remaining guards shook where they stood. The third had a gleam in his eyes that told Gabe that he wouldn't leave easily.

Gabe cocked his head to one side as he regarded the man. "You're the one that cut Brayan up, aren't you? You tortured him because he wouldn't submit to the Amir."

The man grinned, showing off full white teeth and two sharp fangs. "He deserved what happened to him. He refused the Amir. No one refuses the Amir."

“Brayan is the *Demonas Amaté* of a *Djini*, just as I am,” Gabe replied to the shock of the audience watching them. Gabe could hear it in their voices as they spoke amongst themselves. “What right did the Amir have to keep us from our mates?”

“He is the Amir!” the guard shouted as if that explained it all.

“I don’t give a shit if he’s the pope. He doesn’t have the right to force people to be his little sex toys if they don’t want to be. No one does.” Gabe waved his hand in the air, pointing in the direction he hoped the harem was located. “There are over a hundred people up there in the Amir’s harem that have been forced to be there under penalty of death. How many of them have mates out here? How many of them have families? How many of them have been tortured by you if they don’t do as the Amir wished?”

“He is the Amir,” the guard shouted. “He is the ruler of Jinnistan, the final authority in everything.”

“Uh, that’s not exactly true.”

Gabe’s head snapped up to the royal balcony at the sound of the most beloved voice he ever thought to hear. “Tehmper,” he whispered. Beside Tehmper stood his clan brothers, Clagh, Storym, and Zayne. Beside Zayne stood Brayan.

Before Gabe could give in to his desire to run to Tehmper, commotion around the arena caught his attention. Gabe turned in a circle, watching as each side of the room was suddenly filled with very large men, men who looked like Tehmper and his brothers.

“What is the meaning of this?” the Amir shouted.

“It’s all very simple, Amir. A long time ago, before the Great War, Jinnistan was ruled by a clan, each clan taking control for forty years.” Tehmper said as he slowly started down toward the arena floor, his brothers following right behind him. “After the Great War, most of Jinnistan was devastated. Almost all of the clan houses were destroyed. It was decided then that someone would be chosen to rule Jinnistan until such time as the clans could be rebuilt.”

Tehmper stopped in front of the Amir. He pointed to the different clan houses around the large room, all of which were slowly making their way down to the arena floor. "It would seem to me that the clan houses have been rebuilt for some time, Amir. It's time to give up your throne."

"No!" the Amir shouted. "I am the Amir. You can't make me give up my throne. An Amir has been in charge of Jinnistan for generations, since my father, my father's father, and his father before him. My family has ruled for centuries. We will continue to rule for centuries."

Clagh suddenly pulled a rolled parchment out of his shirt. He held it in the air for all to see. "According to these scrolls, the clans are supposed to rule Jinnistan. The Amir was only to be in authority temporarily until the clans could be rebuilt." Clagh turned toward the Amir, a slight sneer on his face. "And all mention of this was removed from our ancient scrolls so that no one would know."

"Then they don't exist," the Amir insisted gleefully.

"Not everyone keeps their ancient records in the same place, Amir," Clagh said. "Some of us choose to keep copies under safe keeping so that certain people cannot destroy them."

"Lies, it's all lies," the Amir shouted as he swung around to talk to the restless crowd. "Can't you see that they are trying to take over Jinnistan, to take my throne?"

"Your throne," Tehmper said. "Let's talk about your throne, shall we? Your mother died when you were born, correct?"

Gabe knew before the Amir even said anything where this line of conversation was going. He bit his lip to keep quiet.

"Yes, why?"

"And you were presented to Jinnistan on your fifth birthday as is the custom, correct?"

"Yes."

"Where were you before that and why did we never see your mother while she was pregnant with you? Why is there no record of

you having a wet nurse or someone caring for you before you were five? Just where were you until then, Amir?"

"I was right here in Jinnistan, in the royal palace."

"Were you?" Tehmper asked. He started slowly walking around, his hands clasped behind his back. "Then why does no one remember you? Why is there no record of you being in Jinnistan before age five?"

Gabe watched his mate stroll around, feeling more proud of the man than he ever did. Tehmper not only believed him about the Amir but investigated his theory. If they could prove that the Amir was a fake, they could have him removed from his throne.

Gabe turned to see what the Amir's reaction would be when he saw a glint of light flash off of a steel blade. Before he could think of the merits of his idea, Gabe threw himself at Tehmper, plastering his body to his mate's back.

White-hot pain stabbed into Gabe's body as the blade of something sank into his flesh. Gabe gritted his teeth, but his cry of pain still echoed through the arena as if shouted through a bullhorn.

He heard Tehmper roar and turn and then felt his strong arms cradling him. He tried to draw in some of the air that had left his lungs, but every time he did pain unlike any he ever felt ripped through his body. Gabe desperately clutched at Tehmper.

"Teh-Tehmp—"

"Shh, do not try to speak, *Demonas Amaté*," Tehmper whispered.

"Hu-hur-ts."

"I know, Gabe," Tehmper said softly, his face pinched with anguish. "The pain will go away in a minute."

Gabe frowned at the silent tears he could see gathering in Tehmper's dark eyes. His hand trembled uncontrollably as he reached and wiped a stray tear off of Tehmper's cheek. "Do—don't c—c—cry. L—lo—love y—yo—you."

"I love you, too, Gabe, my *Demonas Amaté*." Tehmper's broken whisper made the pain Gabe felt feel insignificant compared to the joy the man's words created.

Gabe wanted to say more. He had a hundred things he wanted to say, but he just felt so tired. It took too much effort. He also felt cold again, bone-deep cold, like he did when he didn't have Tehmper to warm him.

"Co-cold."

"Shh...I know, *Demonas Amaté*," Tehmper said. "I'll keep you warm." Gabe watched as Tehmper's hand flamed and came toward him. He felt no fear of the flames licking along Tehmper's skin. His mate was a fire demon.

"No, no, Gabe," Tehmper cried out when Gabe's eyes started to close. "Keep your eyes open, *Demonas Amaté*. Stay with me."

"Ti-ti-tired, Teh-Tehmper."

Tehmper's sharp inhale shook Gabe's entire body. Tehmper closed his eyes for a moment, tears leaking out from under his eyelashes before he opened them again. Gabe could tell the man was trying to smile for his benefit.

"Okay, *Demonas Amaté*, you rest and I'll see you when you wake up." Tehmper's expression was one of mute wretchedness, as if his very soul was dying.

Gabe used the last of his waning strength to reach up and caress the side of Tehmper's face, watching as the man's eyes briefly closed while he leaned into the soft caress. When they opened and Tehmper gazed back down at him, Gabe smiled.

"My Tehmper."

Gabe heard a loud cry of pure anguish fill the room as he faded away. His heart ached as he let the heaviness in his eyelids close them. He wasn't stupid by any means. He knew he was dying. His greatest regret was that he had to leave Tehmper. He just wished he never had to.

"Is that what you really wish?"

Gabe's eyes snapped open. He was momentarily blinded by the brightness of the white light surrounding him. Gabe blinked several times until the room came into focus. He realized that he lay on a floor of pure white, and everything around him faded away into nothingness.

Except for the man standing over him.

"Well, answer my question," the man said. "I don't have all day, you know. I'm a busy man."

"Who are you?" Gabe asked as he got to his feet. He frowned, realizing that he felt no pain, no cold, no nothing.

"Of course you don't feel anything, Gabriele. You're dead."

"I'm dead?" Gabe patted his hands down his chest. He could feel himself patting his body. How could he be dead?

"Well, technically, you're in limbo, the world between worlds."

"How can you read my mind?" Gabe asked in astonishment. "And who are you?"

"I go by many names—Gabriel, Gabrielus, Gabriël, even Gabriele, like you. I kind of like the fact that we share the same name. I could go on, but that's not why I am here. Basically, I'm a messenger of sorts."

"A messenger? For who?"

Gabriel pointed up.

"I haven't been religious for a long time."

The man chuckled. "I know but that doesn't matter to the big guys. They still keep an eye out on you."

"Big *guys*?" Gabe asked. "There's more than one?"

Gabriel chuckled. "Several, as a matter of fact, although not all of them are men. Still, they seem to have a soft spot for you."

"Why me?"

"Why are you named Gabriele? Why did you mate with a fire demon? Why is the sky blue?" the man frowned. "So many questions and you haven't answered the one I asked you."

"What question?"

“Do you really wish that you never had to leave Tehmper?” Gabriele held up his hand when Gabe opened his mouth. “Before you answer, you need to know that there’s a hitch. The big guys have a sense of humor, which means there’s always a hitch.”

“Hitch?” All sorts of horrible scenarios started going through Gabe’s mind. He could stay with Tehmper as his pet dog. He could stay with Tehmper but only watch him from afar. He could stay with Tehmper but as a woman.

Gabriel chuckled. “No, but that last one would be interesting, wouldn’t it?”

Gabe frowned. He didn’t really think so. And he didn’t find this situation amusing in the least.

“No, I’m sure you don’t find it amusing at all, but bear with me. Because of your selfless act in saving Tehmper, you’ve been given a choice. One, I can return you to your world, wiping away any memory of Tehmper and the demon world. Two, you can continue to die, in which case you pretty much have a one way ticket upstairs. And that’s not a bad place to spend eternity, believe me.”

“And three?”

“I can return you to Jinnistan and your demon unharmed and alive. However, if you choose door number three you will never be allowed to return to the surface. You will have to live out the rest of your days in Jinnistan.”

“With Tehmper?”

“Yes.”

“Then I choose Tehmper,” Gabe said without hesitation.

Gabriel smiled. “I thought you might.”

Gabriel patted Gabe on the back. “Just remember that the big guys will be keeping an eye on you, and they expect you to live a long and happy life with your demon. So don’t fuck it up.”

“Can you say that?” Gabe whispered. He jumped and looked up when thunder suddenly shook the room.

“Well, we’re not supposed to, but it slips out every once in a while. Just remember what I said, Gabriele, and you’ll be fine.”

Gabriel put his hand on Gabe’s forehead and gave him the lightest of pushes. Gabe felt it all the way down to his toes, as if lightening had struck his body, and he fell backwards, the room around him fading away as he continued to fall.

Suddenly, Gabe stopped with a silent thud. Pain filled his body, hitting every nerve as if he had just fallen off a ten story building. The air rushed from his lungs, and he cried out in agony.

Just as fast as the pain hit Gabe, it was gone. Everything was gone—the pain, the exhaustion, the cold. All Gabe could feel were strong arms wrapped around his body and a face buried in his neck as tears dripped down his skin.

“Tehmper?” he whispered.

The body holding him froze, then Tehmper slowly raised his head. His eyes widened even as his face paled in shock. “Gabe?”

Gabe reached up and wiped the tears from Tehmper’s face. “I think you’d better call me Gabriele from now on.”

Chapter 10

Tehmper stared down at the man in his arms in utter disbelief. He watched Gabe die, felt the last breath leave his body just moments before. Now he was breathing and he seemed just fine, as if nothing had happened.

The injury to Gabe's back had been a fatal one, even Tehmper knew that. The sword had gone all the way through Gabe's body, nicking Tehmper in the back. Tehmper's hands were covered in Gabe's blood.

"How—"

"I was given another chance," Gabe whispered, "a chance to be with you."

"Oh, Gods, Gabriele," Tehmper cried out as he crushed Gabe's body to his. He could still feel tears streaming down his face, but this time they were tears of joy. He had his *Demonas Amaté* back, alive and well.

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure one or more of them had something to do with it," Gabe whispered against Tehmper's throat. "There's just one little hitch."

Tehmper's heart raced with panic as he eased Gabe back and looked down into his face. "Hitch? What kind of hitch?"

"I can never leave Jinnistan."

Tehmper waited for there to be more, but when Gabe didn't say anything else, he frowned. "That's it? You can never leave Jinnistan?"

“Well, I was kind of given orders to live a long and happy life with my demon.” Gabe grinned. “But I think that was more of a suggestion than anything.”

“I swear I will do everything within my power to make it happen,” Tehmper promised. “I’ll love and protect you until the day of my death.”

“Yeah.” Gabe chuckled. “Let’s skip the whole death thing, okay?”

Tehmper laughed and hauled Gabe closer. He reeled from the knowledge that he had his love back in his arms. He wasn’t saddened by the fact that Gabe could never leave Jinnistan. He just hoped it wouldn’t be too heartbreaking for him.

“How do you feel about never leaving Jinnistan? Is that going to be too hard on you?”

Gabe shrugged. “I don’t imagine it will be easy, but as long as I have you I will learn to deal with it. Besides, I was given the choice to go home and never know anything about you or Jinnistan. I chose you.”

Tehmper didn’t know what to say. He was humbled by Gabe’s choice and hoped he could live up to the faith the man put in him. He would spend every day of the rest of his life trying to make sure Gabe never regretted his decision.

“I love you, Gabriele.”

Gabe smiled. “I love you, too, my demon.”

Tehmper helped Gabe to his feet, then suddenly spun him around. He needed to see with his own eyes that there was no remaining sign of the sword wound. He wiped the blood away with the sleeve of his shirt, inhaling softly at the perfect white skin he found.

“There’s not a mark on you.”

“What?” Gabe asked. “Is my tattoo gone?”

“Tattoo?”

“There’s a tattoo of flames burning around a medicine circle on my shoulder blade. Nick and I got drunk one night and we thought it

would be cool to go get matching tattoos. Haven't you ever noticed it before?"

"No. I was always too busy touching you." Tehmper's fingers moved slowly over the colorful tattoo on Gabe's shoulder. His nerves tensed immediately as he recognized the symbol. He turned and gestured to Clagh.

"Come look at this."

Clagh walked over and carefully examined the mark. Tehmper bristled a bit at having another man touch his *Demonas Amaté*, but he knew this was important. Still, he did edge a little closer.

As casually as he could manage, as he didn't want to upset Gabe, Tehmper asked, "Is it—"

Clagh's eyes were wide as he glanced over at Tehmper and nodded. "It is as you thought, Tehmper."

"What?" Gabe asked as he glanced over his shoulder and tried to get a look at his shoulder blade.

"Nick," Tehmper called out, looking around the room for the man. He spotted him standing by Storym and Zayne. "You have such a mark on you?"

"Well, kind of," Nick said. "We got tattoos at the same time, but mine's a little different than Gabe's. I'm not into that whole fire burning thing."

"May I see it?"

Nick shrugged and started to pull his shirt off. He turned around and showed Tehmper and Clagh his back. The same medicine circle tattoo lay on Nick's back, the only difference being the wind swirling around the circle instead of flames.

"Tehmper," Clagh said, "your *Demonas Amaté* and his friend have the marks of one of the chosen ones."

"What in the hell are you guys talking about?" Gabe snapped.

"You both have the mark of the chosen ones," Tehmper said reverently, "the ones of prophecy."

“That prophecy is an old wives’ tale,” shouted a voice from several feet away, reminding Tehmper that the Amir still lived, even if he was being held prisoner between two *Djini*. “Everyone knows it’s not real.”

Tehmper’s hands clenched into fists as he turned to face the man. He started in the Amir’s direction, having every intention of bringing his miserable life to an end when he felt two hands grab his arm.

“No, Tehmper, you can’t kill him,” Gabe said.

“He attacked my *Demonas Amaté*,” Tehmper spit out between clenched teeth. “By Jinnistan law, I have every right to kill him.”

“Then the right is mine,” Gabe said. “He was trying to kill you. I stepped in and got hit instead. If anyone deserves revenge then it is me, but this is not the way to handle this.”

“And how would you handle it?”

Gabe glared, bringing a small smile to Tehmper’s face. “Don’t give me that you’re-just-a-surface-dweller look. You know I’m right. The people of Jinnistan need to pass judgment, not us. He has caused them far greater harm to them than he has to you or me.”

Tehmper knew his *Demonas Amaté* was up to something when he leaned up and planted a small his on his lips. “Watch and learn, *Djini*.” Gabe turned to the crowd and started walking slowly around the arena.

“You have heard the evidence. There are missing ancient scrolls that talk of the Amir’s position being temporary, that the clans are to lead Jinnistan once they are rebuilt. There is no knowledge of the Amir before his fifth birthday. He even talks like a surface dweller.”

Tehmper was impressed with the thrall Gabe had the crowd in. They hung on his every word. Except for Gabe’s voice, no one made a sound. When Gabe finally came back to the middle of the arena, Tehmper placed his hand in the middle of his back. He wanted Gabe to know that he supported the words the man spoke.

“The Amir is being accused of crimes against Jinnistan, ranging from imprisoning people against their will and forcing them to be his

sex toys to attacking *Djini*. This is your country, your homeland.” Gabe pointed over to the Amir. “And he is *your* Amir. He is subject to your will, not his. The Amir is to work *for* the people of Jinnistan, not for his own personal gain. So, I leave the decision up to you.”

Tehmper raised his hand when several voices started rising. He couldn’t make out exactly what they said, but he wanted his position to be clear. “I know I speak for all of the demon hunters when I say that we will stand by your decision. As the chosen one has said, this is up to the people of Jinnistan.”

Gabe arched an eyebrow but continued. “Does the Amir stay on his throne or do the clans take over rule of Jinnistan? Please, choose wisely.”

“You do not have the right to judge me!” the Amir snapped. “I am the Amir. No one has the right to judge me.”

Tehmper chuckled when he saw Gabe roll his eyes. He pretty much felt the same way. The Amir was digging himself a hole with every word out of his mouth. Tehmper just hoped it was a hole big enough to bury the Amir and his ego in.

“Look,” Gabe said as he nodded toward the audience. Tehmper watched in awe as one by one the people in the arena stood up and held their thumbs upside down. It was amazing and gratifying at the same time.

Gabe winked at Tehmper and stepped forward. “So, you have made your decision, then. Is the Amir to be replaced on the throne by one of the clans as stated in the ancient scrolls?” Tehmper almost jumped when the crowd of people went wild, cheering and yelling. “Then we shall leave it up to your council to decide which clan rules first.”

Gabe raised his hand to quiet down the crowd, but there seemed to be no stopping them. They chanted and shouted, stomping their feet. Tehmper could see how excited they were. He knew that they had been given a taste of freedom they hadn’t felt in a very long time.

Tehmper just wished he or one of his clan brothers had seen what was happening to Jinnistan before now. They could have stopped a lot of suffering. Tehmper glanced over at the small, scarred man huddled against Zayne's side. They could have stopped that at the very least.

"I will kill you for this!"

Tehmper heard the words screamed out from behind him. They sent a chill of foreboding through him. Tehmper spun around, shoving Gabe behind him with one hand even as he reached for his sword with the other.

His heart pounded as he watched the Amir race for him and Gabe with a sword in his hand. He knew that either the Amir was going to die or he was, because he wasn't letting the man anywhere near his *Demonas Amaté*.

Tehmper gripped the sword tightly with both hands and raised it into the air. He readied himself for attack when the Amir suddenly stumbled, his steps faltering until they came to a complete stop. The sword dropped from his slack fingers and clattered to the stone floor.

A red dot formed over the Amir's heart and slowly spread outward until it covered nearly his entire chest. It slowly began to smolder, wisps of black smoke curling up through the air. Tehmper's jaw dropped open as he watched the Amir gasp, then fall forward onto the floor.

The silence in the arena was filled with shock and tension. Tehmper slowly took a step forward, then another and another until he reached the Amir's side. He grabbed the man by his shoulders and rolled him over. What he found shocked him beyond speech.

A large hole now burned through the middle of the Amir's chest. It was so large Tehmper could have fit his fist through it, and it continued to smolder, getting larger and larger. If it continued to burn, Tehmper knew that eventually the Amir would be reduced to ashes.

Tehmper looked up, not understanding what exactly happened or why the Amir was smoldering until he saw the flames leaping off of Gabe's fingertips. His eyebrows shot up as shock filled him.

“Oops.”

“Oops?” Tehmper asked, echoing Gabe’s word. “You just set the Amir on fire from the inside and all you have to say is oops?”

Gabe crossed his arms over his chest. “So, I picked up a few of your bad habits.”

“I’d say you’ve picked up more than my bad habits.”

Gabe shrugged, not looking the least bit upset by the news. “Maybe you’ll pick up a few of mine.”

Tehmper stood to his feet and walked over to his *Demonas Amaté*, taking the man into his arms. “Maybe I will,” he murmured right before taking Gabe’s lips in a long kiss. The room around them went silent, the world seeming to fall away until it was just the two of them.

When Tehmper lifted his head, the room was still eerily silent. He glanced around, shocked to see every last inhabitant in the room, except for Nick, bowing down on their knees to him and Gabe.

“Okay, that’s just a little bit creepy.”

“You are the *Demonas Amaté* of a fire demon, one of the chosen of prophecy. You just saved them from an unjust ruler and introduced a new era of freedom to all the citizens of Jinnistan.” Tehmper chuckled. “What did you expect?”

Chapter 11

Gabe tossed a small fire ball back and forth between his hands. It was a small parlor trick but one that he found amusing when he was bored, and he was really bored right now. Tehmper was off meeting with the Jinnistan council—again—leaving Gabe to amuse himself. It wasn't working.

"You toss one of things at me again and I will tear a piece out of your hide."

Gabe grinned over at Nick.

"Hey, look, I still have burn marks from the last time," Nick whined. "I'm serious, Gabe. Knock that shit off. It gives me the willies."

Gabe let the flames in his hand flicker out as he sat up and stared at Nick. "You've got to be kidding me. After everything that happened in the last month you're worried about a little singed skin?" Nick's forehead wrinkled and his eyebrows drew together, which told Gabe the man was thinking too hard. "What?"

"Have you ever figured out why these damn tattoos mean so much to them?"

Gabe slouched back against the couch cushions and shrugged. "Tehmper tried to explain it to me, but I don't exactly get it." Gabe wiggled his hands in the air. "All too mumbo-jumbo for me."

"Well?" Nick asked as he sat forward. "What did he say?"

Gabe rolled his eyes and sat forward as well, resting his elbows on his thighs. "From what I understand, the prophecy says that when all of the chosen ones are found and mated to their *Djini* that Jinnistan will experience a period of peace and prosperity that will last a

thousand years.” Gabe waved one hand just a little. “I’m paraphrasing, of course.”

“Oh, of course.” Nick chuckled. “So, we’re the saviors of Jinnistan, huh?”

“Looks that way.”

“Doesn’t it seem a little strange to you that we’re supposed to be the saviors of Jinnistan and we’re surface dwellers? You’d think that the saviors would be from here, you know?”

“What seems strange to me is all the demons they keep bringing over to meet you. It’s like dial-a-demon around here lately.”

Nick snorted. “You’re telling me. I’ve had more propositions in the last week than I did my entire life on the surface. If I took up even a tenth of the offers these guys have given me I wouldn’t be walking for a week. Every damn one of them is so sure I’m their mate.”

“Are you?” Gabe asked. He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively. “Do any of them *do it* for you?”

“You’ve seen these guys, right? They’re like walking orgasms. I’ve had enough wet dreams lately to last me a month.”

“So, you’re young, free, and single,” Gabe said. “Why not take one of them up on it?”

Nick shook his head. “No, it just doesn’t seem right. I like these guys, don’t get me wrong, but they all seem to be looking for *that one*, you know?” Gabe’s eyebrows shot up when Nick twisted his hands together, looking kind of nervous. “I think I am, too.”

“Nick, it’s not a bad thing,” Gabe said. He got up and moved over to the couch where Nick was and sat down beside him. “Look, it’s not easy. I can never go home. I miss my family, my friends, the life I had. But if getting all that back means I lose Tehmper, it’s just not worth it.”

“You really love him, don’t you?”

“Yeah, I do. The whole fire demon, mating bite, chosen one thing is a little weird. I’ll admit that, but the benefits far outweigh the pitfalls.” Gabe sighed deeply. “Tehmper makes my blood boil.”

“Literally.” Nick snickered.

“Yes, he does, but it’s more than that. I’m the center of Tehmper’s universe, and how wonderful is that? He does everything in his power to make me happy. Look how fast he freed the people in the harem. He refused to sleep that night until they all had homes or went back to their families. He knew how important that was to me.”

“Yeah, that was pretty cool. I’m just amazed that so many people were being held against their will and no one knew.”

Gabe grimaced. “Oh, someone knew all right—the Amir’s personal guards. Why do you think they’re in jail right now awaiting judgment? What they did was wrong, and the people of Jinnistan want justice.” Gabe grunted when he felt Nick elbow him in the side. “Hey, watch it or I’m going to light you up.”

“Is it really true that you and Tehmper burn up the sheets, literally?”

Gabe chuckled. “Wouldn’t you like to know?”

“Oh, come on, tell me,” Nick said. “I’m living the life of a monk here. I got to have something to dream about.”

Gabe started laughing.

“Hey!” Nick snapped, smacking Gabe in the arm.

“No, no, I just had a thought. If Tehmper and I have sex, we *do* burn up the sheets. We’re talking full-on flames and everything. But I’m mated to a fire demon. It’s to be expected. You have the air sign on your tattoo. You have got to wonder what will happen when you have sex.”

Nick looked dazed for a moment and then a wicked grin crossed his lips. “I’m thinking tornado or something. Maybe free-floating in the air during sex. Can you imagine what that would be like? I wonder if we can fly?”

Gabe laughed hysterically as an image of Nick and some faceless demon floating in the air during sex flashed across his mind. Within seconds, Nick was laughing right along with him, both men leaning into each other.

"I'm not sure this is how a *Demonas Amaté* of the new ruling clan should behave. It does not quite seem proper."

Gabe tilted his head back to find Tehmper standing over him, the man's large arms crossed over his chest.

Gabe waved. "Hi, babe, how was work?"

Tehmper arched an eyebrow.

The words Tehmper spoke suddenly filtered through Gabe's amusement-filled brain. His laughter slowly died away as he turned over to kneel on the couch and grab Tehmper's shirt. "Did you just say our clan is the new ruling clan?"

"I do believe I did," Tehmper replied. "The decision was made by the council this afternoon."

"Why?"

"The council believes that our clan is the best suited for the position."

"That's it?" Gabe asked. "We're the best suited for the position?"

"Well, it might have had something to do with my *Demonas Amaté* being a chosen one, but I might be mistaken."

Gabe slumped down in the couch. "I knew this was going to come back to bite me in the ass."

"No, no," Tehmper said. Gabe yelped when Tehmper reached down and picked him. He was tossed over Tehmper's shoulder and carried out of the study, with Nick laughing hysterically in their wake. "I am the only one that gets to bite you in the ass."

Gabe rolled his eyes for Nick's benefit, but he couldn't keep the sloppy grin off his lips. Tehmper was headed upstairs, and Gabe was really hoping to get some personal attention from his mate. He missed Tehmper a lot when he needed to leave for work.

Gabe wiggled as he was carefully slid to his feet. He couldn't keep from laughing at the swiftness in which Tehmper stripped his clothing off before tossing him onto the bed. Gabe landed with a small thud and bounced a couple of times, his eyes never leaving the gorgeous body that was being revealed to him as Tehmper got undressed.

“So this ruling clan thing,” Gabe said. “Does that mean we have to move?”

“Yes, *Demonas Amaté*, I’m afraid that it does. The ruling clan must reside in the royal palace.”

“We’re going to ditch the harem, right?”

Tehmper crawled onto the bed and settled his body between Gabe’s legs. “I was thinking we could clear it out and make it into a sort of pool room that we could relax in. What do you think of that?”

“A pool room?” Gabe asked, his breath hitching in his throat as Tehmper started drawing little circles on his chest. “Maybe we could put in a few privacy screens?”

“Yes, that would be a good idea.” Tehmper started licking around his nipples. Gabe’s hands clenched in the sheets. The man had a seriously talented tongue. “I like the idea of having someplace that I can touch you whenever I want.”

“Anywhere, anytime,” Gabe hissed. He could feel flames come to life and start flickering along his skin. Gabe had learned over the last few weeks that it was a sure sign that one or both of them were aroused. There was just no hiding it.

“I like touching you, *Demonas Amaté*.”

“That’s—that’s good, Tehmper,” Gabe whimpered as the man’s tongue licked a path down his chest to his abdomen. “That’s really good.”

“Yes?” Tehmper asked. Gabe whimpered when he heard a cap snap open. He knew what was coming next, and the anticipation almost killed him. “You like it when I touch you?”

“Yes!” Gabe wailed as two slick fingers pushed into his eager entrance. He closed his eyes tight, the sensations racing through his overwhelmed body. “No one touches me like you do, Tehmper. You make me burn.”

Tehmper chuckled. “As I’m a fire demon, that’s a good thing.”

Gabe rode the fingers pushing into him, moving his hips as fire burned all around him. His head started to thrash about on the pillows.

Small whimpers of need fell from his lips. His body ached for every touch of Tehmper's hands. His heart seemed to rush to every spot Tehmper touched.

"Tehmper," Gabe groaned, "please."

Suddenly, soft breath fanned Gabe's face. Gabe opened his eyes to find dark eyes staring back at him, filled him with love and devotion. Tehmper's hard body lay atop Gabe's, pressing him down into the mattress. It was a weight that Gabe would never tire of.

Instinctively, Gabe's body arched toward Tehmper's. He gasped as bare chest met bare chest. Gabe wanted to feel every inch of his lover. He wanted to climb under Tehmper's skin and never come out, be warm forever.

The insistent pressure at his tight entrance sent an ache of wanting through Gabe's body. Gabe's breath hitched in his throat. Tehmper grinned and reached down to grab Gabe's butt cheeks, pulling them apart as his hips pushed forward.

Gabe couldn't disguise his body's reaction when the head of Tehmper's cock breached his hole. He shuddered and let out a ragged moan. His hands gripped Tehmper's shoulders. As Tehmper pushed in the last few inches, Gabe was filled with an amazing sense of completeness.

He cupped Tehmper's face in his hands and looked deeply into his dark eyes. Even though passion burned through his veins, Gabe knew this time their connection was different, the loving was different.

They were together, two halves of the same soul. Coming together as they were was more than the meeting of a physical need. It was the combining of two lives as they were meant to be. Together, they were whole.

Gabe's heart nearly burst from the love he could see shining in Tehmper's eyes, love only for him. Gabe couldn't control his outcry of delight as Tehmper began moving in him in a timeless rhythm that brought them both to the edge of ecstasy, then threw them over.

Sharp fangs sank into Gabe's neck, and he was hurtled beyond the point of return. Flames flared around both of them as Tehmper drew in Gabe's life-giving blood, bonding them together again. The fire burned brighter and higher as they both yielded to the searing need that overrode everything else.

As Tehmper retracted his fangs and licked at the bite mark, Gabe savored the feeling of satisfaction his lover left him with. His body ached, but it was a sweet ache that told him he had been fully loved by his mate.

"My Gabriele," Tehmper whispered reverently, "my Demonas Amaté."

"Yes," Gabe replied, "always, my fire demon."

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stormy believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two or three men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul mates, true love, and happy endings.

Stormy lives in the great Northwest region of the USA, with her gorgeous husband and soul mate, six very active teenagers, two boxer-collie puppies, two old biddy cats, and three fish.

You can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand and a puppy in her lap, or on her laptop, creating the next sexy man for one of her stories. Stormy welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website at www.stormyglenn.com.

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