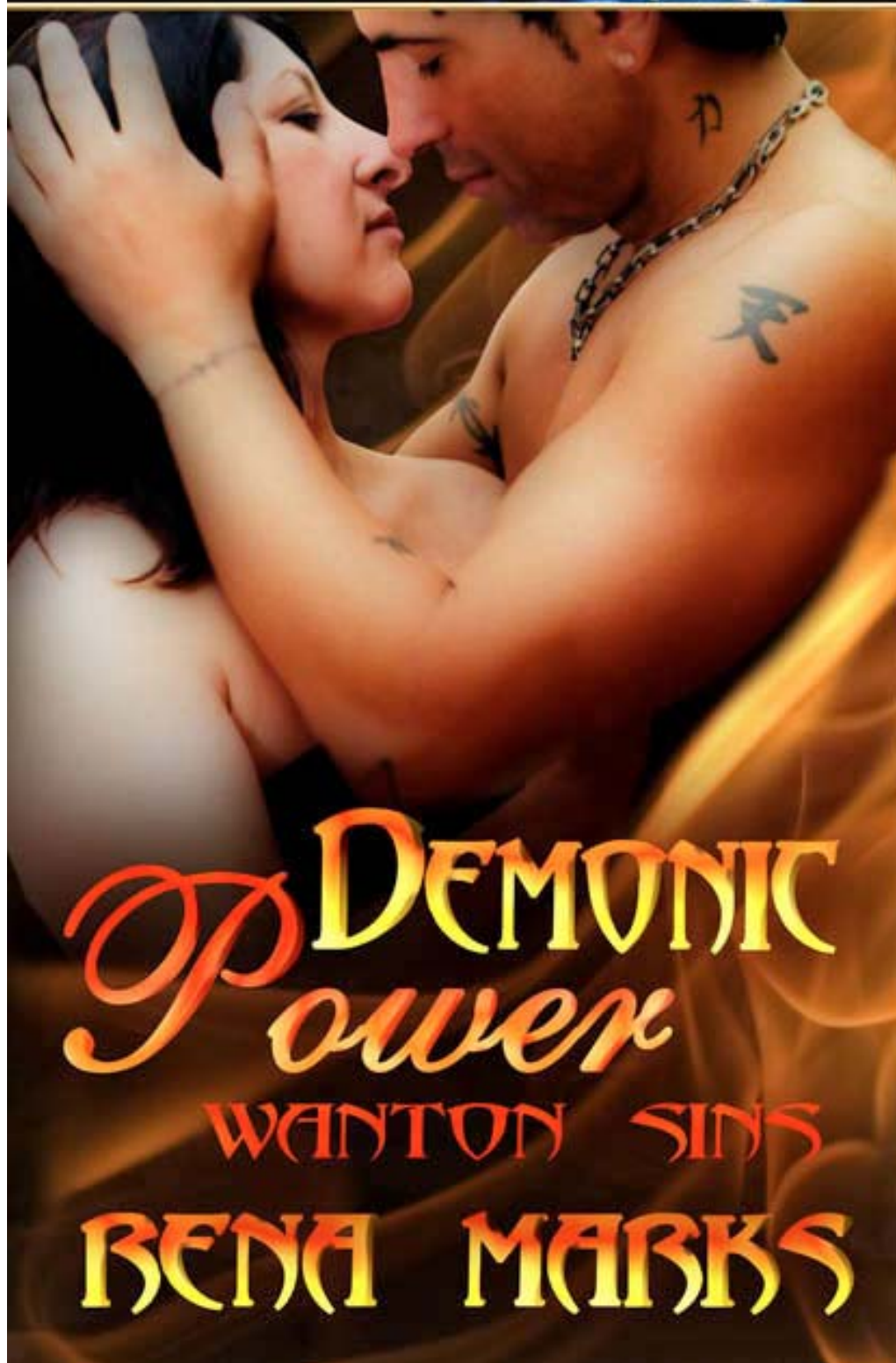


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Demonic Power

Rena Marks

Book 3 in the Wanton Sins series.

Holly Dewan has been to Hell. Not only was she kidnapped and carried through dimensions into a strange land called Luciefyore, she's told she's a breed of demon with a rare power, the ability to trigger lust. The man who captured her is large and tight and sexy, with biceps the size of mountains. Eyes of green with horns to match. Temptation has never been sweeter.

Ace is a bounty hunter with one mission, to bring the demoness home. But the woman has tempted him with her lush curves and long, honey-brown hair. Her lips are full, her eyes a mysterious mix of sultry innocence. And he knows just how to trigger her wave of power—a blazing trail licked right down to her core.

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Demonic Power

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DEMONIC POWER

Rena Marks

Dedication

To Patricia Grubb, who understands that sometimes life is Hell...until we make it a better place.

The Three
Rena – Trisha – Monika

Three
little old ladies and their dogs
were
sitting on a park bench
having
a quiet conversation
when
a flasher approached from across the park.
The
flasher came up to the ladies,
stood
right in front of them
and
opened his trench coat.
Trisha
immediately had a stroke.
Then
Monika also had a stroke.
But
Rena, being older and more feeble,
couldn't
reach that far.
— Author unknown

Prologue

What form would he take today? Ugh, it was so dreary to choose anymore. There was no one of importance around to appreciate the amount of power it took to change forms. And he had so much stored, he could expend the tiniest bit from his little pinkie with no repercussions.

That was the main reason why he spent his power to change his body. Proof that he was the lord and master. The most powerful being alive.

The only creatures native to where he was banished were these strange little, lizardlike scuttle demons. Dumb as stumps, there was barely any point in impressing them. Plus, lizardy forms were one of his favorites, but damned if he'd let them think he mimicked them.

Oh, it was definitely a thinking day. There weren't many clarity days anymore. He would use this one to his full advantage. He would let loose his rage and figure a way out of this banishment.

The answer dawned on Enishka like a flash of lightning.

He'd been trapped for years, alone, on this no-good planet they called a moon. His face rearranged by a demon bitch, the eyes spread apart to the temples to keep him from focusing his laser beam on anyone ever again.

While the Council simply watched as she violated him. Not once did any of them intervene, just allowed her to do whatever she wished to *him*, the highest being in their dimension.

The Demon Lord.

But now he knew how to get them all back. How to enact revenge and how to set himself free to rightfully rule Luciefyore again. For a Demon Lord always had an ace up his sleeve. Sure, they'd uncovered and punished him for the demon egg he'd once traded to a human. But what the council never knew was...there were more.

He'd call to her. The mixed-breed brat wouldn't be able to refuse to heed him, especially if she didn't know she carried demon genes. The traitorous demons in his own dimension would stab him in the back before he could even blink, but humans... Humans were sheep. Stupid creatures, so easily tricked. When the magnetic pull of a full moon occurred, he could access the insane ones who were kept in asylums. Send them to the demon spawn to bring her to him. No one would know. He'd keep her forever. Or until an army of his children were hatched and they'd devour her, ingesting her magic and magnifying it for his own use.

When his army was full grown, he'd attack both dimensions. He'd conquer both...

And then rule both.

Chapter One

What's Meant to Be will Always Find a Way

Fear paralyzes.

Her fingers normally would move nimbly enough to insert a key into a lock rather quickly. But at this moment, the frozen digits stumbled, stiff as frostbitten extremities.

In the middle of summer.

Panic made her catch her breath as she pushed the door open, closing it behind her so quickly it slammed with a vicious thump, much like the heart against her ribs.

"Stop it," she chided herself. "There is nothing out there that follows you. Nothing watches you. You're just a big ole fraidy cat."

She forced herself to peer out the peephole. As usual, nothing. Slowly the terror in her chest began to dissipate, loosen like a weight levitated from her rib cage. Was she paranoid? Or was something stalking her? Some sort of evil? Was it real? Or worse, in her head?

No, of course it was real.

"You think a lot of yourself, Holly," she muttered under her breath, trying not to acknowledge the fact that she was switching on every lamp in the house. "Why would the resident evil pick you to stalk? There's nothing unusual about you, no hidden money, nothing."

Except for that thing. That thing that had happened during those frustrating teenage years. The thing that she'd never speak of again.

Thinking of the past... No, she wouldn't think of it. She was jinxing herself by going there.

The air began to thicken around her and the china in her cabinet clattered noisily. The lamps around the room began to dance on the tables, the floor lamps swayed in an eerie dance.

The lights flickered on and off.

"Stop it!" she screamed, hands over her ears.

And all was still.

But would she ever be safe? From others or from herself? Refusing to think about the answer, she ran back out, completely forgetting it was once the dark she ran from. It always chased her.

She ran until she was out of breath and then stopped, inhaling enormous gulps of sweet air, filling her burning lungs with the wet chill from a nearby lake.

"Female!" A deep voice called out.

Holly Dewan turned toward it and gasped. The man was massive. Huge, broad shoulders tapered to a narrow waist. Tight biceps the size of her head. He stood at least six feet seven inches. His hair was black and his eyes were the color of sea foam, a deep, murky green. A narrow nose. All in all, a gorgeous specimen.

With horns that match.

"I am here to protect you. Follow me."

He turned away from her and began to walk away. Great. Another psycho, and was he really wearing costume horns? She watched him stomp off, knowing he was crazy if he truly expected her to follow. Why did she attract the insane?

She turned and headed quickly in the opposite direction.

But walking toward her was a man in dirty medical scrubs, who grabbed her arm as he babbled. "You. You have to come with me, I have to bring you to him."

His hair was perhaps blond, but so dirty it looked brown, hanging in greasy, stringy clumps. When he smiled, gobs of yellowed teeth protruded, but the worst were his eyes. Watery, pale blue, they looked right through her. As if there was no will or brain behind them. With that, there could be no conscience. She tried to turn back, but he held on with a viselike grip.

"Let me go," she gasped, jerking her arm from his tight grasp. His fingers were steel, squeezing the tender skin as she fought. "Stop it! Let me go," her voice was shrill now, rising higher and higher with panic.

He pulled her along, babbling incoherently. "Nish-ka. Wants you to sail in a ship, sail on a cloud to the moon. The special moon, the red one, not yellow. Nisss, nish, nishka. Nishka."

His grip was locked, not only hurting above her elbow where he squeezed but also nearly detaching her shoulder from its socket.

She was knocked to the ground suddenly, the air yanked from her lungs in the fall. She twisted her head around just in time to see a fist hit the face of her attacker. The first stranger who had wanted her to follow him.

And yes, he definitely had horns. They were murky, a pale shade of green and she felt like giggling. The horns would be good for jewelry. Shouldn't green be a peaceful color? Not a fist-slam-in-the-face color? It was actually a beautiful shade. It matched the beauty of his piercing eyes.

* * * * *

She was out cold. He couldn't believe she'd led that attacker on. What was she thinking, not following his instructions? He'd been very specific when he told her to follow him. Next thing he knew, he'd turned to see her moving in the opposite direction toward some whack job. Could she not tell the man had wandered from a human asylum? Did she not see the full moon?

Did she not know they were after her?

Slowly he stretched his neck to release the tension. Then he stooped to the unconscious female.

At least this time she'd do as he requested. He'd sling the weightless slip of a woman up over his shoulder. He'd follow his instructions and take her straight through the Gates of Hell.

Poor thing.

He was surprised she'd lived this long on her own. His gaze narrowed. Like most women, she'd probably existed on her looks. Her breasts were full and sweetly rounded, pushing up and over her neckline without being too obvious.

Not like the women in Luciefiore, who exposed everything but their nipples. He decided he liked a little left to the imagination. And his imagination was running wild.

Her wavy hair was long and honey brown. Would it be light brown down below? Or would she be shaved lickably smooth? What would her heart-shaped ass feel like cupped in his palms? Would she like it squeezed as he thrust into her wet heat?

He shut off his train of thought as he reached down to impersonally pick up the woman. She was a job, nothing more.

* * * * *

Holly awoke upside down, her body jarring up and down. The pavement rolled up to greet her hazy line of vision and she realized she was slung over someone's shoulder.

Someone with a tight ass.

Something wasn't quite right with the world. Granted, she was upside down. She must have a concussion, because everything was eerie. As though she'd wandered into a world based on Halloween. A light misty fog rose from the ground and to her shocked brain, it looked as if the shadows danced to missing music.

Why were there shadows at night? Why did they sway to a voiceless song?

As they were coming up on a pay phone, she heard the shrill of ringing. Without pause, the man carrying her stepped into the booth and picked up the receiver.

"Yeah... I have her, she's safe... No one saw, though she was accosted by a schizo... Yes, you know how to reach me, then."

He hung up the phone and proceeded out of the booth.

Holly arched her back to try and raise herself. "Let me down!"

"No."

That stumped her. But only for a moment.

She beat tiny fists on his tight rump but stopped when she felt the intimacy of the sexy, lean muscle beneath her hands. Because that was one thing she had to avoid to control herself. Desire. "Please."

"Hold still. We're almost there."

"Where?"

"You talk too much," he grumbled.

"I'm pretty sure this is illegal."

"So sue me."

"But..."

"Quiet."

She wanted to warn him. There was someone chasing them. "Careful –"

He literally growled at her.

Holly screamed when she thought the attacker would accost them. The big man whirled around at her scream, setting her down in one swoop. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

Dizziness made her sway, but she pointed behind them, from where they had been walking. "A man," she gasped. "Following us."

"Impossible. My gift is the sense of tracking. Why do you think they sent me for you?"

His words made no sense, not to her. So she insisted. "But I saw someone..." she gave a quick glance around. There was no one. Just a tree, planted alongside the sidewalk.

He looked exasperated as he grabbed her by the hand and hauled her along, walking quickly down the sidewalk again.

Even though shadows were constantly moving all around them, and she couldn't explain why, she just felt it. This time she knew someone followed them. She jerked her head around to see.

The giant tree that had been planted had pulled up its roots and was walking upright behind them, with two branches waving like arms.

For the second time in her life, Holly Dewan passed out. This time the man who had been holding her hand caught her before she hit the ground.

* * * * *

She awoke, strangely enough, aware of her surroundings. She sat up in bed and saw the outline of her protector sitting in a chair.

For after seeing a walking tree, maybe her sanity was at stake. He couldn't possibly be a kidnapper, not sitting there so calmly. Please, let him be her savior, and not a psychiatrist.

The words tumbled from her mouth. "Tell me I'm not crazy."

He answered seriously enough. "I don't *think* you're crazy." Yet his tone implied, *I could be wrong*.

It put her on the defensive. "Are you wearing a Halloween costume?"

One well-shaped eyebrow rose. "A hell what?"

"Not hell. Hall. Hall-o-ween. A costume?"

"I don't understand what that is."

She closed her eyes tight. "I am crazy."

He leaned in, ever helpful. "I believe so. You were scared by a simple tree."

She kept them shut, even though she wondered how close he was, and asked, "Why are you wearing horns?"

"I can lower them if they make you uncomfortable. I'm just more powerful while they're raised. I needed all the reserve power to bring you here."

One eye opened. Yikes, he was close enough to...kiss. No, not kiss. Don't think of kissing. It could unleash... "Are you telling me you're a...real demon?"

"What else would I be?"

"What else indeed?" she parroted.

"Why did you faint?"

Oh, that. She clutched the sheet in her hand, twisting it. "Didn't you see it? I thought someone was chasing us, but it was a...a walking tree!"

He looked blankly at her. "And?"

"You don't get it. The tree, it pulled its roots up from the ground and they looked like feet. Two of its branches swung like arms. Like it was alive."

"I take it plants don't walk after dark on your Earth?"

"On Earth? Why are you referring to it as *my* Earth? Where the hell am I?"

"Luciefiore. The demon dimension."

"Hell?"

"Are you kidding me? I pulled you out of Hell, woman. That's where I found you. Hell on Earth."

"Found me? Why were you looking for me?"

He looked slightly wary. "Didn't anyone tell you? You're the most sought-after woman on the planet. Both dimensions. And baby, I'm a bounty hunter."

She leaped from the bed, searching for the front of the house. Finding the door, she flung it open and stepped onto the porch.

He followed, as if curious to know what she'd do next.

She wondered herself.

She discovered one thing—he was right. This place definitely wasn't Earth. Not with its reddish sky instead of blue. But the red wasn't the color of a burning orange sunset on earth. It was more of a pink.

She'd never seen a baby-pink sky.

Defeated, she plopped onto a porch chair. "Why would I be sought after?"

"Because Enishka wants you."

That name sounded familiar. Wait, that was what the lunatic had babbled. Nishka. "Who is he?"

"The demon lord. He's been banished to one of our moons, but there've been rumors underground of his active search for you."

"Why me?"

"I don't know. Lady, I don't ask questions. I just get paid to deliver."

"Deliver what? Who do you work for?"

"Caleb and Keara Van Trump."

"Van Trump? They own a few hotels, don't they?"

"On Earth, I believe so. They're the rightful rulers of Luciefyore, but gave it up for the Earth dimension where Caleb was born. In the meantime, Keara's cousin Jere Rousseau and his wife Natalya Hershkle-Rousseau rule."

A bald bird flew across the yard. No, not bald. Deformed. In fact, it wasn't a bird at all. It was the oversized gills flapping like wings that tricked her. One eye peered at her from the side of its head.

"Is that a fish? Flying in the sky, like a bird?"

"You are what you eat. I imagine it's the same on Earth. The birds eat the fish. When they live too long without being eaten themselves, well, you get the picture."

This place was insane. Or she was.

"I want to go home."

"You can't go home. They're searching for you on Earth."

"Why wouldn't they search for me here?"

"You're safe here. With me. I've never lost a client."

"How much are you getting paid to deliver me?"

"Enough."

"I have money too. Take me back home and I'll pay you."

Once again, his beautiful green eyes looked straight at her. "Baby, you are home. This is where you really belong."

What did that mean?

"Hello, Holly." A woman's voice called out from the gate of the yard, distracting her. She was lovely—long blonde hair curled softly to her waist. A real live tiara sat atop her head. "My name is Natalya."

As the woman approached, Holly realized her dress was completely see-through, emphasizing more than it hid. And yet the beautiful woman seemed absolutely unperturbed.

"Let me guess. You're a demon too? What would demons suddenly want with a human?"

For a second, both demons on the porch looked lost. "Oh, you don't know, do you, my dear?" Natalya asked.

"Know what?"

"Why Enishka wants you?"

"I've never met your demon lord. As far as I know, anyway." Holly shivered when she thought about the resident evil that had followed her since birth.

Natalya looked over at the green-horned demon. "She doesn't know."

He looked stunned. "Your highness, I wasn't aware."

Natalya turned back to Holly, pity in her eyes, yet at the same time slightly condescending. "You were never meant to be on Earth, sweetie. You're not really a full-blooded human."

Holly looked almost frail, as if she might crack apart at the seams. "I really don't want to play anymore. Please, both of you go away."

"Tact is so not my forte," the beautiful blonde grumbled. She looked down at her fingernails regally, studying her cuticles. "For now, I will leave. Ace, you make her understand."

"Me?"

"You are being well paid to take care of the little demoness. Consider it part of the job." She turned to walk back the same way she'd arrived, the shapeliness of her tight buttocks showing through an intricate web of linked, fine gold chains.

"Your highness, wait!" The green-horned demon looked slightly panicked. "She was raised human? I don't know how to..."

"Figure it out."

"Perhaps someone else..."

"Uh-uh. And whatever you do, don't let her escape back to Earth. It's too dangerous. That's where they'll catch her. It's been foretold." Her tone was ominous. And way too dramatic for reality.

Dangerous? Foretold? Holly felt a hysterical giggle erupt as she watched her feet. Crawling across the porch was a spider with a man's face.

And his appendage.

Both demons had the audacity to look at *her* as if she was crazy.

"Aww, hell, I think I know what her power is," said Green Horns.

The blonde demon-queen glanced at the spider's erection. "Very observant."

But then the woman named Natalya was gone and Green Horns was pulling her back into his house. "What's your name?" Holly asked. "What'd she call you? I can't keep thinking of you as Green Horns."

"Don't tempt me, woman."

Tempt him? How? "What do you mean?"

"Stop looking at me in that manner. Licking your lips and letting me know what you're thinking."

"I told you what I was thinking. I was wondering what your name is."

Instead of answering, he asked, "Where are your horns?"

"I don't have horns. I think you and blondie have a different person. I've never had horns."

He moved in close, way closer than he should have. She could smell the clean scent of his skin. He was rich, spicy. Manly. Lord, he was tempting her darkness.

The side she kept hidden.

Uncontrollably, her lips parted on a gasp as she fought the urge to touch them to his well-defined chest. His arm reached out, clasped around her waist and pulled her close.

Close enough to run his fingers through her hair...the area over her temples.

"What are you doing? I told you, I've never had any." Was that husky voice hers? She'd always had a hard time fighting this side of her, but it was released so easily with him.

Wham! Air sucked into her lungs in an instant cataclysm of change when he found the most sensitive spots. Her heart pounded, her nipples hardened, her lips swelled.

The area he fingered was as erotic as hell. As if he'd touched a slick tongue to her swollen clitoris.

His eyes had become heavy. He couldn't have known what he'd done to her. Exquisitely, his thumb brushed over the magical spot again.

Moisture rushed to the area between her thighs like a waterfall about to go over.

Panic ensued. She'd always been able to avoid this. Always. Before it reached this point. But not now.

The need was triggered.

"Stop," she panted.

He looked tortured. "I can't. It's your power, it calls to me. Turn it off."

She couldn't. She'd never turned it off before. In fact, she'd only let it unleash once before. It'd haunted her ever since. She'd avoided it since.

And then that other side taunted, like a little demon behind her shoulder. *He can take it. Look at him. Biceps the size of thighs. Legs made for running. For thrusting. He can take it. He's strong. You won't hurt him.*

He sounded helpless, but his fingers still swirled erotically over her. Suddenly he turned her toward the back wall where a mirror hung.

Good graces, that couldn't be her. Her eyes glowed. Her skin was kissed with a gold glitter dust that caught the light when she moved. What had this place done to her? This man? This demon?

He bent his head to her neck and tasted her skin. His hands reached out to cup her heavy breasts. She wanted nothing more than to fling off the barriers of clothing keeping him from touching the warm golden glow of her skin.

"You wear too many clothes," he murmured in her ear. Before she knew it, her sundress was slipped off one shoulder, exposing a breast to the mirror.

"Beautiful. I knew you would be."

She raised her arms, watching as her breast lifted in the mirror. Reaching behind her, she found his horns and never hesitated, just wrapped her hands around them and instinctively stroked.

"Oh, baby. There's no stopping now," he warned.

The words alone were erotic, not to mention the warmth of his breath in the sensitive whorl of her ear.

He tore the remaining strap from her other shoulder and the dress whispered down her body, landing on the floor.

For never having been naked in front of the man, she was strangely not self-conscious.

His hips bucked against her ass as he stared at her nipples. Gently, he covered them with his large hands then slid his palms down the front of her body.

Obviously her hands stroking his horns were driving him crazy. Impatiently he inserted his fingers into the hip strings of her panties and whipped them down her legs.

His hand cupped her mound, masking her secrets from the mirror. She parted her thighs, giving him easier access to the swollen folds she wanted touched and separated.

His finger was soaked from dipping into her. He smeared the slick goodness over her sensitive bud.

"Ooh, that's good," she moaned.

He trailed kisses down her neck as he continued his massage of her labia.

The world was spinning. Her breathing became deep pants. She turned in his arms, impatient with not being able to touch anything but his horns while the man knew her pussy.

His shirt was white, sleeveless, emphasizing the dimensions of his biceps. They were huge, that alone singled him from the humans. Demons had much more muscle tone to their bodies.

Not that she'd seen many. It was an instinctive thought. One she had known about all along but ignored.

His shirt had snaps. Damn, what a girl could do with snaps. Grasping both ends of fabric, she yanked them apart. A smoothly defined chest made her heart pound even more. Leaning forward, she pressed hot kisses over him.

He grasped the back of her hair, pulling her face up for a kiss. His lips touched hers and immediately demanded compliance. She opened hers, taking his tongue, while her

hands roamed his chest. She trailed her fingers over ripples of muscled abs, stopping at his jeans. Unhooking them deftly, she slipped her fingers inside.

This land was Heaven, not Hell. He was wonderful to feel, hard and hot and eager.

The skin of his penis was silky soft and quivered when she touched it.

"Take it out, little Holly."

She pushed his jeans down his hips, freeing his hardened cock. She trailed her fingers over the distinct cuts of muscles in his thighs. She dropped to her knees, rubbing his cock against her cheek.

He rewarded her with a deep groan.

She rubbed her lips, then her tongue along his shaft.

She was out of control, flames licking her internally from her thighs to the tingles of her nipples. He bent over and pinched the very tips then twisted gently, sending a burn that ignited more flame in her sheath.

She swallowed the head of his cock, bobbing her mouth over the tip, and licked it thoroughly.

"That's it," he exhaled. "Just like that, baby."

Somehow his hand wrapped in the back of her hair, holding her mouth to his jutting cock. Forcing her to suck him to pleasure.

She wanted so desperately to masturbate as she greedily swallowed his cock. She trailed her fingers down her body to reach her clitoris.

Green Horns watched her use her fingers on herself for just a few moments.

"That's so sexy."

With one yank that showed his lack of control, the demon brought her back up to her feet.

"Little Human Holly, I have to take you fast and furious this time. You're ready, aren't you? You can take my size?"

He lifted her, squeezing her buttocks together as her legs wrapped around his waist. Her bare cunt pressed to his abdomen, smearing sweet juices across his heated flesh. He carried her into the bedroom, laying them down on the bed, still covering her.

He looked into her eyes and pressed the head of his cock deeply into her pussy. She was stretched so wonderfully tight, her inner sheath craved more sensation. It wanted to grip, to clutch at him, to clench him with waves of pleasure.

Her lips parted on a quiver. "More, please," she begged. "Deeper."

"Fast or slow?" He dragged a finger over her tight little clitoris, making her buck against his hand.

"Either...please," she begged, undulating her hips against his finger, on the edge, wanting more of his sensuous rubbing.

"You're not going to have a clitoral orgasm, baby. You can do that one by yourself. I want you to come deep, triggered by my cock sliding inside you."

In that case, she wanted him to start thrusting. The sooner, the better. She spread her thighs wider, as if she could get him even closer to her than he already was.

Roughly she raked her fingernails across his back. He arched and hissed, the pleasure-pain making him plunge his cock deeply into her all at once.

"Ahhh," she breathed.

"Naughty girl. You're going to make me hurt you."

She looked up from beneath curling lashes. "Did you think I liked it gentle and sweet?"

Hell, she was a dream come true. She certainly looked angelic with her pink lips shaped like a bow. And she was much gentler and sweeter than a full-blooded demon, but obviously she was strong.

And demanding. "Kiss me really hard."

He slanted his mouth to hers, releasing his tongue with a groan. She greedily lapped at him, nipping his lip. One hand was clenched around his shoulder, the other snaked down to hold his testicles.

Gently she squeezed and his cocked thrummed within her slick warmth.

He pressed his hips into her, giving a swirl. He found a rhythm—out, in, swirl. She was breathing heavily and moaning softly.

She was so wet, he could hear the slick friction where their bodies met. A sucking sound, in and out.

Suddenly the female gasped, moaning delightfully as she came in a wet rush, waves cresting and falling in her body all around his cock. The waves milked him until he erupted high up into her, watched her eyes roll back as she took another breath.

His yell was masculine, a roar of satisfaction. At last.

Chapter Two

Hidden Secrets

Holly woke up in the dark. A candle was lit, casting dancing shadows along the wall.

"You were tired," the green-horned demon said from a chair across the room.

She sat up, catching the sheet to her breasts before it could fall away.

He seemed amused. "I've already seen it all, sweet."

She flashed him a dirty look. "Well, seeing as how we've done the dirty, I don't suppose I can have your name?"

"Acel. And do you realize this is the first time you've lost your temper?"

"Well, you are irritating me."

"Most women would be basking in my afterglow, baby."

"Hmmp. Bask in mine. I'd like to go home now."

"Can't take you back to Hell."

"Earth."

"Whatever. You didn't belong in there. You're demon."

"Of course I'm not. I have no horns."

"The humans removed them. Probably when you were a baby. The sensitive spot that turned you on? Humans don't have that."

"So you're saying I was adopted?"

"Looks like. And they considered you deformed. Removed your extra bits as an infant so you'd fit in better. Get up, sweet cheeks. We need to get you some clothing before it gets light out. Make you look all demony, even minus the horns."

"Well, I wasn't adopted. My mother bore me. So if you think I was, then are we heading out to pretend I'm not human? Because apparently I am."

"We're keeping it a secret that you were *raised* human. Enishka, the demon lord, is after you."

"Me? Why me?"

"We don't know why he wants you, but it can't be good. It never is."

She reached for her torn dress, but he stopped her.

"Wear my shirt."

He handed her a garment and turned away. Rather than argue, she took the moment to hastily throw it on and cover her nakedness while she had a chance.

"What else?" she said, looking at her bare legs.

"Your sandals?"

At the raise of her eyebrows, he shrugged. "I've seen women wearing less anyway."

His shirt did reach her mid thigh. And it was currently in fashion to wear shirtdresses. She wouldn't appear too odd. At least on Earth.

"Five minutes to shower, though you might want to leave my scent on you. It will keep other demons from breathing down your neck."

What in Luciefiore was wrong with him? She was his charge, he needed to take care of her. But instead he'd bedded her. Yes, it was her power to unleash lust, but hell. He'd known that when he'd triggered it purposely.

She probably didn't even know the importance of her power. She was frail. In spite of her heritage she wasn't like a demon. In fact, she wasn't even aware of their traditions. She'd never had complete powers, not with the removal of her horns in infancy. She was way too trusting and weak and...sensitive. For some reason, her essence socked him in the gut. He wanted her to reach out for him, to trust him to care for her. Not look at him as if he were as crazy as the lunatics she attracted on Earth.

That got his goat. He was a protector and she preferred to wander alone.

She was as smart as a whip too. As soon as she'd discovered what he could do to the spots where her horns had once been, she'd returned the favor, gripping his horns and sliding her fists up and down.

But if not for the sex, she'd have nothing to do with him. No, his gorgeous little demon wanted a scrawny human.

He'd given her a choice. She didn't know the customs here, of course. But he'd told her she'd have his protection if the other demons thought she was his. What he didn't tell her was he was the number one hunter in his field. Women would sell their firstborn for a chance with him.

Maybe she'd surprise him. Maybe she would choose to wear his scent.

She chose the shower and the full five minutes. He was waiting on the front porch when she was dressed in his shirt and her own sandals.

"Come."

The area looked a little different in the daylight. A lot different actually. She didn't remember passing rosebushes last night, but they certainly made an impression today. They were huge, at least six feet tall, growing like sunflowers, the roses as big as her face.

Wait, what had he said? Walking plants?

Plus, the sky was the wrong color. It was...red. Not the brilliant orangey red of a burning sunset on Earth, but a pinkish blue-red.

"Your sky is pink," she said. "It's beautiful. But weird."

He smiled at her. "I thought that when I saw your sky. I guess we get used to our own. Imagine my surprise when I crossed the portal and saw your sky was blue. Who ever heard of a blue sky?"

She was sure the pink sky was more dramatic than the Earth blue. She looked upward as they walked, not wanting to miss any of it.

"You know, we have a color crayon called sky blue."

He laughed. "We have one called sky pink."

But his mood had changed, as if he was irritated with her feminine wonderings. He picked up his steps, keeping his face expressionless. They walked in silence for a while before arriving at a small shopping center. He strode directly into one of the shops, his hand on her elbow, keeping her facing straight ahead as they entered.

Ugh, just like a man to ruin her mood.

The demoness of the shop approached warily. Apparently Mr. Green Horns was well known.

Understandably, not liked.

"May I help you?"

Holly tried not to stare at the bone protruding through her nose like a bullring.

"We need some clothes for her," Green Horns said matter-of-factly. "We'll look around on our own for a while."

There were racks and racks of clothing. Ace wandered around grabbing a few pieces and tucking them over his arm. Holly rifled through a few outfits, but nothing was appropriate to wear. Like Natalya's outfit yesterday, everything was beyond that of the common hooker.

Holes cut out. Transparent fabric. Clothing that fit like onionskin. Papier mache was not her look.

"Okay, I have a few. What do you got?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Why not?"

"I can't wear these! I am not wearing anything with chains. Nothing see-through. Nothing skimpy."

Ace had the nerve to look at her like she was crazy. "Look around," he said, with a motion of his arm. "Do you see anything else but chains, translucent material, or flat-out missing material?"

"Exactly. I'm not wearing these clothes." She looked at the fabrics on his arm, pulling the top one off. "I refuse to wear this." She held up a thin tube-shaped dress of skintight nude material. A body stocking. While it would cover her breasts to the bottom curve of her buttocks, it left nothing to the imagination. It was the ugliest thing she'd ever seen.

He grabbed her to him. "Look here, little girl. There are no choices. These are the clothes demonesses wear. You dress differently, you stick out like a sore thumb. It screams, *Steal me! I'm the human everyone is looking for.*"

Grabbing a couple more of the wispy fabrics, he shoved her into the dressing room.

"I'm not putting these on," she warned from the doorway.

"Then I'll do it for you." He stepped into the door and closed it behind him, locking the knob.

"Get out!" she gasped.

"No. I gave you a chance to pick something. My patience is at an end, woman."

His hands tugged at her shirt, deftly sweeping it over her head without unbuttoning it. She slapped at his hands futilely.

"I'll scream," she warned.

"I'll gag you," he warned back. "One scream will have hundreds of demons here to do much worse than change your clothing, princess. After all, you washed off my scent, didn't you?"

Really? Was he upset because she chose not to wear his — ick — scent?

"Bastard," she hissed venomously, fingers slapping at his hands still. "I can do it myself!"

But she couldn't, not when he sat back with his arms crossed, watching her strip for him. Her hands faltered, and she looked away when he stood again, large hands reaching behind her and deftly unsnapping her bra. This time, though, his movements had gentled.

She continued to stare at the wall as he draped one of the so-called dresses over her head, hanging it squarely over her shoulders and looping off her panties in one smooth move.

At least the lace was black, though it was definitely transparent.

She closed her eyes briefly. This was as good as it got. Nipples poked through as if she walked nude. She knew she had to be bright red. This was too humiliating for words.

"I know," he said softly. "Try this."

He held out the nude body stocking she'd tossed into the "I refuse to try these on category." He pulled the black nothing from her, shimmied the nude one-piece over her head, deftly covering her body parts, then slid the flowing black dress back over her.

Tentatively she looked in the mirror. Not bad. In fact, she looked good. It was the illusion of nudity rather than all out showing — and it gave her a mysterious air.

"Ace," she said, her happiness barely contained. "You did it. This is perfect."

He seemed almost embarrassed. "We'll get more in different lengths, different colors. A few outfits. It'll be your signature look. Layers."

"Layers," she repeated, spinning in the mirror. Impulsively she reached up to the green-horned demon and kissed him square on the lips.

Wham!

Lust swept through the dressing room from the tips of her fingers to the tops of her toes. Ace instantly hardened, and his erection pressed insistently against her belly.

His hands snaked around her waist, yanking her even closer to him. His tongue was in her mouth and she kissed back for all she was worth.

Damn. It was her kiss. She had triggered the atmospheric change with her kiss. It was easier to let loose here. But it felt so good kissing the sexy demon who was so turned-on he was uninhibitedly rubbing his erection against her. She began rolling her hips against him, every now and then gasping when her sensitive clit hit the right spot.

He cupped her ass in his hands, kneading the soft cheeks.

The nude stocking suddenly felt alive, rubbing erotically against her bare skin, alerting nerve endings and making them tingle. His fingers were along the bottom edge, inching it higher.

She hiked a leg around his waist to give him better access.

He took what she offered freely, sliding his finger between her labia to find her wet within. He groaned when he plunged his finger into her heat. "Oh, baby, you're so hot inside. I can't wait until my cock is in you."

She thought she'd die when he wiggled the finger inside her in a come-hither move. It was too pleasurable for words.

"This isn't real, Ace," she murmured apologetically between gasping kisses. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to. I bespelled you."

"No apologies, princess," he said. "I want this."

"But you don't," she continued. "It's me. My kiss. It triggers this lust."

"You're a breeder, baby. That's all. You're one of the most revered of demonesses."

"What—ahh!" He'd lifted her onto his hips, her legs wrapped around his waist. It spread the lips of her pussy wide. He pressed a finger to the most delicious spot.

Maybe the demoness clothing wasn't such a bad idea after all. It made her feel naughty, sexy. She felt wicked enough to have a full-blown orgasm in the dressing room of a store in broad daylight.

"But you might regret this," she tried to explain, though she sure as hell didn't want to stop. She was dripping onto his fingers, the ones he was pumping in and out of her cunt.

"I won't regret it," he said. "Please don't turn me down," he begged.

How could she? She was masturbating unabashedly onto his fingers.

His lips lowered to her nipple, exposed by a tug on her body stocking, and sucked it into his mouth. Instant fire spread throughout her loins. She squirmed, ready for his cock with the wetness that flooded her.

"Hold on, lover," he said. "I want to eat you."

His words made her ache deep inside.

With little effort, he cupped her buttocks in his hands and swung her up over his shoulders. Her pussy was spread apart again, this time before his face. She leaned back against the wall, which arched her even farther.

His hands were cupped around her ass. "Spread your pussy for me," he groaned.

She pulled her swollen labia aside, exposing her glistening clit.

"Perfect," he crooned, spearing it with the point of his tongue.

"Yes, Ace," she hissed. "Just like that."

She grabbed at his horns, twisting her palms up them. He went wild, licking and sucking at her uncontrollably.

She realized at that moment, she was the driver. She was in complete control, even while he worshipped her most sensitive parts.

She licked her palms and rubbed the warm wetness over his horns. They bulged with raw heat. In return, Ace speared his tongue into her sheath, in and out, fucking her senseless with his tongue.

He pulled away. "I can't take any more, Holly."

He slid her down his body then flipped her over the small bench so her ass was in the air. His thumbs parted her puffy labia, and his cock slid into her.

He was thick inside her swollen pussy, sliding through her slickness like melted butter. He rode her hard, his balls slapping against her. Her moans began to grow louder.

"Sssh," he reminded. "Naughty girl, you'll call attention to us. Bite this if you need to scream."

A soft silky material was tied around her, covering her mouth.

This was so wonderfully wicked. Hot, steamy sex in a dressing room of a shop, gagged and fucked repeatedly.

Her orgasm was close enough to reach out and grab.

Just then he pulled from her sheath with a slurp then bent low and tongued her ass. The tiny rim of muscles tightened in heightened pleasure. He licked up and down her slit, murmuring how good she tasted, before he stood and plunged his cock in again.

He pounded her pussy and suddenly it was too much. She rocked against him as her muscles clenched all around him.

She bit the gag to keep from screaming when her climax began.

He muttered a soft grunt behind her then paused. He thrust into her so deeply he exploded, his seed spreading through her like hot lava.

The waves of pleasure rolled over her as she panted in harsh breaths. Slowly he pulled his erection from her flesh and pulled her up to quivering legs. Gently he untied the gag.

He used the rag to wipe off his cock before he pulled up his pants. Then he gently wiped her pussy.

"I'm going to slip out while you dress," he whispered. "I'll ring up the purchases while you get your clothes straightened," he gestured to the tan and black garments that were bunched around her waist. "Meet me at the register."

She nodded, and he kissed her trembling lips. Reaching for the tags, he ripped them from the items she had on then gathered up the rest of the garments from the floor.

She sat on the bench, her legs shaking.

She hadn't had an attack of lust like that in years. And so far, he didn't seem upset over it. Not like back when...

Slowly she pulled the tube dress over her buttocks and stretched the top half back up over her breasts. Then she draped the transparent black lace over her again.

Slipping her black sandals back on, she gathered up his dress shirt. At the last moment, she grabbed the wadded gag.

Ace was at the register. The purchases had already been rung up and bags were being handed to him. The sales clerk looked a bit ruffled, her lips swollen and her cheeks pink. She kept looking behind her at a stock clerk.

Ace's demeanor was different as she approached. His horns were still extended. He swung his arm possessively around her neck before he walked her out of the store.

She would simply pretend it didn't happen. That she hadn't jumped the man. Twice. Lord, what could he be thinking?

She used to be able to control this so much better. But something about the sexy green-horned demon tossed her restraints right out the window.

And he didn't know that if she lost total control...she could hurt him.

Chapter Three

Careful What You Wish For

She didn't know where they were headed, but she didn't need to. He was leading her along. They paused in front of a restaurant.

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes. So far *you've* eaten..."

His eyes widened. "Little Human Holly, did you just crack a joke?"

"You were thinking it!" she laughed. Quite frankly, she couldn't believe she did. Talk about calling attention to a problem she'd spent her whole life trying to forget.

She rolled her eyes to pretend it was no big deal. "Oh, feed me already."

The waitress eyed her outfit enviously before seating them at a table.

"Please send us Valnaeus root," Ace instructed.

The waitress never paused. She went over to a cabinet in the wall and pulled out a plate with a silver cover. She returned immediately, setting in on the table in front of them.

Holly looked around at the dozens of other patrons, all sitting unserved still, yet waiting politely for their own meals. "Get your way much?" she asked sarcastically. Then, "What is it?"

"Lunch." He grinned at his easy answer, ignoring her first question. "It's the easiest thing to order. There's no waiting. It's filling and healthy. It supplies nutrients that depleted demons need. And sugar, I'm guessing you've ignored your demon requirements all your life."

She left it alone then, because she didn't need him pointing out how often they'd had sex, one of her demon needs. She'd gone her whole life avoiding it, and suddenly all her wants and desires were unleashed with him.

"Did you see the waitress checking you out? I think you started a fashion trend," Ace whispered.

"You would have started it," she reminded. "I don't think I thanked you."

"You did. The dressing stall, remember? But if you'd like to do a follow-up..."

"Oh! I didn't mean —"

He tsked. "Holly, Holly. You were coming along so nicely and then jumped right back into the prude skin."

"Well, I don't normally just bed strange men!"

"Why not?"

"Huh?" He seemed serious. Was it really acceptable here?

"You're a beautiful demoness with a rare power. Why don't you use it more?"

"I didn't know it was a power before now. I knew I caused things to happen. And that I hurt people."

He nodded. "Humans are weaker, and we're a passionate race."

"I've always been strong, though not as much as you."

"You were dehorned in infancy. A lot of your strength never developed. Yet you're still stronger than humans are."

"Yes. But also a lot more easily scared than humans."

"Why is that, Holly?"

"Strange, paranormal things happen. I don't know what I attract, but some kind of evil follows me. It just hasn't happened here yet."

"Like the night I caught you on Earth?"

"Yes! Exactly. I was running from it."

His eyes looked sympathetic. "Oh, Holls. That's nothing evil. Sweetheart...that's you."

"What do you mean?"

"You've repressed your power. It was overflowing. It caused things to shift, to shudder, like too many magnets in a room."

"So when I tried to run, it ran with me?"

"Yes, baby." He exhaled. "Have you run all your life?"

She nodded slowly.

"And people around you seem oversexed?"

She nodded again, more intrigued this time. "Always. I attract the weird ones. They hump street signs, trees, anything..."

"You bring out their sexuality. You're a breeder, Holly. Didn't you wonder why the shop we were just at didn't have employees running every which way?"

She cocked her head to the side, eyebrows raised. She hadn't thought about it.

"You caused a sexual wave to envelop the entire store. The cashier checked me out at record speed so she could finish things with the stockboy."

Holly's eyes widened. "I trigger lust in everyone? Not just myself and the guy I'm with?"

"Exactly. You're revered among our kind. A breeder keeps our race from dying out. We're highly sexual, but only during the higher lust levels released by a breeder can we multiply. Normally we'd keep your identity a secret, so demons aren't pounding on your door constantly, begging you to trigger widespread lusts."

"But now?"

"Now we definitely need to keep your power from Enishka."

Holly looked down at her plate. The something-root he had ordered was gone, and she didn't remember eating it. Yet she must have. Her plate looked used. But she couldn't remember tasting it. Or even remember what it looked like.

Acel saw her glancing at her plate. "Ready?" he asked.

She nodded, rising, but swayed slightly. He caught her, taking her by the elbow. "Too much Valnaeus root," he muttered.

Dizzy female was no challenge for him. As soon as they walked out the restaurant, he picked her up and carried her home. This time, though, she was carried properly. Bride-over-the-threshold-style, not the fireman's hold.

"Acel. Ace. What kind of a name is that?" She lightly circled a fingertip teasingly around the whorl of his ear, feeling like a drunken sailor.

"What kind of a name is Holly? That's a fruit," he responded.

She giggled.

"Tell me about this Kevin."

Surprise made her start. "H-how do you know about him?"

"Holly, sweet Holly, you told me about your once-upon-a-time boyfriend Kevin at lunch. Remember?"

"No, I don't. And why would I tell you about Kevin? I've never shared anything about him. But then again, I don't remember eating lunch."

"It's the Valnaeus root. Gives a demon your entire day's worth of nutrients, but there's a price to be paid. It works like truth serum. Everything bubbles up and out in a drunken blur."

"You fed me truth serum?" She injected the right amount of indignation into her voice.

"Of course. I had to learn about you. You don't talk much about yourself. Close up like a clam."

"That because I like my privacy! You don't just feed someone truth serum and pry information out of them."

"Really? My bad." He did sound a little apologetic. Maybe he didn't know human etiquette. But could she be sure? Sneaky demons, you couldn't trust them.

She cupped her palms around his cheeks and peered into his eyes. He didn't seem too torn up about the accidental drugging.

She was a little drunk. She went back to nibbling at his ear. Or maybe she had been circling his ear. Oh, well, now she was nibbling.

"Holl?"

"Hmm?"

"That feels very good," he muttered.

"Ace?" she whispered huskily. "Tell me about your past. Do you have a girl?"

There was a pause and she knew he was fighting.

"Come on, big guy. Confess to all your sins, like I did. You had the root too."

"No girlfriend. None whatsoever."

"Hmm." She thought back to the wild sex they'd shared. Twice. "You *are* straight?"

"Of course I'm straight!" He sounded completely insulted.

"Well! Excuse me for asking. I just wanted to know how strong my power was."

"Demons don't do gay. Ever. That's an Earth thing." He was quiet for a couple of seconds. "You wanted to know if you could sway a gay man?"

"Is that so wrong?" she said on a giggle. "It really is a common female fantasy."

"Next time you only get half as much Valnaeus."

"You should grow it."

"I do. I cage it in the backyard."

"Cage?"

"It's a root. Long fingered, or toed, depending on how you look at it. But you know things shift at night? Well, Valnaeus can walk, so you plant it, nurture the damn things, and they walk to your neighbor's yard to become someone else's meal."

"Eww. I ate toes?"

"Technically. Though they are vegetables, not animals. You know, it's disgusting that humans eat flesh."

"What? Demons are vegetarian?"

"Yes."

"All of you?"

"Yes. Now you see why we think humans are barbaric. Earth is Hell, where they roast rotting flesh and gnaw it off a bone like vicious beasts, saliva dripping from their chins. Then calmly wipe their fingers off on a wet nap like nothing out of the ordinary occurred. I know because I searched for you outside something called a wing place, where I smelled your scent briefly. Humans swarmed in there like a wave of locusts."

Well, put like that, it did seem disgusting.

"But toes! You fed me toes, Ace."

"Sweetie, it's normal. Trust me, you have demon genes. I would never do anything to hurt you."

She had to trust him. He was the only one here she knew. But for some odd reason, it was more than that. She felt connected to him. Yes, he was a demon who was raised here...but he was still different.

So far she hadn't seen one friend of his. Other demons didn't look him directly in the eye, as if they were afraid of him. And he admitted that he had no girlfriend.

It was like describing herself.

He set her down long enough to open the door. "What's got you quiet?"

She smiled. "Nothing. Just thinking is all."

He smiled back, dimples showing in the lean cuts of his cheeks.

"Is Holly really a fruit?"

He nodded solemnly. "I'll feed you some, okay?"

"I don't fit in here, Ace."

"Of course you do, Holls. You have the best of both worlds. You belong in both. Not many people can say that."

"I'm not as strong as demons are."

"I can take care of you. You don't have to worry about anything." He reached out and brushed a lock of hair from her forehead, tucking it behind her ear.

"Would you want to be a weakling among strong demons? Or a strong half-breed among the weak humans?"

He didn't answer.

"You have to let me go home, Ace." Her voice pleaded.

"It's not safe for you on Earth, Holly. Enishka is a force you don't want after you."

"Do we really know if he wants me? You could be mistaken."

"Until we're sure, I need to protect you."

A tiny thrill shot through her before she slammed it down. It was his job. That was all. He was being paid to "protect the little human". If she hadn't triggered his lust twice with her power, he would never have touched her.

Why would he? He was absolutely gorgeous.

She didn't even have horns. She knew nothing about his world. He knew even less about hers.

"I'm afraid of this place."

"You have me."

If only it were true.

"Why are you single, Ace?"

There was a huge pause. "I don't have a lot to offer."

"You're handsome. Strong. Brave. I don't understand what else you need."

"Things are different on Earth. It doesn't matter, Holly."

"If I don't go back there, where will I live?"

"You'll always have a place here with me."

"Why would you take that on? I'm a stranger. I could make your existence a hell."

"Stranger?" He laughed at the word. "No, you're hardly strange. And you couldn't be obnoxious if you tried."

"This Enishka. What does he want with me?"

"I don't know exactly. Keara and Natalya are working to find out. Don't worry, Holly. There's lots of people that have your back here. You're one of us...and frankly,

people feel guilty. The fact that demon eggs were allowed to hatch on Earth and those poor innocent children were forced to live their lives in that hell dimension...well, we take care of our own. You'll never be a burden."

"My power could get out of hand."

"You'll learn to control it. You've just never used it, you're inexperienced. It'll come."

He was beautiful. The chiseled cut of his jaw was lined with a day's growth of shadow. His nose was perfectly straight and his brows dark and heavy. If her hand settled on his biceps, it wouldn't even come close reaching around.

But more than his beauty, he was just an amazing guy. So unlike the rude, aggressive demon she'd thought he was when she first met him.

"Let's go to bed," he whispered.

Holly nodded sleepily. "I am tired."

Ace stood, holding out a hand for her. He led her into his bedroom, where he slowly undressed her.

She must be getting used to the crazy place. She was standing here and thinking nothing of being stripped naked by a gorgeous demon who also thought nothing of touching her impassively.

She held up her arms. Ace slid a white gown over her head and smoothed it down her body. He turned to pull down the bedcovers and then helped her in between the sheets.

She was almost surprised when he lay down with her, but this was his bed after all. Still, he pulled her to him, kissing her softly along the top of her head.

"Rest easy, little Human Holly. I promise I'll keep you safe here."

She drifted, a tiny smile curling her lips. She felt like a cherished doll, someone's prized possession.

Chapter Four

Seek and Ye Shall Find

Holly woke up slowly. It was unusual not to wake up trembling and startled. But she was safe, tucked onto Ace's chest. Most importantly, he was safe. He was exhausted, his features softened in sleep. His lower lip pouted, begging for attention.

Holly smiled as she fought the urge to kiss it. Instead she slipped quietly from the bed she'd shared with him for nearly a week.

"Where are you going?" His voice echoed loudly in the silence of the night.

"Just to the bathroom," she pointedly whispered.

"You're sneaking. I felt when you awakened."

She grinned. "I didn't want to wake you up." She leaned over the bed, impulsively kissing him, the way she'd wanted to just a few minutes earlier. "Go back to sleep."

Damn, he *was* a good tracker. She'd kept her breathing even and held as still as possible for at least twenty minutes or so.

But it was that damn dream, one dream, and she was wide-awake for the rest of the night. She shouldn't be dreaming it anymore. Ace had explained that the bumps in the night always following her around were from her own powers. And she hadn't had the dream since being here.

It always started the same. Slowly she walked by an ancient school. The building was in ruins, bricks broken and tumbling. No one could see her, no one could hear her. The schoolchildren were taunting another child, and suddenly she could feel what that child felt, the shame at being different, the frustrated anger, the pent-up rage.

She grew more frustrated as the other children began to beat the child. She screamed at them, but no voice left her throat. She tried to grab someone who was hitting the girl, but her hands sailed right through her as if she were in another dimension.

It was way too much—the taunts, the screams, the tears. The world was spinning, she was screaming, things were blurring.

She was insane.

Nothing made sense, time was off, sound was off. The insanity was contagious, rubbing off on her from the crazy children!

One turned to her, gnashing his yellowed teeth as if he'd chomp her arm. A zombie! There was no other word for it. Zombies spread the brain-rotting disease through their saliva. She had to stop him before he bit.

She kicked him in the abdomen, and he went sailing through the air. Grabbing a brick, she went to swing it through the air.

She was hitting children.

Time stopped and the school grounds were like a ghost town, frozen in time. Motionless children lay together, cuddling on the ground, angelic cherubs sleeping.

The only clue to their true state was the sightless eyes that stared straight ahead.

Horrified, she'd awoken.

But it was just a dream. A nonsensical, impossible nightmare. One that had no correlation to real life whatsoever. She would never really slaughter children.

Suddenly she felt safe and secure. For the first time in her life, she *was* protected. There weren't bumps in the night, odd breaths shivering down her spine, objects flying across the room.

After she'd gone to the bathroom, she tiptoed to the kitchen for a glass of water. She drank it slowly, peering out the tiny round kitchen window that sat over the sink like a porthole.

Across the yard were the cages. Ace had explained about his garden. It was where he grew the Valnaeus root. She squinted, trying to peer closer.

Good grief, they did look like toes humping around in the soil. Giant toes, too big to escape the mesh of the wire gate. Oh, this begged a closer look. The backyard looked so different at nighttime. She padded to the French doors and opened them wide.

The wispy material of her nightgown floated gently around her calves when a breeze caught the edges. The moon wasn't full so there wasn't a lot of light, but there was enough to walk through the yard.

She dropped to her knees when she got to the cage. The Valnaeus roots rushed to where she sat, as if eager for a pet or a stroke.

Ugh, they were ugly. Hugely knuckled, like the roots were giant, arthritic hands. And alive somehow.

Eww, was that hair that grew on them? Coarse, thick hairs that grew abnormally, like the wiry hair from a mole.

Did she dare to touch them? Oh, hell, why not? She ate the damn things before.

The holes in the gate were slender enough for her finger to fit through. Eventually, though the Valnaeus constantly jumped and squirmed around as if they taunted her, she poked one.

Her last coherent thought was it felt squishy but looked firm. Like it was rotted inside. Dimly she heard Ace's roar from somewhere behind her.

* * * * *

Holly awoke groggily. The surroundings were unfamiliar. A raggedy old sofa was in her line of vision. She was in an unmatched recliner, feet up. All the curtains and blinds were pulled down tight, blocking any vision from the outside in.

A horned stranger stood off to the left.

Figures. Another demon had her. Apparently snatching was a favorite pastime in Luciefiore. She turned her head to see better. Blinking took a few seconds. Wait, there were two. Beyond beautiful, they were breathtaking. Who would have ever guessed that demons could resemble angels? Were they related? Both had the same color of horns, as if they'd been kissed by metallic swirls of gold. But even with their perfect beauty, they didn't have what Ace had.

That charismatic something. The charm, the crooked little grin.

The two stared at her, waiting for her to speak. What the hell was the etiquette in this crazy place? Women first? Even when imprisoned? But she didn't want to wait around all day, so she obliged. "Who are you?"

The first one grinned, and rows of pointy, triangular teeth ruined the illusion of beauty. "Carinsyn. This is Belzar. And you, little human, are Holly."

"How do you know my name?"

"Belzar heard Acel finally took up with a woman. I took it upon myself to figure out that the most sought-after human would be commissioned by the greatest tracker of all time. Of course, since I managed to take you from him, I do believe it makes me the greatest now." The demon magnanimously inspected his solid gold ring as he spoke.

"Very modest of you. How did you get me away? I don't remember anything."

"That's because you were unconscious. I hadn't figured out how I was going to snatch you, when you did the perfect thing. You reached out and poked a Valnaeus root." His grin became broader. "That's when I figured you were human. Who else would be stupid enough to touch Valnaeus?"

"You better be sure," Belzar snapped. "The last thing I need is fucking Acel after me because you brought her into my house."

Holly said nothing. They had enough information as it was, and Ace had told her to keep her identity a secret so she wasn't stalked and forced to create lustful situations.

"I'm sure she's the human," Carinsyn said. "Didn't you notice how she didn't know to speak first? She doesn't understand our ways."

"Maybe I was just a little dazed," Holly said.

There was silence while both demons studied her intently.

"So...humans don't look so different from demons, do they? They're just missing the horns," Carinsyn said to Belzar, like she wasn't even present.

Humans didn't have three rows of teeth like a shark either.

"Other than that," he leered. "How do your other parts work?"

Carinsyn leaned in, his face scant inches from hers. "Do you get wet and slick? Or do humans stay dry? Is it painful when we pound into parched flesh?"

His smirk was evil.

Panic dropped like a heavy stone in her gut. There were two of them, both stronger than her. Would they rape her?

Her best weapon was her mind.

"What makes you think I'm human? You're already going to be hunted down by Ace. Clearly I wear his scent. Wouldn't it suck to find out you risked everything and got the wrong person?"

A slight look of fear washed over Belzar's face.

Carinsyn hissed. "Prove your demonity. Raise your horns."

"Did you really ask my girlfriend to do something so personal?"

Both demons whirled around at the sound of Ace's voice.

"Carinsyn." Ace nodded once. "Belzar. I'm going to have to kill you both."

"Fuck you. We got your human." Carinsyn extended his hand and suddenly his fingers grew into long, tapered points, gripping around her neck, the fingernails long and thick like claws.

Acel remained calm. "You're making a mistake. Holly isn't human, she's demon."

"Bullshit."

"You want a hint of her power? A tiny taste?"

"Whatever. She's got no power. She's completely human."

"Unleash, Holly."

What did he mean? She had no horns to raise to prove she was demon, like they'd asked her to earlier. And he'd told her not to tell about her power.

"It's okay, baby," he said. Talking to the demons again, he said, "She has a soft heart. Doesn't want me to outright kill you both. But, Holls, if you don't *extend your power*, I will slaughter them both."

Extend her power. Okay, that was what he meant. Hmm. How exactly did she do it? She did the best thing she could. She closed her eyes, parted her lips...and imagined she was kissing Ace.

The fantasy took off in her mind. He kissed her back, his tongue drew out...

Immediately she stopped.

Both demons were staring at her. All around them, lights were flickering on and off. Dishes were rattling behind closed cabinets. The curtains hanging over the windows waved madly with the whirlwind she'd created.

"See?" Ace said proudly. "Breeder."

"Shit," Carinsyn yelled, dropping his hand from her throat as if she were a disease. Belzar stared at his friend's fingers in horror.

Carinsyn flexed his stiff fingers back and forth, but they remained demonic claws.

"My hands! I can't change them back," Carinsyn screamed, panic breaking his voice.

"I-I'm sorry," Holly said, shocked by his terror.

"I warned you both," Acel said to the demons. Suddenly he moved in, taking her arm and lifting her to her feet. "She's not the human. She's my girlfriend, and a breeder. An eye for an eye."

What the hell did that mean? To her amazement, neither demon responded, frozen silent as they looked at each other in dismay.

Ace gripped her hand in his much larger one and curled the other arm protectively around her shoulders as he led her from the house. Amazingly, the two demons allowed it.

Once outside, giant white wings tipped with golden edges unfurled from Ace's shoulder blades. He snatched her to him, holding her against his chest, breath warm against her temple.

"Holly, sweet. Are you all right?"

"Yes. I think so. I don't know how long I was out, but I'd just woken up right before you got there."

"No, you weren't there long. I watched him drag you out of the yard, but I couldn't intervene. He was touching you and his power is instant pain upon contact. I knew to come to Belzar's house, because Carinsyn wouldn't be stupid enough to take you to his own."

"Why did they let us leave? What does eye for an eye mean?"

"I gave them a choice, Holls. They stay quiet about your identity – a breeder – and we stay quiet about them."

"You mean we don't report the kidnapping to the police?"

"Not that, baby. We don't tell what happens after you unleash your power."

She was still confused. He turned her to see the house. Through the side window, she saw two masculine shadows.

Entwined.

"Remember I said demons are never gay? You just gave them the worst punishment in the world. Unleashing your power of lust in a house with no women."

When his arms tightened around her, their feet lifted from the ground, and she gasped. Over the rooftops they flew, miles and miles, until she completely lost sight of where she was and which way she had come.

Eventually they touched down in his backyard. The Valnaeus roots thumped madly in the cage. Crazy pets happy to see them.

"They try to tempt you to stroke them," Ace said.

"You called me your girlfriend," Holly said numbly.

"You touched Valnaeus," he responded gruffly.

"You never told me not to!" she said, indignant at the implication that the kidnapping was her fault.

He closed his eyes, exasperated. "Oh, baby, you can't touch Valnaeus root."

"You never mentioned that."

"I forget how much you don't know about our dimension. Valnaeus root is evil, Holly. Like a drug. We wear gloves to cultivate it and cook it. Only once it's cooked can you touch it. That's why it's illegal to grow without gates where it can wander off and crawl into someone's house at night."

He locked the door with a click. Holly looked like she was ready to drop.

"Let's go back to bed, Holls. It'll be morning soon. We can sleep through the sunrise."

She allowed him to lead her to his bedroom, where she stood still as he undressed. Then he turned to her and stripped her nightgown from her body.

It was amazing how comfortable she felt with him. Not once did she flinch from his gaze. Tugging on her hand, he pulled her to bed.

"So I can't touch Valnaeus root. What other things should I know? Little things...like the fact that you can fly?"

Because that little tidbit surely had never been mentioned. Ace brought her head to rest on his chest, his arm around her. "You're known as my girlfriend here. It brings you protection."

"Why?"

"I'm in the top line of hunters. The best of the trackers. One who's earned wings. Only those willing to make a sale to Enishka would dare to go up against me, like the two tonight."

"Will they come after us?"

"No. Demons are not able to enter homes of other demons uninvited. They nabbed you outside. Plus they will never come around us again. They're afraid to give us the authority of sharing their indiscretion with each other."

Holly took a deep breath, fighting off the yawn that was looming. "So, let's see if I got this straight. All demons are straight, or at least none have come out of the closet. All demons are vegetarian. No demons can break into another's home. Valnaeus root is alive."

"Only at night."

"All vegetation walks at night. Birds become fish. You're a prime catch, according to yourself."

"It's the truth," he growled with a flushed face, making her grin.

"How long am I to be hidden here?"

"Baby, I don't know," he said seriously.

She quieted, as it seemed she had to think about that. "Since you fly," she murmured sleepily, "with those gorgeous wings...does that mean you ate something like a bird or a bat? Oh, no, wait...those would be meat..." her voice wandered off, her breathing was light and even, signaling sleep. Acel stroked a lock of hair.

He hoped she would be hidden here forever.

* * * * *

She was dreaming, she had to be. Lusty, hot dreams of a talented lover. She spread her legs as wide as they would go and moaned when a tongue parted the swollen lips of her labia.

Sweet bliss! She raised her hips, jerking them high, clenching her buttocks tight with each thrust. The sinful tongue snaked in and out before his mouth clamped on to her clitoris, sucking with moaning pulls as two fingers thrust into her wet sheath.

She opened her eyes to find Ace holding her to his chest, one hand encasing hers.

The dream had felt so real. And damn, she was as hot as hell from it.

Carefully, she eased a hand out from his and lightly caressed his rock-hard chest. His breathing continued, light and even.

She ran her touch down the ridges of muscle to his groin. She cupped his sleeping cock. His skin was silky soft and she imagined tasting it.

Her pussy was soaked, the juices already running down her inner thigh. She parted her legs over his, rubbing the swollen lips along his leg. Slowly she slid down his body until she was level with his cock.

It was as hard as a rock now. Apparently the demon didn't sleep through her tentative ministrations.

But he was going to pretend for her.

Very, very slowly, she inched down his body, nibbling the tender skin of his abs, stretched taut over tight muscles. She licked farther down his sweet body until she arrived at the stiffened erection between his legs.

She licked up it just once and then opened her mouth over the mushroom-shaped head, tasting the tiniest bit of sweet pre-cum. She closed her lips over the ridge of his cock, exploring the tiny triangle below.

He was delicious. His breathing had deepened, the rise and fall of his chest quickening.

"Don't stop," he whispered. She looked upward, his eyes focused steadily on her, never wavering.

"I won't," she promised.

She licked up the underside of his shaft, then engulfed the entire cock with her mouth. She wet it thoroughly, then sucked at the tip. It twitched in her mouth.

His hand fisted in her hair, pulling her away from his cock. She looked up at him. "I thought you didn't want me to stop."

"It's so good, I don't. But I'll spill. I want to please you first."

"This pleases me, Ace. To do what I want, when I want to. You have no idea."

She bent her head back to him. Sweet little kisses along the length, tender sucking at the tip then engulfing the whole thing in her mouth.

He made the most tantalizing moans of pleasure, especially when she wrapped her hand around the base and pumped up and down while she took the top half in.

A single thrust of his hips signaled his loss of control. Warm, salty sweetness hit the back of her throat and she swallowed.

When his climax finished, she continued to pump her hand, softer now, but still forceful.

"You're going to stay hard," she said.

He let her do as she wished, tenderly licking his balls. Desperate now, she crawled up his body. He stared into her eyes, as if daring her to go farther. She impaled herself on him, taking his cock deep into her.

Instant heat flooded through her. She clenched the walls of her vagina around him, wanting to keep him tight inside her, forever. He was bliss! He felt so good deep inside, hot and hard and wonderful. Slowly she rotated her hips, dancing her body on his. She cupped her own breasts, pinching her nipples delightfully.

"That's so sexy," he whispered, his voice deep and turned-on. "Spread your lips so I can see inside."

She obliged, pushing the swollen skin aside so he could see the deep pink inside. His cock hardened deep within her.

"I can see myself going in and out," he said. "Your pussy wraps around my cock."

"Mmm," she said. "My pussy doesn't want to let you go. Ever."

But the demon was too wicked for words. Deliberately he sucked on his finger then used the wet fingertip to massage the rim of her anus and before she knew it, stretched her delightfully.

She pressed herself down onto him, not sure if she wanted the finger deeper or the cock, just knowing there was an insatiable need to be filled. She rocked on him, twisting her hands over his horns.

"Come for me, pretty lady. Feel my cock in you, tighten around it until you explode."

He reached out and squeezed her nipples.

She gasped, clenching her sheath around him.

Suddenly Ace bucked, flipping her over onto her back with their bodies still connected. He looked down into her eyes.

Reaching out, he grasped the iron rungs of the bed. His biceps flexed as he gripped, pulling himself upward to thrust into her body.

She could feel him deep within her, sparking a flood of liquid heat.

Holly climaxed, feeling the orgasm blossom out from deep within her and spread throughout her body.

Chapter Five

Learning to Live

The sexy demon brought her breakfast in bed. It was surprisingly like human food, except for the lack of meat. And the fruit was exotic, unidentifiable.

"It's holly. Remember? I told you I'd feed you some."

Holly smiled then hesitantly cut a small sliver of her namesake. The piece melted on her tongue. Still, it was delicious.

She took another bite.

"That normally has a peel and seeds. I removed them for you."

She smiled. "Good thing. I wouldn't have known and would have chomped it, rind and all."

Her words made him close his eyes. "Dammit, I have to remember you know nothing about Luciefyore! The simplest things I could screw up."

"Well, it's not a big deal unless the seeds or peelings are poisonous, right?"

His silence made her pause in the chewing.

"Oh, hell, Ace."

"I'm sorry, Holls." He sounded miserable. "It's my fault you were kidnapped last night. I forgot to mention you can't leave the house. I forgot to mention you can't touch raw Valnaeus."

His voice sounded so dejected, she looked intently at him before speaking. "It's fine, Ace. I'm fine. No harm, no foul, right?"

He gathered up her empty tray without answering. Then, "Why don't you shower? We have to head over to Court this morning. Natalya wants to meet and do some research to find out why Enishka is after you."

Ace heard the shower running and knew she was relaxing sore muscles under the hot spray. Dammit, he'd come so close to losing her. The problem was, even after all this was said and done, why would she choose him? He'd neglected to tell her women had the power to take their choice of mates here. He'd tricked her into calling herself his girlfriend, and in the beginning had triggered her lust twice to sleep with him. But should she know she had the choice...what the hell did he have to offer her? Men outnumbered women two, possibly three to one. She could have her pick. So why would she choose him? What would she see in him?

Absolutely nothing. The only thing he had depended on was protection. Yet it seemed he couldn't even keep a fragile half human safe.

Most women, if they didn't go for money or looks, depended on good old-fashioned love. Marriage, white picket fence, six kids and a pet tarantula in pink.

He couldn't even offer her any of that. She could never belong to him.

Because he belonged to Enishka.

"Ace?"

He set the dish he was drying back on the counter and turned toward Holly, surprised. He hadn't realized she was done already.

"You were standing there a long time," she said softly.

"Just thinking. Let's head out. Here," he said, handing her a mug.

"What is it?"

"Remember the root you touched? We can't eat that one now. It's spoiled. So I made a tea from it. Not as nutritious as eating the entire root, but it does have some value."

She brought the mug tentatively to her lips. The tiniest taste made her eyes pop open. "That's good!"

He smiled. "Not many people are smart enough to enjoy tea. They consider it a trait from Hell, er, the Earth realm, I mean. Silly superstitions. People pass up so many health benefits."

He gave her his arm. She looped hers through it. "Earth has superstitions too, you know."

"Like?"

"There's some people who refuse to cremate their dead. They believe it's too much like burning in Hell."

Ace laughed. "That's ridiculous! If you're in Hell, your body isn't with you! That's why you die, only the shell gets left behind."

"I know," she agreed. "Why do your people believe Earth is Hell?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. It's a concept as old as time. Earth is harsh, full of hatred and prejudice and fighting. It's evil. We get glimpses of it through foretellings, learning about the way you corrupt your environment...like adding fluoride to your drinking water to prevent cavities! Do you honestly not realize that fluoride is a dangerous poison? Why in the world would you willingly ingest it?"

"Bureaucracy," she murmured. "Sometimes we can't control things."

"The landfills. So much waste! Your foods—tell me what nutrition comes from frying animal skin in fat until it crunches. Tell me why you would drink a can of carbonated corn syrup then toss the can into another swollen landfill."

"It does seem silly. And it's called pork rinds and soda."

"Your people have completely forgotten the eye-for-an-eye rule. Instead you imprison your criminals and give them more benefits than they ever had before prison. Free meals, free room and board, free education, free exercise. Free entertainment

because it's inhumane to be bored. They have more luxuries than their victims ever had. Here we have fewer prisons. Punishment is the same as what was done to the victim. Death to the murderer. Rape for the rapist."

He was on his soapbox today. It was kind of cute, actually. He was probably stressed, blaming himself for losing her last night.

She actually wasn't all that scared by the kidnapping. She had known Ace would come for her. In all honesty she had more fear when she lived by herself on Earth...before she knew it was her own power haunting her.

"So Natalya is the ruler here?"

"Natalya rules with Jere, for Keara and Caleb, who stay on Earth. Demons fear all four of them because of the knowledge that they've survived being to Hell and back. In fact, Jere was raised there. The two women are the strongest demonesses we have, both standing up to Enishka. Natalya is known as the Huntress while Keara is the Punisher. They're two of the greatest forces ever known. They're best friends now, but it wasn't always so. Once they were mortal enemies."

"How did they get to be best friends?"

"They had to pair up against Enishka. There was a prophecy about Keara written. Enishka was going to sway it to be beneficial for him and it ensnared Natalya in the process."

Up ahead was a castle. An honest-to-goodness fairy-tale castle, sitting in the middle of smoky drifts and outlined with the pinkish-red hue of the sky.

"We're here," Ace announced.

"However did I guess?" Holly said drily.

Two demons stood on either side of them, acknowledging Ace with a slight nod. They were majestic creatures, with a darker skin color and horns like polished midnight. The skin color was deep—a beautiful black. And a lot of it to see, for they dressed in loincloths.

"What do the women wear?" she whispered.

"Women? Women can't be servants, that's silly."

It might have been a comical statement if she wasn't focused on the tight buttocks next to her. Holly stared, finally tearing her eyes away to pay attention to Ace.

"They used to be naked," Ace whispered. "But Jere's a little more modest, being raised on Earth like you were. He insisted he didn't want to see jewels dangling."

"Curse my luck," she whispered back with her droll sense of humor.

It made him smile, then he growled into her ear. "I'll let you peek at my jewels. Later," he promised.

He probably didn't realize how her mouth watered.

"Hello, Acel. Holly," said a sweet voice Holly had heard before, from the angelic looking demoness known as Natalya. Like before, she wore a diamond tiara in her hair.

"Your highness," Ace acknowledged.

"Holly, I don't believe you know my husband, Jere."

Natalya's husband was another mixed breed. Like she was. Holly tried not to make it too obvious that she stared at him as she tried to figure out if any passerby could tell he was of mixed races.

Unlike her, he had his horns. He definitely could fit in much better. And obviously he was used to the culture, the rules, the rituals.

Jere laughed at her obvious perusal. "I understand exactly how you feel. It won't take long to catch on to the customs here. And change the ones you can't stand."

He eyed a loincloth as another male servant walked by.

"Looks like she has, my love." Natalya stared at Holly's outfit. "I wondered why women in town were suddenly layering clothing. Now it makes sense."

"She's a little fashion trend, that's for sure," Ace said. Holly couldn't help but think he sounded as if he bragged about her.

"Well, let's go dig up the books," Natalya said.

"What exactly are the books?" Holly asked.

"Ancient scriptures of foretellings, future, past and present. Enishka is written in several of them, but his fate changes constantly. You see, they never name people, but a person is able to control his destiny, so the prophecies forever shift also."

"The books explain about the fate of Enishka? Without naming names? You have no idea whose fate is whose? Then why do you even use them?"

"They've helped us so far in clearing up our destinies. Mine and Keara's. The third foretelling is yours."

"How do you know it's me? How did you even know the first two were yours?"

"We have enough information at the time to deduce that the first foretelling was about the Punisher. The Huntress was weaved in, and from that came mine."

"I guess I don't understand why I'm here."

"See Holly, there's more. The foretellings? There's actually three demonesses. That's why we sent Ace to find you and why we need to keep you out of the Earth realm."

"It could be anyone."

They'd reached a room with cavernous ceilings, making their voices sound like echoes in a cave.

"The clues were too many to ignore. I'll prove it to you." Natalya headed toward a bookshelf, her voice disappearing behind stacks of shelves. "Where are the books? Jere? Baby, where did we hide them?"

Her husband followed to where she was hidden between the shelves.

"If I could find the right passage and read it to you, you'll see for yourself." Her voice carried.

"I believe we set it higher last time," Jere said from behind mountains of books.

Natalya was rifling through the books on the shelves, noisily shoving some aside with loud thumps. "Enishka used to live in Court. Here. Before he became insane from delving into all four books at once. It's unheard of to keep all four together. But he broke the rules, as arrogant as always. When insanity struck, he moved into the marsh, like the scriptures foretold. Lived in the mud. It was disgusting. So once that happened, no one was able to find the four scriptures ever again. But once he was banished to the moon, Keara and I joined our powers, and found they were simply cloaked in a spell. We thought they had been destroyed. As it was, it took a lot to separate them. We needed to balance the power and strike from both dimensions, ours and Hell. I mean, your Earth. But Keara was here in Luciefyiore, so there wasn't any power on Earth to use. I had to use three little old ladies, fortunetellers on Earth, who inherited some residual power from me. The three of them, of course, have no idea of what they possess."

Her voice became louder as she and Jere came to the table, carrying heavy, reddish-pink books with them. The material was rough, covered with tiny little bumps, and looked wet.

"Eww," Holly said. "What are they made of?"

"Human tongue," Natalya said nonchalantly.

Suddenly Jere plopped the book on the table with a thump. With a look of disgust on his face, he wiped his wet palms across his thighs.

"Like I said," Natalya pointedly continued, "there are four. Two are on Earth in Keara and Caleb's possession. Two are here, still cloaked. The four books can never be brought together, whoever does so faces the same insanity curse as Enishka faced. What we do from time to time is open a portal and pass the books back and forth so we can read each other's. Keara was the one who found the scripture about you. Ahh, yes, here it is—

"The eve shall cometh to pass when demon and human shall mix. Precious are these seeds for their rarity in the ability to breed. The third seed is invisible to all and to herself, for lack of horns and heritage. By the light of the moon, she shall be captured in the Realm of Earth by the Demon Lord and forced to marry. Her power will be great, enough to shatter both planes of existence should it fall into the wrong hands."

"That was how we knew you were female. We also surmised you were a descendant of the eggs Enishka once hid on Earth, especially since you knew nothing of your heritage. Invisible to all, get it? And see...your power is great. A breeder? Well, that's the highest power we have, enough that breeders are kept as high priestesses. But the last part is what is worrisome. Captured in the Realm of Earth by the Demon Lord and forced to marry. That's what he did to Keara, forced her to marry him. Fortunately, her marriage wasn't recognized anywhere but there, so her Earth marriage to Caleb stands. I'm sure he'll rectify that mistake should he get a hold of you during his second marriage."

"So we keep you out of the human realm and he can't capture you," Jere said.

"I can never go back home?"

"Technically this is your home."

"But I don't have horns."

"Not many demons can have as much power as you do without their horns. The only reason why your horns cannot grow back is they were removed before they were fully formed," Natalya said.

"See, Natalya's were removed when she was banished to Earth. They grew back upon her return to Luciefiore. The pheromones are triggered by other horns around us. Had she been left on Earth, they never would have grown without another to trigger the hormones," said Ace.

"But will I be accepted here without my horns?"

The room was quiet and she knew her answer.

Acel was the first one to speak. "No one will dare utter a word about your lack of horns, Holly. You're under my protection."

Natalya smiled. "I knew this would be a good match," she said triumphantly to her husband, who groaned and rolled his eyes at her. "Now, back to the books. In this one it says—

"She shall have the power to open the cross-breeding between species. Dogs will mate with cats, and monkey with man. Beware the folly. Danger exists in the manipulation of mankind, for if the strong eat the weak, balance is lost and destruction reigns.

"One creature possesses the ability to change form at will. Upon his breeding he will pass his seed to a new line of corruption, enabling the parent to become all knowing and all powerful, the greatest being of both realms. Insanity shall keep him feeble until scales are tipped with sands of time.

"A Unity of Three will protect the weaker creatures from the Insane One. But who shall protect the Unity? Feminine strength is subtle yet powerful, but weakness lies in the female heart.

"One shall learn love. One shall face her dark. One will cross her greatest fear.

"And slaughter the innocent babes."

Once again, the room fell silent.

"What does it mean?" Holly whispered.

Natalya answered, her face white. "It means I learned love. Keara faced the dark. So you will be the one to slaughter the children."

Holly's heart pounded. Her greatest fear was to go crazy. And she'd have to be insane to murder helpless children. "Oh, hell no! I refuse! No way am I killing babies. I don't even step on spiders!"

Geez, was Ace looking at her differently? As if he didn't really know her? As if she already might be...crazy?

"Ace, really," she said.

Natalya interrupted. "It can't be right. Something's off. If it were me, it would work. I'm a warrior, I've fought to the death. Not that I ever slaughtered innocent babes, but it would make more sense. But instead, I was handed the sentence of learning to love. Did we mess up our fates somehow?"

"What do you mean you were handed the sentence?"

"A few years ago. The Council banished me to Earth without my horns as punishment for a teensy little mistake, which almost wiped out our race."

Jere look at his wife.

"Oh, okay," she mumbled. "I was to remain there until I learned true love. So there can't be two of us. Let's think about this rationally. Holly, what's your greatest fear? What gives you nightmares? Your biggest phobia?"

Holly stared into the fire. "Madness. Crazy people terrify me. I attract wackos, and deep down inside, even though I know it's ridiculous, I wonder if it's contagious. If one day I'll cross the line into crazy too." There. She'd said it. She'd admitted it aloud.

"That can't be a coincidence," Jere said. "Her fear is insanity. Enishka controls the insane."

"But still, what is the correlation with killing children?" Natalya asked.

"I must go insane," Holly whispered. "The foretelling says I cross my greatest fear. It doesn't say I face it, like yours do. I absolutely go crazy and murder innocent babies. I need to be locked up."

"Prophecies don't have to be fulfilled. They're foretellings, but the future can always be changed. We will do it, Holly. You won't go crazy and slaughter babes."

Chapter Six

Be Careful What You Wish For

It was dark outside when she and Ace left the castle. Nothing looked the same as it had during the daylight when they'd arrived. Holly looked around in awe. How did one even find their way around this place?

A horde of wildflowers crossed the sidewalk in front of them. They strutted, as if taunting the people already on it. A rose along the sidelines turned and hissed, thrusting its thorns at the cluster of purple wildflowers. The flowers screamed and ran, begging for mercy.

The rose, left behind, chuckled.

Holly shivered. Then she looped her arm through Ace's. It wasn't as good as being carried through the wicked ways of the night like the last time, but at least there was constant contact.

Ace flexed his biceps. She squeezed, feeling the muscle contract under her touch.

"That's the secret, Holls. See the rose's laughter? It's all about bluster here. Never show your fear in Luciefyore."

"But I am scared."

He stopped her. "Do you see anyone around?"

"No."

"That's because they fear me. Holly, you're with me. Throw your shoulders back and wiggle your ass like you own it, baby. No one would dare even look you in the eye unless I introduced you."

She giggled at his audacity. And cockiness. "That's you they fear, though. Not me."

"Untrue. What can capture a lion, Holl? And still look like a lamb? They think you live on the edge of danger for cavorting with me. And when we're done hiding from Enishka and they all find out you were raised in Hell just like Jere, they'll quake in their boots. They'll be glad they never crossed you."

The idea was intriguing. To be feared and respected...and not have to do anything for it?

"Practice it, baby," he encouraged.

Holly gave him a wicked smile. She tossed her thick mane of honey waves over one shoulder and licked her lips.

"That's it," he purred, hoping his breath wouldn't catch. "Work it, baby."

She added a swagger to her walk.

This time his breath did catch. The demoness was right there, always just under the surface. Holly had no idea how easily her other half was unleashed.

"Now you have it, sexy girl." His voice was husky deep, and he fought the urge to clear his throat. No need to alarm her.

Or trigger her need out in the open field, because public sex was illegal.

"Ace." She turned suddenly.

"Hmm?"

"If I could control my power...my lust...would you want me without it?"

"What?"

"Would you want me if I didn't force you?"

Holly thought she forced him? How fucked up was that?

"Baby girl, I want you now."

"You didn't touch me last night. I had to wake up and initiate it with you."

"You were exhausted from the ordeal. I was going to let you rest first. Holly, your power is a gift, not a curse. You don't force people with it. You enhance what's already there."

"You would be attracted to me without it?"

"Yes. I would." His voice sounded very definite. "In fact, let's practice it. You work on controlling the lust. Don't let it out, okay?"

She watched him, curiosity shining in her eyes.

"We're out in the open. We can't have sex, it's against the law," he murmured. "It's safe."

But his touch was contradicting his words. His finger reached out, tracing the curve of her arm. It feathered along her collarbone.

Her heart sped up.

"Fight it," he whispered.

She breathed deeply until her heartbeat slowed.

"That's it," he said. "Concentrate on knowing that we're out in public, on a sidewalk, at night. Nothing is going to happen, not out here anyway. Laws are not broken here. Our punishments are too great."

His tracing finger trailed down between her breasts.

She inhaled sharply.

"You're doing fine. It's all my own control still," he murmured.

It was right there, lurking below the surface. But she felt a sense of accomplishment, because it hadn't boiled to overflowing.

He brushed her nipple. The zoom ripped through her.

"Fight, Holly."

"Too much lust," she gasped.

What was he doing? He continued to tug her nipple. Surely he had to know what he was doing to her.

"It's not lust, little Human Holly." His voice was calm, unaffected. "I just got started loving you."

The internal storm subsided.

"That's it," he said, his voice easy and soft. Slowly he pulled her trembling body to him, tucking her head under his chin. His large hands caressed her back. "You're amazing," he murmured. "I've never seen such control."

Perhaps because she was still stunned into distraction. He'd said "*loving you*". Was it a play of words to confuse her power? Did he just mean it sexually, as in making love to her?

"Do you feel it?" he asked.

The lust? The power that she'd tamped down?

"The feeling between us?"

She raised her head. He was looking down into her eyes.

The demon was beautiful. And yet...so unsure.

"You...doubt yourself?" she asked.

"I don't know how you feel about me. Not a clue. I'm laying my heart out for you, baby. Give me some hope here."

"I-I, uh, I—" *Am a stuttering idiot!* She could hardly spit out the words.

"I pushed you too fast. Don't worry, Holly. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. Come on, let's get home."

They walked back in silence, each lost in their own thoughts.

Home. Should she think of his place as home? Even if she was never allowed to return to Earth, maybe Ace would want her to get her own place.

"You look worried, Holl."

She laughed. "So do you, Ace."

He frowned, looking slightly uncomfortable. "Yeah. I guess."

"Why?"

"I came on too strong. I shouldn't have."

"Ace, you didn't."

"I just didn't have the right to tell you any of that. I never should have—"

He was serious, she could tell. And she did not want to hear this. She had to stop him.

Holly stepped up to him and silenced him with her lips pressed to his.

Effectively stopped.

Besides which, he'd started something up in the hills that he just needed to finish. Because dammit, she was melting for him.

She pulled back and slowly shimmied the dress down her hips, leaving herself dressed in skinlike leggings with a bandeau loosely tied around her breasts like a sheer scarf.

His murky eyes darkened.

Holly tilted her head to one side then brought her hands up to cup her breasts.

The demon's face remained expressionless, but his body went completely still.

What was it he had said earlier? Work it?

She tossed her thick waves over one shoulder and smoothed her open palms down her body. She inserted her fingers into the top of her waistband and worked the fabric down an inch or two. Farther then, until her hipbones showed.

His breathing was even and deliberate, timed precisely to show no lack of control.

Carefully she pulled her leggings down farther, nearly down to her mound.

His Adam's apple moved slowly as he swallowed.

Her fingers caressed over her abdomen, teasingly as if they'd dip lower while he watched.

He growled and took a step forward, but she stepped back.

"No touching, demon. This time is all mine."

He looked confused but acquiesced. In one smooth move, she peeled the leggings off and kicked them aside. Then she unknotted the scarf from her breasts, freeing them.

He stared at her nude body possessively. She dropped to her knees, kneeling before him and pressing her cheek to the bulge in his pants. "Mmm, baby, you feel good," she murmured.

The zipper of his jeans sounded loud as it scraped downward. One pop of the waistband button and his jeans were pulled low enough for the painful erection to escape.

She rubbed her cheek against the soft skin.

Turning slightly, she placed tiny kisses alongside his shaft, from the base to the head. Very gently, she licked the seam. A drop of pre-cum wet the head and she pressed the tip of her tongue to it.

The tiny hole of his cock flattened under her tongue.

His hands fisted at his sides. She knew without looking that his horns had elongated. In fact the spots where hers had been tingled in response.

She rose to her feet, grabbing the scarf from the floor.

"Follow me." She draped the scarf that had tied her breasts around his neck, pulling him into the bedroom and all the way to the bed. With one hand she pushed him onto the bed then climbed on top of him.

"Sit on my face," he commanded.

Holly shivered with lust.

She spread her legs wide, rubbing her open sex against his hot skin. "I want you to know something first."

"What?" he growled.

She whispered close to his ear. "I'm laying my heart out for you too. I want you more than I want any other demon here. I crave you. I love you."

He placed a finger over her lips.

"Holly, I'm not a good choice for you."

But the sexy demoness was done talking.

She nipped his bottom lip with sharp white teeth and then crawled up his body, one leg on either side of him, spreading her labia for his view. Facing him, she spread her lips with her fingers, then lowered her pussy onto his waiting mouth.

He licked greedily, slurping her sensitive flesh like a man deprived.

She raised her hips. Ace followed, lifting his head to latch on to her again. He flicked his tongue harshly against her swollen clit.

Frantically she began to rotate her hips, pushing against his mouth.

"Harder, Holly," he commanded.

She let go with wild abandon, grinding onto his face. A finger slid into her swollen sheath, cutting through the hot wetness.

Her breasts tightened, the nipples tingling as they stood erect, as hard as rocks.

"Pinch them," he muttered between licks of her pussy.

One of his hands reached up to replace hers in spreading her lips, so she used her own hands to rub over her breasts.

Rolling waves of pleasure coiled tightly throughout her body and she screamed her bliss.

Ace pushed her onto her back, covering her with his body as he plunged his thick cock into her.

"You are so damn sexy when you come," he muttered, looking down at her as he thrust his cock into her sensitive flesh.

"I want my legs over your shoulders," she murmured. "I want you to see my pussy as you thrust in and out."

He grabbed her legs hurriedly, throwing them up and over. It changed her position, and his eyes glowed as he looked down at the feast he'd sucked to completion.

"You're insatiable," she murmured.

"So are you, baby. I want to come home one day to see you masturbating, your fingers deep inside yourself."

"I want to go out to lunch again. And I want to be fingered under the table until I cream all over your hand."

His cock pulsed within her.

"Baby, you're going to make me come so hard," he groaned.

"Come deep inside me, Ace. But next time I want you to come all over my ass, so it drips down my slit."

"Fuck!" he roared, slamming into her. His hot ejaculation spread throughout her like molten lava, coating her and marking her as his.

He dropped his head onto her shoulder, panting against her. He pressed kisses onto the top of her breast as his heart calmed.

Holly caressed Ace's slick back, kneading the muscles there lovingly. But something was wrong.

He hadn't said he loved her back. There was something she was missing here. He had to love her too. Didn't he?

Who laid their heart out and admitted to loving someone without the other person saying it back? Had she misread the situation and totally blown it? Didn't he say he was laying his heart out for her?

"We need to feed you, little human." His voice rumbled.

"Let's go raid the fridge," she said casually, hoping he'd forgotten about her declaration of love.

"Mmm. But I think we should go out. Get you a little more exposure to the demons who live here."

He rolled up off her and stood over her. He reached a hand out. "Come on, baby. Let's go have dinner in town, where people can see you. Start the fear working."

They shared the shower, making it quick. Holly was afraid to open the conversation to anything deeper than casual.

They dressed silently, and Ace waited for her at the front door. Together they walked out of the gate that marked his yard. A few steps down the walkpath, and they arrived at the hilltop, where one could see farther out. Holly shivered.

"What's wrong?" Ace asked.

"I can't get used to it. How different things are. Every night."

Ace shrugged, holding her to him. "I don't see it. Of course I've been here all my life."

He released her and took a step forward.

She slipped her hand into his, following him. "Wait."

No sooner had she said the word than the world changed. It was like they'd taken a step into a bubble of swirling, condensed air that slowly thickened around them.

"Shit," Ace snapped. "We're in a portal, Holly." He turned to look behind them, but it was too late. The gate had closed, leaving them in a continually shifting bubble.

"How can we have entered? I didn't see anything."

"We were tricked. The boundaries shifted in a split second. It has to be Enishka, though I don't know how."

Up ahead, the swirling air made it difficult to see through. Still, Holly peered. "Ace," she yelled as the volume of the wind increased. "Those are lunatics. From an Earth asylum."

She'd seen enough of them to know, to recognize the scrubs and the straitjackets tied around the waists. The crazy people were trudging ahead, the wind blowing against them.

Ace turned her away from the psychos. "Come on," he yelled, grabbing her hand.

They forged forward, running through the wind tunnel as best they could. As far as she could tell, they were getting nowhere fast, but it was getting louder with the winds howling around them, whipping her hair every which way. The crazy people were still behind them, taking their own sweet time. Suddenly it dawned on Holly – the psychos knew there was nowhere to run. Eventually they would catch up.

"Where are we heading?" she gasped.

"We're looking for the other edge of the portal," he yelled. "There!"

The edges of the portal were blurry lines between realities. Ace ran to it, shifting so she was behind him, protected by his larger frame.

He stopped abruptly when the wall hardened, and Holly slammed into his back. He turned, sheltering her within his arms.

"The portal won't close until someone goes through," he said, yelling to be heard over the wind.

"But we don't know where it leads out?"

"It's Earth on the other side," he said. "See the insane ones waiting there?"

"Why are they there?"

"Apparently Enishka called them to grab you there and hold you."

"But they're on both sides of us!"

The ones that had been chasing them weren't moving very fast through the cutting wind, but then they didn't need to. There was nowhere else to go. They were trapped.

Holly took a deep breath. "How will we close it?"

"When they get closer to us, I'll drag one of them through it, as soon as the edges stop wavering."

She could still see the lines between the realities blurring. But as they became stronger, the lunatics behind them on Earth tried to cross through, arms held out like zombies.

One was almost inside.

"Holly, that dark spot!" Ace yelled. "It's Luciefyore!"

Where had it come from? It wasn't there a minute ago. But right now it shimmered like a black hole.

"Jump!" Ace yelled, letting go of her hand.

Through the portal she leaped. She jumped across the ditch, and the ground on the other side rose to meet her. But it wasn't as soft as it appeared. She landed painfully, dropping and rolling. The air was knocked from her lungs, leaving her gasping. Still, she wrenched her head up to look behind her.

Where was Ace?

He hadn't jumped with her.

She turned just in time to see him, in the blurry cutout in the sky, watching her. From behind him, hands grabbed, just before the portal blinked out.

* * * * *

Dammit, how could she forget? Ace had said the portal wouldn't close until someone went through.

A human had to go through, not demon. That was the whole reason why Enishka used crazy people.

Ace had let her assume he was going to shove a lunatic through. But apparently he didn't think she'd be safe among them once they all attacked. He sacrificed himself for her, and somehow she had to get him back.

Holly slowly stood.

She was stranded in a strange place, where it was dark and confusing. She had to find her way to the safety of Ace's house. She curled her fists in frustration. Damn him. He had known he was going to sacrifice himself to close the damn portal.

Maybe Natalya and Jere could help. Maybe she could find the kingdom. Or the court. Whatever the damn place was called. The castle in the middle of the field.

She looked around. Nothing looked right. Now even the portal was gone, so she couldn't be sure if it had been behind her or in front.

Even though she knew she had to hurry, it might be best to look in the morning. She limped alongside the ditch wandering and wondering. Hoping she was heading in the right direction.

Eventually the area began to look familiar. Wait, she'd been here before. It wasn't Ace's neighborhood, but...oh.

It was the vicinity of where she'd been abducted by the two demons after she'd touched the Valnaeus root.

She was an idiot, wandering into even more danger. She paused, looking around to find her bearings.

Rose petals were scattered across the ditch.

Roses. She took a deep breath, remembering the laughing rose from earlier. It had bullied the wildflowers and now here it was, shredded to pieces.

Ace had told her just an hour earlier...bluster. Never show your fear in Luciefyore.

The seed of an idea planted itself in her brain.

The demon kidnappers had been bounty hunters. Rivals of Ace. They would be angry at her, but their fear might be greater. Either of her power, or that she would tell how the two had been together.

In either case, those two would get her to Enishka. And from there she'd find Ace.

She didn't have a plan to rescue both of them. But she was sure Enishka would agree to release him for her cooperation. After all, the demon lord wanted her.

The sound of laughter and music echoed up ahead. Rows of round tables were scattered around. Holly stood, looking around at the sea of faces. Something dawned on her at that very moment.

Demons were cliquish. All demons sat at a table of demons with the same color horns. Red-horned demons sat together. Blue-horned. Gray.

And farther ahead...gold. Holly narrowed her eyes and stomped full ahead.

Both the demons she sought sat with their backs toward her, though the other demons at the table watched her approach.

She made her voice strong and hard. "Carinsyn. Belzar. You remember me. I'm Holly."

The men jumped to their feet, ignoring the rest of the group they'd been sitting with. "What the hell are you doing here?" Belzar said.

"I'd like to talk to you both. Now."

"Who's this?" asked one of the demons, looking her up and down appreciatively.

"No one," snapped Carinsyn.

"A walk?" Holly asked, eyebrows raised. "To...talk," she said mockingly.

Carinsyn and Belzar met each other's eyes then hurriedly strode to either side of her. They took her elbows, and a burn came from the skin contact. Ignoring the pain, Holly planted her feet in the ground.

"Hands off. You don't want to piss me off."

The rest of the demons at the table looked surprised at her strong tone, as if she should have run by now. But she had to set the rules. Show them who was in charge. Show no fear. Show no pain.

But neither one dropped her arm. So she whispered, "Maybe we should just talk here, then. Really loud."

The burn stopped when the contact was abruptly removed. Apparently they had been trying to intimidate her, and one of them had the power of burning pain upon contact.

"Wise choice," she said in a smart-ass tone like her arms weren't still throbbing.

They moved down the sidewalk, a demon still on either side of her, but all three avoiding contact.

"What do you want?" snapped Carinsyn when they were far enough to not be overheard.

Holly tried to look bored. What was it that Natalya did? Holly mimicked her...by studying her cuticles slowly. She counted to ten mentally then spoke again. "When you took me, what did you intend to do with me?"

"Get rich," he sneered. "Sell the human off to Enishka. I was sure you were her."

"Well, I need you to get me there anyway."

"Riiight," muttered Belzar. "Who would be willing go to the moon of their own free will?"

"Your opinion doesn't matter. You either do as I ask, or you'll have to make sure you two are never in a room alone. Because you never know when I'll sneak up behind you and blow a little kissss..."

She moaned the word and a tingle came from the roots of where her horns should be.

"Stop," roared Belzar. "It's a deal."

Easier than expected. And she owed it all to Ace, because he had been the one to teach her how to control the power. In fact, he'd been the one to teach her she had a power.

"We'll take you back to Ace's. He has a license to grow Valnaeus. You touch it, and when you're out cold, we'll contact Enishka."

"Why do I have to be unconscious?" she said, suspicion in her voice.

"Are you kidding?" Carinsyn said. "He's insane. He'll smell a trap, especially when a demoness arrives instead of a human. With you unconscious, we can pretend a mistake was made. Hopefully he won't flip off the deep end at us."

Ace had been right. The stigma of a male-male relationship was dreaded enough to make the demons agree to face the wrath of the demon king. What a crazy, mixed-up place.

"Okay. I'll touch it."

Chapter Seven

Err on the Side of Caution

Holly came awake slowly, wondering where she was. She couldn't see. The world was covered in thick gauze.

No, not gauze...it was a smoky mist, a fog without moisture. Almost like a thick haze of black smoke...yet it wasn't burning. And she lay on the ground, not a ground of dirt like home or even in Luciefyore, but a strange, spongy surface covered in finely ground powder.

Aware of voices, she sat up.

What the hell was she wearing? A black gown, nipped in at the waist and strapless. Ugh, a Luciefyore creation, the skirt was a series of slits clear up past her hips to her waist. If she walked fast, everything would show, because chances were, there was nothing underneath.

A demon in a hooded robe stood next to her. Although she couldn't see his eyes, from the angle of his hood, his job was to watch over her. He tapped his staff three times, signaling her arousal to someone who sat on a throne of strategically placed boulders.

The enormous demon sitting on his pretend throne reminded her of a huge Jabba the Hutt. He turned his massive head away from her in order to see her.

His whole head had to turn, because his eyes were located on the sides of his face...near his temples. It was the only position in which he could see her.

Shock made her gasp. He was a monstrosity. Not just the misplacement of his features, but of him as a whole. His horns were huge and massively thick, curled like those of a ram. His nose was widened with all the extra space between his eyes and his thin-lipped mouth was a tiny round hole. The top of his head was slightly pointed, like an egg.

"You must be Holly. It's about time you woke up, you lazy demoness." The demon lord spoke in a singsong, as if he wasn't fully sane.

He stood suddenly, throwing his hands up in the air and yelling at the night stars. "Lazy, lazy. After all I've done for her! Does she even stand in my presence?"

The robed demon used his staff to poke her harshly in the upper thigh. She looked at the area where his face should have been. As he moved slightly, the shadow masking his features lifted for the briefest moment.

His flesh was crawling, alive with wriggling worms of decay, and he hissed at her. A piece of his lip fell off, dropping at the ground near her.

She jumped to her feet, afraid of the contact with the rot.

Off in the distance, Enishka clapped his hands. They were long fingered and hairy, with several knuckles spanning them, like the legs of a spider.

"Oooh, she does love me!"

He stomped his foot. Except there was no foot there, for the bottoms of his legs ended in claws. The long, curved toenails clicked on the rocks below. "And lookie, she's dressed in wedding finery."

"I didn't dress myself!"

"Nonetheless, wearing the finery means you'll have to marry."

Marry? This was the prophecy – how he'd nabbed Keara. He'd forced her to marry him, but made a mistake somehow? One that he would rectify with her?

"Someone dressed me! I have nothing else to wear!"

A long, skinny demon made a show of prancing by, naked. He turned to face her, stroking himself rudely, then turned, wriggling his ass as he walked away.

"I will not go naked!" she snapped.

Enishka smiled condescendingly. "As you wish, my sweet child."

A muffled sound came from her left. A man was tied, wrapped like a mummy, face away from her. But his horns had protruded in defense. He mumbled again, trying to tell her something.

She'd know those green horns anywhere.

She ran to Acel, ignoring the Rot Demon next to her. She reached Ace's side, turning his head.

His eyes were huge, looking past her. A gag was around his mouth, preventing him from saying anything. He was trying to tell her something with his eyes. She couldn't figure out what before the Rot Demon reached out with the hooked end of his staff and caught her around the neck.

She gagged, reaching up to insert her fingers underneath the hook. The Rot Demon was forcing her to stand. Blood poured from her fingers.

No, not her fingers. Her neck. The staff had sliced her throat.

She stood, knowing if she didn't, she'd be beheaded.

Ace was going crazy, squirming within his ties next to her, watching the blood continue to flow through her fingers. The Rot Demon kicked his head, and Ace was still.

Glowing dots swam before her eyes, swirling, growing until they resembled tiny, pixelike people. Winged figures. Fairies.

No, the fairies were real. One flew directly to her, hovering and buzzing like a bee. Her flaxen hair was the length of her entire body. She was dainty and delicate, with tiny fingernails sharpened to daggers. When the creature spoke, she had a mouth full of sharp teeth, filed to triangular points.

"Are you human? I can't tell. You seem like you are. But yet you're somehow demon too."

Holly couldn't speak, not with the staff around her throat. The fairy creature faced the Rot Demon, who dropped the staff and turned to flee. Pieces of him dripped off in his haste.

The chatter of the demons present had ceased. Whatever these fairies were, the tiny winged creatures scared them. Even Enishka was subdued.

Still, he spoke. His voice was the most sane it had been yet, pleasantly modulated. "She's completely demon."

The fairy turned her head toward him. "She has no horns."

Enishka had no response.

The fairy flew closer toward her, landing on her upper chest. The tiny being was heavier than she appeared, landing with a thump. She lapped at the blood pooled onto Holly's breastbone.

When she flew away, her mouth was bright red. And her teeth were bared in a wicked smile, sharp, little pointed teeth, double rowed, like those of a shark.

"Her blood is red," she announced.

Vicious little creature. She didn't need to taste her blood to see that.

The world was getting faint for Holly, as if it came from inside a long tunnel. Her vision was darkening, and sound was muffling.

"No, no," the fairy laughed. "No dying for you, little human-demon."

She flew to her forehead, kissing her softly. The kiss tingled for a moment then penetrated, like peppermint oil. She stood dazed, staring at the laughing fairy.

In slow motion, the Fairy Queen flew off to the Rot Demon.

The tunnel vision completely cleared, and the Rot Demon began to scream piteously. All heads turned toward the scene to watch. He was clearly petrified.

The whole swarm of fairies followed the queen over to him. Then the screaming suddenly stopped.

His rotted head, still attached to the hooded robe, lay on the ground a few feet from his body. The ground was covered in rich blue blood.

Holly felt sick, but suddenly she understood. The fairies doled out punishment based on revenge. An eye-for-an-eye type of thing, just like the creed the demons lived by. He'd sliced her throat so they decapitated him without a flinch.

Was it because the fairies deemed her human? She was still demon too. The fairy buzzing around her watched curiously.

"You *are* dressed in wedding finery. And being demon, that means you must wed. Who shall it be? Pick anyone here on the moon, demon or human."

Enishka's small mouth was smiling. Surely he didn't think she'd pick him? Was he as crazy as all that?

"I pick that green-horned demon, the one tied and gagged."

Enishka's smile grew even wider.

The fairy flew over to Ace. "He's unconscious," she announced. "No matter. Bride, come here."

Holly ran toward Ace, but there was something odd. Enishka was definitely not protesting the marriage.

Still, what were her choices? Either the demons or the lunatics in tattered scrubs.

"Hold him up," the fairy said bossily.

Holly sat behind the unconscious demon, holding his head tenderly against her breast.

A clicking noise caught her attention. Enishka's toenails, tapping on the rocks. Suddenly, as if they'd received a message, the insane humans surrounded Ace, lifting his body to force the unconscious man to stand.

Holly stood too.

"Dearly Beloved Brethren..." began someone from a distance, safely behind the throne of Enishka.

The little Snake-Demon hissed at her, and Holly realized she'd missed her cue.

"I do," she stated quickly.

A few of the fairies flew to Ace, lifting his head and dropping it quickly, to have it appear as though the unconscious man nodded.

The Fairy Queen clapped her tiny hands. "Oh, goody! I now pronounce you...man and wife."

Enishka clapped loudly, followed by the copycat, hesitant clapping of his minions. "Wonderful! Another happy, eternal marriage."

Eternal? There was a puzzle somewhere.

"You know, it's permanent here and on Earth, right?" he asked slyly.

Holly looked at the Fairy Queen, who nodded solemnly, affirming the answer.

Holly shrugged. What did it matter?

"And now I shall return the demon couple to Luciefyore. Because they are not banished to the moon as you are," squeaked the tiny Fairy Queen.

"Holly, my love. Contact me should you wish to come back home," Enishka called, laughter tingeing his voice.

Holly ignored him, gathering up the unconscious Ace in her arms. In a blink, the fairies landed them right in the middle of Court. Natalya and Jere ran down the steps toward them.

"Holly? Ace! What's happened? Where have you been? I felt portals being opened and closed, and now you're here, with protection fairies, no less."

The Queen looked into the crowd of demons, nodded once and winked away.

"Ace is hurt. We were tricked into opening a portal by Enishka. The only way to close it was to have someone go through. So Ace did."

"How is Enishka opening portals?" Jere asked.

"Somehow, somewhere, he's tapped a power source," Ace said, his voice slurred. "I think it's related to the Earth realm."

Upon Jere's signal, four servants helped Ace onto a stretcher, maneuvering him into the castle.

Holly rushed forward, reaching for Ace's hand.

He pushed her away. "Find someone else to protect you."

"But...you..."

"I can't believe you married me." The disgust in his voice was evident.

Stunned, Holly froze. Ace was carried away.

"Holly?" Natalya asked.

Holly turned toward her, barely aware that the demoness had stayed behind with her. Jere was gone, he must have walked forward with the stretcher.

"Just give him some time. He's in a lot of pain and not thinking clearly," Natalya said.

"I don't understand why he's so upset. It's not like we have to live together. If he doesn't want to, that is."

"You damned him, Holly."

"He can go his happy way. We can pretend not to be married. I want to go home anyway."

Natalya closed her eyes. She seemed to struggle to find words to explain the situation. "Holly, don't you understand yet? You can never go back to Earth. You should never have been there in the first place. And...Ace was allowed his freedom from servitude to Enishka by promising never to devote his life to another. Marriage violates that rule. Luckily Ace can't live on the moon where Enishka is. So consequently, he is damned to Hell. He's banished from here."

"We are in Hell," Holly said slowly, confusion written across her features.

"Hell is Earth, remember? You're forbidden to live there because of your parentage, but he's forbidden to live here with his violation."

"So what happens now?"

"He'll be de-horned at noon. It's a necessity. Demons can't let humans know of their heritage. Plus horns give him power and the added advantage of strength. Then he's shipped off to Hell. Your Earth. You remain here, in your Hell. Luciefyore. You and your husband are on opposite sides of the universe."

"We'll find a way. I'll get back somehow. He'll get back. Something."

"There's more. When Ace is banished to Earth, his memory will be wiped. He'll have no idea of his previous life. He'll awaken on Earth as an amnesiac with no idea of who he is or where he's from. He'll just know he's different, that he doesn't fit in."

* * * * *

It was several hours before Jere returned to the waiting room where Holly and Natalya sat in silence. "Ace and I think it's the humans opening the portals," he said. "The insane ones that Enishka has the power to call. Speaking of which, Ace will see you now, Holly."

Holly paused. While she looked forward to seeing him, she dreaded it at the same time. But this wouldn't do. If she were to remain here in this dimension, she was going to have to learn to take care of herself. She couldn't live her life the way she used to on Earth, running from the shadows. Here she needed to take charge, to bluster.

Jere and Natalya both stared, waiting for her reaction. Looking expressionless, Holly simply nodded and made her way to Ace's room.

His bed faced a window. Ace was staring off into the gorgeous pink sunset. Slowly she walked to him.

"I'm sorry, Ace."

"It doesn't matter."

"I would never have done if it if I'd known. That's what you were trying to tell me through the gag."

"I know, Holly."

The spots where she should have had horns tingled, like the beginnings of anger. "Well, dammit, Ace. I'm a big girl. This should never have happened, because you should never have sacrificed your freedom for mine in the first place."

Holly whipped her head around quickly. Slowly her hair floated around her face.

Ace looked stunned. The idea angered Holly more. Apparently she was a walking doormat if he was surprised by her temper.

"You should have been honest with me from day one. Told me about the goddamn walking trees! The Valnaeus root. Powers. Not protect me like I'm a fragile little human. You're the one who kept reminding me I'm demoness, right?"

"What do you want me to say, Holly? Yes, you are demoness. But baby, you were *raised* human. And it is my job to take care of you. Here in this place, you are helpless. Yes, you have a power but it's limited with a lack of horns. And really, Holly, when it comes down to it, the best thing you can do is distract. Distract kidnappers, murderers with a triggered lust. But what happens when it's done? You're still tied up."

Holly raised an eyebrow. "Done? When it's done? If I had known how to use it, I could have gotten away from the two idiot demon snatchers myself!"

Ace looked as if he had a child to console. "Holly, you would be an idiot for trying."

Idiot? The giant, muscle-head thought she an idiot?

"Is that so?" she asked sweetly.

Ace looked relieved, as if she had finally been convinced to see sense.

Slowly she headed toward the bed. When she got close enough, he reached out for her hand. "Baby, I know it's hard to accept. But I'm here to take care of you."

Holly leaned forward. "And my power is worthless? Only good enough for a distraction? Unimportant?"

Ace nodded, slowly. As if he didn't want to hurt her feelings.

"Get distracted by this," she snapped, and blew him a kiss.

Wham. The air thickened, sweeping across the room like a living, breathing blanket.

"Holl—" Ace began, his voice deep with lust. "Watch—"

Holly crawled onto the bed, her legs on either side of him. "Watch what, baby? Watch my lust? Don't let my itty-bitty worthless power get out?"

Ace tried to nod, but his eyelids were heavy. His gaze focused on her breasts.

"Like what you see?" she asked, her voice sultry.

Ace gulped.

One garment at a time, Holly pulled off the clothing she'd changed into. Peeling the layers he'd encouraged her to buy, exposing a little more each time. First the top garment, leaving her nipples outlined by the sheer material of the second. Then the fishnet stockings, exposing smooth skin underneath.

A small droplet of sweat broke out over his temple when the final layer left her body completely naked. She rubbed her hot core on him, letting him feel how wet she was. Her breasts stood swollen and jutted proudly, the nipples erect and pink.

"No one will come in, Ace. I unleashed my *worthless* power over the entire castle."

He stared up at her in amazement. Was his amazement due to the fact she would go this far to prove a point? Perhaps he didn't think it possible to allow her power to unleash over the entire court.

No matter. Holly took a discarded fishnet stocking and tied it around Ace's wrists then through the bars of the headboard. With his hands over his head, his triceps bulged, veins twisting up the muscles.

She leaned over and licked one.

Ace hissed.

"Sssh, naughty man," she admonished. "Now suck my nipple."

The nipples jutting outward hardened even more as she arched her back, her breasts pointing toward his mouth.

When he enclosed one in his wet mouth, swirling his tongue over the erect peak, bliss hit. But it wasn't what she wanted.

"Suck it!" she demanded.

He immediately complied, and she released her breath on an exhalation.

"Good. Now the other."

He released her breast and she angled the twin toward him. When he released it, she spoke sharply.

"Not yet."

Immediately he wrapped his lips back around the peak, sucking it into his mouth until she moaned.

"That's enough," she whispered. He released her breast then leaned back, waiting for more instructions.

She leaned forward to taste the pulse at his throat. Slowly she licked her way up to his earlobe, where she nipped it gently.

"Do you feel like licking my pussy?" she said softly in his ear.

His cock tingled in response.

"Answer me, Ace."

His Adam's apple bobbed when he swallowed. "Yes."

She rose off his body and bent backward, spreading her labia with one hand. Her pussy glistened pink inside. "Are you sure? Is this what you want?"

He licked his lips when she angled her pussy toward his face for a closer view.

"Yes, baby. Please," he pleaded.

But she never lowered her luscious lips to his waiting mouth. "Perhaps not," she said at last. "You've been bad."

Ace clenched his fists. She'd unleashed lust and then turned him down. But Holly wasn't done yet.

She rotated her hips in a sensuous circle as her fingers parted the swollen lips of her pussy. She scissored her clit while he watched, taking her time, letting him enjoy long moments of watching her masturbate.

His cock was so hard she knew it would be painful. She could see his heart pounding, as if it'd explode. He couldn't even speak, he was so turned-on.

She pulled her fingers out of her sheath and sucked on her index finger.

Now," she said as she slowly turned around to face his feet. She leaned forward on her knees, doggy-style, so her delectable ass aimed toward his face. With one hand, she reached up and spread her body for him.

"Holly," he hissed. "Untie me."

"Nope," she answered. "You've been a bad boy, thinking I'm all worthless. That I have a silly little power. But who's on top now, huh, Ace?"

She pushed her bottom closer to his face. Suddenly he snapped up and licked her slit with one long swipe.

Though it felt awesome, she pulled higher, away from his mouth. She was the one in control.

He tried to reach higher, but with his hands bound to the bed it was impossible.

"Dammit, Holly. Lower your cunt to my mouth."

In response she lowered to just beyond his reach. Then she sucked the head of his cock into her mouth. He went still then thrust wildly into her mouth. He rubbed his cheek along the back of her thigh, trying to get her to lower onto his mouth.

She could feel his frustration. But hell, she'd teach him to call her power helpless. Helpless equaled worthless.

And who was helpless now?

He was fighting his orgasm, even though his thrusts were uncontrollable. She sucked harder then used a hand to cup his balls.

The hard columns of his thighs clenched underneath her hands. "Fuck me, Holly. Lower yourself."

In response, she turned her body so she was facing him. Very slowly she lowered herself so the lips of her pussy met with the head of his cock.

She inched lower, taking a bit of him into her. She was soaked, the silk of the liquid gliding over the tip of his cock.

He looked into her eyes. "This is all your lust?"

"Nuh-uh, baby. The only reason I'm wet is because it's you, and you're luscious. I unleashed my power on everyone but me."

He looked impressed. If one could see the emotion flutter across his face. Right now Holly was more concerned with the look of heady sexual excitement rolling over his features.

Maybe he didn't love her. But hell, lust was her power. Apparently the female was in charge here in this dimension. She would damn well make him love her.

She lowered herself all the way, feeling how warm he was deep inside her. She twisted her pelvis, gripping him with her internal muscles and riding him hard. He thrust up into her, meeting her grinds.

He was close to orgasm, so Holly lifted herself up, keeping him from finishing. When he calmed she lowered herself again, starting her thrusts slowly and then building them up longer and harder.

His hands gripped the sheets, claws extending, ripping the fabric like a man possessed. His eyes rolled back in his head and his mouth opened on a gasp.

One small puff of inhalation and he lolled back, unconscious.

That was as good as it got. An orgasm so great it overcame him. Holly leaned over and gently pressed her lips to his.

She was safe now. The entire castle was on a giant wave of orgasm, so relaxed and uncaring she could practically walk away in plain view.

But she wouldn't. She'd disappear quickly and not tempt fate.

She was off his lap, had untied him and was fully dressed before he awoke. He looked surprised when he opened his eyes to find her ready to leave.

He looked at her curiously. "Did you come?" he asked.

She smiled at him. "Stop worrying about me."

"I'll always worry about you."

"That's what this was supposed to show you, Ace. I'm not completely helpless. You were."

She saw the truth in his eyes.

"Okay, your power is a bit stronger than I realized," he acknowledged. "But it's not the same as raw, brute strength. I've lived here all my life, Holly. I was trained here. Not you, baby."

"Yet you're wasting that training by being banished to Earth."

He was silent for a moment and for once she saw the true emotion of his banishment. The raw pain in his eyes before he turned away.

"There's got to be something I can do," she said, her voice breaking on a tremor.

Finally he turned to face her. A lock of hair fell over one of her eyes. He reached out, tucking it behind her ear.

"There's no way out of the agreement I made with Enishka. It was so long ago, and I didn't have a choice. I pledged myself to him for my sister's safety. He owns my soul. I was safe as long as I kept myself true to him. I knew marriage would violate that rule, which is why I never had anything to offer a woman before. Tomorrow I'll face the music and be shipped off to Earth. It wouldn't be so bad if you were there, but now you're stuck here. Without me. And I worry about you. Jere and Natalya promised to keep you safe."

"I don't want them, Ace. It's you I want. You I've always wanted."

He looked at her pleadingly. "I can't protect you, Holly."

"I don't want your protection, Ace. I want your love. I want you to love me as much as I love you."

Whether he tugged or not didn't matter. Somehow she ended up in his arms. A false sense of security engulfed her senses like she was forever safe. But this time she knew differently.

"You're finally all mine and now I have to leave you," he whispered. "I do love you."

"I love you back, Ace."

"Be good, Holly. I want you to be happy. If some other demon makes you happy, go for it."

She pulled away from him, appalled. "No one can replace you..." He covered her lips with his fingers.

"Keep an open mind. Luciefyore's a vicious place. I want you safe, and if you have to pretend to love someone else for protection, so be it."

But she knew she could never be able to. And she knew what else she had to do.

"I want you to know I love you. I'll always love you. But I can't be here and watch them drag you away to be de-horned. I have to leave now."

She could swear he looked disappointed before he wiped his face clean and nodded. "I wouldn't want you to watch. Go now."

She leaned toward him, pressing her lips to his, horribly guilty for having to disappoint him. They stayed locked together for long seconds before she pulled away, because she needed every last second before his sentencing.

She left his room, but instead of heading back to the main conference room where Jere and Natalya waited, she fled down the back steps.

"There is something I can do, my love," she whispered to the silence of the stairwell.

Because all around her, the wave of lust wasn't finished. She had sped the wave in the room she and Ace occupied.

No one would be able to intercept her when Ace realized she'd been gone and no one was responding to him.

That was when Ace understood. The rest of the castle was caught in her wave of lust and Holly had planned it that way.

She'd escaped the castle with no one to watch.

* * * * *

Outside it was nighttime in Luciefyore. But Holly was determined. Not even the changing of scenery was going to deter her from her plan.

She would try to find the area where Ace had first brought her into Luciefyore. She didn't know exactly where she entered, being out cold at the time, but surely she could find the general vicinity. It was a deeply wooded area, which meant west. Away from town.

She hurried down the walkpath, ignoring the trees that followed behind her like swaying, clumsy creatures. How long ago it seemed when a walking tree had startled her so. And when Ace had thought she was crazy. But the fear wasn't present now. Of course, there wasn't as much dark as normal. The sky seemed strangely lit for nighttime. She could clearly see the ground.

Soon she should reach the fork in the path, one of which led to town and the other to Ace's house. The third option should lead her to the woods.

The full moon shone like it was lit from inside, a hundred-watt bulb turned on when on good days it was only a sixty. It burned so brightly there was a rim of light that encircled it. Clouds raced across it, swaying like blobs of black ink.

She stopped to stare at it.

That was how she'd do it. How she'd save Ace. The full moon. Somehow.

That was the connection. The moon to the crazies. The crazies to the demon lord. He had enough power to keep Ace safe.

She moved off the path and into the wandering trees.

How to contact? How does it work? Should she concentrate? Should she...

"Where are you, child?"

The voice carried lightly, a tingling whisper in the wind. Enishka's voice, as placating and modulated now as it was when he spoke to the Fairy Queen. Apparently he pretended to be a docile benefactor in order to manipulate.

A shiver ran through her. The insane were the highest danger, with their lack of morals and consequences. Holly gave herself some inner encouragement. *Don't let him know what you want. Let him assume he's in control.*

Holly whispered back, as if she didn't care whether or not he heard. "I'm going home. To Earth, where I belong. I just have to find the portal to where it is."

That ought to satisfy him, make him believe she was an idiot female who would leave herself defenseless and at his mercy.

"Easy enough to find, if you know where to look. Or you can come visit me, here...on the moon."

"What for?"

"Just a little conversation. You're not happy in Luciefyore. Yet you cannot find your way to Earth by yourself. We can strike a deal. Your choice, sweet one."

"How do I get to you?"

"Let the insane one have you. Just walk through the gate."

What gate? She looked around and saw a shimmery spot wavering about waist-height.

Where had the gate come from? She was sure it wasn't there a minute ago. It had to be a portal. Next to it stood the man, the insane one he spoke of, standing right before her as she'd been mesmerized by the glow of the moon. A lunatic, his straitjacket hanging from his body. He grinned at her evilly.

Fear made her clench her fists. Hell no.

"Don't fight him," the voice warned. "Go with him. It's your choice. No one can make it for you."

But whatever was left of the lunatic's soul was foul. The acrid stench hit her nostrils before he could get close enough to touch her. She spun on one heel, determined to flee, but caught her breath.

There were more. Many more.

Her feet were frozen in place before their icy fingers reached out, clasping her around the arms.

Now she was scared. She screamed as loud as she could, but still they clutched, grabbing and pinching painfully.

Terror gripped her heart and still she screamed, then watched the eyes of one crazy widen frantically as he looked around at the other psychos as if to see if anyone else was in pain. She continued to yell, one long, high-pitched wail, barely aware of the psycho's eyeballs bulging.

In slow motion they burst, bloody clots of stringy material exploding onto everyone around him.

It was the last thing she remembered...other than being pulled into the gate of the portal.

Chapter Eight

Repeated Violations

This was like the last time she woke up on the moon. Dressed in clothing that wasn't hers and knocked unconscious on the rock-and-dust-embedded surface.

But instead of a black lace wedding gown, she wore the opposite. White, a thin gauzy material that formed a loose-fitting dress wrapped entirely around her.

The lunatics were still there. They chanted, perfectly synced, thirteen of them marching a blind circle around her.

Each one missing his eyeballs.

Their eyes were bloody holes in their faces, strings of clotted tissue hanging down over gaunt cheekbones.

Her stomach clenched, threatening to unload the contents within it. No one seemed to notice the injuries as they went about their business.

Suddenly a lunatic missed a step and went down. The circle continued, a heavy foot landing on his neck, crunching bone as the others continued to march over the fallen man.

Tiny little running demons skittered across, pulling the body out of the path of the marching circle. The small demons were human shaped but had rough, scaly skin, remarkably like lizards. They ran on all fours instead of standing upright on their legs.

And Enishka looked different, as if he had changed shape. Even so, he was one ugly demon. His head was too small for his body and egg shaped, the pointy end on top. The base of his skull had rolls of fat, like a package of hot dogs. His face was the same, round and fat, with a small hole of a mouth and flat, thin lips shaped into a perpetual smirk. His jowls hung heavy, making the top of his head look even more small and pointed.

But the bottom of his body was skeletal, with a huge, protruding potbelly. His feet were elongated, as if he wore flippers, or swim fins. But it was the toes that were twice the length of the foot, together the two were at least half the length of his legs.

His smirk widened into a grin when he saw she'd awakened.

"My lovely. It's your wedding night. Ooh la la."

Enishka raised his arms, striking up wind. The white gauze of her gown whipped back and forth, slapping her legs.

Holly was frozen, paralyzed in her stasis.

She couldn't move. Every muscle was heavy, uncontrolled as if her brain was disconnected from the nerves.

Enishka howled, the sound whipping through the air in piercing shrieks. "She's contaminated! Deflowered! Who has done this? She was mine, dammit, mine!"

A lizard demon ran across, running up Enishka's foot, up his leg, alongside his bony body until it perched on his shoulder to whisper loudly in his ear.

"She married the demon, remember? Your possession? You own his soul from long ago?" The lizard's voice was high pitched, as screeching as fingernails on a chalkboard.

Enishka nodded thoughtfully, as if he'd forgotten.

"Holly, my dolly. Come to me." His voice mimicked the lizard's, the pitch high like a teenaged girl.

Her feet weren't her own to control. They moved according to his whims, propelling her forward. Dread dropped her stomach. Still she walked, like a puppet controlled by his string.

When she neared, the eye facing her widened and the side of his tiny hole of a mouth opened in glee. "I have something to show you!"

He suddenly bent at the waist, flinging the tiny demon from his shoulder. Rummaging under his stone "throne", he came up with a small velvet chest.

He opened the lid, and a glow filled the air. A glow the color of sea foam...like that of Ace's horns.

Enishka slammed the chest shut, giggling heartily. "It's a soul!" he laughed. "Mine, mine, all mine! I have you to thank, stupid girl. But he can never get it back, because it was wrenched from him. Great pain and suffering, I tell you. I almost admire him for it."

It took her several seconds to get up the nerve to talk to him. "Why do you keep it if he can never get it back?"

Enishka tilted his head, staring at her for long minutes. He tunneled off into space, losing track of time, before he snapped back to the present. "He can never reabsorb his soul, but someone else might steal it from me. And it hurts, hurts sooo, to touch a soul. Burns like a thousand deaths by being dipped in acid." He eyed the lizardy demon still at his feet where he'd been flung earlier.

The demon warily began to back away.

Too late.

Enishka stomped out, smashing the lizard to smithereens. Small bits of goo exploded everywhere from beneath his abnormally long, bony foot.

"Tricky bastards," Enishka muttered. "Thieves! Robbers! Steeealers!"

Suddenly he turned, his movements jerky. "Must hide it! Must hide my prized possession! Someone will steal...someone will steal..."

The insane demon continued to mutter, placing the box back under his chair. While he was down on the ground, he began to claw at the rock. "Bury it, bury it," he chanted.

He'd forgotten about her.

Cautiously Holly stepped backward, her movements steady and slow and balanced, as if she walked a tightrope. Quietly she slid from his line of vision, where he continued to dig and chatter.

Every now and then he'd suddenly yell out, screaming that *the bastards* dared to steal. Then, that *the bitches* dared to violate him. Him. The highest ranking being in the demon realm. They'd rearranged his face and he couldn't even focus his lasers any longer.

"The Punisher. The Huntress. Hated each other. I made sure. How dare they pair up against me? One was my wife, damn her to hell! One was runner up..."

Keara and Natalya. He spoke of Keara and Natalya, Holly thought wearily.

"Oh, ow! I broke a nail!" He screeched at the top of his lungs. "But...who needs a wifey? I don't. I have a Holly. She doesn't need to marry me, 'cause she married Ace. And Ace is mine. So now...what's his is mine and what's hers is mine and what's mine is mine. I can sleep with the woman and make lots of demonic babies! Yes, yes I can. It's legal, 'cause she belongs to me as surely as she said *I do* to him. Just gotta get her to pucker up the power... Hee heee heeee."

That was the wacko's plan? To sleep with her and continue breeding? No way. There was no possible way her power could be triggered by kissing that disgusting freak.

Holly had tried to wander from his camp. But the razor-sharp teeth of the lizard demons had snapped at her feet whenever she got too far away.

She rested her head on a rock pillow, as far from the idiot as she dared. The bellows became wearying to her now, whereas once they might have scared her. The lizards had wandered off and were now feasting on the human who had been crushed in the circle stampede.

"Woman! I want you here," called out the Demon Lord.

"So?" Holly kept neutral.

His voice turned still. Seconds passed. "You love your Earth so much you feel human instead of demon. You completely ignore your demon genes, or you would be more respectful toward me. You would understand I'm the supreme being of all demons."

"I am not demon."

"On the contrary, love. You even married one. The unconscious green-horned guy? Remember him?"

"If I were a demon, why would a married woman breed with someone other than her husband?"

"Your customs are no longer along the human lines. They are the demon ways. If your husband cannot impregnate you – which yours can't, by the way, with that whole long-distance relationship thing of living on two different realms – then you are allowed to breed elsewhere. Why, your marriage hasn't even been consummated,

because tonight is your wedding night! Of course, it must be your choice. That's the way of the world in Luciefiore. The female gets to choose. The male just takes her other choices from her."

"You knew Ace would be banished to Earth for marrying! You tricked me! And I will never make the choice to breed with someone other than my husband."

There was silence while Enishka clicked his clawed toes. Picking up a bundle of straws shaped like a broom, he began to brush away the sand on his feet to clean them. But the sand mixed with the blood from the squashed lizard made a gelatinous mud. Still he brushed at it as if spots were disappearing.

Finally he stopped. Holding up the broom, he fingered it thoughtfully.

"Do you know what they did to the witches on your precious Earth? They tested them. To see if they were human. They dipped your head in water until you either confessed to practicing the witchcraft they accused you of, or you drowned, proving your humanity in the end." He laughed uproariously. "Funniest thing was...the witch hunters were actually on to something. It wasn't real witches they sought, but a little unforeseen problem with the demon eggs I'd hidden in your realm. Those demons in your dimension had too much strength and extra senses—powers that the humans did not. They thought them witches and killed them off."

"Then there are no more demons on Earth?"

"Not full-blooded. But many of those demons spawned before they died, impregnating human females. That is where you came from, my child."

"But I wasn't hatched! I was born."

Enishka looked bored as he studied his clawed nails. "Maybe. But you ripped your mother's uterus from her womb, did you not?" He clapped his hands together, the nails clacking noisily. "Bravo! True demon spawn you are! How many humans can do that?"

Holly felt sick. Her mother never had any other children.

"I'm not demon."

"Denial gets you nowhere. But see, you have a remarkable power. A power I can obtain should you become the mother of my children. Now that you're a married woman, breeding with the demon lord is not out of the question."

"Forget it."

"Ahh, but my dear. Should you want the alternative? The earthling custom of witchcraft testing?"

A shiver ran down her spine, but instinct told her to stay mute. To not rile him.

"Then you give me no choice."

Enishka stood, clawed feet clinking on the rock ground. The small, lizardlike demons rushed awkwardly, their skeletal legs twice the length of their bodies. They scuttled over the surface of the moon at warp speed to reach her, appearing at her side almost instantly.

She opened her mouth on a startled scream, but their slimy fingers were already reaching for her wrists and ankles, lifting her, raising her to scant inches from the ground to race along horizontally to a shallow well of water in the center of Enishka's platform.

Her scream let loose, long and loud and fearful.

"Motherfu—" Enishka shrieked in pain, slapping his head with his palms.

The wail was silenced when her head was plunged into the water.

"Keep her immersssed," Enishka hissed. He pulled his hands from his ears, glancing angrily at the blood spattered on his palms. He wiped his palms across his abdomen and slowly waited.

One by one, the demonic creatures holding on to Holly began to look his direction, waiting for his instruction to lift her.

The seconds ticked.

Lizard necks began to twist back and forth, panicking at the lack of command, knowing something had to happen before the fragile human died.

The bubbles that had been breaking the surface of the water began to slow.

The lizards were twitching frantically, glancing alternately at each other and the dark master.

Surely they would all be punished for killing a human.

Taking an annoyed sigh, Enishka flicked his pointer finger upward, signaling her head to be raised.

When the lizards released her, she inhaled an enormous gob of air and immediately choked and coughed water from her lungs. The demons standing around the pool flinched at the gagging noises.

When her breathing began to normalize finally, Enishka gave the signal again.

She was re-dunked.

Time seemed to stop along with the lack of sound as she was submerged in the water. Almost as if she immediately entered another reality. Her hair floated in the pool around her, weightless and silky. But there, in the bottom of the well, when she lost her breath again...she began to see.

A tiny pinprick of light.

Tunnel vision. Was it lack of consciousness? No, wait.

There was something here.

Down below the black dots of her eyes, the inky darkness of the water, the swirls of her consciousness, there was a link to Luciefiore. Like the gate she'd traveled through. A black hole in the middle of nowhere.

But again, her head was pulled up from the water. It wasn't as painful this time, though the sputtering of water from her mouth and nose was involuntary. She was almost desensitized, the burn in her nose and lungs lessened by the numb feeling.

Enishka allowed her to catch her breath this time, an honest-to-goodness recovery. He waited calmly until her breathing normalized.

"What say you, sweets? You can bear my child or return to the witchcraft trials. After all, you want your Earth so badly, even enough to face their barbaric customs like this one."

There was one focus on Holly's mind. She had to get back into the water to see if it was truly a portal down beneath.

She knew what she had to do.

Deliberately she cocked her head to one side. "Oh, I'm sorry," she mocked. "Was I actually given a choice? Because I think you forgot to mention that part."

"You dare to mock me, woman?" he shrieked.

"I mock the fact that you truly believe I would bear your children rather than face my own drowning."

He stared in astonishment for a moment. Then he stamped his foot. "Then you shall drown until you decide to kiss me, Holly Dolly. Demonic kisses. The kind only you give."

The kind that triggered her breeding power.

Holly stared straight at him. Then she broke her gaze and deliberately dropped her own head into the water.

Screw him. She may not enjoy her power, but damned if she would let someone else control it.

It didn't take as long before the colors swirled her vision.

Where was it? She shook her head frantically, as if she could see farther. What was it that she saw before? A pinprick of light? A tunnel of some kind? Dammit, where was it?

The lizard creatures weren't holding her down now. And she realized this time her hands were there in the water with her. Frantically, she cleared the water before her, as if by doing so she could see farther through the murky depths.

Where was it?

There. The tiny swirling of inky blackness, growing wider, deeper, opening up like a maelstrom in the water, but not yet extending to the surface. She extended both hands toward it, reaching out as her consciousness slipped farther and farther away.

Chapter Nine

Taunting Time

"Where is she?" Enishka screamed, sending hundreds of lizard demons scattering every which way.

She'd been there a second ago, half her body immersed in the pool before she was sucked in as a whole. It was a shallow pool. There was no way she could just disappear.

Someone helped her to hide. Damn the traitorous creatures, not fully his to command on this substandard planet called a moon. He'd smash them to smithereens.

He raised his arms palm-up, so all the creatures who tried to scuttle away were raised by his power alone, several feet from the ground, supported without gravity even as their bony arms and legs continued to run in the air.

Like metal pieces to a magnet, the suspended lizards swarmed to him.

His face grew to fifty times its normal dimensions, close enough to whisper at them. "Where the hell did she disappear to?"

The terrified creatures of the moon all began to chatter in nonsensical ways, as if they just wanted to speak because he asked the question when they didn't really have an answer. All their small minds could comprehend was, "Don't anger the master".

The volume of the chatter stopped when a three-foot tongue snaked from Enishka's mouth and wrapped around one of the floating lizards, pulling him into his mouth.

Enishka chewed slowly, thoughtfully. She was still here, somewhere. He could feel her, she had so much energy within her tiny human form. She felt more demonic than the annoying little scuttle demons he was banished with.

He had an idea.

"Hannah malchuka, hear my call," he chanted.

He rolled his head, hearing the bones of his neck pop. This would take a lot of power, he would be extremely weakened. Probably wouldn't be able to change forms at will for a while. But it would be so worth it.

"Enishka, the demon lord, dares to fold the fabric of time to create a ridge. A temporal fold, a furrow between the worlds. Let her skip"—he paused for effect—"then-loop-the-wrinkle!" He stamped his foot, yelling the words out quickly. "Just when she thinks she's safe...rein her back," he dropped his voice to whisper, "to where she belongs."

The wind picked up, hurling rocks into a spiral shape that disappeared from sight.

* * * * *

When Ace arrived at Demitris' house, Keara and Natalya already sat together at the dining room table. It was still an odd sight for him to see, the once mortal enemies now turned best friends.

"Any word?" he asked, desperate for someone to have heard anything about Holly. Both women shook their heads.

"Anyone see you cross a portal?" Keara asked.

"No, I was careful. So where is she? She can't just disappear."

"I know. But no one can find her. She's not on Earth, she's not in Luciefyore. We need you to track her."

"How can I? I'll be de-horned tomorrow at noon. I'll be powerless then."

"Then you'll need to track her now."

"Who's searched the moon?" Demitris asked.

"She can't be on the moon. How would she get there?" asked Ace.

"I don't know but we have to be sure she's not. Or on Earth. If she crosses the threshold of the human realm, then her soul belongs to him. For it was decreed years ago that she would be found in Hell by Enishka, the darkest lord himself. He would take her and she *would* lose what humanity she has."

"How can I keep her from crossing before that happens?"

"A guard stands to protect the portal to another world. He keeps those from the wrong species of crossing."

"Holly is a human of demon descent. She is entitled to belong in both worlds."

"Yes," Natalya murmured. "That is a dilemma. If the guard let her cross a portal, you can bet Enishka already has her."

"I am powerless there. And I can't return to Luciefyore without her," Ace said.

"You can escape punishment on a condition. If you were on a mission, perhaps. Your job title is still bounty hunter. If you had to protect your charge..."

"You seem to forget I lost my charge."

"If you were to find her, you could return to Luciefyore with the excuse that you couldn't have her on Earth because of the prophecy. But you couldn't leave her unprotected. She is as fragile as a human, being raised without using her powers. In fact, she was even dehorned as an infant. She has never had horns rise."

"How can I get to her?"

"If she is not in Luciefyore, because Natalya checked, and she is not here on Earth, because you and Keara have searched, there is only one place she can be," Demitris said.

"Enishka already has her."

He nodded gravely. "Yes, my boy. She must be on the moon."

"How?"

"How did he trick you and Holly into getting there yesterday?"

"He changed the borders...of a gate. Not an actual portal. Which bypassed portal guards. But how the hell would I get there?"

"It would be impossible for a demon. Only a human or a half-breed would be able hop an opened gate. But in payment, that human does not receive a round trip. They are forced to spend the remainder of their days."

"Why the hell would any human agree to such insanity?"

"It is said that Enishka can control those in the insane asylums on Earth," Demitris said slowly. "That's it. That's how Enishka is opening portals. He's using the few people on Earth with abilities to open gates."

"Wait," Natalya said. "If he can do it, so can we. Demitris, remember when I was on here on Earth? And I cast a few spells?"

"Yes?"

"The old woman who provided me her urine for a spell would have bits of my residual magic."

"She does," Keara said excitedly. "And now she's taken up with two friends. They've set up a fortuneteller's shop downtown."

"Does she have enough to use to open a gate, should she know to attempt it?"

"Please," Natalya said, rolling her eyes. "It is my magic. Of course it will be great."

"How will I find her?" asked Ace.

There was silence at the table for a bit while they all pondered.

"I know," Demitris said. "We can access Natalya's memory of the old woman, and you will know what she looks like. Keara will lead you downtown, you can find the woman and her friends and get her to open a gate."

"How do we access a memory?" Acel asked.

Natalya responded. "We need water."

"There's a pond in the backyard," Demitris said.

All four demons rose from the table and headed quickly to the backyard. Standing close to Natalya, Acel observed the blonde demon. She had reached the pond first and looked down into the smooth surface.

The water rippled softly. Natalya continued to concentrate on the water, her horns growing until they protruded from her head full size.

Acel realized... in her reflection in the water, she didn't have the horns.

Then, in the water, her image wandered over to a park bench, next to an old woman. Through the memory he could feel the disgust wafting off Natalya in waves. Then he smelled why. The woman reeked, a rank ammonia smell. So this was what accessing a memory was like – watching a movie rewind, complete with sensory detail.

"Not that." To his surprise, Natalya shattered the image with her hand dipped quickly into the water, sending spattering ripples across the surface.

When the water calmed, it showed Natalya again, this time with her husband Jere. It was later now, Natalya's hair was a bit longer. Together she and her husband watched an old woman, obviously wealthy, walking with an older gentleman. She was the same woman as in the previous memory, but so much different now. Something had changed her.

Not something. Natalya had changed her with a bit of demon magic power.

Now the same old woman was thin and wealthy and made up like a hooker. Still, if he could recognize her face in both images, he was sure he'd find her no matter what she looked like now.

The Huntress looked down tenderly at the image, the most emotion he'd ever seen on her face. Unless she looked at her husband. "Ahh, my pet," she murmured to the image.

Suddenly she seemed aware that he watched. Her head snapped up. Natalya looked at him, her eyes eerily lit by a silvery glow from within like flashbulbs. "Do you have enough?"

"Yes, my Queen." He nodded respectfully, eager to seek out the humans. And finding it painful to look into the iridescent silver of her eyes.

* * * * *

Alone, Ace entered the darkened tent and spoke, not bothering to allow his eyes to adjust.

The three old women stank of human urine, much like the memory of Natalya's had. It was a strong smell, enough to cause him to wrinkle his nose. At least in the memory, his brain knew it wasn't in the air.

"I am Acel, a bounty hunter from Luciefyore. I am missing someone. I was told the three great human fortunetellers could help me find her."

All three old hags were seated together at a round table with a huge crystal ball in the center. One of them was the creamy color of chocolate, a bright purple turban wrapped around her head. Huge earring hoops hung from her long, stretched earlobes and she wore a gold and purple satin dress, resembling a tent.

The second hag wore a wig of waist-length blonde hair cut into Farrah Fawcett waves. She fingered one lock incessantly, trying to call attention to the unnatural seventies 'do. She had about three tubes of mascara on her eyes, so her eyelids barely held open with the weight. Constantly she peered at him from underneath her lashes as if she thought her directness was sexy.

But the one in the middle was who he remembered from Natalya's shared memory. That one dripped with furs and diamonds and wore fuchsia spandex pants with a thin gold top that might have been attractive on a girl in her twenties. And the old woman

had the implants of a twenty-year-old. Her breasts stood high and firm, pointing attention to the wrinkles in her face filled in with cream foundation and a spatula.

"I am Madame Rrrena." She yelled her name as if she had a Latin accent, barely able to speak through the high gloss red lipstick. She'd had a bit more plastic surgery done besides her breasts — her lips were swollen as if a bee had stung them repeatedly.

His attention was diverted by the next old shrew dressed in the purple and gold. "I is Madame Mo-Neeka. So nice to meet you, mon." He fought the urge to roll his eyes. This one thought she was Jamaican.

"And I am Madam Treesssh-a." The Farrah one said her name with wide eyes, as if she thought to impress him. Or make sexual eye contact. Unfortunately, she didn't seem to have a culture to lay claim to, but it did appear she was trying to hit on him by the way she kept fluttering her lashes, most of which resembled thickened spider legs. All three women were as deaf as doornails and used amplified tones that caused him to wince.

This was going to be more difficult than he'd imagined.

"Ladies, I need your, um, world-renowned powers to open a portal."

"What will you give us in return?" asked the one with huge false teeth.

Wait a moment. The one in the center was sneaky. He'd have to distract her.

"Are you really Latin?" he squinted at her.

"Well...uh...I'm a lot of races," she informed him. "*I might* be Latina in my blood. I have a nice ass. And I sure can shake it."

"Yep, yep," her crazy sisters agreed. "She really can move."

"Yeah, mon, you should see her salsa," Mo-Neeka said. "You can't even tell she had a hip replacemen'."

"That's cause of the magic spell," Trisha muttered.

She was elbowed by the other two. "Shh!"

But he wasn't about to let it pass.

"Magic spell?" Ace asked.

"Ours, Bounty Hunter. We are very powerful beings." Obviously lying, but they had some sort of residual magic from Natalya's spell casting during her time on earth, enough to make them successful fortunetellers.

The one named Trisha looked through her thick glasses at him. "Let's talk payment for our services." She waved her hand over the fake crystal ball in the center of the table.

Nothing appeared.

"Hmm. Maybe needs polishing." She pulled her bag out from under the table and began to rifle through it. A foil packet escaped, landing on the table in front of him.

"Oops," she muttered, grabbing at it. No wonder this old one smelled of rubber. Her purse was filled with condoms. Slyly she peered up through her lashes and winked. Ace realized she'd planned the accidental maneuver. Eww.

"Weren't you already given plenty of payment?" He turned and looked at Madame Rena this time.

"I-I don't know what you're talking about, crazy," she muttered, peering at her psychic sisters out of the corners of her eyes.

"Your payment, old witch. The life you traded in for this one."

She clacked the gold of her rings together. "Hey, I paid for what I got, sonny! You hear me? I don't owe you horned weirdos nothing."

He raised his eyebrow. "Really? What was your payment? One cup of...pish?"

"What's he talking about, Rrrrena?" one of her sisters asked. Ace felt like smacking his head. Did they really think that by rolling their rrs, the accent was made believable?

"Don't listen to the *chico*. He's crazy." But she looked guilty.

"Is you acceptin' money for jobs behind our backs, mon?" demanded the Jamaican wannabe.

"No! No, in fact, we need to banish the troublemaker before he says anything else. Now."

"Not without that portal," Ace said calmly, leaning back in his chair with his arms crossed.

"Fine!" she agreed, as if desperate to promise anything as long as he'd stay quiet.

"Rena!" hollered Mo-neeka.

"Fine! We'll just get rid of him, give him his damn portal."

"I think we can only do it one way," Trisha said slyly. "We might have to get naked under a full moon, do an all-out threesome."

"Nuh-uh, tramp," Mo-neeka muttered. "I seen u naked, mon. Besides it ees not a threesome when dere is *four* of us."

"I can't help my lusty sexy drive," Trisha yelled. "It's a gift and a curse! Ever since that cute little cover model described me and Rena as exotic and erotic, you've been jealous!"

"That was forty years ago, mon! Those cute cover models are bald and fat now."

"Well, I do have really nice maracas," Rena said, sitting straighter so her odd-shaped breasts pointed freakishly outward.

Ace thought it best to cut in. "Anyway, I'm on antibiotics until a little case of the itchies clears up," he mentioned to the group as a whole.

The three women stopped screaming back and forth.

"Oh. Yuck, then," Trisha muttered. "Let's send the freako on his way."

"That's what I said," Rena yelled, forgetting her Latin accent for a moment.

"Okay, okay. But when he leaves, we're gonna talk." The eighty-year-old version of Farrah threatened with narrowed eyes.

"Yeah, mon! Cuz I don't like the way you was pointin' those things at Harold when we done gone to the senior center," the Jamaican yelled, glaring at Rena's abnormal breasts.

"Hey, hussy, it's not my fault. The girls have a mind of their own!" Rena was still enamored with her boobs, staring at them lovingly instead of at the angry Mo-neeka.

"You popped out your goddamn teeth and stared suggestively at his crotch!" Mo-neeka yelled.

Rena raised her eyeballs to Ace, sharing a confidence. "I prefer the Latin lover. The dark, swarthy types."

"Ladies, please," Ace said, trying to produce his most sincere smile even though all they did was try his patience. "Can you produce a spell with true magic or not?"

"Of course we can," they said in unison, as if his question was ludicrous. "We just gotta dance."

Dance?

"We were born to dance." Trisha rose and hobbled over to a piece of machinery in the corner. She pushed a button with her gnarled old finger and tunes blasted.

With her back to them, one bony old hip began jutting, the only body part moving, reminiscent of Michael Jackson.

At the table, Rena and Monika began moving their heads. Rena's slid side to side which quivered her false teeth oddly, while Monika's bumped out and in, wobbling her double chin. Both began to rise from their seats in odd, jerky, zombielike movements.

Trisha still stood with her back to them. "Start it slow, ladies. One body part at a time to warm up." Now the other hip began to rock back and forth.

The bony, birdlike shoulders of Rena began to maneuver, one up, one down.

Monika swiveled her hand over her eyes, waving it vertically like an exotic belly dancer.

Was Natalya kidding? These three nutcases had some sort of capability to open a portal? He rose from the table, knowing his time here was wasted. But the beat of the music had changed now, and the ladies were in full swing, cackling among themselves.

It was a little bit like looking at a train wreck. You know you should look away before you witness the gore of death, but yet...you can't.

Each was in her own little world, focused on being the star of her own show.

"Look at me, Moe," Rena grated shrilly. "I'm still the best belly dancer around."

"Can't," panted Monika. "The salsa has me in its grip."

Poor Madame Treesha was busy humping a pole.

Chapter Ten

Ramifications

This was an absolutely crazy waste of time. Ace strode from the room, heading out the back way, leaving the dancing old women behind. What now?

There was a water fountain up ahead. Maybe if he looked into the water, it would help clear his mind. Maybe he'd even get a vision, like Natalya had.

Water was revered in Luciefyore, while the selfish human race had so much of it they took it for granted. They didn't even bother to care for it, polluting it with harsh chemicals and wondering why their planet slowly poisoned.

He sat down on the concrete edge and stared into the water. In his mind's eye, he could see the image of Holly.

Son of a bitch, it wasn't his mind's eye. She was there, staring back at him through the murky depths. The crazy old fools had done it. They had released a gate.

Holly was frozen in time, suspended in horror.

He reached in. The water had thickened like clear gelatin. He tried to pull her out, but it held tight, holding her a silent prisoner. He yanked harder and the water released with a pop, as if a vacuum seal had broke. She took a huge gasp as she sucked air into her lungs. He held her close, wrapping her shivering body against him. He wouldn't let her go again, especially when she began to cry softly.

"Oh, baby, it's okay. You're safe," he crooned, smoothing her back.

"Did I...did I...die? Am I dead?"

He lifted her face with a finger underneath her chin. "No, Holly, no. You're alive, you're here with me."

"But how?" she sobbed. "I drowned."

He was aware he was holding her too tight, but he couldn't seem to help himself. He took a deep breath, forcing himself to relax. "You're on Earth now. With me. I'm going to keep you safe. He won't get to you again."

"But Ace," she said, sitting with wide eyes. "It's not safe here. He can enter the minds of the lunatics."

"I know, sweetie. We figured out that's how he got you through a gate. Humans took you through, and it had to be humans who weren't in their right minds, because they would know it would be impossible to come back."

She looked serious. "I don't want him to get to you, Ace."

"I'm the big bad. Don't worry about me." He swung her up in his arms, cuddling her against his broad chest. "Close your eyes and let me take care of you."

When Holly opened them next, they were walking into a motel room.

"This is where you're staying?" she asked.

"Yup. I couldn't stay with Keara and Caleb. It would be a little obvious there and I'm undercover."

"You're banished here, right? On Earth?"

"Not yet, baby. Once I've been dehorned. However, I snuck over here to search for you when you went missing."

"How did you get through?"

"A portal. I still have my bounty hunter's pass."

She seemed to be quiet for a couple of minutes as she processed this much.

"Holly," Ace prodded gently. "What happened to you? On the moon?"

Her eyes glazed over, but her face grew calm. Enishka was unlike anything she'd ever experienced. And she'd run from many, many odd things during her life.

The monster was the worst. He was the epitome of everything she'd always feared. Everything that went bump in the night. Every nightmare that had ever woken her and made her chest pound.

Right now she felt safe enough to talk about it. She had Ace's arms wrapped around her and his scent mingled with hers.

Still, tears continued to stream down her cheeks. "He wants my power. He thought he'd breed with me. Now that you're my husband, he said he has the right to give me demon babies."

"He does," Ace gritted his teeth. "But I'll die keeping him off you. He owns me, Holly. By breaking my word and marrying, I gave you to him. You belong to him just as much as I do now."

Holly sobbed harder.

Ace held her to him, helpless frustration making his horns extend. "Baby, don't cry. You won't have to breed with that thing. I'll slice the head from his body. He may own me, but he can't have you. I'd rather face a thousand deaths than let him have you."

Holly stopped crying and leaned back. Something about his horns being extended in defense strengthened her emotions, as if her horns would rise with his. If she had horns. But even without, she saw through the situation enough now. "Ace, we have to get your soul back from him."

"It doesn't do any good, Holl," he said sadly. "It won't do me any good. It takes so much to remove it, it can't be reinserted. It's his now."

"How painful was it?"

"Like feeling a thousand deaths. Like watching your children die in your arms. Like witnessing your mother being tortured before your eyes."

Holly leaned her forehead to his, resting for a moment, giving him what little strength she could. They leaned in silence for a bit. He'd suffered so much in his dimension. And yet all these demons thought she was the one who lived in Hell.

"Ace, what were all the little fairies?"

Ace's jaw tightened, remembering when Holly had seen the protection fairies. Her blood had been spilled for them to show up. "They enforce the laws for humans. A demon can't harm a human, and they deemed you human because of the color of your blood. Enishka and the Rot Demon had to be punished for your injury."

"So fairies are like your police?"

"Not ours. They're human protectors. Policing is more the job of the Council. Remember when Keara and Natalya rearranged Enishka's face? The Council let the punishment stand because demons are rare to breed and Enishka burned out Natalya's eggs. Who knows how many might have hatched should she have chosen to bear children?"

"Are they demons? The beings of the Council?"

"Not exactly. They're... Well, I guess earthlings would call them Greek gods, or something like that. Caleb, Keara's husband, is related to Eros. They police both worlds, keeping the realities from crossing over."

"What are they like?"

"They always appear around a large table. They dress in white robes, with gold ties around the waist. They're completely expressionless, and only one of them speaks for the rest. They're...different. But their word is law. Piss them off and they'll mute you instantly, without a second chance. Or freeze you and force your compliance."

"The fairies didn't care that I was being tricked into marrying you."

"No, they're impish. Both good and evil, you know? The Council is neutral."

Holly remembered the viciousness of the tiny Fairy Queen tasting her blood.

"Yeah, I do know. I'm sorry I picked you to marry."

"Baby, what else could you do? There was no one else for you to choose. I wasn't upset at you marrying me, I was upset because I knew it gave Enishka access to you. And Holly, I'll die protecting you."

Ever so slowly, she moved her lips toward his. She pressed to him, slanting her mouth over his.

He opened his mouth, silently encouraging her. "I missed you, baby."

"I love you, Ace," she whispered, then closed her mouth over his. There was no more holding back, not when life could be so short.

Power erupted. She poured everything she had inside her into him, nourishing him, giving him all she was worth.

He gasped, his eyes popping open, bright green, the color rich and full. She smiled knowingly, a woman confident and in control, for she'd done this.

She kissed him again, touching her tongue to his and sliding against him.

His lips curved into a wicked smile. "Baby, you're dangerous," he whispered. "Enishka has no idea."

Holly unbuttoned his shirt slowly, not bothering to resist the urge to run her palms over the muscles of his chest. His pecs twitched beneath her hands.

God, he was sexy. He really thought she was the dangerous one?

Sliding her hands up his shoulders, she pushed the shirt over his arms, hearing the rasp as it slithered from his shoulders and hit the bed behind them.

Next she pulled his belt from his slacks, popping the snap of his waistband open and sliding her fingers across his taut abs. His skin was warm and clenched tight under her touch.

Holly smiled. "I guess it's okay that I'm using my power...because you are my husband. And unable to run."

"Very unable," he agreed. "Looking forward to spending my life with you, little human."

"It's a date," she smiled.

She had to lean down to lick a nipple, making him gasp. His hand gripped the back of her head gently, pressing her to him so she'd lick him even more. Her fingernails were lightly tracing the ridges of muscles on his chest, running along his sternum to touch tantalizingly on the inner waistband of his jeans.

"Oh, baby, you're wicked," he groaned.

She rose back up to suck on the side of his neck, biting gently and then soothing the mark with her tongue.

"There's so much I want to explore with you, Ace," she said. "But it all starts with getting you good and completely naked. I want to see every inch of your body, I want to tongue every inch of you."

Her fingers reached the bulge in his pants. She flitted over it lightly, teasing him with her touch. He grasped her hand, holding it firmly over his erection like he never wanted her to let go.

"That feels good," he muttered between kisses.

"It'd feel better if you let go of my hand so I can go under your pants. My palm against bare skin."

His hand immediately lifted from hers. "I like having a wife," he said.

"I like having a husband."

"Good thing, because you're going to have one for the rest of your life, baby doll."

"My husband should take care of me, Ace," she said teasingly.

"Mmm," he responded. "And what do you need, love?"

He bent his head to trace the pulse near her throat. His tongue was hot, feverish with need.

"I need you to undress me," she gasped.

She didn't need to ask twice. The gauzy white of her dress slipped easily from her shoulders and slid down her body.

"You are so beautiful. You know in the beginning I triggered your lust on purpose to get in your pants, right?"

"What?"

"When I first met you. I had to have you and you weren't interested in me at all. You just pined after all the wimpy humans. So I triggered your power."

"And here I felt guilty for seducing you."

Somehow they were on the bed and Holly was writhing on top of Ace. She was completely naked and the bulge in his pants was hitting her in the most delicious spot.

The waistband of his pants fell apart and now there was just the thin material of his boxers separating her from the throbbing in his cock.

She rubbed against it some more, barely aware of when Ace slid down his underwear enough to expose his erection.

Oh, blessed skin contact! The friction was awesome, the warmth of his skin hitting her sensitive clitoris. If she pressed hard and ground her cunt against him harshly, the silky liquid from inside her smeared onto him and found its way upward to moisten her clit.

She needed more. She lifted her hips just a few inches and when his erection sprang up, she impaled herself on it in one fell swoop.

It slid through her swollen flesh and filled every inch of her. She rested her head on his shoulder for a minute, savoring the feeling of his cock deep within her pussy.

"This is where I was meant to be," he murmured.

"Me too, demon," she responded.

His large hands gripped her hips and moved her back and forth. "Mmm, Holly, ride me."

He leaned up and captured a nipple between his lips, sucking it hard enough to send tingles down to her loins, triggering her sheath to clench.

She leaned back and lifted herself from him. He looked at her questioningly, but she only smiled naughtily. Crawling away from him, she lowered herself to all fours so her bottom pointed at him.

"Take me like this," she commanded.

She could see their reflection in the mirror on the dresser next to the bed. Ace immediately rose, his cock gleaming with her fluids. Stroking it lightly, he aimed it toward her slit, which was so swollen it looked like it would cushion him. He passed the head of his shaft up and down her a few times before sinking back in.

He pulled out and clutched her hips. He jerked her back toward him and then held her still. "Baby, you feel so good," he muttered.

Watching in the mirror, she saw him staring at her exposed ass. He licked his finger then slowly traced it through her crack. Finding the puckered rim of her anus, he gently massaged.

She gasped, gripping his cock with her cunt.

"Like that, Holly?"

"Mmm," she breathed.

Very gently, his finger dipped into her rear entry. She arched her back. Just one finger in her tightened everything so deliciously.

"Oh, baby. I want you to feel good every day," he muttered, twisting his hips to press his cock against the lip of her cervix.

"More, Ace," she panted, pressing backward into the sexy demon. "Give it to me harder."

In and out his erection plunged, the huge head of his cock sliding against her internal walls. Explosions racked her body and she arched her back.

Ace watched her climax in awe. She was beautiful, her spine arched delicately. He leaned forward and kissed a slim shoulder, then cupped her heavy breasts in his hands. Gently tugging on her nipples made her moan with pleasure.

He sucked on her neck, thrusting hard into her, until his own orgasm came in a gushing spurt of hot liquid.

Slowly he released her, where she collapsed on the bed, wrapping arms and legs around him. "Baby, I'd love to cuddle you, but we'd end up having sex again. You relax, take a shower when you want. I have some calls to make, okay?"

She murmured something at him and pressed her lips to his.

* * * * *

When Holly had finished up in the shower, she left the bathroom dressed in a towel just as Ace closed the outer room door.

"Ace? I can't wear the slimy dress I arrived in."

"I know. I called room service to bring you up a dress from the shop downstairs."

Holly smiled. "Do you think of everything?"

Ace kissed the tip of her nose. "Yes. I take care of you, remember? Now get dressed, love. We have to get you back into Luciefyore." He handed her the dress.

Holly dropped the towel to the floor. Casually, as if she didn't noticed that he stared, she slid the dress over her head. "Panties?" she whispered.

He shook himself. Then he walked over to her, dropping to his knees in front of her. He touched her thigh to get her to lift her leg, then slid her panties over an ankle. She placed that foot on the floor and raised her other leg. He slid the panties up over the second ankle and waited for her to place that foot on the floor. Then he slowly pulled them up her legs.

She gathered the bottom of her dress up, held tight under her breasts.

Ace made sure the waistband of her panties was straight, staying kneeling before her. Then he placed a kiss on her mound.

She inhaled sharply.

"Maybe we have time to trigger that lust before we head to Luciefyore?" he teased. "Nah, let's get you over the border, and then we can have all night in our own bed."

Contrary to his words, he slid the elastic of her panties to one side and licked up her slit.

Whoosh! Heat slammed into her loins in a rush.

"You just triggered my power. I think we'll have to run full speed down to Luciefyore."

Ace stood, smiling as he leaned forward and kissed her lips. One finger straightened her underwear and cupped her mound through the thin fabric. She dropped her dress over his hand.

She was wet through her panties.

He kissed her lightly, his breathing deep. "We do have to hurry. And then we're holed up at home, in bed, for three days straight."

A thrill of excitement shot through her at the prospect of walking home horny and swollen.

She brought her arm up around his neck and licked his lower lip.

"Holly, your power feels different."

No sooner as he spoke than she was yanked from him, her body flung backward at warp speed, until she nearly slammed into the wall behind her. But instead the wall disappeared like a small dot when she was sucked into a circular spot.

Unlike the last time when she'd leaped into a portal, this one felt different. Yes, it was a strong vacuum. But instead of the air pressure condensing around her, it came from the inside out.

All around her, scenes replayed. Back when Ace had first accosted her on Earth. No wait, now it was their wedding. Oh, it was back to when they were shopping for demoness clothing.

Time was flipping back and forth without continuum. Flowing before her eyes, washing through her in waves. Holly had been in the odd bubble of pressure for years now.

No. Now it had just been a few seconds.

Suddenly it was yesterday. Now it was tomorrow.

Panic hit her midsection, flowing through her veins until her fingers and toes tingled. Should she jump out? When would she leap? How would she get back to Ace?

* * * * *

Back on the parody of a Luciefyiore moon, Enishka clapped his hands. "Do you feel it?" he yelled, stamping his foot and squishing another scuttle demon that was foolish enough to run across his path. "We have a bit of power brewing! Yes! A breeding power. And I...have...eggs."

Lightning struck as he raised both clawed hands to the sky.

"The breeding! The breeding! There we go," he screamed. "Quickly now, unbury the eggs. They've been waiting for quite a while. Take care, for every egg you break, you'll pay with a testicle."

The scuttle demons gulped, looking at each other's groins. They only had two each.

Enishka continued to pace, even as the demons began to frantically dig with bare fingers at the rough, rocky surface of the moon.

"I'm gonna be a daddy," he sang. "Stupid Natalya. Stupid Keara. Stupid Holly Dolly. None of them ever caught on. I'm an egg stealer. I hid some on earth... Duh, Holly Dolly should have known that, she was one. Keara I made become my wife, she knows why. Food for the children! But Natalya...dumb blonde bitch. She thinks I burned her eggs?" He cackled uproariously. "I transplanted her eggs! Hid them on the moon! Now that we have a breeder called Holly...hee hee hee, I'll fertilize."

The scuttle demons looked at each other in alarm. Hurriedly they dug some more, taking bigger gobs of dirt out of the holes.

"I have to change," Enishka decided suddenly. "The form. What form shall I take? It's important, that's the form my sons will see. Hmm, can't be too scary. Nothing sharp. Soft edges." Whatever form he took, he was stuck with for quite a while. He'd expended too much power for the temporal fold in time. So it had better be good.

Suddenly it was easy to decide. He was all powerful, all knowing. He'd stolen eggs. Conquered the Prophecies. Tricked Holly into letting loose her magnificent power.

The power was sex-related. Therefore, his form had to be...phallic.

The scuttle demons paused in the digging. It was true. The first tiny egg was exposed, no bigger than the palm of a hand. Oh, but looks were so deceiving. This egg would contain the most hideous creature ever created.

"Now, I need to get their mother here," Enishka rambled. "The boys...they'll be hungry."

Chapter Eleven

Trickery by Sorcery

Natalya was looking into the water of the fountain in her backyard of Luciefyore. Jere stood a few feet away, feeding the caged Valnaeus root.

"Did Ace tell you that Holly touched Valnaeus?" Jere called out.

Talya smiled, her reflection soft in the water. "No. Poor Holly."

"Yeah, it's why I laughed so hard. I'm not laughing at her, mind you. I just remember the confusion so clearly when I first moved here."

"I imagine it feels like all the time traveling I had to do," she murmured, "a little disoriented, lots of confusion..." Her voice wavered, her concentration distracted. Her pet Rena had rolled across the water.

Natalya loved watching the woman. She reminded her of the time she spent in Hell, when she was trying so hard to set Jere's life right. Back when she fell in love with him.

"Baby?"

"Hmm?"

"Tally, you're distracted again."

Natalya looked up from the water. "I'm sorry, love. It's my pet."

Jere grinned, walking to her. "You're going to be spying on her a while. I'll go get you a sandwich."

"Jere," Natalya chastised, sealing a kiss onto his lips. "It's not spying, sweetie. It's called guarding."

Her husband laughed. "Whatever! I'll still bring you a sandwich. You're going to need your strength. For later." Taking one finger, he pulled her loose neckline from her cleavage and pressed a kiss on the soft skin there.

He walked away, leaving a drooling demon queen staring at the luscious rear end belonging to her husband.

"Sweetheart," she called out.

He looked back over his shoulder.

"Make it strawberries and wine."

Jere winked at her and she blew another kiss before she turned again toward the fountain.

"Okay, pet," she murmured. "You'd better be good. I'm going to be busy. All night."

But something wasn't right with the old fortuneteller. She dizzily wandered from path to path, recklessly bumping into trees.

"What's she looking for?" Natalya thought aloud. "And what's wrong with her? She's acting...insane."

The old woman was accosted by one of the Earthling crazy people. He was dressed in dirty scrubs. He was showing her how to do something...drawing a pattern in the dirt. Then the schizo wandered off, leaving her pet alone.

But Rena was mumbling, chanting. What had happened to her? Did his insanity rub off on her? Was Enishka at the bottom of this? Had he found out how much she loved the silly Earthling. Was that why he tried to make her one of his?

Suddenly the ground shimmered. Good grief, Rena opened a portal with Natalya's own magic. The hole was growing beneath her feet, wavering indefinitely.

"Oh, hell, no!" Natalya yelled.

The old woman prepared herself to jump into the portal.

Natalya jumped into the water of the fountain.

It never made a splash.

On the other side, in the Earth dimension, her eyes glowed in anger. Slowly her horns extended. But she was alone.

Her pet was gone, already having gone into the portal. Natalya knew she would have to reach in, grab her and pull her out.

Feet firmly planted on the ground, she pushed her hand through the blurred line of the portal, connecting with the soft arm of the old woman.

But she wouldn't budge.

Natalya took a deep breath and poked her head into the noisy gate. "Hey," she yelled over the roar of wind, "you need to come back with me."

The old woman ignored her, her back toward her as she tried to march forward.

"Hey," Natalya said again, reaching higher to shake her shoulder. The old woman turned.

Yellow teeth grinned from the mouth of the psycho from earlier, though this time he was dressed in the clothing of her pet.

Before Natalya could think, he yanked her in.

* * * * *

The male servants of the castle also couldn't find Jere, the Ruler of Luciefyore. The only clue left behind was the water fountain that his wife loved to watch.

Around it laid broken wineglasses and spilled strawberries on the paved stone.

Jere was long gone at that point.

Now he stood in the Earth realm, in the kitchen of Demitris. He'd gone directly there. To his surprise, Ace was also present, already explaining to Keara and Caleb about Holly's abduction.

"He must have grabbed them both. I wonder if he'll try for you next," Ace said to Keara.

"I doubt it," Demitris said. "After all, it was Keara and Natalya together who rearranged his face so he couldn't focus that laser beam on anyone ever again. I doubt if he wants to get them both in one spot."

Jere sat at the kitchen counter where the Earth versions of the ancient foretelling books sat. "This can't be good," he muttered, flipping a page.

"What?"

"Did you know Holly should have another power? A deadly scream? Apparently it explodes areas of high blood flow, the brain, the heart."

"Oh, hell. Explodes as in death?"

"Yes."

"I don't think I ever mentioned to her that we can't kill a demon who ranks higher than we do."

Jere turned toward Caleb. "Will the Council hold her accountable if she doesn't know?"

Caleb nodded. "Yes. Rules are in place for a reason and there are no excuses for breaking them. Should Holly accidentally kill him, she'll have to pay with her own life."

"Okay," Keara said. "Until we figure out a way to get them out of there, we have to get one of us in there to send a message telling Holly not to scream. No matter what, she can't kill Enishka."

"The only two who can travel are those with human blood," Demitris added.

"Even so, how can the traveling be arranged?"

"If Enishka can use Earthlings to open a portal, so can we. I say we call upon Talya's pet," Keara said.

Jere groaned. "I was afraid you were going to say that. Who's gonna tell her we put her pet in mortal danger...for a portal?"

* * * * *

The three old ladies were sitting around the black-velvet-skirted table awaiting them, almost as if they'd anticipated the arrival of the group of demons.

All three, looking like old owls, stared unblinkingly as they approached. "What do you horned weirdos want?" screeched Trisha.

"Aww, let them talk, *chiquita*," Rena said.

Ace leaned in toward Jere to mutter under his breath. "Did she just call her a banana?"

Jere shushed him, though he had a smile on his face. "Don't insult the old shrew. For some weird reason, Tally likes her."

"Ladies," Keara said. "Holly and Natalya have been abducted by the Demon Lord. We need your assistance in opening a portal to retrieve them."

"Mon, we's already did dat last time. For him!" A bejeweled finger belonging to the Jamaican pointed accusingly at Ace.

Keara sighed. "Which is why we know your power is great enough to do it again."

"That took a lot out of us for nothing," Rena said. "We're not as young as we used to be, you know."

"Surely the greatest three Earthlings of all time can open another."

"Nope. We're depleted."

Keara clenched her fists.

"Course, for Natalya and Holly we'd do it. *If* we had the power to. But we don't."

Demitris, ever the diplomat, stepped in. "How can we get you some more power?"

Ace snickered and answered at the same moment the three women did. "Men."

Demitris looked confused. "Men?"

Trisha ran her hand down the length of her body from breast to hip. "We're lusty like the demons!" she hollered.

"Surely you have men here?" Demitris asked, after the shock left his face.

"Have you seen them?" Rena said. "Ferget it, loser, if yous think we're gonna be satisfied with that. Take your *chicos* and go."

"Demons," Ace said suddenly. "There men outnumber women three to one. Unlike the Earth realm."

Trisha peered over her glasses. "Do they all look like you?"

"More like him," Ace said, jerking his head toward Jere, who dropped his jaw at the deliberate insolence.

"I outrank you," Jere reminded Ace, his tone indignant.

"Take one for the team," Ace whispered back.

"I could do him," Monika whispered into Trisha's deaf ear.

"There's not a lot you won't do, hussy!" Rena hollered.

"Slut!" Monika yelled back.

"Tramp!" Rena said.

Trisha threw her arm up to the sky, where the flesh flapped like a flag in the breeze. "Cougars!" she screamed. Somewhere above, lightning flashed.

All three women cackled gleefully, hooting and hollering.

"Oooh," Monika said, wiping the corner of her eye. "I think I peed."

"How do we get us some men?" Rena asked suspiciously of the stunned demons who watched incredulously while the three crones finished their laughing fit.

Both Jere and Demitris turned to Ace for that one. Ace looked helplessly at Keara.

"No demon will enter Hell," Keara reminded him. "We can't drag them across the border on any pretense."

"Okay, then here's what we do," Ace said. "The three women will enter Luciefiore, since no demon is brave enough to cross the Earth realm."

"Pussies," muttered Monika.

"And," screeched Trisha, "we need the men. That's the only way we can get a portal to open. We have to stir up the love juices!"

"The younger the better!" yelled Rena.

Demitris winced. "Are they always this deaf?"

Keara nodded. "Talya thinks it's cute. She's got a spell for the three of them called 'cotton in the ears'."

Demitris continued. "Ace, can you round up some demons? I have to work on reversing that deaf spell. It's driving me nuts."

Ace looked at the ladies, long and hard. He was about admit defeat when Jere spoke. "You can always blackmail all those hoodlum hunters you hang with."

"I don't hang with those losers!"

"Losers?" Trish asked, one of her painted on eyebrows raised. "We don't want no losers."

Keara looked sly. "You know the type. Young bodybuilders, all brawn, no brains. Just slick, sweaty...muscle."

Trish's eyes glazed over. "Oh. Yeah. That kind of loser."

"But now what do we get out of the whole deal?" Rena asked slyly.

"What do you mean?" Keara asked. "You said you would help us to save Holly and Natalya. You have a bond with Natalya. That should be payment enough."

"Bond, schmond. She doesn't call, she doesn't write."

"But the residual magic she *allows* you to keep enables your fortuneteller career."

"Pfft. We don't really know if that's her magic. It could be the magic of us three together."

"Yeah, mon!" Monika yelled, standing straight. Her breasts jiggled over the low-cut neckline of her gown. "It's probably our own magic! It happens when the three of us get together."

"Yeah." Trisha looked sharp, glancing up from her own cleavage for a minute. "We're the wicked witches of the east, west and south. That's power, baby!"

"Who's the witch of the north?" Demitris asked, curiosity coloring his deep voice at their bizarre reasoning.

Trisha looked at the ancient demon like he was stupid. "That's Glinda. Didn't you never see Wizard of Oz? We don't want nothin' to do with a *good* damn virgin witch."

Jere looked exasperated. "You three are going to be turned loose in Luciefyore with six demons who will see you as forty years younger! What more could you want?"

Rena looked sly. She glanced at her cronies out of the corners of her eyes. This couldn't be good.

"I hate to admit it, but our power does let out rather wickedly when we party. We have to have booze flowing freely. Naturally the young...and they better be buff. Demons will have to lose their inhibitions with us."

Monika snickered. "'Cause we have none."

"I'm a fucking cougar!" yelled Trish, her eyes magnified as she peered through her glasses.

Suddenly, Rena looked thoughtful. "Ladies, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think we want to stay forty years younger a bit longer, don't we? Son of a bitch, if you're taking forty years off, we want to stay that way for a whole 'nother forty years!"

Jere looked horrified. "No way! We can't agree to that!" he looked at Demitris, pleadingly. "That upsets nature! There's a helluva price to pay."

"Then pay it. It's the only way to get your wife back, sucka," Monika said.

Jere's eyes glowed. Caleb placed a calming hand on his shoulder. "Ladies, I'm sure we can work together on this. But surely you can see how hard it is for us. How do we explain the disappearance of, ahem, three famous fortunetellers on your planet?"

Ace cut in. "And cut down the mayhem the three younger versions of you would create? 'Cause if you're this bad as three mummies..."

Ace held his breath. Jere had warned against insulting the old three.

Trisha looked at Rena.

Rena looked at Monika.

Monika looked at Trisha.

Eyes widened. Air was sucked into wizened old lungs. Just when he thought they'd turn and fight, he was surprised. All three cackled in another laughing fit.

It sounded like an entire coven of witches let loose. Whooping and hollering, the only three that were stunned and silent were the demons.

"Oooh, that was good. We're mayhem. Us!" Rena said finally, wiping the corner of her eye with the long wig of Trisha's. The wig now sat askew on her friend's head, the length much longer on the left side. "Anyways, my dear devilish friends. Those are our requirements. End of discussion. You want them back, agree to it now."

The three insane ones were proud instead of insulted? Ace would never understand Earthlings.

Keara looked angry. "Natalya will be very disappointed in you," she admonished.

"Pfft! She taught me everything I know." Rena looked down at her fingernails, studying her cuticles. She did look oddly like Natalya in the mannerism.

Jere looked at Ace, who nodded slightly. "Okay, old witches. We agree. I need my wife back, as does Ace. But don't expect any additional favors."

"Likewise, pipsqueak!"

Keara leaned in. "I'll have you know, I would have given you *eternal* youth and beauty for the return of my friends."

"I'll have you know, Natalya *is* one of mine. I would have done it for free."

With that, the three old hags erupted into another cackle of laughter.

Keara clenched her fists, her eyes glowing blue. Demitris placed a calming hand on his daughter. Without a word, Keara turned and marched from the tent, leaving the others behind.

"Old witches," Caleb said. "I'm sure you understand that it'll be much harder to hide you on Earth with your, um, adapted looks." He turned toward Demitris. "I think we'd have to leave them in Luciefyore for the whole forty years while they re-age."

Jere and Ace looked appalled, each knowing they'd be stuck babysitting them. "No way!"

Demitris looked after the tent flap where Keara had disappeared. "It does seem that Natalya would be best suited to look after the Three. And she didn't earn the title the Huntress for nothing. Let her track them should they wander. Luciefyore it is."

Ace, Caleb, Jere and Demitris left the tent and the obnoxious guffaws behind them.

"As I outrank you, I think you and Holly should have to take care of them when we get home," Jere whispered to Ace.

"Hmmp. Fine. But good luck explaining to your wife that *you* agreed to change their forms for forty years."

They walked to the wooded section, just between trees, where Keara waited.

"Okay, Ace, now to get you back into Luciefyore," Demitris said. "You'll know where to find a group of young demon males?"

Ace nodded, looking at Jere. "The Horned Hood."

Demitris held out his hands, and Keara covered her father's hands with her own. A blue flash of light exploded.

Chapter Twelve

All Brawn, No Brains

Suddenly Ace stood alone in the trees. Trees that walked and waved, holding hands and singing.

He was home. Sweet home, where things were normal again. Turning on his heel, he headed toward town to the local bar where the known group of young bounty hunters hung.

Ace walked into the bar. If a bar could get deadly quiet, that one did. Apparently word was out that he'd been banished to Hell. Just as well, he'd needed more respect anyway since he hadn't hunted in a while.

Now he had to find the suckers he remembered from his local gym, Excel. Ace looked around and spotted them.

The group of half a dozen young, buff demons sat at a table downing whiskey. They raised their glasses when he approached.

"Bad luck, man," Isheetov said. His auburn hair draped in curly locks down to his collar. Blue eyes looked briefly at Ace. Isheetov had modeled earlier in his career, before weightlifting took its toll. He'd become too large for the standard-size clothing and had switched to bounty hunting instead.

Ace shrugged, pulling out a chair to sit. "I'm hoping it won't be so bad. I have been to Hell and back, of course, on a bounty mission. I met a couple of inhabitants. The Earth women aren't too bad...lusty like the demons." He tried not to cringe at repeating the phrase.

The entire bar went quiet at the statement.

Finally one of the six demons round the table called him on it. "What? They're vicious, hellish bitches. Ugly too, all skinny with those bony elbows and knees. Why the hell do they starve themselves first and then airbrush the rest of the curves away?" asked the demon Jonzales. He was highly intelligent, and direct to the point.

"No, not at all. In fact, there are three" – uh, how to lie with a straight face? – "very attractive earthlings who can be talked into helping me. I'd met them there last time."

This of course got the testosterone brewing. "Attractive? How?" someone else asked.

"Two of the three women were described as exotic and erotic. All three of them are completely different. The exotic one is Latin, one of them is Jamaican. The erotic one is a blonde with belly-dancer eyes."

Technically, *belly dancer eyes* meant she would look good covered by a veil. But the brainless bodybuilders looked even more intrigued. Ace continued on. "Besides, it's good that I have friends who owe me."

"Owe you what?" Buystion asked suspiciously, raising his long, smooth and thin horns.

"Favors. Don't you remember when I gave you the lead on the convict?"

Buystion didn't reply, though his slender horns shrank slightly.

"How about you?" Ace said, turning to the demon next to him. "Ellis, who sponsored you when you began hunting?"

Ellis looked down. Almost, very nearly, ashamed of himself as he traced unseen patterns on the table.

Still, another looked unconvinced. "I'll bet they're attractive," Isheetov muttered.

"These three are," insisted Ace.

"Well if I have to meet humans, I'm using a fake name," said Ellis.

"What?" Ace stared at him. "A fake name?"

"Yeah. I think I'll use one of those human names. I'm gonna be Wayne. That sounds like a big, tall, buff human kind of guy. Probably around seven feet or so."

Another demon looked up. "Yeah! I pick, um, Steve. That's a classic name. They even wrote a book about me. See Steve run. Something like that."

"I'll be Ruben. No, wait. Greg. Yeah, Greg. I like that one. I like the way it starts with a letter and ends with the same letter."

"That's retarded, man. Try something like Jeff."

Isheetov's head nearly pulled a three sixty. "I like that one. I'll be the Jeff."

"Not *The* Jeff," the one known as Ruben, No Wait Greg, said. "Just Jeff. You can't go around calling yourself *The* Jeff."

"You're calling yourself Ruben No Wait Greg," Isheetov accused back.

"George," called a quiet voice.

Silence rang around the table.

"I like that one," said the calm voice again. This demon, with chocolate-brown horns, was laid back and reserved. Always silently observing.

"George does seem a normal enough name for the quiet guy," Steve grumbled. "Of course, the quiet ones are the ones you have to watch out for."

Behind his back, the "normal" passive demon George flipped him the bird.

"Normie."

All heads swiveled around at that one.

"What?" the demon now known as Normie said defensively. "I always liked that name."

Greg shook his head as if to clear it. Then looked back to Ace. "These Earth women would dare to enter Luciefyore? Without the strength horns provide? Wow, they got guts," Greg muttered.

"Oh, it's more than that," Ace said. "They're actually witches. Very powerful. They can snap a demon in two."

Jeff's eyes glowed. "Really? Wow."

Nothing impressed a powerful demon more—especially a young body builder in his prime—than power. They began to talk among themselves, voices rising to be heard over each other.

"Excuse me," Ace said, heading to the bar.

From behind him, he heard Buystion say, "My name's gonna be Ken. Like one of those cool dolls that comes with a Barbie."

Groans reverberated around the table.

Ignoring the new argument that ensued, Ace signaled. The bartender swung over.

"Hey, can you do me a favor? A round of shots every hour to that table, okay? Send the tab to my house. Natalya's settling my debts before tomorrow."

"No, problem, Acel. And by the way, good luck to you." The bartender looked truly sorry.

"It'll be fine," Ace said with a hard edge to his voice. "I'll serve my time and find my way back."

The bartender's look didn't change. Everyone knew Ace wouldn't be the same person when he returned. You couldn't be, not after being banished to Hell with your mind erased. Being helpless without horns or memories of how to fight.

Ace acknowledged his voiceless concern with a nod then turned to leave. He did a swift double-take. Three gorgeous women were sitting on the demons' laps.

No, not women.

It was *the Three*, but holy Luciefyore.

He recognized Rena by the breasts. That was the only thing about her that hadn't changed. Though she was forty years younger, she still had the breasts of a twenty-year-old.

Trisha still had blonde, Farrah Fawcett locks, though the hair looked like hers now instead of a wig.

And Monika was gorgeous, creamy skinned without her turban, and with a much looser purple silk robe stitched in bright red. Slim red fingernails to match the caftan stroked erotically up the biceps of the demon before her.

Ace still stared.

Rena licked tenderly up a ridged horn attached to Wayne. The seven-foot-tall demon whimpered under her ministrations. Son of a gun, those Earth women were wild. She had to know she was giving a public display of a blowjob. She just didn't care.

Trisha was performing a lap dance on *two* of the demons. At once. No longer were her movements rickety, but sensual and smooth, though she did border on the verge of slutty.

And Monika was draped across Jeff and Wayne, both hands with long, red talons wrapped around the shots of whiskey. "Lots of girls fake it," she was saying, without the accent. "But I'll teach you both how to tell the difference."

She downed both shots, slapping the glasses on the table. Then her hands disappeared under the table, and the demons' eyes widened.

"Ooooh," she moaned. "Mmmm. Baby, give me more...yessss..." she breathed.

The temperature in the bar rose.

"Double the drinks," Ace instructed. No expense was too high to open the portal for Holly and Natalya. And damn if the Three didn't know what they were doing.

Because outside, the weather had changed.

Shaking himself to gather his attention, Ace ran quickly outside. Jere already stood waiting around a small puddle. "It's working," Jere yelled over the roar of wind. "This is a full-out portal, not just a gate."

"Once the portal's open, how will Holly and Natalya know to jump in? What if they're tied up?"

Jere shrugged. "We don't know what's going on over there."

"Exactly," Keara said from behind them. "So one of us has to go in and get them."

Jere and Ace spun around.

Keara stood with her husband, her black hair whipping in the wind. "A half-breed has to cross portals, or the balance shifts and will cause an explosion in both worlds."

"I'll go," Jere growled. "It's my wife."

"You can't," Keara said. "You have to rule Luciefyore."

"Keara, you can't go," Caleb snapped.

"I have to," she pleaded. "I've faced him before. Talya and I have combined power."

"Exactly! He's well aware and prepared for that move! You can't surprise him twice, Keara."

"But this time we have Holly. He doesn't expect the power of three. And sweetie," she whispered, but magically, her soft voice somehow carried over the roar of winds, "we caused something we didn't bank on. The balance of the three humans has upset the universe...we have to balance it with the power of the three demonesses. Look at this place."

All around them clouds rolled across the sky. Lightning struck, lighting the ground in areas it hit. Demons were running, wondering what was going on.

Before Caleb could respond, Keara turned and jumped into the puddle of water.

Chapter Thirteen

Timing is Everything

At the same exact time Keara jumped, Holly leapt from the wrinkle in time. She landed behind the stone chair of Enishka's throne, hidden from the sight of everyone on the moon.

All the little demon lizards were busy. Enishka was helpless, having taken on the form of a huge worm. He was gigantic and slow, a head attached to a pasty-white, thick columnlike body. The width of his neck equaled the size of his jowls, yet his forehead was pointy from the lack of hair.

"Took too much power," he mumbled to himself. "Can't change back for a while."

Natalya was tied to a wooden stake, arms above her head. Around her, hundreds of eggs quaked as the hatchlings inside tried frantically to break free from their shells.

The eggs were hideous, the shells clear as glass now that they had ripened to hatch. Inside, repulsive creatures were folded into fetal positions, opening large mouths on silent screams, sheer green gas filling the eggs.

"Hurry, my sons! Be born and feast on the flesh of your mother!" Enishka screamed from his spot near the well. His head slowly turned toward the lizard demon closest to him, as if sharing a confidence. "They're perfect children! Can do no wrong. I'm such a proud papa. Their tiny bodies will be invincible! The amniotic fluid inside the egg is acid. And my sons are poisonous, the sweat exudes from their skin, slowly paralyzing a victim. They have their mother's hunting skills and her powers. And the best part? They'll be full grown in about ten minutes, thanks to the time wrinkle. Why, I should be ready to take over the world in fifteen or twenty minutes."

Natalya panicked, wriggling desperately to break free from the ropes. One of the eggs rolled near her foot, spewing small droplets of liquid through the shell.

A crack appeared in the smooth eggshell. Claws poked through the slit, poison dripping onto the shell from the lobsterlike claw. The shell fizzled and popped, as if eaten by the internal acid, and began to disintegrate.

Holly gasped out loud from her position behind the throne.

"Where did you come from?" Enishka screamed, trying to wriggle his fat body toward her.

Natalya's head whipped around to see Holly. Her eyes were huge, a gag around her mouth. Holly ran to the eggshell that was dissolving.

The disgusting, foul creature was already half out, wriggling like a baby slug in a trail of slime toward Natalya's foot. It let out a cry, its mouth so large it looked as if the entire head could open should the jaws detach.

In fact, the mouth stretched across the face from behind each ear, like a breed of serpent that could swallow a victim larger than itself.

Holly raised her foot. The creature howled louder, testing out its new lungs. She stomped and the sound was cut immediately.

Sharp pain wrenched through her foot as the glass eggs shattered into shards, piercing her flesh.

"No! You bitch!" Enishka screamed. "My son!"

Ignoring the pain, Holly began smashing all the eggs scattered around the ground, ignoring the green gases that were released. The smell of rotted demon began to rise, permeating the air with the acrid smell of sulfur.

"I'll kill you!" But his fat, wormlike body was slow and much closer to the hidden gate in the well than he was to the post where Natalya was tied.

Holly continued to stamp the children of Natalya and Enishka, bits of sharp shell lodging deeply into the soles of her feet. Adrenaline rushed through her body, allowing her to ignore the damage to her lower extremities. Several minutes later she stopped, breathing hard. Racing to Natalya, she used a large piece of discarded shell as a knife to cut the ropes binding Natalya's wrists, ignoring the burn to her own fingers.

Natalya stared at the demon lord warily, wondering why he hadn't yet chased after Holly.

Enishka was simply watching both women from his spot in the pool, where he seemed too sluggish and heavy to move.

Then she realized he just didn't care to chase them. He had an evil smirk on his face, an ace up his sleeve.

"The gate," Natalya whispered. "He's going to close it and trap us."

Both women raced for the water, but with a wink, Enishka rolled into it, his heavy bottom end making a huge splash, cracking the side of the well and letting all the water flow out. The glow in the water, which signaled the portal, ebbed and died.

Natalya grabbed Holly's hand, pulling her backward. "It's too late. Come on!" she yelled. Immediately turning, they ran as far as they could from the well.

As they passed Enishka's throne, Holly suddenly stopped, yanking her hand away. "Wait," she yelled, running back toward the throne.

"What are you doing?" Natalya screamed.

Holly was riffling around the base of the chair, finally pulling out a small chest hidden underneath it. She fiddled with the lock, but it wouldn't open. Grabbing a rock, she smashed it off.

The lid burst open, emitting a steady glow from the chest. Inside was a solitary marble among the black velvet. It was such an unusual color, Natalya was stunned for a moment. Sea foam.

It was Ace's soul.

"No, you can't touch—" Natalya yelled, even as Holly reached in.

Holly grabbed the marble. Her shriek of pain filled the air before her head whipped back, almost harsh enough to snap her neck.

The marble absorbed into the palm of her hand.

Natalya ran toward Holly, briefly noting all the scuttle demons and even Enishka huddled with their hands protectively over their ears.

Interesting. Apparently Holly's scream pained them.

She grabbed Holly's shoulders, shaking her hard until the screams stopped. Holly looked at her blankly. Her eyes were changed, the pupils huge, filled with the color of Ace's horns.

Suddenly the air became thick and heady, hard to breathe. A blue light filled the sky, pointing down to where the water from the well had spilt onto the ground.

"Keara," Natalya breathed. "About time, sister."

Keara rose from the puddle of water completely dry. She looked quickly about, catching the scene of Enishka and the scuttle demons huddled in pain all around her.

"Holly!" Keara yelled. "Don't scream!"

Keara ran to Talya and Holly, briefly kissing Talya's cheek. "Good to see you're alive."

"Likewise, half-breed. I've missed you."

Holly looked lost in the recesses of her mind. Keara cupped Holly's face in her hands, trying to get her attention focused. "Holly, the books say you have another power. Your scream? It pops areas of high concentrated blood vessels."

Holly was dazed, staring straight ahead.

"Her eyes are the color of Ace's," Keara said to Talya. "What happened?"

"She took his soul."

"Oh, God. Holly? Holly, listen to me. Come on, honey." Keara shook her shoulders slightly. "Holly? I need you to hold your screams. You can't kill a demon that outranks you. Remember the eye for an eye? If you kill Enishka, even accidentally with your screaming, you'll have to pay with your own life."

"The threeeee bitchessss invade my territory... Again. Was my kingdom not enough for you? You had to come follow me here? Leave, Keara. I didn't send for you."

"You had no business sending for Tally."

"She entered a portal on her own."

"You tricked me, bastard." Natalya snapped. "You sent me a vision of my pet going into harm."

"Prove it, Huntress bitch. Maybe your skills have gone lax since good ole Ace has become greater than you. After all, he found the little human Holly I've been looking for. Thank him for that, will ya?"

"You're gonna be in big trouble when the Council finds out about Holly."

"Bullssshit. I've already been banished for the stolen eggs. What are they gonna do, banish me twice?"

Enishka laughed heartily then stopped. He kicked wearily at the scuttle demons until they laughed along with him, a fake constant chitter.

Natalya continued. "Not to mention...Ace. You took his wife. You think he's not going to be a little upset?"

Enishka rolled over in the dirt, a fat sausage of a man. "Doesn't matter. I own him. I could summon him here. Watch this."

"Heed my call, Demon's Own. Grant my request and return my possession."

Enishka waited impatiently. His beady eyes began to shift. "Where is he? Is he defying me?"

Keara looked bored. "Do you think that perhaps you have a quota of demons on the moon?"

"What? What quota? What are you talking about?"

"It's why the moons are used as prisons. Each one can't hold more than four adult-sized demons at a time...and how many do we have here now?"

"Son of a bitch. So what do we do?" he whined, as if they would really help him.

"Send Holly back down there."

"Holly? Why Holly?"

Because she's hurt. But the words were left unsaid, because apparently he hadn't yet noticed.

Enishka looked thoughtful. "No, Holly can't go. That little bitch murdered my sons! She's gonna breed the next batch since Natalya's now worthless."

"Natalya and I will combine our power against you unless you let the three of us go. You know how that panned out the last time."

"Are you threatening me?"

"What do you think?"

Enishka looked thoughtful for a moment. Then he brightened. "Ace up my sleeve! I do, I do! I own Ace...and I have an ace up my sleeve."

The demon bitches looked confused. Didn't they understand what he was saying? How stupid were the creatures? It was so unfair that they could merge enough power to rearrange his face.

He whispered. "Know why I change shape?"

Keara answered. "Vanity. To show everyone how much power you have. No other shape-changing demon can make the shapes for the periods of time that you do."

"No one's ever seen my true form."

The tone was ominous. A bead of sweat trickled down Keara's temple. The temperature was rising quickly. The tiny lizard demons began to scuttle around frantically.

"From day one I changed shapes. I mimicked the creatures around me, combining shapes of demons I saw. It was safer than my own true form."

Holly babbled. "No! Don't ask...don't ask him his true form. Don't ask."

Natalya stared at her. Was Enishka's insanity transferring? He was becoming more lucid, even as Holly was becoming strange.

"I was born of three parents," Enishka said, his voice deepening to a level they'd never heard. "The one standing between the thighs of my mother at my birth died from the shock."

"Born, not hatched..." Holly sputtered.

"Hatched, but early. That parent incubated her own eggs within the warmth of her womb. I hatched and pulled it out enclosed in my tiny fist. We have that in common, Holly Dolly," he said congenially. "The other two parents...they went insane. You see, I can trigger or control insanity, though I didn't know it as an infant. But I need all my power for that. So the public profile has to go."

His torso grew.

Blood and pus erupted from the splits in his skin, arms and legs emerging from places they never should have been, like abnormal vestiges of his three combined parents. His hair fell off in patches of bloody scalp.

If hideous in some of his forms, he was horrifying *au naturel*. Some of his skin was scaled. His eyes, yellow and crazed, cut right through objects. But even in his natural state, his eyes were still on the sides of his head.

Holly stared in horror. "I know you," she whispered. "From my dreams."

"Yesssss." His tongue forked out and wrapped around her neck like an enormous snake.

Keara and Natalya couldn't look directly at him, the visual was so horrendous. Yet Holly stared. Natalya tried to get Holly to look away, but she didn't seem to be connected with her brain.

A hideous smell erupted from him, sulfur and decay, like a walking corpse. That was why the eggs had smelled so horrible. A gene passed along from their father.

Suddenly the evil being hissed, "Holly... Dove... Would you like to watch the excruciating punishment your husband went through in order to relinquish his soul? Such bravery, such torture. Really gruesome, especially when the rich blue blood flows from his mouth and nose. You know I can make you go crazy enough to kill him, right?"

Holly stared numbly, unresponsive in Natalya's arms.

"Holly Dolly, did you say yes? Why, I think you did."

* * * * *

"I have an idea," Ace said to Caleb and Jere.

Both men looked at him.

"If Keara jumped through this portal and popped out over there, chances are it's going to be difficult for the three of them to get back to the same portal. Correct? Maybe Enishka has guarded it or had his legion of scuttles move to guard it. So what if we move this portal over? Force another to pop open in a different spot? Hope that it's close to the girls or that they notice it before Enishka does and can jump through."

"How would we move a portal?" Jere asked.

"The Three are still creating it. It's active. So if we drain the water into a different spot, it may just shift into another portal when the energy runs out of the first."

Caleb nodded. "It makes sense. It's worth a try."

"Well, let's dig a trench and drain out this pond downhill. Ten or fifteen feet should be a good distance and won't take too long."

* * * * *

On the magnitude of his power alone, *he* created a waterfall from the well of water, effectively destroying the original portal.

Little did Enishka realize he merely helped the plan Ace had thought up just a few minutes earlier.

But shimmering in the waterfall was the image he'd wanted for the crazy Holly. The visual of Ace twisted in agony, his body contorted in muscular cramps. As if he were ready to scream.

But his teeth were clenched. In the image behind him, Enishka was in the reddish form of a lobster, laughing hysterically. "Scream for me and I'll change my mind. Scream for me and I'll take your sister instead," he chanted hysterically.

Ace suffered silently. Watching the projection was Holly, a silent, green-tinged teardrop trailing down one cheek.

"Ignore it, Holly. It's not real, it's not happening now. It happened long ago, what's done is done," Natalya whispered.

"Oooh, the pain!" Enishka taunted. "Watch what's next, Holly Dolly. Watch me when I slice him open and tear it from him."

"Don't watch, Holly. He just wants you to scream so you can do enough damage for your own punishment. He'll use your pain to taunt Ace."

But when Ace was slit open across the solar plexus, a demonic claw plunged in, twisting and turning, wrenching past organs, the skin of his abdomen torn raggedly and streaming bloody guts.

The pain was too much. Ace's eyes rolled back into his head, and finally he bowed to the demon lord's wishes.

He screamed.

The sound ripped through Holly. The love for Ace triggered a memory in his soul, the one buried alongside her own.

Her eyes rolled back also as she screamed for both of them.

Chapter Fourteen

Healing the Sands of Time

Keara saw the portal open at the same time Natalya did. As if by unspoken agreement, they grabbed Holly's upper arms and dragged her toward the new pool of water that somehow suddenly appeared next to them. The three women sank into the water, immediately silencing the heart-wrenching scream before the demons on the moon could drop with the damage.

The three appeared on the other side of the pool to see the familiar faces of their husbands.

But it was apparent not all was well. For one thing, both Keara and Natalya rose from the water dry. Between them they dragged an unconscious Holly, who was as soaked as a drowned rat.

Ace took the limp body from the arms of the demon queens. "Holly, love, talk to me," he begged. She was so fragile, his little half human. He didn't know how she'd survive this.

From everywhere, demons were running to their aid, alerted to the weather changes of portal openings.

"Call an ambulance," Natalya snapped to one of the bystanders.

"Talya," Keara whispered. "Her feet."

Holly's feet hung uselessly, burned black in spots. Huge blisters covered the bottoms, swollen thick with poisoned pus. Slices criss-crossed into them, some as high as her ankles. Shards of glasslike eggshells still protruded.

"What the hell happened to her feet?" Ace growled. "And why won't she awaken?"

"She fulfilled her prophecy," Natalya said. "She slaughtered the children."

"What children?"

"Mine...and Enishka's."

The chatter of demons stopped all around them. Ace felt fear clench his midsection. Armageddon was what would happen should Enishka ever breed.

Natalya continued. "And she can't ever wake up, because she absorbed your soul."

Lightheadedness swam around Ace and he was barely aware of his horns distending as he roared his pain.

* * * * *

Natalya and Keara watched Ace hover over the still form on the hospital bed, even as the doctor spoke to him.

"Caleb," Keara said. "We have to do something for him."

"There's nothing we can do, sweetheart," Caleb said. He hugged his wife to him, aware of how lucky he was that she survived the confrontation with Enishka. But Keara squirmed away to study Ace.

Caleb kissed her cheek. "I'll be right back," he whispered, slipping into the hallway.

Keara turned her attention back to the bounty hunter. Ace looked like death, his head in his hands as he worried over the lifeless Holly in the hospital bed.

Natalya had sent for the best doctor in the dimension. The man's personality left a lot to be desired. He was egotistical and power driven. But those defects would serve well to bring Holly back to normal, the challenge alone would be worth it. The doctor couldn't face such a failure of this magnitude.

On the other hand, Dr. Venishkitzhy had a history with Acel. Ace had refused to allow examination when Enishka had removed his soul. He'd refused to allow the doctor study of his wings when they'd appeared after the soul stealing. As far as the doctor was concerned, he was owed and it would be satisfactory to score on Acel.

Now the pompous man, the best in all of the dimensions, stood over Holly, making notes in the notebook he carried.

"Her acid-bound feet will be scarred for life, crippling her. The soles of her feet were sliced by the razor-sharp eggshells, some spots clear up through the tendons, in which the poison absorbed. Not that the destroyed tendons matter—she's paralyzed to the waist from the acid of the poison. There's nothing we can do. Nothing else matters at this point..."

Because her diagnosis could get much worse. She'd absorbed Ace's soul. While in essence she saved it from Enishka, there was a price to pay. She would never awaken. She was doomed to a comatose existence, sacrificing herself so he could live freely from the demon lord.

"Acel," the head of the unit said, "it's your decision. We can keep her on feeding tubes for the rest of her life. But she'll never be responsive."

In a few days, the doctor would mention "testing" to see what else could be done with the comatose demoness. Perhaps a strategically placed mention of a miracle would encourage the experimentation.

If it was possible, Ace's head sank even farther into his hands. He was unable to make the necessary decision. It was exactly where the doctor wanted him.

"Doctor," Natalya said. "Leave it be."

Holly lay completely still against the white sheets of the hospital bed.

"The imprint is becoming heavier," Keara said as she and Natalya moved closer to the bed.

Around Holly's neck wrapped the mark of Enishka. She had faced the demon lord, taken a possession of something of his...and still lived. The only person in the world who had done such a thing.

Yet she would never be aware of the benefits of the mark of bravery. For she would never again awaken. But the tattoo twisted anyway, like a series of forked tails, winding around her neck and trailing down one side like an exotic chain. No demon had ever worn the mark of Enishka before. Consequently, no one had ever seen what his mark was. For as ugly as the demon lord was, his mark was absolutely gorgeous.

Keara traced the raised, blackened scar. Holly's skin was surprisingly smooth beneath her finger, soft and supple.

"She's done so much bravery for such a little human. Saved your soul. Stopped Enishka. Fulfilled the prophecy. Destroyed the poisonous infants from growing into an army to trigger Armageddon. She saved both worlds."

Immediately the hospital room flashed with a glow of bright, white light. Magically the room began to elongate slowly, stretching into a cavernous creation of spaciousness. In the new space, an oval conference table appeared with a dozen golden chairs spaced evenly around it.

Each seat was filled with a man, all dressed in white robes with golden ropes tied about their waists. Likewise, each face was completely expressionless, staring straight ahead.

One man sat at the head of the table, the only one of the white-robed who made any eye contact.

"The Council," Keara whispered. She glanced around for Caleb. He had mentioned earlier that he would be back and this would be a good time to face his distant relations.

But Caleb was slowly materializing with the men of the Council, specifically sitting next to his uncle, Cupid – also known as Eros.

The head of the table stood.

"Thus begins the trial of Holly Dewan."

"Trial?" Ace snapped, venom in his voice. His horns extended instantly. "What is she on trial for? How can she be punished any further?"

"Silence, demon. We will request information from you if needed."

With a wave, Ace was magically struck silent, left staring in a helpless paralysis at Jere.

With one hand the head of the Council reached in the vicinity of the window. An image of the full moon swung into the room, swelling until it took nearly one wall. The shadows of the craters moved together, swirling and fading until the image of Enishka appeared like remote-access television.

Enishka had taken the form of a human male, even though he obviously hadn't seen one in a while. His head was as proportionate to his body as possible, but it was still smaller than the rest of him. His thin lips didn't know how to smile, and his attempts at it looked disgustingly like a smirk instead.

The small amount of graying hair on his egg-shaped head was cut short as if to lessen the effects of male pattern baldness, some areas sticking up in patches as short as a quarter of an inch.

His body was puffed, showing his excessive weight, the size of his jowls blending with the width of his neck.

His eye peered beadily as he turned to the side to view the proceedings.

"Thank you! Thank you so much for seeing me and listening to my complaints of mistreatment! She murdered my sons, rare demons, and she stole my most precious possession...a soul given freely to me."

Though Natalya couldn't help rolling her eyes at the disgust that came over her, the Council never blinked at his obvious lies. She had to admire their self-control.

The head of the council spoke. "Official charges from Enishka against the accused include the murder of a demon. Demons are rare in breeding and to destroy a successful fertilization is against the laws of the Council."

Jere stood, signaling his wish to speak.

"Go ahead," the head of the table said.

"Enishka has broken the law by breeding with my wife, Natalya. She is not a possession of his in any way and he has no rights to her. In fact, many of you may remember you allowed the punishment of his face rearrangement to stand because of his illegal act of burning out her eggs. We found out today that her eggs were not burned out, but were stolen and transplanted to his moon instead."

"That is a viable charge," the head of the council said. He looked around the table. One by one each person lowered their head, signaling the acceptance of the charge. "However, the other parent known as Enishka, the demon lord, presses for hundreds of murder charges. Natalya Herschkle, what say you as the mother? Do you press for murder charges also?"

"No. The children were not innocents, but monstrosities. Holly did not commit murder. I hold nothing against her."

The head of the council again looked around the table. Not one other person nodded.

"While you do not blame Holly for the murders, it is canceled out by the accusation of the other parent who claims it to indeed be numerous murders. Therefore, the charge stands."

Natalya took a deep breath. "In that case, it is my right as the other parent to modify the charge. We had but one child hatched between us that Holly stamped out. That equates to only one single murder charge."

The head of the council looked at the bared feet of the unconscious demoness. "Her feet do not have the damage of just one stomping."

"No, she has suffered the damage of hundreds of razor-sharp, acid-filled eggshells. She is paralyzed from the waist down. But only one murder occurred, the first

hatchling. None of the other eggs had completely hatched, so technically there were no other murders."

The head glanced around the table. Twelve nods followed.

"The charge has hereby been changed to the single count of murder."

"No," Enishka shouted. "That's not fair! I had hundreds of destroyed sons! An army!"

"Silence," the head of the council said.

At once, Enishka's tiny hole of a mouth was frozen, as speechlessly bound as Ace was.

"The demon lord also accuses her of a charge of stolen possession. That of a soul belonging to him."

"I counter-charge with the same," Natalya said quickly. "He did not own my eggs, but hid them from me. Rightfully they should have been fertilized by my own husband."

The head of the council looked thoughtful. "Your charge of stolen eggs will then cancel out his claim of a stolen soul."

Enishka stamped his feet, absurdly angry that his charge was tossed aside so carelessly while he could not voice any argument over it.

"Now, then, the original charge of robbery has been officially been dropped. The trade-off of the accusation with the soul with the accusation of the eggs. The original charge of multiple murder has been dropped and replaced with a single count of murder. We then find Holly Dewan guilty of murder."

Keara stood, signaling her wish to speak.

"Go ahead," the head of the council said.

"May I suggest Holly's banishment to Earth as punishment for the charge of murder? She would rightfully suffer in Hell, then."

Ace looked hopeful. He could care for her on Earth at least.

"Negative," he said. "We have reached our decision for her punishment. Holly, awaken."

Immediately Holly sat up in bed at the command, her face contorted in agony. A moan escaped her lips, and Ace jerked as if to go to her but was bound in place.

With a wave of his hand, the head of the council numbed her.

Holly sat upright, her head tossed back, breathing heavily, as if her body had a will of its own. She looked confused, as if she had no idea where she was or how she had gotten there.

"Demoness, you shall remember the words I speak today. You are hereby punished on the charge of murder. You shall not live out your life in an unconscious stupor, but shall retain full consciousness to forever grieve your action of taking another's life. Furthermore, you are on parole for the rest of such life. Your keeper shall be your

bounty-hunter husband known as Acel. Because Acel deserves no punishment, you shall no longer be crippled, which would cause him to become a caretaker, but shall have full mobility again from the waist down."

With that, the Council dissipated, leaving six demons with their mouths agape.

The image of the moon showed Enishka in a full temper tantrum, screaming mutely and stamping his feet, his clenched fist pounding on the stone chair arms. Like an insane four-year-old.

In a moment the moon blinked and vanished.

Holly looked around the room, her gaze locking onto the demon closest to her.

"Ace?"

His hair was ruffled from having run his hands through it constantly. His eyes were bloodshot, like he'd been crying.

"Baby! Holly, how do you feel?"

"Umm, my whole body's numb."

"I guess that's a good thing. They took away your pain. How are your legs? Can you move them?"

Holly wriggled her feet then moved her legs. "Yes, it just feels weird 'cause I can't feel anything."

"Maybe your feeling will come back once you're healed and don't have any pain."

"Should I not be moving my legs?"

"You were paralyzed, Holl. Couldn't move anything below the waist. The Council healed it."

"So I'm punished...but what of you?"

"I don't have to go to Earth anymore. I no longer belong to Enishka, so he can't decree my banishment. Instead my duty is to keep you in line with your punishment. And while we're on the subject, what the hell were you thinking to touch my soul?"

"I would do it all over again, Ace. I would rather face death than allow that pig to own you."

"Dammit, you need to take care of yourself, not me."

"Let's take care of each other. I love you, you love me. It's the way it should be."

Her husband bent and ever so slowly brought his lips to hers. The others in the room faded away as she kissed him back, clutching onto his broad shoulders. Finally she pulled away to look quizzically at him. "As my husband, shouldn't you have kissed me already? Way before this? Should have been the first thing."

The worry lines in his face smoothed. "Sorry, baby doll. I have to practice harder at my husbandry skills."

Ace leaned in again, a huge smile on his face. Holly laughed, wondering how he would pucker through the smile, but stopped as soon as his lips descended.

Chapter Fifteen

Sweet Rewards

Ace checked Holly out of the hospital against the doctor's wishes. Of course, part of the doctor's refusal was his own greed at wanting to examine her new mark of Enishka. No one in Luciefyore had ever seen it, and no one was yet certain of its benefits. What a *coup* for him, the greatest surgeon in Luciefyore, to be the sole examiner of the most astounding mark in the world! Especially after discovering the most magnificent thing.

The demoness married to the bounty hunter bled...red. Was it a result of being marked? Or something bigger? It was sure to make the doctor's career should this tidbit leak to the press. It had been rumored that she was human, yet it had also been rumored that she had the highest power in the dimension. His opinion tended to run toward the latter, for how else would she have faced the demon lord and lived to carry his mark if she wasn't demon?

Excitement wet his palms. This was a mystery for him to get to the bottom of, and he would take full advantage of his good fortune.

But his dreams were shattered by the Queen of Luciefyore. She walked into the room when he was arguing with the demon hunter over the legality of discharging his wife.

The good doctor had just pulled the trump card, asserting his authority over the demon. "The patient was entrusted to my care by the one of the demon queens. Just yesterday she was near death. And having treated you in the past, pecking order says that I now outrank you. While we disagree on her condition, I'm afraid your wife must stay according to my whims." He smiled gleefully. "Just until I'm sure all is well."

"Dr. Venishkitzhy," Natalya cut in. "I understand your concern for your patient. However, because Holly has been so tragically weakened, we haven't yet made the announcement."

"What announcement?"

"Why, Acel has been the best bounty hunter Luciefyore has seen. Has gone so far as to Hell and returned in one piece. In fact, has even faced banishment to Hell. And Holly? She chose him as her husband. She is the only person in the world to carry the mark of Enishka. That makes them a very powerful couple, even without the promotion we just gave Ace...to third in command."

The doctor's jaw dropped.

"Why, sir," Ace said, his eyes hard, "I do believe that trumps your authority."

* * * * *

Weeks had gone by since Ace brought her home, and Holly was completely mended. Oh, there was a twinge here and there if she bent the wrong way, but she was completely healed as far as anything else went.

But something was wrong.

Ace hadn't touched her once since her return from the hospital.

Why?

Demons had worn a trail up their front porch, wanting to see the mark of Enishka that she carried. Wanting to meet Ace's wife, treating her as if she were a revered creature.

But Ace didn't seem so enthralled.

Holly sat on the shade of the back porch, rocking gently. It was warm today, the sky a perfect pink. Puffy red clouds danced across the horizon. At any moment the skies could change, threatening rain.

She sighed. Rain was perfect lovemaking weather. But for now, it was perfect sunshine. Like earlier, she noticed Ace peeking out the back door. Soon he would ask if she was all right. Again.

What did it matter?

He was disgusted with her. He was stuck as her caretaker. She couldn't remember everything that had happened on the moon, as far as details went, but she was aware of one thing. She'd gone crazy and murdered infants as predicted.

It didn't matter that they were monsters. It didn't matter that they were hideous manipulations that should never have been created. What mattered was, they showed Ace the true Holly.

The one inside her, the one she'd kept hidden. The one she'd always run from. Like the lust she'd always unleashed, and only once had sex without. Yet he was affected. Never had the power been not triggered it in some fashion.

They had to be linked, the lust and the insanity. Now that he knew, he had to be horrified to be linked to her.

Ace watched her rock in her semiaware state. His heart was breaking for her. Keara and Natalya had said it was something she needed to work through, but he couldn't imagine living the rest of their lives this way, like strangers afraid to tread on each other's toes. "It's not every day you face your biggest fear, Ace. Holly is afraid of insanity, and Enishka made her insane. Give her time. It was terrifying to watch her, but she had to live it."

Anger surged in him. What had gone through her mind when Enishka let loose his power? What pain had she felt?

It felt good, satisfying. Finally! An emotion of passion, something different from the careful, nervous demon she'd turned him into. The one afraid to "break" his charge.

"Holly, you need sunlight." Even his voice was louder and stronger, yet she didn't bother to look up at the tone. Listlessly she continued to rock in the shade, half aware of her surroundings and half not, almost as if she lived in another reality.

That was it. She needed to live. Here, with him in this dimension. Gritting his teeth, he grabbed a blanket from inside and tossed it on the lawn, where the branches from a tree were sparse enough to let the sunlight filter through.

He didn't ask her again. This time he picked her up from the rocker and strode over to the blanket with her, ignoring her yelp of surprise.

There. She'd yelped. That was the most attention she'd given him in weeks.

He'd get more of it too.

Carefully he laid her down on the blanket and grasped the fabric of her gown from between her breasts, tearing it neatly down the center.

"What are you doing?" she gasped.

"Getting you some healing sunlight. A tan."

She looked bewildered. That was okay, it was better than listless.

He stripped her naked.

She lay as stiff as a board, until eventually the sun worked its magic and her limbs relaxed. Yet her mind didn't. She continued to peek at him warily.

As if he must expect her to...fulfill her duties. Tentatively she asked, "Will you want me to trigger the lust?"

At first Ace felt more anger. But looking down at her naked form, it was impossible to stay upset. Her shoulders were softly rounded, her arms and legs long and lean. Her feet, dainty. She looked up at him with huge eyes, staring directly at him. So unafraid, so trusting. Of him.

The woman was so sexy, she had no idea.

She also had no idea that she couldn't pull her power. Powers were only expended during health, and quite frankly, Holly's outside was healing, but inside was another story.

For some reason, she was afraid of her lust. Just like in the beginning, but she had to learn it didn't control her, that she controlled the power.

She'd find out soon enough.

"Why would I want the lust, Holl?"

"Everyone wants it. You said it's the most revered power in Luciefyore."

"Do you want it?"

She shrugged. "It wouldn't be so bad if it didn't come with...drawbacks." Like insanity.

"Trigger it," he commanded.

Holly closed her eyes and tilted back her head. She moaned and exhaled breathily on a kiss.

Nothing.

She opened her eyes, confused. She looked up at him and blinked.

"How does the sun feel, Holly?"

She was silent as she pondered the warmth. "Good. Tingly."

Deliberately he dragged his eyes down to her breasts. They hardened beneath his gaze. He reached out and touched a stiff peak, rolling it between his fingers.

Her pink tongue delicately licked her lips.

"There's no power to call, is there?" he said gently.

"No," she said, her voice small.

"You have to be in good health. You're not. Not yet. Your body has healed, but mentally you're still not there."

"Then without the lust, my insanity can't be triggered also?"

Is that what she thought? That now the two of them would go hand in hand?

"You don't have lingering insanity, Holly. Yes, Enishka can transfer his to someone in close proximity, but it isn't permanent. It doesn't penetrate and invade you. It's his insanity that he allows you to feel for the moment, thereby relieving his own mind. He simply used your biggest fear against you."

Ace slowly lifted his shirt, exposing smooth skin and lines of muscle. "Now I'm going to show you the power between us, babe. Lift your legs."

Helping her, he bent her legs at the knees, spreading her legs and bringing them to her chest. "Women here tan all over," he said, his eyes on her spread labia. Gently he brought two fingers to spread her lips gently apart.

His touch was magical, sending a thrill down to her nether region.

"The sun heals, Holly," he said. "The warm rays rejuvenate you, make you feel sexy. You're energized, concentrated all right here." He slid his fingertip through her slit. It slid easily, obviously she'd already gotten wet. Was it his touch, his gaze or the sun?

"Your nipples are hot and hard." Yes, and tingles were shooting down to the base of her tummy. "Your pussy looks like it's waking up out of sleep." It was. It was like she could feel her lips engorging with the sun's energy. They were slowly moving, being kissed by the gentle warmth of a breeze as they swelled.

"Are you horny, Holly?" His finger plunged into her sheath, feeling the slickness for himself.

"Yes," she breathed as he curled his finger to reach her G-spot. He rubbed erotically over the smooth pillow of inner flesh.

"And that's without triggering anything, baby. This is me and you. Do you want me to eat you, Holly?"

His mouth over her tingling mound? His tongue flicking out and licking her clitoris?

"Please," she whimpered.

Leaving his finger inside her, he moved to kneel between her spread legs. "You're beautiful," he muttered, and clamped his mouth over her entire pussy.

Sweet bliss, his mouth was warmer than the rays of sunshine had been. She squirmed beneath his tongue, the feelings almost too intense. His lips French kissed her clitoris, his finger in her sheath still caressing her sensitive G-spot. He was going at it like a man starved. His horns had even extended.

She gripped them, pulling him into her. Holding him by the horns, pressing his magical mouth against the hot core of her pussy. Wondering and yet not caring if the neighborhood could watch through the fence. Could hear her moans. Fact was, it was a little naughty, even thrilling, to know someone might watch them fuck.

He'd moved his finger out of her sheath so he could insert his tongue. In and out, thrusting it, tasting her entire channel with the sides of his tongue.

"Do I turn you on, baby?" she whispered.

He licked up her entire slit, slurping at her tender skin. "Hell, yes,"

"Then please fuck me... It's been so long, and I need you. Now."

His shirt ripped as he flung it over broad shoulders. His jeans dropped next, exposing a cock so hard it looked painful. He rubbed it against her pussy, wetting the head thoroughly. She was so hot, it sank into her swollen flesh.

She hissed and wrapped both legs around his waist. She lifted her buttocks to embed him deeper, holding on for dear life as his hips rolled slowly in and out.

The waves began deep inside her. She felt insatiable as she pressed herself even closer to him, gasping as she bit his shoulder to keep from screaming out. Her orgasm hit full force, ripping through her uterus first and clenching his erection as she rode higher.

"That's it, baby," he muttered thickly. "Let loose. Come for me."

"Yes," she screamed, not caring about the neighbors listening.

Ace threw his head back. The cords of his neck strained. "Fuck," he yelled in response as his orgasm overtook him also. He bucked wildly, emptying all he had into her.

Slowly her heartbeat returned to normal as her head lay across his chest.

"What worries you, love?" His voice rumbled beneath her ear.

"I didn't want you to know I can go crazy. Just flat-out insane like that. Enough to kill babies."

"Holly, were they really babies?"

She paused.

He continued on. "How could they have been anything but monsters? Specifically bred to exude poison from their pores. Killing machines without remorse who eat their mother upon birth. Created by a demon who is truly insane on top of evil."

"I know, Ace. But what if they had been just innocents and I had killed them?"

"Then you would be beating up yourself now. But where do you stand? Beating yourself up anyway...for something you didn't do. Something that never happened. Let it go, Holl. Life's too short to worry about what-ifs. So what if you go crazy? The good news is, you won't know it." He smiled. "No different from if I go crazy. Or paralyzed. Or anything. You'll be there to take care of me, and I'll be there to take care of you."

Holly turned her head slightly, pressing the softest of kisses to his bare chest. "I'm glad I found you."

"Technically I found you. I searched and searched, remember? That hell-hole dimension?"

She laughed. "I'm so glad you did. You're perfect."

His voice was gruff and she knew she'd embarrassed him. "Not perfect."

"Perfect for me. I love you just the way you are."

"Exactly why I can't figure out why you were so afraid to have me know your fear of insanity. I love you just the way you are, demoness."

"Even minus the horns?"

He kissed the top of her head. "Even without the amputated horns, baby."

"Ace?" Holly murmured sleepily.

"Mmm?"

"Do you think there are others out there on Earth? Stuck in the wrong dimension? Like me?"

Epilogue

Many years earlier, best friends Keara and Natalya had discovered that with a few modifications, they could actually make phone calls to each other across the dimensions. It was completely necessary once Keara and Caleb's daughter was sent to Luciefyore to be trained by her aunt and uncle. As an adult, little Randi would decide which dimension suited her better.

Natalya Hershkle had nearly gnawed her nails to the quick. Right now Talya needed to talk to Keara. Only she would understand her worries. So much had come together perfectly, but one thing worried her.

Keara answered on the first ring. "I've been waiting for you to call. How is Holly, sis?"

"She's mostly fine. The bottoms of her feet are still scarred and she's quite proud of the mark of Enishka around her neck. The paralysis is still gone, and most of the numbness is gone, so apparently her feeling is returning. But Keara, something else is not right."

"What do you mean?"

"I haven't been able to find my pet. She's never been gone this long. I'm worried. I can't track her anywhere on Earth!"

"Okay, I'll see what I can find on this end. I'll enlist Caleb. Don't worry, hon, she'll turn up. She'll be fine. Now, we're crossing the border to visit Holly. Do you and Jere want to come?"

Three hours later, Keara, Caleb, Natalya and Jere walked by the Horned Hood on their way to the house where Ace and Holly were residing.

Six male demons wearing thin gym tank tops with the name Excel across their muscular chests straggled from the bar, swaying drunkenly and completely worn out, banging into each other in their exhaustion, oblivious to the four who watched.

"We have to swear to an oath of silence," Ken mumbled. "We'll go to hell for sure if anyone finds out about some of those acts."

Greg was staring at the top floor of the bar, where the three luscious witches hung out a window. "I can't believe you claimed to be a one-woman man."

"I am," Ken insisted. "One woman on top. One on bottom. One was on the east and one was on the west."

Greg counted on his fingers. Then he looked up to the window and counted the women. He looked puzzled, and again counted his fingers. "Bottom. Top. East. West. Four." He counted the witches again. "Three. Umm, dude, what other woman did you do?"

But Ken was distracted by the vision of the three witchy women offering peek-a-boos of their breasts out the window.

Trisha was waving madly. "Rest up, sugar," she called. "And hurry back."

Monika blew a kiss.

Rena slowly pulled the index finger she had been sucking from her mouth, kissing the tip and pointing it at him.

"Damn, that Rena's hot," he muttered.

The rest of the demons apparently agreed, looking incongruous as all huge, horned men blew sickeningly sweet kisses at the window. Finally they turned and made their way down a steep embankment, still swearing their oath of silence.

"You're my favorite, Ken!" Trisha called out.

"I'll take Greggy Ruben any day!" Rena called. "And you at the same time, Georgie!"

"I'm gonna git the rest of you!" Monika said. "Wayne, Jeff and Steve. You're all mine!"

Jere and Caleb stared at each other in shock. They'd completely forgotten about the Three. Ugh, which of them was supposed to be babysitting them?

Natalya stood staring at the window in shock, completely missing the scene with the demon gangsters as focused as she was on the window instead. "That's my... Is that my Rena...pet... What the hell did someone do to my pet human? Whose spell is this? When does she return to normal? Jere!"

Jere looked pleadingly at Caleb. "Help me out, man!"

Caleb shook his head emphatically and turned, continuing his walk alone. "I ain't touching this."

"Baby," Jere gulped, pulling Talya away. "We need to talk about the next forty years."

About the Author

During my daytime job, I explore people of all types. At night, I love to read.

Why did I start writing? My favorite authors were all between books and I twiddled my thumbs until deciding, "Hey, I can do this for someone else out there who's waiting for a new release too!" My favorite authors in no particular order include: Kim Harrison, Laurell K Hamilton, Jim Butcher, Charlaine Harris and Kelley Armstrong. So obviously, I cling to urban-fantasy-type work with one difference—I'm a romance author at heart. I must have my happy ending with Prince Charming. And no, it doesn't matter if he has fangs. Or fur. As long as he's naked, we'll be just fine! Therefore, Ellora's Cave seems a perfect fit for my work.

Join me for a few hours and get lost in my worlds. For now at night, I love to write!

Rena welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

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