



DIRTY LITTLE DEMONS

C.R. MOSS

Hell's demons. Personal demons. Making sure her friend, Sophia, doesn't kill a dancer. Bonding with her soulmate. Ridding the world of the scourge that entered Las Vegas... It'll be a busy night.

Jaime Sue, now called Jay for confidentiality purposes, is back in Las Vegas, gearing up for a dangerous assignment. Sophia wants her to attend a revue with her. Master Dante requires her to go to the show since the two contacts she needs to meet with work in it. There she realizes one of the dancers she has to *bond with* is her *one*, her soulmate.

While battling inner demons, fighting the demon-gang that came to town and fending off their leader, Ash, and falling in love, Jay finds there's more at stake than just her life.

Story done in collaboration with R.M. Sotera. For Sophia's point of view and to see what happens when she meets her man, read *Dirty Dancer* by R.M. Sotera

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DIRTY LITTLE DEMONS

BY

C.B. MOSS

DEDICATION

*As always, to my other half – love you, babe.
And to my gal pals, Jo and Sherry, thanks for
your assistance on this project and for your
wonderful friendships.*

CHAPTER ONE

Journal Entry, October –

So many demons, so little time. Here I am, back at my original stomping grounds, called in by the Master of the Las Vegas Headquarters, my old mentor, Master Dante, to help his men. Master Virgil at the Los Angeles sect and Master Dante say I'm special. I'm the only one they've found within the La Setta di Uccisore with the quality they need.

Yes, I have psychic traits Master Dante helped me to develop. Sure, I had learned to fight in a number of disciplines, had become certified as a personal trainer and licensed as a massage therapist. And of course I've had a handful of sexual partners because it's our sect's way of bonding with another person and combining our strengths to fight the demons. But what the men mean regarding the one unique peculiarity of mine no one else has yet – a scar from the bite of a demon.

Lucky me. If I had known all those years ago my first boyfriend was a demon, I would have killed the bastard the moment he laid a finger on me. But I was young and naïve, just run away from home and didn't know

much about the darker aspects of life. Ah, Michael. My first lay. When he bit me, I didn't think twice about it. I had figured it was all a part of making love, part of the games we played. It wasn't until a few days later when I began to hallucinate that the bite came to mind. I left class, went to confront him about it. Bastard had disappeared. Just up and vacated the apartment we shared. All he left behind was a letter telling me thanks for the good time. The prick.

But as I learned when I was younger, everything happens for a reason. Because of Michael, I had been discovered by Rachel Quigley, witch extraordinaire, introduced to The Sect of the Slayers and, as they say, the rest is history. I've found my purpose in life as a demon killer.

From what Master Dante and our commune's scientists have figured out, the saliva in Michael's bite gave me atypical functions. I can smell when a demon is around. With a single thought, I can switch between different visions—normal, infrared, ultraviolet and night, whereas my co-slayers have to wear specialized sunglasses. I can track the evil buggers with ease.

Thing is, I haven't killed a demon in months. The LVHQ pulled me from my Los Angeles duties and clientele and has had me sitting around, waiting for orders and working on their high-end clients and slayers. This hurry up and wait crap irritates me to no end. I could have stayed in LA and worked with people who are nice and appreciate my services while the sect here waited for Mistress Beatrice and her undercover

agents to return. But no. They wanted me in Las Vegas – just in case. I’m tired of massaging snobbish people who think they’re entitled to whatever they want just because they have money. I’m tired of working out in the gym and training the male slayers who think they already know it all.

Hell, when it comes down to it, I’m tired of being alone.

It’s been a decade since I left the backwaters of Tennessee. Almost ten years of fighting, of searching for the one man I could call mine, of shoving skeletons in my closet. I have no true friends. I had to change my legal name. I trust no one because of Michael. Due to the sect’s laws to keep our identities safe, I can tell no one but my true love what my real name is. We all go by nicknames. I’m growing tired of this way of life. But how can I risk my heart again? I want to be close to someone, have them know the real me, have them love me. But therein lies the rub. How can a man love me when I don’t trust anyone? And even if I come to trust him, would he accept me? My flaws? My past?

Jay tapped the end of the pen against her cheek, reading over what she wrote. She sat up, crossed her legs to create a more comfortable position on the bed. Her bare, pale legs contrasted against the burgundy satin comforter. She loved living in an area where she could wear shorts most of the year.

Perhaps saying I have no true friends and all my clients are snobs is a bit dramatic. Master Dante, Rachel and my client, Sophia, have been great friends.

Sophia was even nice enough to invite me out with her tonight. Well, maybe her assistant's email was more of a command than an invite, seeing as how Sophia doesn't want to go to the revue all by her lonesome. I have to chuckle. She's a high-powered exec and nothing ever seems to faze her. Except this. Poor Sophia. She's beside herself. She's in a world of trouble with her boss because her casino's show is failing. The competing show we're going to is getting rave reviews. I can't blame her apprehension about going to the revue and having to take notes though. I'd hate to have to go alone myself, be in the awkward position of scoping out the joint and the men. So, I'll be nice and go and keep her company. It'll be something to occupy my time.

Footsteps clacked on the travertine tiles of the hall. Jay cocked her head, listened from her cross-legged position on the bed. The fast heavy rhythm of the steps told her Master Dante approached. She closed her journal, slipped it and the pen under a pillow and waited.

"Jay? Are you in there?" a deep male voice called out.

"Yes, Master Dante. You may enter."

A robust man barged in. His height and stature reminded her of a Norse God from the pictures she had seen in her mythology class in school. Black hair stuck out in frazzled, pointed clumps. Dark circles lay beneath his deep-set brown eyes. An air of hyper excitement surrounded the man. A quick psychic assessment of him told her he had

been up all night, working and worrying throughout the day, but the news he brought was good.

"You have no clients this evening, right?" He wrung his hands and his gaze darted around the modest bedroom.

"No," she drew the word out and raised an eyebrow, wondering what her mentor was about and what caused his nervous ticks. "But I do have plans."

"Oh. Well, you'll have to change them. I need you to do something and it may require your...um..." He dragged a hand through his hair, increasing the state of its disarray. "Charms."

She folded her arms across her stomach and tilted her head, willing him to get on with his request.

"I need you to go to a show over at The Bavarian, but it's sold out. The boss, who we should have been able to count on, wasn't any help either. You'll have to work your way in somehow."

The Bavarian. What a coincidence. "It's not *Decoeur's Dream*, is it? Because I already have a ticket."

"Yes, it is. That's great." He clapped his hands, rubbed them together. A smile lit his face. "How did you manage it?"

"Sophia. I guess she has a contact at The B and

was able to score some. Her assistant said she needed me to go with."

"Meraviglioso! Brilliant."

"Why is my going to a combination female and male revue so wonderful?" She toyed with the end of her long braid, musing how her black waist-length hair had become another weapon in her arsenal.

"Mistress Beatrice and her undercover agents are back. Two of them happen to work at the show you'll be attending and are your contacts." He folded his arms in front of him. His hands disappeared beneath the wide white cuffs of his gold kung fu shirt.

She realized he carried nothing with him. Jay narrowed her eyes, her forehead crinkled. "So where's my packet of information? Don't I need the men's portfolios?"

A hearty laugh rolled from him. "Ah, my beautiful Jay. We've let you sit idle for too long. You've lost your touch."

She jumped off the bed, sore he thought she had lost any abilities when she had been training nonstop. "What do you mean?"

Master Dante slid a hand out from its hiding spot. He held it up. "Relax. I meant no offense. You have to admit though, your mind has been closed. If it were open, you'd realize you don't need the crutch."

"But I've always been briefed on my contacts and the mission." Confusion settled in her mind. *Granted, I've been pretty self-absorbed lately, but that shouldn't have affected procedure.*

"True. But this time it's a special case. You'll know him when you see him and learn the mission after you two make introductions."

"Him? I thought you said there were two." She crossed her arms over her stomach again, not liking how her master seemed to be hiding something from her.

He turned pale, his cheeks flushed with a deep shade of mauve. "Yes, I meant them. You'll know *them* when you see them."

Before she could question him further, he hurried from the room.

Jay sat at the desk, rested her head in her hands, willed her mind to open to search for a sense of what was going on. Minutes passed, but only thoughts of work and how unsatisfied she had been filled her mind. Though Dante had tried to cover his tracks, he had said *him*. *That I'll know him. Yeah, right.* She pushed away from the desk, glancing at the digital clock on the nightstand next to the bed. The hour had grown late. She was due to meet Sophia soon.

At the walk-in closet, she thought of Master Dante's words. With her luck, the contact would be a snot-nosed, acne-prone kid who worked

behind the scenes and never experienced a day of exercise in his life, let alone sex. The thought of dressing to seduce a man such as she imagined burned her gut, but she'd have to deal with him and the other one. She and her contacts would have to bond if she were to have the help she needed.

She flipped through the clothes, knowing she should at least try to look sexy so she could entice the men, but her heart wasn't into it. The yearning to find her true mate welled up in her tired soul. *How much longer do I have to endure bonding with men I care nothing about?*

A man's white dress shirt caught her eye. *This and a tight pair of jeans will do.* She pulled the shirt, a remnant of a brief affair years ago, off the hanger and smelled it. Though Big T's scent was long gone, she imagined the man's spicy fragrance on the fabric. Back when they were together, she had believed he was her soulmate and had planned to reveal her real name to him. But a demon attack had killed Big T before she had the chance. Guilt over his death and how she couldn't save him plagued her for ages. Even though Big T had never told her his real name, it also had taken her a long time to realize he hadn't been *the one* to begin with.

Her sigh filled the air. She left the closet, tossed the shirt on the bed. From the top drawer of a tall

cedar-wood dresser, she pulled out a full-busted demi cup bra and a matching pair of black boyshorts. The cleavage boosting bra and sheer stretch lace panties would have to be enough *sexy* for the evening. She grabbed a pair of hip hugger jeans from the bottom drawer.

Showered and made-up with her favorite lotion and makeup, she strolled back into the bedroom to dress. The fragrance of the lotion with its hypnotic scent of luscious plum and purple orchid and underlying hints of vanilla, amber and musk prepared her mindset for the night ahead.

From beneath the bed, she pulled out a footlocker, turned the combination lock and opened the lid. She retrieved a black knitting needle roll up and put it on top of the bed. Inside the roll up lying against a purple backdrop, various sizes of steel and wooden spikes glinted in the lamplight. She chose two small thin steel ones that reminded her of tiny thin knitting needles. Those went into special slots she had created on the outer sides of her bra cups. Two longer steel spikes, the width of her ring finger, would slide into hidden compartments in the upper section of the black boots she planned to wear. She unzipped a pouch in the roll and retrieved a silver hair clip. The clip, covered in sharp pyramid-like points, would fasten at the bottom of her long braid.

As with all the sect's weapons used for demon

fighting, these, too, were cleansed and charged by a Wiccan High Priestess, sung over by a Rabbi, blessed by a Bishop and kissed by a Buddhist. And, though she was no longer a practicing Christian, she prayed while she finished prepping herself for the evening. She prayed for the safety of herself and her fellow slayers. She prayed for the courage to do her job to the best of her ability. She prayed the evening would provide her with needed diversion from the monotony of life and wouldn't turn out to be a bust.

CHAPTER TWO

Jay backed up against the short wall lining the semi-circled lounge, propped her elbows on its narrow counter. People milled about the area, buying treats at the yogurt stand, checking out merchandise in the specialty store for the revue, lining up to enter the theater for the last show of the evening.

Where the hell is Sophia? She checked her watch. Five minutes until the show attendants began seating and her friend, who had to pick up the tickets since the man wouldn't release them to her without proper identification, was nowhere to be seen. A careful survey of the surroundings revealed more women dressed in skimpy clothes, shoes on their feet only people with extreme sadistic tendencies would create and makeup applied with trowels. Her gaze latched on to a particular hot mess in a bright pink miniskirt, black bustier and fishnet stockings. The blonde tottered on high-heeled, booted-feet toward her. A

smile lit her garishly made-up face.

A crowd had gathered, waiting for the doors to open. Jay took a slow, deep breath, assessing the scene, attempting to find an escape route or Sophia. In no mood to be solicited, she inched along the wall, heading for an opening in the multitude of people away from the woman.

"Amanda, wait!"

Amanda? Jay stopped short, raised an eyebrow, reconciling the woman with Sophia's voice. The hot mess drew near. A pair of green eyes, dark like the depths of an evergreen bush, stared at her. The woman's right eye winked. "Sophia?" *Unusually dressed?* She'd have to have a talk with Brandi on the difference between *unusual* and *streetwalker*.

"Shh." Sophia held up a finger to her mouth, swayed on the stilettos. "I'm not Sophia tonight. I'm Carrie. Do you like?" She smoothed her hands down her outfit, turned on the balls of her feet, almost tipping over as she faced forward. Her hand shot out to her side and grabbed onto the wall. Sophia appeared a little green around the jaw line.

Jay took a step back, wondering what happened that afternoon that her friend would get lit before the show. She shook her head, her waist length braid slid against her chest. She tossed it over her shoulder, wincing when the sharp points of the clip nipped her back. "That's right. Your assistant

did mention the fake names and that you'd be in an unusual outfit. Brandi failed to mention there'd be a raid on her closet. Didn't realize we were supposed to get hooker-fied for this gig."

Her friend covered her face in an apparent attempt to compose herself, then moved her hands to her sides and cleared her throat. "I do not look like a hooker." Sophia's thick wine scented breath puffed out.

Jay waved a hand in front of her face to rid the air of the alcohol fumes. "I beg to differ, but the disguise is good. You'll definitely not be recognized by those who don't know you. And the aroma of drunken hobo is a nice touch, too."

Sophia clasped a hand over her mouth. "Is it that bad? Do you have a mint?" Her palm muffled the questions.

"No to both. You know I have a more heightened sense of smell than most."

"Go get me a mint."

She shot her a you're-skating-on-thin-ice glare. Irrked by Sophia's demand, Jay raised her brow, placed her hands on her hips. "Excuse me? I'm not Brandi. Don't think you can boss me around."

"I'm sorry. That came out the wrong way." Sophia's bottom lip curved into a full-fledged pout as she lowered her gaze. "Could you please go get me a mint? I don't want to walk into the store in my condition."

Jay's long black braided ponytail swished around her hips as she disappeared into the crowd of women waiting like cattle for the doors to the show to open. In the specialty store for the show, Jay discovered the perfect candy for her friend. Moments later, she returned to Sophia, who was propped up against the wall, and handed her the treat. "Here you go, *Carrie*. Suck on this."

Sophia took the item from her and her eyes widened to the size of half-dollars. "It's a penis! It's Jett's penis."

Jett? Jay chuckled to herself. *That's right. This is the show he works at. Man, I have been too self-absorbed if I forgot that. At least I know he's not one of my contacts.*

Sophia shrieked. "I...I...I can't get away from his rubbing *it* in my face!"

The crowd of women stopped talking, gazes glued on Sophia. Jay tilted her head and stared at a petite girl to their right, willing her to mind her own business. An embarrassed half-smile creased the young girl's face before she turned and slid through the crowd. She glanced back at Sophia, touched her finger to her lip to shush her. "How much did you have to drink?" *Sophia's boss must have rode her hard to chink her tough exterior this bad. Nothing shakes her.*

Her friend's gaze fixated to the small candy apple red head of the penis pop. "A couple of

glasses," she mumbled. "It's his dick, Jay. His dick is haunting me."

Jay cocked her head to the other side. "Sophia?" She drew her friend's name out.

"All right. You caught me. I had two bottles of wine and gave Brandi a glass out of them. I had to fortify myself for my unwanted recon mission." Sophia held up the tickets, stuck her tongue against her lower lip, creating a contemptuous vibrating sound. "*Decoeur's Dream*. My ass. Bet they don't even know how to dance as well as my *Gods* do. They're probably all gay, too."

She snatched the tickets from her friend's fingers. "Come on, *Miss Carrie*. Let's go in and we'll see if you're right." Jay placed an arm around Sophia, steadying the tipsy woman as they went into the theater. She read the strips of gold paper—table fourteen, seats ten and twelve. The attendants at the curtained entrance broke off their portion of the tickets and pointed her and Sophia in the right direction.

Always conscious of her surroundings and the people congregating in them, Jay scanned the black walled and tabled room. Two exits—the doorway they came in and another farther back along the same wall. The stage was forward of the seating, a bar sat behind the red booths horseshoeing the tabled area. Excited auras vibrated around all the women who were packed

like sardines at the narrow tables. Their charged up voices chatted without pause, growing louder with each passing minute. No evil scents hung in the air, but there was the distinct spicy tone of another demon slayer with a hint of something else. She wondered for a moment who her contacts would be that they had such earthy scents.

Jay shook her head, not liking the idea of being in such an enclosed area with a bunch of hyperactive, hormonal women. A wave of gratitude flowed over her when they reached the table. She had an end seat, facing the exits, with plenty of room to her right. Should any trouble deem to walk through the doors or off the stage, she'd notice in an instant and be able to react.

She glanced to her left. Sophia had disappeared. More women filtered into the theater, to their seats near hers and Sophia's, introducing themselves as they sat. There was an Amazonian-type woman whose name was beautifully exotic, but hard to remember and say. There were a couple of tourists, cute artsy people from New York City. A woman from the local paper, looking relaxed and like she had been having a fun evening, sat and handed her a card. The redhead hoped to get a quote for an article she had to write.

Before they could continue their conversation, the lights went out, the music came up and a

man's voice boomed over the speakers. Sophia sat back down, placing a beer in front of her and two in front of herself. Jay shook her head. "What? Two beers for you and only one for me?"

"The second beer is for a special friend of mine." Sophia took a swig, chugged half of it, slammed the glass back on the table. "Sorry."

Sophia's need for more alcohol was puzzling, but she said nothing, nor inquired about the *friend*. The exec had a hard time lately trying to keep her own show afloat. She needed to unwind, let her hair down, not be lectured. Besides, Jay had a good feeling she knew who the *friend* was. Both he and Sophia would be in for big surprises once their personalities met.

Loud music pulsed through the room, shaking the flimsy walls. Spotlights intensified, cascading the handsome dark-haired master of ceremony in bright white light. The sound mix and lighting arch changed format, ushering a line of chainmail adorned men and women in long medieval gowns onto the multi-colored lit stage.

A strong whiff brought the male demon slayer's scent to her nose. The spicy earth fragrance, with an undertone of something she couldn't place, set off a ball of fiery need in her. She scanned the stage, zoning in on the direction of the aroma. A dancer in the back with dark hair and eyes stared in her direction. A sexy smirk lined his lips. *Him*.

Her one. The one. Dante had been right. She knew him. That was for sure. But why did her *one* have to be involved on a mission with her? Why couldn't she have met him elsewhere, in a situation where his life wouldn't be in danger?

The emcee, Bodin, announced Jett. As the lead dancer, Jett stepped forward. He grabbed the middle of his fake chainmail and ripped it apart, displaying a sleek tanned chest with a silver hoop earring pushed through his right nipple. He reached for his waist, his hands cupping the material below his belly button. The women in the audience went wild. With one sweeping motion, Jett pulled the pants from his body, revealing a red g-string. Sophia looked spitting mad. The other ladies at the table appeared enraptured.

The rest of the dancers followed suit. Fake chainmail flashed in the disco lighting, fell to the black stage. Black tights followed suit. Dresses and undergarments slipped off the female dancers. Jay had no eyes for any of the dancers but one. No ears for the music blaring and women screaming. Her sole focus was on her contact, the chiseled man with tan skin. She wished she had his sculpted body on hand for her anatomy classes, even his serratus muscles were defined. Seconds later, the men and women strutted off stage.

She glanced at Sophia. A muscle strained at her friend's jaw. A lone tear from narrowed eyes slid

down her cheek. The lights went down, then came up again to reveal Jett in the middle of the stage, dressed in black leather pants, a Metallica t-shirt ripped to his navel and black snakeskin boots. Jett gyrated.

Sophia clenched the bottle in her hand.

Jay reached out to her friend, grasped her wrist. "Sophia. Chill."

A scream from the reporter caused her to jerk. She glanced at the pretty redhead, then back to her friend.

Sophia stared at her hand clamped to her wrist and tugged. A wicked feral smile curved Sophia's lips.

Jay released her grip.

"Oh, I'm calm," Sophia uttered in cold, matter-of-fact voice. "See you later. I have some unfinished business to take care of. Once and for all." She slipped out of her seat and headed toward the house left wall, the third full beer bottle in hand.

Jay considered stopping Sophia from making a scene, but only for the briefest of moments. Jett would be a good match for her workaholic friend, loosen her up and make her enjoy life. Sophia would be just the ticket for him to bring his ego down a notch. She sat back, allowing the events to unfold as they may.

Total chaos ensued. Sophia interrupted Jett's act

by hurling the bottle at him. Jett made quick work of catching and tossing it to the side of the stage where a black-clothed stagehand moved it out of the way. The dancer's movements were swift, fluid.

Jay narrowed her gaze and zoned in on the man. He was a slayer, that was for sure. A damn fine one, too. The fact that he was meant for Sophia, who was trying desperately to drown him in beer, verbal accusations and red wine, brought a smile to her face.

Jett grabbed the microphone from Bodin, smoothed a hand over his sweaty brow. He looked out into the swarm of drunken women. "Well, it looks like I have an admirer who finds it necessary to douse me with liquids tonight." He glanced down at Sophia, then toward the emcee. "Bodin, would you get me a set of cuffs to use now, and a bucket of ice cold water for later?"

Jay covered her mouth to stifle a laugh. She had a good idea Sophia was in for a dose of her own medicine.

Sophia pushed her way through the swarm of women back to the table and grabbed her purse.

Jett rushed off the stage, and in a feat of slayer training and agility, crossed over the tables. Dodging women's groping hands, he jumped on the table right in front of her and Sophia.

Sophia's gaze shot up from her purse to her. Jay

winked just as Jett hopped off the table and behind her friend.

He wrapped an arm around Sophia. "Not so fast, pretty lady. Since you are determined to be part of my show tonight, I'm about to make your wish a reality." He twirled her to face him, then pulled her up into his arms.

She squirmed.

He laughed.

"Let me go. I will have you fired for this. You...you gay!"

"Not a chance," Jett promised. "And to set the record straight, I'm not gay, sweetheart."

The women at the table cheered and Jay continued to chuckle at her friend's torment. Male slayers tended to have great senses of humor. They had to or else there was a chance of going crazy from the seriousness of fighting evil.

"You let me go right now, buddy," Sophia demanded. "I'm not one of your little man groupies."

True to his word, Jett soon had Sophia back on stage, cuffed to the roller chair. He propelled them around the stage. Sophia's mouth continued to move in a torrent of words and Jay wished she could hear what accusations her friend was slinging at the dancer. Jett plucked off his leather pants, straddled her body and Bodin doused them with water. As the clear liquid ran down her face,

across her chest and seeped into her clothes, she opened her mouth as if to scream. Jett's lips clamped over hers. When the kiss ended, Jett spoke to the audience.

Jay tried to pay attention to the discourse, but the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end, pricked her skin. She scanned the room and her gaze landed on her man hanging out in the back shadows of stage left. He held up a hand, moved his fingers up and down. Jay repeated the *hello* greeting. Feelings she hadn't experienced in ages—ragged heat, the flush of desire—rampaged through her. She longed to have him in her arms, his lips tasting, trailing, sampling the nooks and crannies of her body. He disappeared from view and the chilling possibility he didn't feel the same triggered goose bumps on her flesh.

A cocktail waitress placed a beer in front of Jay. At her confusion, the theater worker said it was compliments of the house. She shrugged a shoulder and chugged the freezing cold, almost tasteless liquid. Years ago, she had loved the taste of most American mass-produced beers, but over the course of time, her palate refined. Now she preferred dark microbrews or imports.

Lights flashed overhead and a fun guitar and synthesizer riff from an old new wave band filled the theater. From the right, three men in long black robes and white wigs quickly marched out

onto the stage. Her man was in the lead. They stood in triangle formation, snatched the wigs from their heads and tossed them to *invisible* stagehands. At the start of the lyrics, her man, then the other two, ripped the robes off their bodies, revealing blue waistcoats, white cravats and tan breeches. Jay's heart skipped a beat at the glimpse of skin hidden beneath the coat and cravat.

The men stepped forward for a four-count, then back for another four. They rotated, undulating their hips and removing the cravats. Those pieces of clothing disappeared to the sides. Facing front again and on another high beat of music, the three shucked their coats. Tan skin, rippling with muscles and sweat, gleamed under the lights. Stepping into a straight line so they were all at the edge of the stage, the men turned, presented their backs, ripped off their breeches. Toned ass cheeks and powerful leg muscles moved to the beat of the music. Each was in a different colored g-string—her man in blue, another in white and the last in red.

The combination of the beer, the sexy music and sight of her almost naked man intoxicated her. She shifted in her seat, wishing the show was over so she could get on him and on with what needed to be done. The lyrics broke through her need and she agreed with the lines of the song. *Yep, I'm*

seeking and I hope to get. Hot desire pulsed through her.

They jumped around to face the audience again. A multitude of hands waved in the air, women hoping to cop a feel of any of the handsome dancers. Two female dancers in toga-like attire and holding brass scales twirled onto the stage, spinning into the male dancers' arms. Her man strolled into the audience, bee-lined right toward her. Excitement pooled in her stomach. When he reached the table, he took her hand and pulled her from her seat. The music slowed during an interlude exchanging between the guitars, synths and drums. He slung an arm around her waist and dragged her into him. He swayed his hips and thus hers in the process. Their bodies joined and moving as one, he danced her up onto the stage. His hands slid all over her back, seeming to miss the dangerous hair clip with ease. He pressed his pelvis into hers. His hardness pushed into her abdomen. Women cheered.

"Hello, Jay," his sexy, British accented voice whispered into her ear. "It's a pleasure to finally meet you."

Jay's insides turned to mush. She loved men with accents and hoped his wasn't faked for the sake of the show. Her traitorous body grew limp in his arms. *Get a hold of yourself, girl. You're on the clock.* Registering the beat of the music, she

stepped in time with it, following his lead, rubbing her body against his in return. The two of them danced close. For a wondrous moment, she forgot about her duties, forgot about the dangerous world outside the theater, forgot the fine hunk of a man, whose hips oscillated against hers, could die in a matter of hours.

"What's your name?" The question brought a whiff of his scent to her. The something she couldn't place before was his pheromones. She opened her mind and was met with intense longing. He did want her. No acne-prone kid, no awkward seduction, would be her fate. Her heart sang in happiness.

"I'm called Ace. Want to go backstage with me?"

"Do you have to ask?"

A bright smile lit his face. He held her arm up in the air and twirled her to stage left. She made sure to hold her braid in place so the clip wouldn't cut her or his beautiful body and to keep to the balls of her feet so not to trip. Ace navigated her through the apron to the dimly lit offstage area.

"I have to finish my act, but then I'll be back," Ace stated, then claimed her lips in a passionate kiss—with a heated and searching tongue—that made her head reel. All too soon, the lip-lock ended. "You are so much more than I expected." He pecked her forehead and trotted off.

She stood there, stunned. He had taken her breath away in more ways than one. She sighed, then realized her feminine wiles had overrode her common sense and killer instincts. With a good mental lashing to herself, she regained control of her lustful body and ticked off a game plan in her mind. She was about to sneak back into the apron and to stage left to watch the rest of his act when an object hit her calf muscle.

All senses on alert, Jay spun around, prepared to fight off any type of attack, but encountered Sophia instead. The poor woman was still cuffed to the chair and had been hog-tied to the bottom of the fly rail near the steps. A piece of red cloth protruded from her mouth. Jay choked on a laugh.

Sophia narrowed her eyes, mumbling around the material.

"What?" Jay tilted her head with a huge grin. "You want me to help you?"

Sophia nodded. Her blonde wig shifted forward and fell into her eyes.

Jay moved the synthetic hair back into place. "There. That better?"

Sophia's muffled voice fought to be heard around the gag.

"Ya know, girlfriend, I'd love to take that thing out, but I really don't want to piss off the men back here. There is a show going on. I don't think the management would like a woman screaming

backstage."

Her friend's eyes narrowed and, if Sophia's gaze could shoot daggers, she believed it would have. A sense of guilt crept over her. She had to be nice. After all, Sophia was a good friend. She liked having the executive in her life. Jay reached out, intending to remove the red cloth.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Ace crooned nearby.

Jay dropped her hand, shrugged her shoulder. "Sorry, Sophia."

Sophia bounced in the chair in a show of vexation.

Ace walked over and put an arm around Jay. "Ready to get this show on the road?"

"Sure," Jay replied, glancing around the area. "But MD said there were two contacts I'd have to meet."

"Ah, yeah. He'll be along later. For now it's just you and me." Ace kissed the top of her head.

Her pulse kicked into overdrive and her hormones sizzled in the rush of blood through her arteries. "Sounds good to me." She wiggled her fingers at Sophia. "Later, girl. Call me."

Ace pulled her away, led her out of the revue area.

It was time to get busy. She couldn't wait.

CHAPTER THREE

Pangs of guilt ran through her for leaving Sophia tied up backstage and for considering herself lucky her blue g-stringed contact was not an acne-ridden whelp. Ace took her hand and led her through the offstage area to a bright empty hallway, grabbing a pile of clothes and shoes from a wardrobe stagehand as they passed by. Pleasurable tingles zinged into her hand from his warm touch, traveled up her arm, distracting her from her guilt. She wanted to giggle like a schoolgirl, but contained the giddiness threatening to claim her.

“Where are you taking me? And what about the rest of the show?” The questions allowed her to appraise him, admire the man who had a good five inches of height over her without being obvious. Strong jaw line. Square chin. Dreamy dark eyes under shaped dark brows. Not to mention a kick ass body that sported a six-pack plus some. A big improvement over the other men

she had to deal with in the past.

"As for the show, I told the manager and director I had to leave early. As for you, I'm taking you to a special place, B.O.H." He glanced at her with a wink, directed her around a corner into the hidden corridors of the casino. "Somewhere we'll be able to talk and such without being disturbed for a little while." They stopped in the middle of the hall. He put on the black t-shirt and jeans he had taken from the wardrobe person, covered up his gorgeous muscles.

"B.O.H.?" She looked at her hand. Her palm and fingers had grown cold without his grip. She rubbed them against her jeans in an attempt to recreate the warmth. Nope. She needed him.

Ace smiled and leaned against the beige wall to put his sneakers on. The tight black shirt strained against his chest. "Back of house. The areas of the casino not meant for public view or use. We're going to the prop room of another show. We won't be bothered there since the show is dark tonight."

She nodded. The urge to tousle his brown faux-hawk styled hair pressed upon her, but she resisted. There would be plenty of time to dishevel each other's hair soon enough.

To her delight, he captured her hand again, spurred her on. They hurried down several passageways, past offices, janitors, dealers on their

breaks. Feeling like a teenager running with a forbidden lover to a secret place for a tryst, laughter bubbled within her. She kept the lighthearted sensations to herself. It was neither the time nor the place to lose herself in selfish pleasures. *Maybe after the mission.*

Several females said hello to Ace and a couple mumbled disparaging remarks about her, but she didn't care. Ace was hers now. Whoever he had relationships with in the past didn't matter anymore. All that mattered was the next several hours and whether he realized she was *his* one.

He pulled her into a dark room, released her hand, then left her side. A chill streaked over her when he moved away. *Great, all we've done is kiss and my attachment to him has begun. Why couldn't our personal bonding have waited until after the mission?*

A click sounded behind her. Soft lights illuminated the room. Long and thin clothing racks lined the area's perimeter, while a few short round ones dotted the floor. Costumes ranging from evening gowns to lacy lingerie hung on padded hangers. Ace walked around a rack, disappeared behind a gray floor-to-ceiling partition. Springs squeaked. Curious, she followed.

Ace lay on his side on a queen-sized bed with two thick white pillows and matching comforter.

A spindle-style brass headboard and footer framed the bed. He patted the space in front of him.

"Shouldn't you tell me what our mission is first?" Jay walked over to a table with a portable stereo system and other assorted items on it. She fidgeted with flyers created for the *Sirens of the Night* topless show, trying to tame her raging lust for Ace. While her contacts were always raring to go, most times it took her some effort to get in the mood. Not so this go-round. More than anything, she wanted to do a swan dive onto the bed and ravage every inch of him, but she didn't want to come off too eager. She was known for her cool composure and wasn't going to blow that reputation just because some man turned her head.

"Later," his accented voice rolled deep behind her. "One thing at a time." He smacked the bed twice.

Jay smiled, but didn't go to him. "What's the rush?" She placed the papers back into a neat pile, not expecting him to come right out and say *we're each other's ones*, but hoping for some hint concerning their situation.

"There's no rush." The bed shifted.

Aw, he sounds disappointed. Jay glanced over her shoulder. He sat up and swung his legs over the side of the mattress. With a shake of her head, she

searched through a rack of compact discs near the sound system and stumbled across an album of one of her favorite artists. An idea came to her. "Oh, I love this singer."

"Who?"

She spun around and held up the case. "I adore her. Her short hair, her sexy, sultry voice. May I?"

"Sure." He flicked his hand in the direction of the stereo.

Ace didn't seem happy she wanted to play tunes and not with him, but she figured he'd change his attitude once he saw her idea. She popped the disc into the player, pressed the button for random play and turned up the volume. Thankfully, the right kind of song filled the prop room. Jay tapped her heel, getting a feel for the beat, letting the tempo move her body. She unclipped and loosened the braid in her hair, shook her jet-black locks free, turned and strutted forward to stand before Ace. He sat on the edge of the bed, an appreciative grin animating his chiseled features.

"We have time for me to dance for you, don't we?" she inquired, removing her boots.

He nodded, appearing more enthused than before.

Swaying her hips to the music, she unfastened the buttons of her shirt, then strolled to the head of the bed. Caressing the top sphere of bedpost and

keeping her gaze on Ace's, she swiveled down to a crouched position. Slowly, she rose, tossing her hair around.

Ace reclined back onto his side, arm bent with his cheek resting on a hand. His brown-eyed gaze followed her dance alongside the bed, foot tapping to the beat. She circled around, placed her back on the post and slid up and down, undoing the fastenings of her jeans. When she turned back to face Ace, she lowered the trousers. After stepping out of them, she grabbed the edges of her open shirt and flung it open, revealing her black bra.

Her man crooked a finger, enticed her with a come-hither look. Jay shook her head and wagged a finger, then shucked the shirt. She pivoted, looked over her shoulder with a wink. As she strutted away, Ace cleared his throat. She spun around again, smiled, swung her hips while running her hands up her body and under her hair. Feeling like a sex kitten, she tossed the length of her locks with her hands. How freeing it was to disrobe and dance. No wonder the men appeared to enjoy being on stage. She was about to release her bra when the song ended and the next started.

Ace indicated for her to move to the bed and she went, settling down beside him.

"You can get next to me anytime, babe," referencing the song, he stroked the side of her

head, placed a kiss on her forehead.

"Ace, when we were on stage, you said I was more than you expected. What did you mean?"

His dreamy brown eyes gazed into hers. "I read part of your file, learned how you came into the sect, what your background was. And I saw an old black and white photo. The picture didn't do you justice."

"Really?" Her nerves dinged with eagerness. Normally, she didn't care what a man thought of her, wouldn't fish for compliments, but for some reason, she wanted Ace's approval. "How so?"

"Well, it didn't show off your black hair and how it shines like the finest silk or how your blue eyes are a deep blue. They remind me of that in-between stage between dusk and night right before the final light of day fades."

An explosion of girlish pride boomed in her, ramping up her desire for Ace even more.

"The picture," he continued, "also didn't bring across your personality. Plus, you were fully dressed. Quite unlike you are now." His passion-filled gaze raked up and down her body.

Contentment from the well-versed compliments slid through her. She sighed and placed a hand on his solid chest, focused on the contrast between her skin and his shirt. His heart beat fast and strong beneath her palm, matching the pace of her own. Her gaze moved up to his face.

Ace lowered his head, brushed his lips against hers twice. He pressed them upon her in smooth possession, soft and unhurried. The slow kiss churned the fire within her. She parted her lips, an invitation for him to enter. He accepted, slipped his tongue in and glided over hers, seducing her with long deep strokes.

In a quick shift, Ace maneuvered his body on top of hers without breaking the lock of their mouths. Lust and love surged through her veins. Her skin heated from his contact. She ached for more than the touch of his kiss, wanted him inside her, wanted him to become a part of her beyond the ritual bonding. To do that though, to become each other's *ones* they'd have to share the most intimate piece of information they had in their possessions—their names. Could she tell him her name and go even further by sharing her pre-sect name? Deciding she'd cross that bridge when the time came, she broke the kiss, trailed her lips up his jaw, leaving a kiss right below his ear. She hugged him.

He pulled back and gazed down at her. "Oh, Jay, I'm so glad I was assigned with you. I believe you may be my—"

Jay put a finger on his lips. "No," she breathed in a husky whisper. "Save the words for later." She raked her hands down his back, found the bottom of his shirt and rolled it up.

Taking the hint, he sat up, kneeling over her pelvis, and took off the t-shirt. His pectorals and side obliques rippled with the action. A crooked smile adorned his face while he took his time unfastening his jeans. Her breath hitched. He pushed his clothing down his thighs, freeing his solid member. Her gaze stayed glued to it as he rid himself of the jeans and g-string.

He lay back down on the bed and picked up her arm, placing kisses from her hand to her collarbone, a gentle trail of affection leading to her neck. The palm of his other hand marked graceful territory over her stomach, up her other arm. His thigh rested against hers, heating the patch of flesh there.

Slow lingering kisses brushed her jaw, her cheek, her forehead. He leaned back, stroked the back of his hand and fingers up her arm again, across her cheek, ending the caress by pushing some locks of hair behind her ear.

Ace's dark gaze peered into hers with a longing she had never seen directed at her before. None of her contacts had ever treated her with such respect and reverence. Neither had Michael in the time they had spent together.

"Cherished," his voice whispered near her ear.

She gave a small gasp, wondered if he read her mind.

"I want to cherish you." He stroked her hair,

cupped her cheek, kissed her temple. "Will you let me?"

Jay nodded, held her control in check, reminding herself it wasn't the best of times to break down in tears because someone wanted to love her.

His body covered half of hers. His mouth claimed her with fierce passion and his hand palmed a breast, massaging it through the fabric. Ace pushed his knee between her legs, rubbed his thick thigh against the fabric of her lacy boyshorts. She arched into his groping hand, pressing the other part of her chest on his. Ace groaned with masculine dominance into her mouth and slipped a hand behind her back. His fingers made fast work with the fastenings of her bra and before she knew it, the garment was off her body. His mouth latched on to a breast. His tongue toyed with her nipple, fingers slipped beneath her panties.

Jay bent her back again. She wanted him to devour her, make her his. Ace chuckled around her breast. His hot breath on her moist tit sent shivers through her body.

"All in good time, my little firecracker." He licked his way over to her other breast. The process repeated with his tongue and mouth while his fingers slid between her folds to play with her clit and slit.

She writhed beneath his touch, pondering how

long she'd be able to take the foreplay before she subdued him and took over. Though she wanted to get laid post-haste, he seemed to have other plans. He laved his way down the center of her torso to her crotch, took hold of her panties and slid them down her body, continuing to trail his tongue down her leg. After he tossed her underwear to the floor, he licked his way up her other leg and ended at the top of her pubic area with a kiss.

Ace moved her legs apart and settled between them. His head dipped down. The touch of his tongue within the fissure of her folds sent her mind whirring with passion. He kissed, then bit her clit. Her hips bucked toward the ceiling. *Control, girl, control. You don't want this over before it even gets started do you? Ride the wave of pleasure as long as you can since you've been denied it for so long.* He lapped and suckled her vulva. She grabbed his hair, entwining her fingers in the gelled spikes. Her toes curled on the satiny comforter and the sensation on her feet added to the pleasure waves whizzing through her body. With hooded lids, she gazed down at her new lover. She released Ace's hair and rose up on her forearms to observe him better.

He glanced up at her, gave a wink, then went back to his task with a nip at her crotch hairs and sliding a couple of fingers into her canal. In and

out his digits moved, alternating with his tongue. She clutched the fabric, digging her nails into the bedding material. Before she plunged over the edge, she scooted away from him. His dejected expression made her smile.

"I," Jay's voice cracked. She cleared her throat. "I think it's your turn, big boy. Lay on down here." She patted the bed like he had earlier.

After he became comfortable on his back and placed his hands behind his head, she straddled him. Settling her hands over the nipples of his chest, she reminded herself she needed to go slow, savor the experience. Her gaze held to his, she moved her hands to his shoulders, then slid them down, feeling the all the contours and nuances of his upper torso. She brushed the tips of her fingers over his nipples. He sucked in his breath.

His skin was hairless, hot. She traced the outlines of his well-defined muscles, down from his pectorals, through the segmented areas of his abdomen, to the top of his crotch. When she reached the boundary of his pelvis, she stopped, flattened her hands on his torso and retraced her tracks. She flicked his nipples again. He quivered under her hands. She caressed the tiny nubs once more.

She played with his breasts, bringing his small nipples to hard nubs. Her silky hair feathered his chest and stomach. She kissed down his chest,

making sure to add extra attention to each of his distended nipples with playful nips. With the tip of her tongue, she drew moist lines in the ridges of his abdomen muscles. Upon reaching the head of his penis, she kissed the tip and took it in a gentle grip.

The shaft throbbed in her hand and an excited thrill raced through her in anticipation of what was to come—making love. Not just sex, but real love with her *one*. As if in tune with her thoughts, his hips thrust toward her. Taking it as an invitation, she took him in her mouth. She relinquished her hold slightly and with positioning him just so, traced the underside of his cock from balls to tip with a finger. His fingers threaded through her hair. She sucked on his length, her tongue sliding along the silky skin, her fingers an O around the base.

Above her came a moan and slow, deep panting. His hips rose off the mattress again. Encouraged she had brought his desire to full rapture, she moved her head up and down, her lips and tongue moistening and enticing his cock.

She snaked out her tongue and licked the underside of his length from his balls to the end. After rimming the ridge, she laved down the length, back to his balls and took one side of the sac in her mouth, gently sucking on it, then the other side. His fingers wrapped tighter in her hair

and a low, rolling moan sounded above her. She smiled and kissed her way back up to the moist tip. She slid her fingers along his cock.

The fingers in her hair untangled themselves and a hand smoothed down her errant locks. He pulled out and away from her. "Now, Jay. I want you now," Ace spoke with a quiet intensity.

More than happy to oblige, she mounted him. Jay's legs gripped his hips, her over-aroused pussy enveloped his penis. He thrust in. Hot fire flared in her loins. She rocked on him in a heated frenzy, milking his cock for all it was worth. Sweat slicked her down. She panted and gasped in escalating bliss. Unintelligible words spewed from her while her womb and pelvic muscles convulsed around his dick. Pleasurable waves of sexual satisfaction surged through her. Perspiration soaked tendrils of hair stuck to the sides of her face, but she didn't care. Another spasm rocked her body. She gripped him tighter until her throes of ecstasy subsided and all that was left was the light pulsing of her crotch encasing his cock.

His body trembled under her, his own release following suit. He jerked with a low growl, then relaxed. She kissed his shoulder. A warm, contented feeling stole over her.

Jay lay upon him, feeling his strength. His force permeated her, made her strong and vice versa. She rubbed her hand up his arm. When it reached

his neck, she kissed him with light tenderness. She took a deep breath. His skin smelled of love and sweat. Not caring about the dampness of his body, she nuzzled her cheek against his soft skin, listened to the steady beat of his heart. His solid body tensed, then relaxed beneath her. His arms wrapped around her, held her in a strong embrace.

Too bad we can't stay this way forever.

CHAPTER FOUR

Jay snuggled closer. Pleasant thoughts of a world without evil, of a home with a white picket fence, of a love that would last forever floated through her mind. Ace's arms banded tighter around her. She smiled, brushed her cheek along his shoulder, kissed his collarbone. *Forever. What a concept.* She hoped after the mission they could explore the possibility. Maybe they could go out on a date, learn about each other, pretend they fell in love like a normal couple. And after a period of time, once they built a solid, trusting foundation, then they could share their names.

Ace hummed to the music, moved and pecked the top of her head with a quick kiss. "My beautiful, Jay," his voice murmured. "I'd like it if...um...I want..."

His heart sped up. The beat tapped fast beneath her ear. She stiffened. *He wouldn't tell me his name now, would he?* The disconcerting thought slammed in her head. She pulled away and looked

down at him. His dark-eyed gaze smoldered with unspoken affection and desire. His mouth trembled, about to form words again. *No*, her inner voice screamed, but she couldn't stop what had already started.

"I would be honored if you, and only you, my precious, my *one*, would know me by my given name, Alexander Colm Everet."

She sat up, swung her legs over the bed and put her head in her hands. "I don't know what to say, Ace."

The bed shifted behind her. Ace leaned his silky body against her back, laid his five-o'clock-shadowed chin on top of her shoulder. "Say you'll return the favor. Tell me who you are, Jay."

"I can't." She sprang to her feet, found her clothing. "It's too soon." She faced him, clutching the items to her chest.

"Too soon? How can it be too soon when we know what we are to each other?" His lips merged into a thin white line. His gaze flashed with broken spirit.

Jay stepped forward, threw her clothes onto the bed, picked up her underwear. In jerky, uncomfortable motions, she dressed. "You haven't even told me what the mission is yet. How about we make sure we get through the next several hours first?" She shoved her arms through her shirtsleeves and buttoned her jeans.

"I'm not Big T." He stood and put his jeans on.

"I never said you were." She turned to walk away, but he grabbed her arm.

"I'm not going anywhere. Nothing's gonna to happen to me."

His statements held such conviction, but she couldn't allow herself to believe him. Jay yanked her arm from his grip. *That's what Big T thought, too.* She couldn't commit to Ace yet. Not with the unknown threat of the mission hanging over her head. Not until they crossed that dangerous hurdle. Tears burned the backs of her eyes. The beautiful night was ruined. She glared at him. He pulled his shirt over his head.

"Fine. Be that way," came the curt words muted by his t-shirt.

She spun and stomped over to the stereo, put on her boots and shut off the music.

Footsteps sounded behind her. A strong hand graced her shoulder. "Look, I'm sorry. I shouldn't be so gruff, but I've waited awhile for you. Mistress Beatrice gave me your file a long time ago so I already feel like I've been with you for ages. I should have realized Master Dante didn't extend you the same courtesy."

"No, he didn't. He made me come here unprepared." Jay turned and put her arms around his waist, laid her forehead on his chest. "And I'm sorry, too. I shouldn't let my past demons affect

me the way they do. But could you please tell me about the mission before I go crazy?"

Ace hugged her. "We've tracked down Ash and some of his cohorts. They're here in Vegas. Our mission is to find them and take care of them once and for all."

Cohorts? Was it possible Michael was part of the gang hanging out in town with Ash? It wouldn't surprise her if her ex was with the group. After all, from what she found out, Michael was one of several of Ash's progenies from a fellow demon woman. Why wouldn't they travel together? And if they were here together, she'd be able to track the bastards down and exact revenge, for herself and her mother. Ash would pay for tearing her family apart. Michael would pay for being the world's worst boyfriend. Guys talk of psycho bitch girlfriends from Hell. Well, they were about to see what that meant. She leaned back in Ace's arms and gazed up at him. "Thank you for telling me."

"You're welcome." His head lowered and his lips brushed hers.

His mere touch stirred her insides. The world vibrated beneath her feet. It scared her how fast she had fallen for and trusted in him. His mouth moved upon hers, nipping, tugging. She encompassed him with her energy, drew power from him, fed him strength from her reserves. They would need fortification if Ash and his gang

were the ones in town they were slated to fight. No wonder there was to be a third in their slayer party for the mission. She put the missing member out of her mind. Breathed in the sweet force of Ace's love. Breathed in...

She jerked from his kiss and grasp, sniffed the air.

"What is it?"

Jay held up a finger. She tilted her head one way, then another in an attempt to get a bead on the subject. The aroma was faint. She closed her eyes, envisioned the strip, the hotels, the casinos, tracking down the demon scent. A stronger whiff of the fragrance seared her nose.

"Demon," she answered. "The wind must have kicked up because I believe it's at the casino next door."

"Are you sure?"

She narrowed her eyes and lifted a brow in a silent question of *you didn't really just ask me that, now did you?*

He held up a hand and chuckled. "Never mind. Of course you're sure. I'm not used to working with slayers who are so competent."

"I understand." She fixed her hair and attached the clip to the end. "We should get going."

After making sure they had all their stuff, they left the prop room in search of their first kill of the night.

An hour later Ace drew their search to a halt. "I thought you said it's in here."

Jay scratched her head, scanning the area made to appear like paths in a city park complete with green carpeting for grass, beige for the sidewalks, old-fashioned streetlamps and benches. "It is here, but it seems to be a quick bugger. And, if my tracking's correct, there may be two others with it as well."

"Three total. Great." He opened his cell and tried the other slayer's number again. A few seconds later, he closed it. "Voice mail."

"We'll be fine. These three aren't strong. Between the two of us, we'll be able to take care of them."

"Are you —"

She cleared her throat before he could finish his question.

"All right, I get it. But if you're so sure of yourself, why haven't we come across them yet?"

A group of teens walked by. A sentence in their animated chatter whipped Jay's attention around. Another teen agreed with the first that the coaster was awesome. Jay glanced back at Ace. He nodded. In unison, they said, "The roller coaster."

Together they hurried through the casino and up the extra long flight of stairs to the amusement and arcade area and found the exit to the ride.

Minutes later, the trio of demons, who looked like average gothic teens, stumbled through the gate, laughing and sipping out of flasks. Jay's face scrunched up from the fetidness wafting from the black-clothed, pierced and spiked-accessorized youths. The boys' and girl's body odors reminded her of a fast food sandwich that had too many onions and too much oil and vinegar on it. *A fragrance good for the food, but bad for a person – or in this case, demons.*

The trio headed for the exit of the casino. Ace and Jay dropped in behind them.

Keeping his focus on the staggering group, Ace bent his head toward Jay and whispered, "We don't have any of our weapons with us."

Jay stopped, bent over and retrieved the *knitting needles* from the special piping on the side of her boots. She handed one to Ace. "For the lesser demons we're following, all you have to do is scratch them with this. Or this." She showed him the spiked clip at the end of her braid.

"I'm used to knives, guns and swords. So tell me, what makes this so special?" He hefted the thin spike. "And, since I'm used to throwing a knife at lesser demons, what would we have to do with this if they weren't?"

"My tools are special because they're blessed by religious individuals. Saves me a whole world of trouble when I'm slaying. As for the demon kids,

were they higher on the demonic ladder, we'd have to stab them through the chest. Right where the heart would be if they had one."

"Like killing a vampire?"

"Yep." The exit door slammed behind the teens. She trotted after them. "Come on."

Ace and Jay burst through the doors. The trio slipped around the corner into the passage leading to the parking garage. They hurried into the hall. The two male demons flanked the female.

"On my mark, throw the spike into the guy on the left," she commanded out of the side of her mouth.

Ace nodded.

"One, two...Mark!"

They winged their spikes. His flew true and sank into the demon on the left. The kid fell to his knees, then to his side. Jay's stabbed the guy on the right, dead center in his back. The demon crashed face forward to the pavement. Both bodies flashed yellow-blue in spontaneous combustion. Green smoke curled up from the ash piles. The girl screamed, flapped her hands near her face, her black-lined eyes wide and frightened, staring at the remains of the two slain teens. A tear in the youth's black fishnet hose expanded up and under her black leather miniskirt.

Jay snatched the spikes from the carnage and was at the goth's side in a second. She clutched the

girl in a headlock, held the flat end of the spike to her temple. "Hello, sweetie. What's your name?"

The girl squirmed, stomped down on Jay's foot. "Bugger off, dyke."

Thank God for steel tips in my boot toes. She angled the crook of her elbow under the goth's chin, pressed the weapon further into her skin.

"Watch the language, chicky," Ace stated. He crossed his arms and glared at the girl. "Now, be a nice lass and tell my friend your name." His biceps and forearms bulged from the movement, kept their definition as he continued his menacing pose.

"Sally. The name's Sally," her tiny voice whimpered.

"Good," Jay crooned. "Tell me, Sally, where is the rest of your gang?"

"What gang?" The girl's tone rang with flimsy bravado.

Jay huffed. She was tired, grimy. Most of all, she didn't want to put up with any bullshit. "Right now the flat end of my spike is poking your temple. At any time, I can flip it to the other end and one little scratch from its point will cause your demise."

"Really?"

The girl's body shook in her arms, but Jay couldn't back down, couldn't have any sympathy for the poor girl whose life ended the moment she

hooked up with the wrong crowd. She reminded herself Sally was no longer human. "Really. Let's try this again. Where are the others? Most specifically, Michael and Ash."

"Mi...Michael...an...and Ash?"

Jay shifted the spike off her temple, but didn't flip it to poke her.

Sally squealed and wriggled. "Please! Please d-don't hurt me. I d-don't know where th-those two are."

"But the others?" Ace growled.

Through long sniffs and whimpers, Sally offered, "T-they're over at the B-bella Rosa. Th-then there were plans to go over to Th-the Parthenon. That's all I know!"

Jay released the girl and pushed her away.

Sally spun, then faced them. Thick black rivulets marred her pale cheeks, pooled on either side of her jawbone.

"Leave," Jay commanded with a flick of her hand.

The girl didn't seem to think twice. Her running steps faded as she fled the scene.

"Why the hell did you let her go?" Ace barked.

"I didn't." Jay smirked.

Staccato steps crescendoed behind Jay. She had a feeling Sally would return. Ace lifted a hand and pointed. Jay flipped the spike in her hand, positioned it in her fingers, then tossed the silver

length over her shoulder.

"Wow." Ace's jaw dropped. "You nailed her right between the eyes."

She turned just in time to see Sally drop to the ground on her stocking-tattered knees. The teen combusted into a pile of ashes and green fog. "Yeah, I'll admit that was a lucky shot." She retrieved the spike and stuck it and its twin back in the slots in her boots.

"But how?" His gaze switched from her to the fading green haze over the ashen remnants.

"The stairwell over there is closed. She had to come back to go down to the ground floor." Jay cocked her head at Ace's disappointed frown. "What? Did you think I have psychic powers and read her mind?"

He nodded.

Jay strolled up to him and took his arm. "I do and on occasion I can read a demon's mind, but this time I didn't need to. I took in the scene the moment we came out here. See the yellow tape at the door over there?"

Ace nodded again.

She smiled. "Let's go back over to the B. I booked a suite for the night so I wouldn't have to travel back and forth from the compound."

"What about the ashes?"

"The wind will clean them up."

The moment she stepped into the suite, she started stripping. "I'm going to go take a hot bath and then a shower. Make yourself comfortable." She tossed her room key on the round marble table in the foyer, then indicated the tan couches in front of the huge cedar armoire concealing a television and stereo. "There're some snacks and drinks in the kitchenette if you're hungry." She pushed a chair she had sat in earlier back into place at the whitewashed antique dining room table on the way to the master bedroom where a king-size canopy bed sat in the middle.

In the master bathroom, she turned on a CD player she had brought with her, ran water into the Jacuzzi tub and finished disrobing. The hotel provided bubble bath. She took advantage of the product, dumping a generous portion of the sandalwood smelling product into the tub.

Music playing, tub filled, she slipped into the foamy heaven, closed her eyes and sighed. She had to relax, get back into the swing of fighting. Subduing and ridding the world of the three teens had been way too easy. She didn't believe the rest of the night would be so uncomplicated.

To ease her thoughts, she remembered her childhood days. A time in her life that was carefree, charming all on its own, compliments of living in the countryside and with happy parents. At least until her father became a cheating louse

and her mother a lunatic. Up until she was compelled to leave home. She pushed the negative musings away, fantasized about the man sitting in the living area of the suite.

If she weren't careful, her passion for him would override her caution. That would blow the whole mission to pieces. She couldn't mess it up, not this time, not with Ash and Michael so close.

The door squeaked open.

She looked over at the form standing in the doorway. It wasn't Ace. "You must be my other contact." A whiff of air let her know he was a slayer, but there was no undertone of sexiness like Ace's scent held. "It's about time. Where's Ace?" She moved and rested her forearms on the side of the tub.

"He's out front, watching television." The new man, sporting a typical American accent, stepped into the shower and tub section and shut the door. "I'm Keg."

"I'm Jay." The faint light emanating from the nightlight in the electric outlet didn't illuminate him, but she didn't need to see him. She remembered the dirty blonde hair, tattooed dancer well enough from the opening act—cocky smile, an egotistical air wafting off him, making her think he'd have an attitude.

"I know."

Ah, there's the attitude.

He unzipped his jeans and moved the material away from his groin area. "I'm thinking we should get on with what we need to do. As it is, Ace isn't too happy he has to share you and the night's wasting away."

"Well then, come on." She reached over the edge of the tub and patted the marble step up to the unit.

Keg dropped his clothing and knelt on the step. His pelvis was in perfect line with her head, his cock at the right height for her mouth. His erect penis swayed in the air.

She focused on his thick shaft, moved her head to his crotch and took the phallus into her mouth. Since he was a secondary member in their little troupe, she had no need to screw him. As long as he came and she was able to transfer some of her *energy* to him, they'd be good to go. She ringed the bottom of his cock with her thumb and forefinger, sucked on the upper portion. Mouth and fingers bobbed on his smooth silky shaft. For several moments, she continued in this manner, varying her speed and pressure, eliciting varied groans and moans by the man she pleased.

The dick slid from her mouth and she snaked out her tongue, licked the underside, rimmed the ridge of the mushroom head. She lapped down the length, then kissed and licked her way back up to the moist tip. Gliding her fingers along his cock,

she followed suit with her mouth, massaging and caressing the shaft with her lips and tongue. The cock pulsed. She drew harder on it. He reached down to the back of her head, played with her wet hair.

A pleasurable groan came from Keg. The fingers in her hair clenched and relaxed. He pushed her further onto his shaft. She hummed around the dick in her mouth, relaxing her jaw and throat muscles to make room, and prepared to transfer some of her power to him.

The door swung open, slammed against the wall.

“Stop,” Ace’s voice boomed in the small space.

Keg pulled out, stepped away and fixed his clothing.

Ace threw a towel at him.

Jay glared at Ace, irritated at the interruption. “What the hell?”

He pointed at her, tapping his finger in the air, appearing to hold his words in check, then swung his focus to Keg. “You. With me now.” The two men left the room.

Testosterone. She shook her head and stepped out of the tub, deciding since her bath was ruined, it was time to rinse off in the shower. Talk about attitude. Ace would have to change his, if she were to do her job right. To beat the bigwigs, they all had to be connected and she was the common

denominator. She'd have to top off Keg. Ace would just have to deal with it.

Moments after she got under the hot, beating spray, hands grabbed her from behind.

CHAPTER FIVE

“You’re mine, my precious. No one else will have you,” Ace’s deep, possessive voice growled beside her ear. He pressed up against her, skin hot, slick. His evident erection pressed upon her lower back.

“As much as I appreciate the sentiment, you know I have to bond with Keg. I don’t necessarily have to screw him, but I need to feed him some of my pranic energy so, like you, he has a taste of my powers. I have to give him at least a blow job if we’re to reach our mission objective tonight.”

His hands gripped her upper arms. She reached out with her mind and energy to obtain a sense of his anger level. His aura didn’t emanate any kind of ire. Desire and jealousy fueled him. Strong fingers, burning from restrained passion, held firm near her shoulders. She wanted to melt under his touch, but she had to remain in control, not become a silly sop. If she didn’t keep herself in check, she’d be useless. Without her strengths, the

mission would be sabotaged before it started.

"I understand, Jay." He kissed her neck below her ear, nipped at her earlobe. "But first I'm going to remind you who your real partner is and then I'm going to set some ground rules for the two of you."

Ground rules? How dare he. She moved to pull from his clutches. His hold stayed. A brief thought of overtaking him flew through her mind, but she dismissed it. The stall was too small to tussle in and a non-demon scuffle would be a total waste of energy.

"Don't think you can get away that easy, precious." He kissed the other side of her neck, his hands smoothed down her arms.

Her knees wobbled. Despite the warm water sluicing over her head and skin, shivers ran down the sides of her body. *Control, girl. Don't let him get the upper hand.* "I'm not planning on going anywhere, but you better realize you're not calling the shots here."

"Oh, I'm not, am I?" Ace trailed the tips of his fingers across her abdomen and up to her breasts. He kneaded the mounds, pinched the nipples.

She gazed down at the hands working her tits, took in a deep breath. "No," she stated, without conviction.

He moved his hands to hers, grasped them and placed them on the wall above the temperature

knobs. "I beg to differ. Keep your hands there. I'm going to show you who's alpha now."

To keep the peace, Jay decided to put her need to stay dominant aside and see where he planned to take her shower. She closed her eyes. He stretched around her. Moments later, his hands rubbed soap over her chest and back, down to her butt cheeks. The pleasant scent of milk and honey filled the small area. Nimble fingers ran the soap along her legs, then her arms. Every line, every curve he washed smoldered with lust for him. Ace pulled down the handheld showerhead. He ran the water over her, slapped her ass and put the showerhead back in its place.

"Hey!" Jay straightened and glared at him over her shoulder, blinking from the water falling into her eyes. She rubbed the spot.

Ace moved her hand out of the way and smacked her butt again. "I told you to keep your hands on the wall," he commanded with a third hit.

Her ass cheek stung. She narrowed her eyes, then faced forward and put her palms flat on the tile. She hated being bossed around, but on the other hand, his forcefulness aroused her, created a little ball of need in her crotch. Testing the limits, she let go of the wall. He swatted the other cheek. She purred.

"You like that, do you?" his accented words

rumbled in the air.

She nodded, her heart rate and breath quickened in silent wish he'd slap her a few more times.

"Too bad, because that's all you're going to get." He chuckled and slipped his hand between her legs, fingered her slit. "Now bend at the waist."

Jay obeyed him. His fingers slipped into her canal, flicked her clit. The restraint she tried hard to hold on to loosened. Giving into him and the situation, relinquishing control, her whole being sank into blissful relaxation from his gentle but firm touches. He massaged a breast, caressed her nether lips. Images of paradise—lush green plants with huge fronds, palm trees, the two of them frolicking in a body of water at the base of a waterfall—rolled through her mind.

His hand released her tit, slid in tantalizing slowness along her back to her hip. His other hand slipped from between her legs. He shifted, placed the head of his penis at her opening, rubbed its tip along her crack. "You're mine, right? Keg is not allowed to touch you here." Ace stuck the tip of his cock in her opening.

A spasmodic clenching of her muscles rippled through her crotch in anticipation of him screwing her again. "Whatever you say. Just do me."

Ace gathered the length of her hair, twisted it.

In a swift motion, he pushed his length into her. She moved her hips back to meet his thrust and edge him in deeper. Waves of liquid fire coursed through her. Electric stimulations flashed throughout her body. His penis slid in and out of her wet cavity in a rhythmic cadence. The rain of the shower beat down on her back, hot water pellets adding to the experience.

"Please tell me who you are, my love." He rotated his hips.

Though explosions of pleasure went off in her with each of his strokes, she kept her wits about her. "I can't," she muttered, then gasped as his cock circled within her, firing off her nerve endings again.

In response to her answer, he drove in and out of her with a vengeance. She supposed his pounding was his attempt to assist in riding her of her demons, but she couldn't let go of that last bit of control she had. He continued to slide in and out of her. Her breath quickened till her torso bucked. An orgasm racked her body. He released his warm load into her.

"But why?" he inquired, stilling himself, rubbing her hip.

His penis throbbed against the walls of her canal. His hand released her hair. He coaxed and caressed her body. She melted beneath his contact, longed to tell him everything, but the time wasn't

right. Whether or not it'd be the best time after the mission was over was a mystery, but he'd at least have to wait until then. "Do we have to talk about this now?" She rubbed her ass against his groin. "Can't we discuss my issues after we take care of business?"

"Business, eh?" He hardened inside her and stroked her deep and slow. "I suppose I can wait."

Once more they traveled to the heights of erotic satisfaction and fell over the precipice of sexual gratification.

He pulled out, turned off the water. She turned to face him. Direct and probing, his gaze stared at her. His hands gripped the tops of her shoulders. "I won't have to wait forever though, will I?"

She shook her head.

"Good." Ace opened the stall, grabbed a couple of towels off the rack and handed her one. He stepped out, dried himself and wrapped the fluffy white cloth around his waist. "Keg's waiting. Let's go take care of him."

Stunned over the turn of events and how Ace had assumed command of her body, she nodded, dried herself off and followed him out of the bathroom. Her mind was in turmoil. Her real name hung on the tip of her tongue. The health of her heart and sanity were another matter. If she gave in to him and something happened to him during the mission, she didn't think she'd be able

to take it. Granted, life had no guarantees and anything could happen to him or her at any time, but for some reason this particular mission had her on edge.

Michael and Ash were in town. The ones who started the whole mess she found herself in. Though if it weren't for them, she wouldn't have Ace. Her gaze fell upon his tan back, its muscles rippling with his movements. How she wanted to envelope him in her arms, take him away from all this, live a normal life. Ace glanced over his shoulder, smiled and motioned for her to join him at his side. She stepped up. He braced her with a possessive arm.

Keg sat on the edge of the bed, shirtless, leaning back on his elbows. The shadowed outlines of his chest and abdomen muscles were enhanced by the light streaming in from the dining room. His pants were undone. He winked at her.

Ace stiffened. "I realize you need to bond with her to help us gain the upper hand over the demons we have to fight, but we're going to set a few ground rules."

"I figured as much," Keg's voice held a sour note. "Let me guess, I have to stay away from her cooch."

"Pretty much," Ace supplied. "Hands and dick stay away from this area." He waved a hand in front of her groin area. "But everything else goes."

Keg's gaze slid over to her. "Jay? You cool with this? After all, you're the supreme slayer. It should be your call."

She removed herself from Ace's hold and strolled to stand in front of Keg. "On the one hand, Ace is my other half and as such, has his rights."

"Ah. Now it makes sense. You're his woman. That explains the daggers he's throwing me with his glower." Keg smiled and winked at Ace.

Ace coughed.

Jay looked over her shoulder, shot a glare at Ace. "But on the other hand, we all know the parameters of the game. I'm up for whatever happens."

"Well then, let's get the party started." Keg stood, grasped the back of her head and clasped his lips to hers.

His kiss, though lacking the sweetness of Ace's love and passion, demanded submission, sent lustful bolts of heat through her. Thoughts of how his lips and tongue would do the same motions to her pussy, regardless of Ace's demand, ran rampant in her mind. Her knees weakened.

Behind her, Ace growled. *What a way to ruin a moment.* She pulled away from Keg, spun to face Ace. She closed the distance between them and poked him in the chest. "What would you have me do, Ace? Do you know of another way for me

to transfer my knowledge and power to him without us pleasuring each other to the heights and over the cliffs of passion? Hmm?"

He looked down at the floor. "No. I don't have any other ideas. Put yourself in my shoes though. Would you be happy if I had to have sex with another woman even if it was a necessity?"

Ace had a point. Jay shook her head. *Talk about a rock and a hard place.* She had to have sex with them. Until she figured out something different, it was the only way to give them a bit of herself. Yet the prospects of monogamy, of fidelity, seemed more appealing with every passing moment. "No, I wouldn't be happy. That said, you have my promise. This is the last time I'm ever with someone else."

"You can make that kind of assurance, but you can't tell me your name?" He placed his hands on his white towed hips.

She huffed. "Ace, not now. After we get done with the mission, we'll revisit the name conversation. Got it?"

"Yeah." He narrowed his eyes. His lips thinned into a tight line.

"Good." She unwrapped the fluffy white towel from around her body, dropped it to the floor.

Crooking her finger in Keg's direction, she indicated for him to come to her.

He stepped forward, brushed his body against

hers. Ace molded himself along her back, kissed her shoulder and neck. With one hand, she clasped Keg's shoulder, with the other, she reached back, smoothed her palm on Ace's toweled thigh. Keg ran the backs of his fingers down her breast, rubbed her nipple with the pad of his thumb. She bent her neck back, rested her head on Ace's shoulder. As Ace smoothed a hand up her abdomen to cup a breast, Keg slid his down and fingered her moist slit.

She closed her eyes, savored the caresses of the men's hands and lips on her flesh, stroking her breasts, stomach, ass. The moments of pleasure drew out. She lost track of whose hand was whose, whose lips were where. Ace moved away from her back. Cool air chilled her skin from his absence. When he brushed against her again, his arousal pressed upon her lower back. She trailed her hand over his thigh and butt cheek.

Keg claimed her mouth once more. His tongue sought entry into her mouth, flicked her tongue. Ace's arms wrapped around her, his hands massaged her breasts. Jay's power built up within her as she fed off the men's loving touches. Keg moved away. He shucked his clothes. His cock protruded from his body.

Jay turned her head, arched her back and kissed Ace. Through the intimate meeting of their mouths, she attempted to assure him of her love.

A mouth kissed her belly. She broke off the kiss and gazed down upon the top of Keg's head. He moved her legs apart and positioned his mouth at her crotch. Ace cupped the side of her head and turned it again. His lips crushed hers. His hands clasped and kneaded her tits. Keg's tongue stroked her clit. Pleasurable waves flowed through her.

Ace ended the kiss. She pulled away from him and Keg and sat on the bed. The men flanked her sides. She grasped each of their cocks, stroked them, gave each mushroom head a quick lick and kiss. Both men moaned, seeming to appreciate her ministrations. As she gave a hand job to one, she sucked the length of the other, licking and stroking it with a loose fist. Every so often, a gentle tug to her hair would indicate the desire for her to switch. Minutes passed as she alternated between the men, sliding her hands and tongue along their silky dicks. Her power turned into a raging fire, but she didn't want to transfer any of her energy yet. She needed all she could muster to become an inferno before she sent any of it to the men. Something within her told her Ace and Keg would need every ounce she could give them.

Keg maneuvered his body, and before she knew it, she was on his lap, his cock sliding within her ass. Her body was tight, had to stretch to accommodate him. She gasped as a shot of pain

flared up her back. He paused for several seconds, then finished entering her. The initial discomfort morphed to pleasure as he rubbed and pulsed within her backside. Free to fellate Ace, she took his penis into her mouth as far as it could go. Ace threaded his fingers through her hair. Keg slipped his hands up and down the sides of her body, squeezed her thighs.

Her energy, combined with her sexual passion, mounted up another step to the point she thought she'd burst. Ace's penis slid from her mouth. "Well, boys, I think it's time. When I start the transfer, don't fight it. The electrifying warmth may be uncomfortable, but if you allow it to flow into you, it won't be so bad. In fact, you may enjoy the added sensation."

She leaned back, turned her head and gave Keg a lengthy kiss. His shaft pulsed within her. Sizzling warmth passed from her lips onto his. He moaned. The uncomfortable sound vibrated upon her tender skin. She broke off from the lip-lock and motioned for Ace. He placed his hands on her knees, spread her legs apart. Kneeling before her, he nuzzled his cheek against hers. She grasped his dick in her hand, gently stroked it as her lips found his and then guided his cock into her pussy. The heat built up between their mouths, their crotches. He, too, emitted a tight groan. The sounds were indications to her that the men were

experiencing the start of the transfer.

Concentrating all her attention to the areas where she and the men contacted, she sent her raging powers and energies to the focal points. With the transfer, the men would know most of her gathered knowledge about the enemies—save the personal information she wanted to keep locked within herself. The men would also have intermittent telepathic abilities, useful for delivering orders during a group fight.

Ace's kiss deepened. His tongue warred with hers, seeming to fight a battle it knew it wouldn't win.

Keg grabbed her hips and quickened his thrusts. His mouth and teeth nibbled her shoulders.

Passion flared within her. Hot energy consumed her. Not able to contain the power any longer, she forced it from her. The sensation of pins and needles shot from all her points of connection on the men.

Ace ripped his mouth from hers. "Oh my God. Let me go. It feels like I'm being repeatedly static shocked, but times a thousand."

"Same here," Keg whimpered. He clenched his mouth onto her shoulder.

Jay reached up, tugged Ace's head back down. She resumed kissing him.

Testing the telepathic waters, she sent out

thoughts to Ace and Keg. *Let the sensations run through you. It'll get better. I promise.*

Keg's clamp on her shoulder loosened. *You're right. The zaps actually feel quite pleasurable now.* Keg smoothed his hands up her torso, clasped her breasts and pinched the nipples.

I agree, Ace added. They're warm...almost erotic. Like being whipped and deriving pleasure from the pain.

Good. Go with it. She rocked on Keg, enjoying his attention to her tits, caressed Ace's cheek as they kissed. Warm suffusions of delightful sensations budded in her toes, wrapped their way up and around her legs, culminating in her pelvic region. She loved the feel of the men's skin on hers, of two bodies sandwiching her in a hot embrace, but their lovemaking couldn't last. They had a job to do.

As the thoughts of needing to return to the mission popped into her head, both men grunted and hummed. They released themselves to their own individual pleasures. Her body took their cue. An orgasm racked her. She shuddered and quaked, allowed the steamroller of passion to run up and down her. When it quelled, she moved Ace out of her way and removed herself from Keg.

"I don't know about you guys, but I need to catch a quick cat nap before we go out hunting." She climbed onto the canopy bed and snuggled

beneath the blankets. The men lay down beside her.

Plumes of fire, rivers of molten lava, black and mucous-green creatures—both tall and lanky and short and squat—with horns, warts and sores over their bodies plagued Jay’s dreams. Little demons surrounded her in the fire-colored hellish pit littered with scorched stalagmites and stalactites. Some pawed at her with their cloven-hoofed extremities. Others grabbed at her bare skin with bird-like claws, leaving bright streaks of red welts, while some pulled her hair. Intense sulfurous heat singed her nose. She fought to escape the circle of beasts, lashing out with arms, hands and feet, screamed for redemption.

Out of the smoky shadows strolled a man reminiscent of her mother’s musings and journal entries. His unbuttoned black silk shirt over a washboard chest matched his eyes, goatee and hair. The loose trousers framing his legs billowed in the hot breezes. Hell’s children retreated, leaving her alone and naked on the charred red-clay ground.

The man sauntered toward her, smug, debonair, a slight smirk creasing his lips. *Ah, my beauty. How wonderful to see you.* He opened his arms, wiggled his fingers in a welcoming gesture. *Come.*

His steady attention invaded her soul. The strange ease he exuded included a deep sense of longing, of making her feel wanted and beautiful, feel like a woman desired above all else in the world. A compelling urge to reach up and take his hand drove her, but she fought the desire. The thoughts and feelings clouding her mind were too reminiscent of her mother's descriptions of the black-clothed devil. Whatever he had to offer was false, was wrong. She fisted her hands, dug her nails into her palms.

Jay hung her head. Her unbound hair fell into her face. *Am I to suffer the ills of my transgressions forever? I'm sorry, Mother. I'm sorry, Father. Forgive me God for falling out of your grace, but am I not finding favor for ridding your world of evil? Am I to be Satan's bride and burn with him in purgatory for all eternity?*

She relaxed her hands, pushed her locks behind her ears. The handsome newcomer stood before her. He spoke a string of foreign words, his voice a sultry melody, compelling her to rise, to embrace him. Black dragon-like wings laced with purple veins unfolded from his back. Loving waves emanated from him, oozed into the atmosphere around her. Pity, followed by sympathy, then empathy expanded from her core, ending with pangs of tenderness wrapping around her heart. Why did she have warm affectionate feelings for

him? She couldn't love a demon. There was no way she could. Her head shook as she fought off his influence. Who was he anyway? Then it hit her.

Ash?

But of course, my sweet. His smirk morphed into a sinister grin. Who else would you dream of, but the man you're meant for?

She shook her head again, then turned her face toward the ground, not wanting to see him, to believe for a nanosecond that she'd ever have anything to do with him. Ace was her man. Ash was someone, some *thing*, she and her sect hunted and killed.

The brimstone's odor grew stronger. Her stomach churned from the aggressive aroma. *Rotten eggs and submarine sandwiches gone bad*, her mind chimed.

Ash smiled and winked. He disappeared in a bright flash of light, his evil chuckle filled the cosmos, then faded.

Jay jolted awake and bolted upright, wiping her forehead dry from the dream sweats. Her senses honed in on the demonic activity in the area. The group was on the move. If she pinpointed their location correctly, they were in the casino, stories below where the three of them slept.

Jay slapped the hard thighs of each of the men.

"Come on, boys." She bounded out of bed, pushing the disturbing dream to a dark corner of her mind. Ash's sultry voice replayed in her head, crooned she was meant for him over and over. The voice wouldn't be boxed. As she went to the closet for her clothes, she mentally yelled at the voice to shut up, told it Ace was her love, that all Ash was to her was a thing to be killed, not loved. But for some reason, the idea of having to kill him made her feel bad. She roped that thought as well and squelched it. Her job was to kill demons.

A knot formed in her throat. She swallowed hard, shoved her legs into a pair of jeans. *Get a grip on yourself, girl. It was only a dream.*

Ace watched her from the bed. "Is everything all right, babe?"

"Yeah," her voice cracked. She cleared her throat, cleared her mind. "Time to get on the clock."

CHAPTER SIX

People stared as the trio strolled by. She was thankful it was close to Halloween. Their appearances wouldn't make too much of a stir. Though, they still did make a formidable sight with their black clothes, matching trench coats and boots. Ace and Keg wore special sunglasses, the lenses calibrated to assist with their temporary sight power, courtesy of her, to spot demons. She kept a pair on top of her head to blend with the two men. Together they sauntered with a casual air through the casino, scouting for a place to sit and observe.

The demons are dispersed throughout the floor, she pointed out to her men, stepped ahead of them. Two females are at the craps table over to our left.

The blondorexics in the skimpy pink and yellow dresses who are fawning over the older men and pocketing chips when they think no one is paying attention?

Yep, those would be the ones, Ace.

How about the men over there at the BJ and wheel tables? Keg inquired.

Good catch. Jay studied the players. Two sat at a black jack table, their backs to her, white fedoras on their heads. A creepy tingle fingered her gut. One tall, dark-haired, dark-skinned man with a black fedora on his head stood at the roulette wheel. She and the guys needed to wrap around, find a place where they could see the two card players, where she could confirm her suspicion. *Michael.*

Who's Michael? The men chimed in unison.

Shit. How could she have let that slip? She spun around, poked each guy in the chest, then wagged a finger. "Don't say his name. Don't think his name. And if we encounter a demon-man with such a name, don't touch him. That puppy is mine."

Ace and Keg held up their hands.

Ace said, "No problem. We'll follow your lead."

Keg nodded, seemingly in agreement.

Jay nodded and looked over her shoulder at the players. They still had their backs to them. She breathed a side of relief. No need to alert the demons any sooner than need be that they were there to hunt them, that she was *the* slayer. "There's a bar over there with some empty seats." She tilted her head toward the location. "Let's go

sit and formulate a game plan.” Jay twirled around. The trench coat fluttered around her legs.

The bar location didn’t give her a good view of the men at the black jack table, but that was all right. Patience was a virtue she learned to have in such matters. Eventually, he would rise and turn and let her see him or she would have to walk by and gain the opportunity for a peek at him herself. Then she would know if one of the men wearing the hats was her dead-beat boyfriend Michael. Then she would exact her revenge.

The old wound, courtesy of Michael’s *love* bite, at the juncture of her neck and shoulder burned. She resisted the urge to rub it. No need to draw unwanted attention to her and her friends, especially if he had any hint of what was going on around him. They needed an element of surprise on their side for as long as they could get it.

“So, boss, what’s the game plan?” Keg sat on a stool next to her while Ace pulled up on her other side.

She glanced over at the women standing at the craps table. Both were cozying up to a bald, heavy-set man in a tropical shirt whose purple, black and green chips lined the two racks in front of him. One lady laughed, fingered his lapel while whispering in his ear and kissing his cheek as the other slipped a green chip from the end of the line. Jay shook her head, motioned for her partners to

gather close. "Go wait for baldy to leave. When he does, get friendly with the ladies. Draw them away from the table and over to the closed reservation section at the back entrance. I'll follow, watch your back."

"But that's still a public area," Keg offered. "Won't that location be a problem for what we need to do?"

"No, it won't."

Both Ace and Keg lifted an eyebrow.

Jay grinned. "Trust me, boys. You'll have clear paths to rid the world of their stench. Then, once they're gone, we'll make acquaintance with the men." She winked, hoping the flirty action would cover the unease she still felt lingering from her dream.

The bartender strolled over, asked if they wanted anything. Ace and Keg waved him off. Alcohol was a no-no when on the clock.

She ordered water. "Okay, fellas. Get ready to work."

They nodded and spun on the stools, their backs to the bar to watch the proceedings.

Jay zoned in on the aging man, figuring his mind would be weak enough to tap, then influence. Aside from the demons' minute persuasions, his psyche was a blank slate. Careful not to intrude completely, she sent out an uncomfortable vibe. Just enough to switch his

focus from the ladies and the game to his little voice of reason.

He glanced up from the table, rubbed the side of his neck.

She decided to put some thoughts in his head. *The ladies don't like me. They like my money. They mean trouble. Leave the table. Leave now. Leave the table. Ditch the girls.*

The man scratched his shiny head. He gathered his chips, said a few words to the stickman and placed the colored discs on the table. Each woman looked put out that he cashed in. The man pushed them away, retrieved three orange chips from the green felt. His expression was one of confusion, but he pocketed the chips and left.

He realized he's missing money, Ace whispered in her mind.

Yes, but he's not going to make a fuss. I instilled just enough anxiety that he's scared to do anything about the women. Now that he's gone, you guys have to go. Like discussed, I'll keep watch. She took a sip of water, kept her focus trained on the women. *Oh, and don't forget to keep your true identities and natures blocked from them. Only open part of your mind to the women and make sure it's blank. If they have any hint you two are superior in any way, they'll cause trouble for us. Got it?*

Again, the men nodded. Ace patted Jay's shoulder as he rose. In seconds, he and Keg were at the table, joining the game, gaining the

women's attentions.

A cold, uneasy shiver skipped down her spine. Her gaze shot over to the blackjack players. The men hadn't moved. To her trained, appraising eye, they appeared not to stir at all, but sit there like mannequins.

Shit. Were a couple of mere mortals shielded with a glimmer to make me believe they were a part of the demon gang? Her gaze darted over to her men. Ace and Keg each had a lady on an arm, walking away from the table. *Damn. That was fast.* She glanced over at the blackjack table. The men were gone.

An evil snicker flitted through her mind. Her gaze shot to the dark man at the roulette table. Immediately, she cleared her mind. He offered her a malevolent half-smile, its ill-natured light glinted in the squint of his eyes. Mesmerized by his attention, she couldn't pull her focus away, but was happy she blocked her thoughts in time. His force was strong.

A pair of showgirls in sequined leotards and full brightly colored feathered headgear walked down the path and stopped. They blocked the man from Jay's view, talked with some patrons, then resumed their stroll. When the roulette table was revealed once more, the man was gone.

Jay jumped from her seat and hurried after her boys, cursing the momentary distraction. She fought her way through a thick stream of people,

wondering where they all came from so fast. An inkling tinged her mind, saying the demons were on to them. This was just another obstacle to slow her down. She quickened her steps, calmed the frantic hurricane of anxiety that built within her. What the hell was her problem? Slayers never felt fear, never worried. What was up with her sudden bout of nerves?

At the opening to the back section of the hotel, she skidded to a stop. Ace and Keg were in the midst of fighting the women near the doors allowing entrance and egress to the hotel casino. Men's fists swung in combinations of hitting and missing the females. Claws slashed through the air, sometimes scraping the men, sometimes not. Heads and bodies ducked.

Voices behind her tittered, then gasped. A bright white light flashed.

Oh, this is not good. People can't see this! Using every available neuron, she bolstered her powers, focused on creating an encompassing screen to hide the men and cloak her. The air around the battle shimmered. Like a chameleon, it took on the appearance of the surroundings a few feet away from the ruckus. Soon the men were no longer in view. All people could see was the stretch of the reservation counter, wall and multi-colored carpet. Of course with her special abilities she could still see through the shield, see the men getting their

asses handed to them by a couple of chicks. She shook her head.

"Wow, that was weird," a woman's voice exclaimed behind her. "Tell me I wasn't seeing things, Walt."

Jay glanced over her shoulder at a heavy-set couple with Welcome-to-Las-Vegas baseball caps on their heads.

"Nah, you weren't seein' things. Check the camera. See if what you snapped was caught."

With a sigh, Jay sent out a bolt of energy. It hit the digital camera in the woman's hand. A guilty twinge poked her for running any touristy pictures that may have been in the device, but she couldn't risk a demon-slayer fight going viral. A quick thought had her planting an idea in the man's head.

"Geez, Walt, somethin' must've happened to this here camera. All our pictures are gone."

The man put a chubby arm around the lady. "That's okay, Bets. We'll go back to the few places we've been, take more pics or buy postcards."

Jay smiled, waited for the couple to turn and walk away before she uncloaked. The moment they did, she spun back toward the fight, whipped a couple of her stakes out of her jacket and threw them through the invisible screen at the female demons. She hoped the fiends were the type to disintegrate into a puff of smoke and pile of ash

and not the kind to melt into a puddle of green goo. She didn't believe they had time to call The Cleaner in should the women be the latter and she sure didn't want to waste valuable time cleaning demon remains from the ground. The metal spikes found their marks.

Howling screeches filled the deserted area. The women thrashed around on their feet, trying to reach for the spikes that protruded from their backs. Green slime dripped from their wounds, marring the pretty dresses they wore. Their blonde hairdos came undone. Their pale white skin flashed to black scales, then back to human skin, then to scales again. They were losing their power, but not falling fast enough for her tastes. She pulled the knitting needles out of her boots and winged them at the women. The thin weapons hit each lady square in the middle of their foreheads. Neon green liquid squirted from the puncture wounds. Ace turned away from the females with Keg in his arms. Some green gunk hit him in the back.

For a moment, Jay bit her lower lip, concerned the naughty chicks were the goo-types. But a few seconds later, her apprehension was allayed. The demons crashed face forward to the gaudy carpeting. Both bodies flashed yellow-blue in spontaneous combustion. Green smoke curled up from the ash piles.

Ace lowered Keg to the ground, then stepped over to the piles and kicked them. The black dust drifted on the faint currents of the casino's air conditioning, fanned out and vanished. He rushed back to Keg, pressed his hands against his side.

Jay dropped the screen, sprinted over, then put the screen back up for the time being. "What happened? Why were they overtaking the two of you?"

"What happened?" Ace snapped. He clamped his teeth together, his jaw muscles twitched and froze. His brown-eyed gaze hardened. "What happened to watching our backs?" he asked through a tight mouth.

She glared down at her lover. How dare he imply she slacked off. "I got detained by a demon," her cold unfeeling voice shocked her, but she couldn't be emotional about what happened. That would open her up to attack not only from the demons but her men.

Ace's face softened. "Oh. Well then." He glanced down at Keg whose face contorted in a grimace. "To answer your question, they ambushed us. There were two others down here. We were able to get rid of them before you showed up, but not the ladies we walked over here with. They knew we were here, what we planned to do."

Jay retrieved her weapons from the ground,

placed them back in their proper places. *They knew. Damn it.* What happened to their element of surprise?

Ash, Keg whispered in her mind.

Keg? *You okay?*

Yeah. He shifted on the ground, attempted to sit up and was successful with Ace's assistance. "Ash is in town. The leader we've been looking for." Keg swiped at the back of his neck. His hand came away with a streak of blood.

"You were bit?" both Ace and she inquired in unison.

"Looks it." Keg chuckled. "I thought she just had a claw in my side. Guess the pain there overrode the fact she had a fang in me as well." Another snicker escaped him.

"This isn't funny, Keg," Jay stated. "You know what this means, don't you?"

"Yeah, you might have competition for position as supreme slayer and won't be high bitch on campus anymore."

Both Ace and Keg erupted in laughter. Ace helped Keg to his feet as they continued to find humor in the serious situation.

Men! She narrowed her gaze at them, shook her head, then spun on her heel and walked away.

"Hey, where are you heading?" Ace called after her.

"To go do my job," she tossed over her

shoulder. Within a blink of her eyes, she dropped the screen, faced forward again and ran smack into Michael.

"Hello, my dear." He flashed a brilliant smile, the one that used to melt her heart. "Time to take a trip with me."

At the same time she tried to step back, he reached out and grabbed her. His strong arms encircled her and in a flash, they were gone.

When she woke from the teleportation, she found herself lying on a bed, her arms stretched above her head, her wrists bound. The white blouse she wore was unbuttoned. Her trench coat was missing, which meant so were the tools hiding in it, but she still had her bra, jeans and boots on. She was still armed.

The bed moved. Her attention shot to Michael who sat next to her, head and legs in human form, torso and arms in black scaly demon form. He ran a claw along her abdomen. The cold touch of his curved digit sent shivers along her skin.

"What do you want, Michael?" She wanted to rip him apart, tear him to pieces, but figured for the moment she should keep her cool, learn what his game plan was.

"I'd say you, but I've had you already. I broke you in, prepared you for your destiny, what you were meant for." He leaned forward and placed a

kiss on her stomach.

She jerked as best as she could away from him.

"Now, now, my dear. Be nice. Enjoy your time in this beautiful suite. I understand you and your new boy toys have a room just like this." Michael pointed the tip of his claw into her skin.

Jay winced from the sharp pinprick like sensation. "You're a bastard."

He sliced her.

Hot blood seeped through the gash. "Fuck that hurt. You're such a dick head." *So much for keeping my anger in check.* The claw cut her again. She grit her teeth to keep from screaming out.

"I'm the dick head? Tsk, tsk. You, my dear, are a bitch. One who needs to be taught a lesson." He backhanded her across the face.

"Michael!"

Her ex-golden angel jumped to his feet. She bent her neck and looked toward the doorway. The dark man from her dream stood in the entry, glaring at Michael. His black-eyed gaze swung to her. A half-smile tweaked his black-haired goatee. He smoothed a hand down his burgundy dress shirt, stuck it in the pocket of his black pants, then leaned against the doorjamb. "Ash," she whispered as her head fell back upon the bed.

"That is correct," his sultry voice crooned from the doorway. "Michael, what did I say about harming her?"

"That I shouldn't."

"That's right. Now untie her."

Michael knelt on the bed, undid the binds around her wrists.

Once he stepped away from her, she sat up, rubbed the rope-burned area. She glared at him. "Dick."

"Whore," he retorted.

"People," Ash shouted. "Please, civility here, if you don't mind." He took a step forward.

She scooted back on the bed a couple of inches, closing off her mind and wrapping her arms around her breasts so her hands could access the sides of her bra.

"No need for modesty, my sweet."

"Yeah," Michael added with a disgruntled snort. "We've already seen you naked." He brushed a long lock of gold-blond hair out of his face.

"Boy, you try my patience," Ash admitted, turning his attention to his troublesome son.

Michael stared at his father and shrugged a shoulder.

Jay took the moment to pull the small spikes from her clothing, maneuver them into position in her hands. "That's true. You have." Both men returned their focus to her. She continued, hoping her plan to antagonize would work, "Little good seeing a naked woman does for your cock

though." Her gaze fell to Michael's crotch. "Such a big ego for such a small—"

"Bitch!" Michael rushed forward at the same time the door to the suite burst open.

Ace and Keg called out Jay's name.

Michael backhanded Jay again, gashing her head. "Should have tied you tighter to that railing in the church. Fucked you till you bled there on the dais."

She flung a spike into his eye. "That would have been preferable to the bite!"

He raked his other clawed hand across her chest, then stumbled back, hands flying to his wounded eye. Blood gushed from cuts above her ear, breasts and stomach.

A glance alerted her to Ace and Keg's advance toward the bedroom.

She bolted to her feet, jumped at Michael, the second spike aimed at his neck. It sank into his flesh, tore at his artery. Blood spurted out. Michael dropped to his knees, then fell to his side, a look of surprise etched on his face. As he hit the floor, he disintegrated in a flash of purple light and smoke. She stepped on the pile of ashes and twisted her foot around, grinding the dirt into the floor.

"No!" Ash screamed.

Jay whipped around. Her boys reached out to capture Ash, but he was too fast and disappeared in a flash of light. "Shit," she stated and collapsed.

Ace and Keg hastened to her sides, hands went to her wounds.

She came around, looked at her men through foggy vision. "How did you know where to find me?"

Ace tilted his head toward Keg. "Seems our pal here has a bit of a connection to the bad guys. Could you give us a moment?" Ace asked him.

Keg nodded and left the room.

"Are you all right? You're bleeding pretty badly." Ace felt around her body. Worry filled his eyes.

"Yes, I'm fine. Head wounds look worse than they normally are. Stop prodding me." She grabbed his hand. His gaze connected with hers. She took a deep breath. One of her demons had been dispatched. Now she had to get rid of some other dirty little demons of hers—like her past baggage, her lack of trust.

"Are you sure?"

A sharp pain lanced through her midsection. "Actually, no." She winced. A flash of their friend, Jett, popped into her head. He was fighting his own demon. "Jett..." she breathed through a contraction of pain.

"Jett? What do you mean Jett?"

Jealous much? Too tired to do so at the moment, she made a note to broach that subject later. "He's fighting... own...demon. Couldn't help...here."

The words were quiet, weak.

"Oh. Okay." He brushed a strand of hair back behind her ear.

She gazed up at her love, palmed his cheek. It was time. "Alexander?"

"Yes?" Surprise and happiness lit his face.

She took another deep but shaky breath. "It's nice...to meet you. I'm...Jamie Sue Tyler." Exhaustion swept through her body like an F-five tornado. She dropped her hand. "Now...since mission...over...if...don't mind...I'd like to..." Jay closed her eyes. The comforting darkness of nothingness consumed her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A month later...

Jay sat in the reserved section in the left leg of the stage of *Poseidon's Fury*, the replacement name for Sophia's *Gods* show, in the Parthenon. She was ecstatic for her friend whose dreams of a sold-out, must-see show had become reality. She was happy she woke from the coma in time to make the show.

Sophia continued to flit around the backstage area, peeking from behind the sea blue curtain one moment and glancing over her shoulder at the employees the next. Jay couldn't fault the woman for her nerves. Hundreds of bodies filled the massive theater. Every powerhouse executive in the Las Vegas area graced seats. Christian Lyon, Sophia's boss, also made sure *the crème de la crème* of the city showed for the extravaganza.

Brandi, Sophia's assistant and sister to Jett, chattered away in Christian's ear. Stressed

features creased his face, a thin line stretched across his lips, making him resemble more of a tortured soul than executive royalty. He didn't seem excited about Brandi's ramblings, but she was happy for them. It kept the man's attentions off her and him safe from Ace strangling him.

Sophia's gaze settled on her. Jay smiled as Sophia felt inside her small evening bag hanging from a delicate chain around her shoulder. She knew her friend kept the penis pop with her to remind her of the night she met her love, Jett. Granted, once she woke from her three-week coma, Sophia had a few choice words for her and several hugs. Her friend was surprised to find out she and Jett knew each other, but wouldn't have had that night happen any other way. She loved her friends and it pleased her they became a couple. Jett, dressed in his Poseidon costume, strolled up to Sophia and embraced her. Occasionally, his glances would scan the room. He was probably worried Sophia had something more up her sleeves. She could be a handful. He leaned in, put his mouth over hers.

"Ten minutes to show time," a loud baritone voice shook the auditorium. It as if Zeus spoke from Mount Olympus. "Everyone take their places."

Jay jumped in her seat, but kept her attention on her friend. She needed to make sure she'd be

all right. Jett released Sophia. The house lights flickered once. Sophia smoothed a hand down her white linen skirt and then hauled ass toward her location. A distressed expression crossed her features.

Jay rose from her seat and hurried over, placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. She caught Sophia's gaze. "Opening day jitters, Sophia?"

"Jay, I'm nervous as hell. I can't do this. I can't watch women salivate over him, not when I'm not sure how he really feels about me...the real me."

"Don't underestimate Jett. He's one of the good guys. Hurting you isn't in his plans. I'm sure of that." A small commotion started stage left. She swung her attention toward the noise. Ace plopped down in her seat. The glare he gave Christian could have melted a snowcap off Mount Charleston. *Poor man. He can't take any man paying attention to me anymore.* A sly smile slid off her lips in perfect timing with the one moving across Ace's face when he finally looked her way. Jay's gaze snapped back to Sophia. She kneaded her friend's arm. "Let's go have a seat before Brandi sends your boss to the nut house. Or Ace brings the theater down around us." Jay slid her hand into Sophia's, moving them toward the red velvet chairs.

Comfortably seated, Sophia leaned toward Jay. "Thanks for being here. You're a really great

friend.”

Laughter whispered between them. Jay brushed a strand of hair from Sophia’s face. “I wouldn’t miss tonight for anything.”

The lights in the theater dimmed until blackness blanketed the massive show room. Slowly, dark blue, green and aqua lights swirled through the audience. The sounds of the ocean piped from the speakers, spilled out into the awed crowd. As the lights irised center stage, a giant seashell emerged. Fountains of water spilled from stage right and left, overflowing into a marble circular-shaped dome. The seashell opened, exposing Jett posed as the Greek God Poseidon. Wearing nothing but an off-white toga, carrying an emerald and ruby jeweled trident, he reeked of pure male sex appeal.

Ace shifted in his seat.

Jay chuckled and whispered in his ear, “Totally different viewpoint from the audience, eh?”

He grunted in response.

She sat back. Ever since she woke up in the hospital and explained a few things to Ace, he’d become possessive and ornery. Perhaps she shouldn’t have told him about her relationship with Michael and what happened all those years ago. Maybe she shouldn’t have told him about the dream she had of Ash and the feelings that overwhelmed her. His nose might be tweaked

over Keg having developed the same powers as she had, over the special relationship between her and Keg due to the special traits they shared. Who knows. All she knew was he didn't want to talk about that night a month ago and she was damn glad she didn't tell him the whole story.

Ace would really have a cow if he knew everything that happened. That during the three weeks she was in a coma, she spent them in Hell, forced to submit to Ash's whim, being rescued by Keg and The Cleaner. How fortuitous it was she and Keg had the presence of mind to discuss what they would do once they returned home before they returned.

Maybe Ace had a sense something was being kept from him, but like him, she didn't want to talk about it. Not yet at least.

A huge smile creased Jett's face while he stood on the stage, rotating his hips from left to right. He descended from the shell down the shimmering blue steps. The screams from the audience intensified. Red highlights glistened in his long brown hair.

As the music tempo heightened, five female dancers dressed as sirens swayed in a hypnotic dance from stage right and left toward the center. Reaching Jett, they danced a slow seductive number ending in a reclining position against large silver satin pillows on opposite sides of the

shell. When the final girl took her place, Jett moved to the center of the stage. He glanced out into the audience. His gaze moved to stage left and zeroed in on Sophia. A broad smile creased his lips, revealing his perfect porcelains. With one hand on his shoulder, he unhooked the toga, letting it flutter to his feet. A perfectly chiseled, hairless, bronze chest above a shiny gold g-string garnered shouts and cheers from the audience. He strolled to the end of stage left, gazed directly at Sophia and mouthed the words, *I love you, baby*.

Jay sighed at the romantic endearment. Ace reached over and took her hand in his. There was still hope for the two of them.

All eyes in the VIP section rested on Sophia. Christian looked shocked, sat speechless with his mouth agape.

Jett grabbed a microphone. "Sophia Dahl?"

A huge grin creased Sophia's face.

"Sophia, would you be so kind as to accompany me on stage?" He extended his hand.

She stood, reached out and touched it, moved with him center stage.

Without losing a beat, he pulled her hand into his, then lifted her up and into his arms. Cheers erupted from the audience, shaking the walls in their intensity.

In three strides, he was on the top riser, placing Sophia on her feet. He glanced at one of the sirens

and she held up a red velvet pouch. He reached for the bag, cupped it in his hand, then raised the microphone to his lips. Jett took in a breath and his voice slid through the stunned silence, "I'm sure you're all wondering what I'm doing up here with this beautiful woman." He narrowed a seductive gaze on Sophia. He puckered his succulent lips and released a silent kiss toward Sophia before glancing back out across the swarm of bodies. "Well, ladies and gentlemen, I have a little story to share with you about this sexy woman beside me." He coughed back a laugh. "This woman attended one of my shows a while back, and let me tell you, my life hasn't been the same since. Ladies." He scanned the audience. "And gentlemen. A month ago, Sophia Dahl walked into my show and my world turned upside down...in a good way."

Small sighs resonated from the theater. Sophia tilted her head toward the audience, then back at Jett.

"Well, I have something that I want to say to this woman by my side. Something I want to scream from the rooftops, but I figure this packed auditorium will suffice."

Sophia glanced over the audience for a third time.

Jay wondered what was going on as hundreds of wide-eyed patrons gazed at them. Hands

interlocked, arms swung around significant others as they pulled them close. While others stared, mouths half-open.

"Tonight is my final performance..." Jett glanced at Sophia.

Jay leaned toward Ace. "Did you know about this?"

He nodded.

Jett chuckled, then added, "As a single man, I've found the one woman who I want to spend the rest of my life with. I want to be with her until this world we live in crumbles and falls. I go to bed every night and wake up each morning with her in the back of my mind. Every single day I wake up and she's still a part of my life, I wonder what this beautiful woman sees in me." Jett released her hand, opened the small pouch and returned with something clasped in his fist. He knelt, pulled her left hand into his. With the other hand, he flayed open his fingers, revealing a ring.

Silence from the reserved audience turned into excited voices boomeranging through the auditorium.

"Sophia Dahl. Love of my life, sometimes pain in my ass, I love you more than words can express. More than life. Do you think having me for your husband is something you would consider? Baby doll, my heart stops every time you walk into the room. When you smile, I want

nothing more than to wrap you up in my love and never let go. Will you be my wife?"

His words appeared to hold Sophia captive. His fingers slid the ring over her left ring finger. She gazed at the shimmering beauty on her finger, then back at him. He waited for her reaction. Sophia glanced over at her.

She winked at her friend, smiled and tilted her head in a well-answer-the-man gesture.

Sophia looked back at Jett. "Yes...yes, yes, one hundred times yes. I will marry you."

Jett turned to the audience, wiped the back of his hand across his brow. "Wow, I was beginning to panic."

Laughter rolled through the crowd.

With one sweeping motion, he stood up, pulled Sophia into a tight embrace and covered her lips with his. A minute later, her feet left the ground.

The thunderous music re-started and pulsed through the auditorium. The sirens rekindled their seductive dance across the stage, garments of red, orange, blue and green silk swirled through the air as Jett and Sophia moved into the seashell. The door closed and the machine started the decent toward the underbelly of the stage.

Jay turned to Ace. "You know I love you, right?"

Ace clasped the back of her head with his large hand, brought her face close to his. "Yes. And I

love you, too.” His lips clamped on hers in demanding mastery.

His kiss was hot, passion-filled. She wanted to melt into the seat or jump his bones or both. But it wasn’t the time. There’d be plenty of hours later, after the show, where they could show each other how much they loved each other. She slipped her arms around him, deepened her kiss.

An ominous chuckle echoed in the dark recess of her mind.

Her arms clutched him tight. Anxiety streaked up her spine. Quick scenes of her time in Hell and snippets of conversation flashed in her mind. Ash and Keg couldn’t be right. She was Ace’s partner. No one else’s.

Jay pulled away from him, gazed into his dark eyes. A wealth of adoration and respect reflected back at her. *I love you*, she mouthed.

He returned the sentiment, embraced her against him.

Regardless of what had happened in the past and what was predicted about her future, she loved Ace. And contrary to what some had to say, she knew her future wasn’t written in stone. She believed *he* was her *one* and always would be and that’s all that mattered.

Ash’s sultry chuckle rolled through her mind again. *We’ll see, my dear. We’ll see.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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