



DEMON HEART

NICOLE
DENNIS

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Demon Heart

by Nicole Dennis

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Demon Heart
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CHAPTER ONE

A cool, crisp breeze whipped down Main Street, skittering the carpet of fallen leaves on the red brick sidewalk across the sidewalk. Jack o' lanterns, witches, skeletons, and other favorite decorations filled the various store displays and stacks of hay bales, donated by local farmers around the small town of Maple, decorated the streets. Around the lampposts corn stalks were wrapped, and scarecrows created by the elementary school for a contest—the good, the bad, the friendly, and the ugly—graced the park benches as if waiting for a friend. All around town, parents and youngsters chattered and joked about the upcoming Halloween holiday and made last minute preparations for the big neighborhood dance and trick-or-treating festivities.

The deep scarlet of one maple leaf, a pale echo of the brilliance of the carved jewel in the mystic store's window, draped itself over one of her pointed black boots. The breeze caught a few curls of her golden brown hair, pulling it free from the French braid, and tugging it across her face. Pushing it out of the way, she glanced into a nearby store window.

The brilliant sparkle of a ruby flame drew Constance Morelli's attention. She stuffed the lists she had been studying deep inside her fashionable brown leather hobo purse, and found herself staring at the jeweled necklace, basking in its glow. The necklace reached out to somewhere deep inside her heart. Constance stepped inside the mystic shop—it had opened only last week—and breathed in the warm scents of cinnamon, cardamom. She spotted the treasure trove of incense, oils, and candles, but after a cursory look around, she moved to the window display and reached for the heavy, old-fashioned, necklace. Hand-wrought silver encircled the flame and she saw ancient symbols tapped into the curls.

"How beautiful!" she exclaimed in a soft whisper. She turned the charm in her hands, staring at the flame carved out of a huge ruby and into a heart. "I can see an internal flame within the gem, as if it's alive, pulsing with a beat."

"Ahh, then you must be the one to purchase the gem, for it calls to you," the woman from behind the counter called out. .

Constance whirled around, startled to see a woman she had never noticed around town. "Excuse me? Why do you say that? I'm sure hundreds of other women have admired and wanted this necklace."

"Yet I wouldn't sell them this necklace if they didn't see the internal flame. This rare gem only calls to one woman at a time to be its true owner, for she is the lucky one to possess its power. It is that woman alone to whom I can sell the necklace."

"What kind of power?"

"This is an ancient gem, rumored to be one wrought to capture a fire demon," the woman said, stepping next to Constance's side.

"A fire demon?"

"Hmm, indeed. He's like the other paranormals who live within this small community. Only this demon is one from ancient times, but kept under control of the jewel. That is what the inscription says upon the silver clasp around the flame."

"Who is this demon?"

"Rumored to be a prince who turned away from a powerful woman instead of taking her hand. Now he is a slave. Quite a change for him." A cold smile appeared upon thin lips.

"All that for not accepting her hand?"

The woman raised an eyebrow. "According to their time and the story, it was a great crime against her honor and status. He did nothing to assuage her honor; instead, he walked away and made fun of

her with his comrades. There was no other recourse but damnation for him."

Connie stared at the ruby in her hand, feeling the weight. "What do you do to bring the demon out?"

"It's written down upon a scroll that if the woman stands naked under the moonlight, the flame pressed to her heart, and whispers the inscription, he appears before her."

"Where is this scroll?"

"Lost over the years. The spell was verbally passed down."

"What will he do—" Constance paused, hesitant but strangely interested at the thought of a man trapped inside the jewel. "—this demon?"

"Oh, the most wonderful things he's learned during the course of his enslavement to the jewel. He makes her most erotic dreams come true. During his time with you, he is your slave, a bond to you, while the jewel holds him eternally."

"Erotic dreams?"

"The most pleasurable of ones. He knows many ways to pleasure a woman in and out of bed. After all, he's been bound to the jewel for centuries. Quite a bit of magic went into its creation, so I've been told," the woman said, tapping a fingernail against the gem.

Constance saw a flicker deep inside the heart and pulled the jewel closer to her, away from the cold woman. She didn't like the feeling she received from the shopkeeper. "What type of man would he be after being captured in here for so long?"

"One willing to do anything you please. Far better than anything out there. If you're not pleased, he can be returned to the jewel and easily forgotten." The woman waved her hand as if she could easily dismiss a person.

Wrapping the chain around her fingers, Constance scrutinized the ruby. The flicker faded for a moment then beat stronger.

"Would you like to wear the necklace? Or shall I box it up?" the shopkeeper asked with a smile.

"I'll wear it," Constance said, her thumb caressing the necklace. She followed the lady to the register and handed over payment, trying not to cringe at the price.

"Would you like to know the spell to release the demon?"

"Does it work?"

"You shall see for yourself. If you're not satisfied, you can return it for a full refund."

"Very well, how do you pronounce the words?"
The woman smiled.



"Holy cannoli, I can't believe I'm doing this." Constance ran a hand over hair that ran in wild waves to her shoulders. Her dark forest gaze looked around the quiet, empty backyard— somewhat secluded by the fence and huge old oak trees, climbing roses, and lilac bushes. Still, in a neighborhood as small as hers, she never knew when some old coot or horny teen stared out a window, binoculars pressed to their eyes to catch the latest gossip.

A cold nose against her bare skin gave her a bit of a shock. Then a soft whine.

She glanced down at the small chocolate lab and terrier mix she'd recently rescued from the local shelter and brought into her small home. Dropping a hand from where it had a chokehold on her white satin robe, she scratched one silky brown ear.

"Do you think I'm nuts, Cocoa?"

As a baker, what else could she name the little brown and white dog except her favorite baking ingredient? Chocolate. Luckily, it fit the little mutt to perfection.

The dog tilted her head and barked once.

Constance sighed. "Thanks. I'll take that under consideration."

The skinny tail swished and thumped against her leg.

Warmth flooded her chest from the ruby flame. It gave her strength to open the robe, lay it over the wooden railing, and walk down to the grass. The moon came out from behind the clouds, bathing her lawn with its pure natural light.

"This will either work or put me in the mental ward, Cocoa," Constance said.

After a soft whine, the dog laid down, head on paws.

"Thanks for the support, girl."

A little woof left the dog as an ear flicked in her direction.

Connie grinned. She cupped her hands around the necklace and lifted it from her skin. After another long inspection of the jewel, she watched the inner flame flicker under the natural light.

Would this actually work?

Standing nude in the moonlight, the necklace her only adornment, she closed her eyes, and recited the words.

There was no flash of light. No rumble of sound. The ground didn't shake. No warm hands on her body.

Her eyes opened. She looked around.

Cocoa whined in question.

"Well, Cocoa, that was a whole lotta nothing. I feel like a complete idiot." Constance moved toward the patio and snagged the robe. "At least I got a beautiful necklace out of the deal. It'll go great with my outfit for the dance."

She lifted it again, only this time, something was different.

The jewel was darker. It felt empty.

Cocoa growled, low and nasty.

"You called me to your bed, milady?"

CHAPTER TWO

Spinning around, pressing the robe to her front, Constance's jaw dropped at the sight of the six-foot-three-inch naked male standing at the base of the porch. Not just any male, but a true blue hunk of walking sex.

"Oh my!" she squeaked.

"Small, but beautiful in form, with hips a man can hold on to. You will be a wonder in bed, milady," he said, his tone reminding her of low rumbling fire and warm whisky. He reached out a lean, elegant hand and drew a finger down her cheek, tracing her jaw.

He stood between the wooden pillars of the porch. Deep auburn hair fell in thick waves over powerful shoulders, a couple of curls dangling past his collarbone, and three thick, silver hammered bands wrapped around his left biceps. Constance's eyes roved down his perfect chest, admiring the strong pectorals complete with dark nipples above a balanced abdominal core, the tight external obliques pulling in his sides and showing to advantage his middle six-pack. His lower

belly, covered with dark red curls, arrowed down to a thick cock nestled against powerful thighs.

Constance licked her lips at the sight of his cock. In its restful state, it was long and thick with a purplish crown and she wondered what it would be at its erect state, held in her hands, slicked with his cum and her fluids.

Hold on, where did that come from?

His generous height came from the long legs that ended in feet standing shoulder-width apart. The stance of an athlete, of a warrior, he towered over her.

"Holy cannoli," she whispered, her gaze lifting back up his body to his face.

She couldn't stop staring. Her gaze trailed from his strong, square and very stubborn chin to his generous mouth—a mouth used for kissing and more. His nose, slightly crooked at the top, looked like it had been broken once or twice in a fist fight. High slashes of cheekbones arched on either side.

Then there were his eyes. Golden bronze in color, almond in shape, with long lashes that made them unique and dazzling. Drawn to them, she found herself leaning toward him, wanting to press her hands to his chest and sink into their depths.

"You are very beautiful. Petite, but curvy and endowed as a woman should be, milady. Not skinny as a stick. I shall enjoy having you underneath me."

Need rushed through her. As the heat rose in her body, moisture flooded between her legs and she leaned against his warm hand, her eyes meeting his scrutiny as the necklace's powerful bond began to twine between them. "Sex under moonlight? I shall give you such pleasure, make you come many times as the jewel needs, as you need to come," he said, his hand tugging at her robe until it dropped in a quiet whisper of silk. Both of his hands rose to cup her full breasts.

"No, I can't, we can't..." Her head drifted back, body leaned toward his heat, when his thumbs rolled her nipples, tightening them into nubs of pleasure.

He never touched her lips, but let his own trail over her cheekbones, jaw, and the length of her neck, leaving gentle flickers of desire where he kissed, nipped, and touched. Almost as if he scorched his imprint upon her skin.

"Oh..." she whispered when he dropped to bended knee.

Even at that height, his hands cupped, plumped, and caressed her breasts until they were taut, and she writhed against the door, aching

for more. Need flooded her core, her clit hardened, her legs wobbled, and his hands moved to her full hips to keep her steady. His mouth parted, enveloping one nipple into its warmth.

She cried out at the sensation and pressed a clenched fist against her mouth. She didn't want the neighbors to hear.

"Cry out for me," he ordered in a husky tone.

"No, can't, neighbors," she said. "Hear..."

He waved his fingers behind him, and she saw a shimmer as a transparent wall rose before her.

"What is that?"

"A barrier to protect you, mistress. No sounds can penetrate. Now you will cry out for me."

"They'll hear..."

"They will not. As I order the barrier, required by you, no one but I will hear your cries of pleasure."

"I can't do this out here..."

"You need more encouragement?" he asked. "More foreplay?"

"Outside, we're outside, we can't..."

"Within moments, you will not care where you are. I have learned plenty while within the lifetime of the jewel. I shall gift you with this knowledge."

"No, please..."

Lifting his head from her breast, he kissed down the slope of her belly, nuzzled the delicate curls over her mound, and breathed in her scent. He brushed his fingers between her legs and smiled. "I see you are wet for me. Your body knows what it wants. Your scent is divine, natural and mysterious, unique only to you. Just passed your fertile time. We can have plenty of sex."

Her jaw dropped at his crude but erotic words.

He used his hands to push her thighs wider. "Open for me, mi-lady. Let me taste you, make you come so very hard, cry out so loud and long."

She tried to resist, but his strength was great and her muscles weakened with desire. She let him place her feet where he wanted around his broad shoulders.

"So wet. So warm. Dripping with your natural cream. I can't wait to taste you. Do you want me to taste you?"

She shook her head, pulling in her lower lip, quivering in need.

Leaning forward, he curled a finger, and brushed it over her damp curls, taunting her. An eyebrow lifted over his glittering gaze. "I can't

taste you? Don't you want me to? Has no one ever gone down on you like this?"

She shook her head.

His hands gripped her hips tighter in a heated possessive streak. "Milady, such pleasures you missed and never felt. Is that why you shake your head because you don't know what is happening?"

She shook, and then nodded her head, confusion racing through her. Her limbs shivered against his touch.

"Open your eyes and look at me. Open them now."

Doing as he requested, she stared at him.

"Right here and now, I give you this vow. No harm will come to you in my arms. Do you understand? You will *never* be harmed or hurt. Understand, milady?"

Her lower lip trembled as he spoke, his calm, steady voice soothing her uneasy nerves.

"Milady, do you hear me?"

She nodded.

"Promise?" she asked in a tremulous tone.

He ran his warm hands up and down her jelly-like legs, warming the muscles. He pressed his lips to her hipbones and the crease between pelvis and thighs, then laved her belly button with a kiss, bringing her back to him. Her fingers delved into his hair, sinking in his scalp.

"My solemn promise," he said. Lifting a hand, he spoke something she didn't understand, the words strange and solemn.

"What is that language?"

"Answers later. Pleasure now." He nuzzled her curls again and breathed in. "Please, may I be the first to taste your essence? To give you divine pleasure?"

She nodded. "Yes, you may."

"Thank you, milady. You don't shave down here."

She shook her head though it wasn't an actual question. It was not as if she had a boyfriend to bother tending down there.

"Perhaps I will give you the new experience of a personal shave on these nether lips." He brushed the back of his knuckles back and forth over the damp curls, and she let out a soft sigh as they gently moved her skin. She squeaked as he pinched those lips in question. "Then you can enjoy the feeling of my tongue on freshly shaven skin and the heated inner flesh so delightful for a lady."

She whimpered at his words.

Pulling in a deep breath, he blew softly against her flesh. She let out a soft cry. Her fingers sank into his shoulder. "Please..."

"What would you like, milady?"

"Something, anything, just please," she repeated.

Smiling at her whispered pleas of desperation, he licked the entire ellipse of her body from anus to clit. After a peek up at the sound of her muffled cry of pleasure against her arm, he leaned in for another long lick.

Her breath sawed in and out when she felt him use his fingers to open her outer folds. When his tongue flicked and nipped the sensitive inner weaves of skin, she squealed in pleasure.

"Ahh, you're delicious as I knew you would be." He flicked his tongue against the opening of her vagina, then upward to her taut, hard clit.

Her fingers tightened in his hair, fisting as she squeaked. "Please, oh please..."

He pushed two fingers deep inside her, letting his tongue brush against her clit, and she moaned hard as her body undulated against him, her liquid need forming in the pit of her body. Her hands dropped to his shoulders and she curled around him as he continued to work his magic on her body. "Come for me," he breathed against her skin. "Come for the jewel."

It was all she needed to shatter. She screamed with the hard release. Her fingernails dug into his shoulders as her body became no longer hers, but tuned itself to the demon and the jewel around her neck. Another flicker against her clit pulled another scream from her. Her inner walls tightened and released around his fingers as she convulsed. Her nails drew blood when her cries grew hoarse.

CHAPTER THREE

He finally allowed her to stop coming, licking her clean, then sucking the last of her juices from his fingers. Cradling her weakened body where they sat on the patio, he used his other hand to draw locks of hair from her sweaty forehead. She shivered with aftershocks and buried her face against his shoulder. She gripped his arm, fingers brushed against the silver metal.

The cold metal brought her back to reality.

"Holy cannoli!"

"Pardon? What is that curious saying?"

She shook her head and pushed back from him.

"Your heart racing and not with desire," he said. "What is wrong, mistress?"

"Is all of this for real?"

His eyebrows pulled together. "After what happened, surely you don't jest. Yes, it is."

"Are you real? You're truly here, in my arms." She pressed her hand on his face, his chest, the silver bands, and then his face again. "I

called you from the jewel. You're not some bastard who walked into my backyard, right?"

"I came from the jewel."

"Prove it."

"Pardon?"

"Please, I need you to prove it to me."

"You saw me..."

"Please!" There was a hint of fear in her voice.

His arm tightened behind her as one hand drew lightly down her arm in a soothing fashion. "Very well, I will prove my words are true. The bands around my biceps here. See?" He pointed to the silver bands on his biceps. "They are the same silver as the necklace. They have the same engravings as the ones on the jewelry. The combination binds me to the gem."

She lifted the necklace, studied the silver banding, and then ran her fingertips over the bands around his arm. "What the hell did you just do to me?"

He smiled in an arrogant, masculine fashion. "Gave you an orgasm, multiple ones from what I could feel. Did you not enjoy it?"

"I never had an orgasm like that in my life. Something else was behind it."

"It's the bond of the jewel and the mistress for the first time."

"Is it always so intense?"

"Depends on the mistress. With you, it is very intense. I, for one, enjoyed it immensely. You have a fabulous body to explore, and I wish to do more to learn it and your delights this evening".

She returned his gaze. "Can we move this inside the house?"

"You are uncomfortable here in my arms?"

"Oh no, just not outside in front of everyone."

"The shield protects us."

"Even with the shield, I don't want others knowing our personal business. Please?"

"Of course, my mistress, whatever you desire. I do as you ask," he said, standing and helping her back to her feet.

"Thank you."

"As you wish and order, milady." He gave her a respectful bow of his head. "I am here to do as you please."

She entwined their fingers and drew him inside the house. "Come with me."

"To the heavens and beyond, milady."

"Please stop calling me that."

"Why ever for? You are my mistress now and that is what I must call you during our time together."

"No, no. I'm Constance. You may call me Connie, that's my name."

He gave her a low nod, a nod of pure respect. "A wonderful name for a beautiful lady."

"And you? Who are you?"

"Whomever you wish me to be as befits your dreams, Lady Constance."

"Not Lady Constance. There are no lords or ladies in America. It's only Constance or Connie. I answer to either one."

"America? The jewel is in America?"

She nodded. "You know what I mean?"

"It was where I last appeared. Some place called California."

"Oh well, now we're in Maine. The other side and ocean."

"Quite a distance for my gem to travel to find you." He smiled and kissed her fingers. "I am glad it came into your possession, Constance."

Pausing at the doorway of her bedroom, Constance regarded him, noticed something harden deep in the background of his bronze eyes. "What is your name? I gave you mine. You didn't give me your name."

"I don't have one, just slave or demon."

"Everyone has a name. I'm sure there is a time before the jewel when you had a life, one with a name?"

"There was a time, a distant one. I don't dwell on it or remember."

"What is your name?"

He blinked once and tilted his head a different way. A distinctive expression appeared over his face at her question. "You wish to know my true name?"

"Yes."

"Aramir," he whispered as if forbidden to speak it. "I am Aramir, the demon of the heart flame, bound to the jewel, summoned by moonlight and mystics to do your bidding, Constance. Summoned to pleasure you tonight to complete the magic."

"There is more than what happened out there?"

"If you wish it ..."

Constance licked her lips, smiled, and nodded.

When his mouth drifted down to meet hers, they came together in a long, slow kiss. Lips pressed, parted, opened again with a reluctant sigh. He walked her back to the bed, sat her down on the edge, a decadent smile on his face.

"What are you planning?"

"More delicious pleasure for you, my mistress," he whispered across her skin as he kissed, nipped, and flicked his way down her body. His fingers traced and learned their way down her curves, molded her breasts, pushed them, pulled the nipples taut, while he licked the valley between.

One of her legs curled around him, her foot caressing his thigh and ass as she became restless under his touch. She flung her hands out and grabbed hold of the comforter as he went further, massaging and molding her belly, flicking his tongue around her belly button, making her moan with desire.

"So sensitive, responsive to my touches, passionate," he murmured as he licked the line where hip and thigh met. Then his teeth nibbled along her hipbone. "Just enough flesh and meat to sink into without taking over your beauty. So much bounty to enjoy."

She grabbed hold of his hair and lifted his face. "Enough talk," she growled.

He grinned at the feisty turn of tone. "Yes, mistress."

She released him, and he went right to where she needed him. His broad shoulders pushed her legs wide. His hands went under her hips, grabbed hold of her butt and lifted her open and high. She squeaked at the position and then moaned long when his mouth dropped on her cleft, his tongue darting deep inside her.

"Holy sweet cannoli!" she screamed and her body climax hard around him.

After that, she lost count of how many times he triggered her with his mouth before he rose above her. Her body hungered for more. Her mind felt drugged with pleasure. "Aramir..." She reached for him while he kept her legs parted wide for his entry.

They both looked down, while he positioned his cock at her flushed opening, tilted up due to his hold. Both moaned when he pushed himself in, the broad head stretching the delicate tissues and ring.

Her fingers clenched, and she petted his arms, her head thrashing on the bed.

His movement was almost inert. Agonizing, aching, arrogant and slow. Delicious friction built as he rocked, keeping his fingers in place to hold his crown, stretching her.

Her heated gaze met his dominating look.

"Now?" he asked.

"Hell, yes," she said.

A wicked grin curled his lips, and he drove deep inside. She screamed in ecstasy as his length and girth filled her completely. Her tissues spasmed in tiny fissures of pain and pleasure as they grew accustomed to his thick cock.

He pulled out and thrust in, hands gripping her ass, the friction increasing. As his hips moved, flesh slapped against flesh and his balls brushed her ass. He put enough space between them to flick a finger against her clit while the angle of his cock hit the right spaces inside.

Her body shuddered, tautened, quivered. She wrapped her arms around his neck, drawing him down to her. When the orgasm ripped through her, she screamed out with her need, as her body broke free, quivering around his cock.

"Aramir!" she gasped, his name leaving her lips as she spun into the clouds with him following her. "Aramir."

CHAPTER FOUR

Basking in the afterglow, sweat cooling on their bodies, air redolent with the scent of their lovemaking, Constance rubbed her cheek against the sleek skin stretched over a powerful pectoral muscle. Her body draped over his like a warm blanket, his long arms wrapped around her as if he couldn't bear to let her go, even after sharing the closest of moments.

She leaned against his warm body, his gentle fingers tangled in her curls. When his palm curled around the nape of her neck, her eyes closed for a brief moment. A long sigh escaped her. Opening her eyes, she pushed herself upright, folded her arms upon themselves, and ogled him with glee.

A smile curled his face, bemused by her attentive expression.

She gripped the charm, lifted it from between their bodies to stare at it. "I can't believe it worked."

Before he could answer, there was a soft scratching at the door, and Cocoa entered. She braced her front paws on the edge of the bed,

her ears flipping back and forth, and her muzzle moving between them. She went from whining out of concern for Constance to growling at the stranger.

"Oh, baby, I'm so sorry I forgot all about you," Connie said, reaching for her pet.

Whispering in some unknown language, Aramir turned to Cocoa and held out a hand, fingers down, to the worried, protective animal. Within a few minutes, he had Cocoa calmed, licking his fingers, and allowing him to pet and scratch her.

"Traitor," Constance scolded her pet, who whined and wagged her tail happily. "What did you say to her?"

"Just protective of her mistress. She is a beautiful animal," he said, adding in another rub on the silky ears. "What did you name her?"

"Thank you, I found her in a shelter. She's been a loyal friend since I brought her home. I named her Cocoa, for her coloring and sweet nature, and my passion for baking,"

After licking Aramir's inner wrist and palm, Cocoa dropped to the carpet and trotted outside the room. She curled on the bed, laying head on paws.

"It suits her and you."

There was a long pause then, a silence that Constance broke.

"What happened between us, Aramir?"

He stared at her. "You called me from the jewel this evening."

She nodded.

"Then you read the scroll and know the details of our arrangement."

"Scroll?"

"The one given to you from the previous owner with the necklace."

"I wasn't given a scroll. I purchased the necklace in a shop on Main Street."

"In a shop?"

She nodded.

"There was no scroll?"

She shook her head, stopping mid-shake as her memory seized on something the shopkeeper had said. "Ahh, now I remember." She looked up with a quirk of her brow. "The shopkeeper said the scroll was lost over time. Only the spell to bring you out was known, verbally passed down."

"The scroll was lost? That makes things a little difficult."

"How?"

"It explains everything to the new mistress of the jewel."

"You can do that for me."

"It looks like I must. What do you know about this necklace?"

Constance sat back then moved to the foot of the bed. Though they just had amazing hot sex, she felt vulnerable and wrapped the blanket around her naked curves. What did she know about the necklace?

"Constance?" His voice cut into her thoughts.

"What happened between us? I don't fall in bed with anyone, Aramir. Especially with a stranger who appears in front of me."

"I will get to it. Please answer the question. What do you know about the necklace?"

Pulling in a deep steadying breath, she tried to calm her racing heart. "Next to nothing to be honest with you, Aramir. I was told to stand naked under the moonlight, hold the charm against my chest, repeat the words, and voila."

"Voila? This means?"

"That you would appear."

"What were you told about me?"

She pulled in her lower lip and nibbled on it. "You were some kind of fire demon. One who would make my most erotic wishes becomes true."

"That's it?"

She nodded.

"Wonderful. Modern times," he said. "What year is this?"

"Twenty-ten."

He cursed in the same language he used with Cocoa.

"What language is that?"

"One from my homeland, Demonish."

Before she could respond, his skin turned red with black markings and horns—real horns—grew past his hairline, on either side of his temples. His face altered slightly. His eyes remained the same gold, but the pupils went from circles to slits. His teeth changed from normal human teeth to a pointy set that looked extremely dangerous.

Clutching the blanket tighter to her chest, she leaned against the footboard. "Holy freaking cannoli!" She swallowed hard.

"As owner of my jewel, I will never harm you," he said, returning to his former human appearance. "Rule one."

She swallowed hard again. "Good. Good rule to have, I guess."

He chuckled and held out a hand, sitting up in the process. "I will never harm you, Constance. It's the same promise I made to you on the back porch. I make it again here and now, when we both have clear heads."

"Then why did we umm...pounce on each other and end up here?"

"That was the bonding of the jewel, the bonding of servant to mistress. It happens after I am called from the jewel so I know whom to obey at all times. It is part of the magic ingrained within the phrases engraved around the silver bands."

"All of which is explained in that mysterious missing scroll?"

He nodded, scratching at his chin. "I wonder how such a valuable item could be misplaced, considering its worth in controlling the jewel and me."

"We'll never know. Here's an oddball question for you. Why didn't you appear with clothes?"

"I am bonded for sex which doesn't require clothing."

Constance studied him and shook her head. "The real reason."

"My mistress provides me with what she wishes to be whatever she deems worthy— food, accoutrement, housing, and other possessions—until I return to the jewel. Rule two."

"How cruel."

"Depends on my mistress."

"Have you been kept as a true sex slave?"

"Naked, bound to a bedroom, fed only after I pleased her."

Her jaw dropped. "Did someone do that do you?"

Pulling up a leg, he wrapped an arm around his knee, sheet draped over the rest of his lower body. "A mistress in England, I'm not sure of the year."

Leaning forward, Constance placed her fingers over his in quiet comfort.

He lifted his solemn gaze and met hers. A quiet smile gave her heart a lift. "Not all were as intense. Being an imprisoned demon has its benefits. I live longer, have seen far more than I ever thought I could from my home. I learned far more than I would amongst my kind."

"How old are you?"

"Almost four thousand years."

Her eyes nearly bugged out of her head.

A rough chuckle escaped him. "You are the most inquisitive mistress, Constance."

"No one asks questions?"

"They read the scroll and bed me. It is all they ever wish of me. When they're through, I'm returned to the jewel to await the next call."

"When was the last time you were called?"

He tapped his finger against his chin, eyes toward the ceiling as if deep in thought. "Sometime in what you called the seventies. It's been a while. I learn languages through the jewel and see the changes of the world through it."

"Holy cannoli!"

"You enjoy that saying," he said with a chuckle.

"You never had a cannoli."

"Apparently not the ones you've eaten."

"Bake," she corrected.

"Bake?"

"I'm a pastry chef. I have a little shop and sell to the local restaurants and bed & breakfasts in town."

"Something you enjoy doing?"

She smiled and nodded. "It's a passion of mine since I was little, learning at my grandmother's side. At her encouragement, I went to a special academy."

Letting his forefinger ply and play with hers, he listened while she spoke about her training and building the shop within the small town. He was surprisingly easy to talk to—attentive, knew the right questions to ask to move the conversation along, and barely interrupted.

Before she finished, she heard his stomach grumble with hunger. He pressed a hand to it and looked away. "Excuse me, please, mistress. Continue with your story."

"Oh, how stupid of me! Here I am, prattling on about my life while you're here after forty years with no food or drink. Aramir!" She grinned and slipped in for a quick series of kisses.

"You're not angry with me?"

"Angry? How could I? Oh, I could kick those ladies for hurting you," she said, leaning in to steal more kisses from his delectable lips. She rose off the bed and raced to the closet, pulling on another robe and wrapped the tie. She rummaged through the dresser and found a pair of extra large sweat pants she had bought once by accident. She tossed them to him.

Snatching the pants out of the air, Aramir swung his legs around and stared at the cotton garment. "What are these?"

"Pants for you. I hope they fit. Only thing I have for now. We'll go shopping in the morning for you."

"You're giving me clothes to wear?"

"Of course. I'm not confining you to this room or to being naked, Aramir. I could never do that to anyone. No matter what a scroll or spell says, you're not my servant or slave."

Rising, Aramir moved to her and wrapped his arms around her.

She held still for a long moment and then returned the embrace, breathing in the delightful scents of cardamom and fire that drifted from him.

Dipping down, he coaxed a gentle kiss from her. "A request from me?"

"Of course. What is it?"

"For now, do not remove the necklace from your person for any reason. Not even for bathing. All right?"

"Is it very important I do this?"

He nodded.

"Then I will do what you request. The necklace will never leave me," she said, a hand cupping his cheek.

"Thank you, Constance."

"Now, try on the pants and let me feed you." She kissed his cheek.

Chuckling, he nodded. "Yes, milady."

CHAPTER FIVE

Sitting on the stool, overlooking a well-equipped kitchen, a glass of iced-tea in front of him, Aramir found himself both charmed and impressed watching Constance perform her own type of magic in the kitchen. Her hands were precise and sure, and she maneuvered the sharp chef's blade through a variety of fresh vegetables and herbs, slicing and dicing them on the large board. She chose a blade of steak and sliced that under her knife. The pungent aroma of fresh garlic wafted across the room as she smashed a couple of cloves to pop open the delicate skins before finely mincing them.

"I'm going to do a quick sauté with crushed tomatoes and toss them with pasta. It'll be a good wholesome meal to start you off with," she said with a smile. She turned away, pulling over a different knife and long white bag.

He realized it was a baguette which she sliced a few rounds off in quick succession. He watched her arrange them on a plate. In a few more minutes, she combined a rich extra virgin olive oil with a variety

of spices in a small white dish and placed that in the middle. She set that in front of him.

"Start off with that to help your belly. It should settle things and we'll see if you can hold down food."

"My stomach doesn't reject anything when I eat or drink after extended periods of time," he said, choosing a round of bread. He tore through the crust and dipped half in the herbed oil before placing it in his mouth.

"That's a good thing. I hate seeing my food go to waste."

His eyes closed in pleasure as the burst of fruity olives opened across his taste buds, followed by the variety of dried herbs, the heat of red pepper flakes, and then the yeasty warmth of the fresh baked bread. So long since fresh food had passed his mouth. He had almost forgotten what it was like to taste anything.

Soft but strong fingers curled around his, and his eyes opened to meet hers which were forest green and luminous under the kitchen lights.

"For so simple of a pleasure, thank you."

"It's only begun, Aramir," she promised.

Over the next half hour, he watched her sauté the meat and vegetables in the olive oil while the pasta boiled in another pot. She explained what she did, every move precise, her wrist sharp and quick while moving the pan over the heat. Soon, she placed a heaping bowl, full of fragrant vegetables, perfectly cooked pasta, and delicious meat with a topping of cheese and herbs, in front of him. She slid on the stool next to him, with another bowl and glass of tea.

"Enjoy your meal. Don't eat too fast or you'll lose the bounty of flavors," she said.

"Oh, believe me. I will not rush this meal. I waited too long for even a decent morsel to waste a fabulous meal like this one." Moving his fork through the bowl to get a bit of everything, he placed it in his mouth and closed his lips around the tines and morsels. Again, his eyes closed, and he moaned in pleasure as his taste buds exploded.

It took a few more full bites before he could find his voice again, but when he saw Constance's amusement, there wasn't the need for words. She understood everything he felt. He took her hand in his and kissed her palm.

It was enough.

A comfortable silence fell between them while they enjoyed the rest of the meal. After he finished a second helping, he rose and went to help her clean the kitchen. He watched her pull out some type of

containers and scooped the remainder of the meal in them, put on a lid, and placed them in the refrigerator.

"Why did you do that?"

"Do what?" she asked, moving the pan and utensils to the sink where she ran water and soap in them to soak.

"Put them in a container."

"The containers keep food fresh longer and we can reheat it in the microwave in a few minutes." At his questioning gaze, she pointed to another machine. "Lots of modern conveniences have come about over the years."

"Seems there is more for me to learn than I first thought."

"You'll get the hang of it. I have a feeling you're a quick learner."

"Didn't have much of a choice in the matter. I believe you're not supposed to do the cleaning, since you did the cooking. Correct?" he said, bumping her hip with his.

"Since I cook and clean for one, I'm used to doing both."

"True, but I'm here. I do everything."

She put her hand over his when he reached to take the sponge from her. "I didn't call you to have a slave."

"Then why did you call me?"

She shrugged and smiled. "I'm still figuring that out, but it's not for a slave. Perhaps I wanted to see if that crazy woman in the shop was right."

"What crazy woman?"

"The one who sold me your necklace. She felt so cold and not right. Gave me the heebie-jeebies," Connie said, shivering. "Now are you going to help me wash this stuff?"

"Of course, my mistress. Where do we start?"

"With the easy stuff. All we need to do is rinse our dishes and stick them in the dishwasher. It does the main work for us." She leaned over and opened another drawer.

He looked at the sponge in his hand and the dishwasher. "You're kidding? There's a machine to do all this?"

"Most of it, yup. It's been around since the late eighteen-eighties, invented by a lady no less. I have to check the Internet to get the exact year."

"Internet, oh yes, that's on the computer."

"You know the computer, but not a dishwasher?"

"It all depends on what is near my jewel. I learn what is near it at the time. Computers and the Internet were around the jewel when I was in this shop—must be the place where you found the necklace."

"So, that's how you learn everything?"

He nodded, smiling "Were you going to try and make me wash everything by hand?"

"Me?" She pressed fingers to her chest, eyes wide and full of innocence. "Oh, I wouldn't do that to you."

He chuckled. "My feisty little mistress, do I need to return you to bed again for another lesson?"

"Was that a lesson for me or for you?"

Laughter filled the kitchen until they leaned against each other. They barely got the dishes and pan cleaned along with the rest of the kitchen. Constance continued to tease him, opening him up in ways none of his other mistresses had bothered with. She wanted to know him, who he was, who he is, his likes and dislikes. She wanted to know him as a man, a demon, and not keep him like a pet.

When he turned away to toss the used paper towels in the garbage, he growled and yipped as something snapped against his buttocks. He jumped and rubbed a hand against his ass, cursing aloud in Demonish.

Constance laughed, unraveling the towel in her hands and twirling it around with a playful look on her face. She gave him a kissy face.

"You devil!"

She gave a squeal when he charged, screaming in play and pleasure as they raced out of the kitchen and around the living and dining rooms. Cocoa barked and joined in their play, yipping at their heels. She squealed again when he cornered her, caught her against his chest, and tossed her over his shoulder.

"Aramir!" Fisting her hands, she beat them against his back, slapping his ass, the laughter rolling out of her. "Cocoa, Cocoa, help your mommy!"

The little mutt sat down. Her ears twitched back and forth, and her tail flipped against the carpet as she watched her upside-down mistress and the stranger.

Aramir slapped a hand against Connie's butt, making her squeak in surprise.

"Hey!"

"Quiet! Stay there, Cocoa, while I deal with this brat," he told the little dog.

Cocoa barked and pranced to the sofa. She jumped up and chewed on a toy.

"Little traitor," Connie said and began to slap her hands on Aramir's broad back again, knowing it was useless. "Let me down!"

"Forget it," he said. He walked down the hallway to her room. He flipped her over on the bed. They rolled over a few times, until he caught her underneath him, wrists captured in one hand.

"You little minx, snapping a towel at my ass," he grumbled. "I should toss you over my lap and spank your sweet butt."

Wiggling underneath him, she drew her foot against his calf, until her mons pressed against his erection. "Is that all you wish to do to me, my big bad demon?"

"How you would like to know," he said before he lowered his head to capture her lips and proceeded to give her discipline the rest of the evening. It ended up being the kind they both enjoyed.

CHAPTER SIX

Thanks to an early baker's morning, Constance left Aramir's warm body before the sun rose. His eyes opened when she scattered light kisses across his chest and lips, and he gave her a sleepy smile.

"After last night, you wish for more?"

"No, I must get ready to leave. Busy morning at the shop."

His eyebrows pulled together and he looked out the window, not the clock to gauge the time. "It's too early, stay in bed with me."

"I'm a baker. I must get things in the oven early before the customers arrive wanting their breads, pastries, and other delicious concoctions." She nuzzled another kiss to his sternum and pushed herself up. "Stay in bed and sleep."

He rolled over on his side, watched her swirl her hair and clip it before she slipped in the bathroom for a quick rinse down. "Do you wish for coffee?" he called over the water.

"The machine is already going, but you can pour me a cup. Add two spoonfuls of sugar. It would be heaven," she called back.

"As you wish."

Stepping out of the shower in time to hear the classic Aramir answer to any of her requests, Connie cursed herself and the power of the jewel. She loved his attentiveness, but wished she knew he did it for her and not because of the curse. She wondered if there was any way to free him. Such a wonderful demon did not deserve to be captive.

Turning, she briskly rubbed down with a towel and dressed in red lingerie, knowing her demon would love to remove it later. She slipped into jeans and a charcoal wrap-around sweater that set off the necklace. Keeping her hair pinned up for the bakery, she added a little powder, mascara, and gloss and called it done. When she stepped out to find socks and her favorite black boots, there was Aramir with a cup of coffee, and a smile.

"This is a most welcome sight any morning," she said, moving to him, kissing him. "Thank you for the cup of coffee. It wasn't an order, you know."

"I know, I could feel the difference," he said, his tone lazy and lingering. His lips brushed back and forth against hers.

Taking the handle, Connie sipped the dark, fragrant brew. Cocoa whined and circled around them, wanting attention, breakfast, and a walk, and Connie crouched down to give her a pat, morning scratches, and hugs, getting a few wet kisses in return.

"Hey, sweetie, how are you this morning? Want an early run?"

Cocoa barked with enthusiasm, her tail wagging at the chance to run and play.

"I can take her out. Up and around the block in my sweatpants shouldn't be a complete outrage to the neighbors."

"No, I don't think you'll shock everyone. You wouldn't mind?"

"It sounds relaxing and something I haven't done. You have enough to do today. Just show me her morning feed in the kitchen and go to the bakery. I'll take care of things around here."

"Hmm, my very own house demon." Connie rose, wrapping her arm around his waist. "Whatever did I do without you?"

"Well, you don't have to ask that question anymore," he said, placing a kiss on her temple while they went down the hall to the kitchen, Cocoa trailing on their heels.

Snatching a pad and pen from a drawer, she showed him the basics around the kitchen, telling him to help himself to anything to eat and drink. After much begging from Cocoa, she showed him the dog

food and treats and how much to give Miss Mooch. She wrote down her cell phone number for Aramir.

"Cell phone? I heard about them, heard all kind of these noises ringing around the jewel. What exactly are they?"

"A blessing and a nuisance," Connie said, then moved to find her purse in the living room and dug out her phone. She tossed it to him and watched him snatch it in one hand with ease. "That's mine."

"You can speak to others on this? From great distances?" He sounded surprised as he flipped the device over in his hand, studying it.

"Along with all types of other applications and fun stuff," she said. "No longer connected to a cord or the house. You can go anywhere as long as you have a connection with it. Most of the time, it's crystal-clear talking."

"Very impressive."

"They can be a nuisance since someone can always reach you, anytime, anywhere, but then you can always reach out to someone at the same time." She shrugged and took the phone back from him. "Anyway, I'll have this with me so you can reach me at the bakery all morning. I'll be home around noon. We'll do something about clothes for you then."

"Clothes?"

"You need more than a single pair of sweatpants."

"If you wish me to go outside the home, yes..."

"Yes, I want you to leave the house." She sipped the coffee and watched him. "I'm not chaining you to the bed or locking you in the bedroom. Go anywhere you wish, use anything in the house, the computer, watch TV, and hang out with Cocoa. When we get you some clothes, I'll show you around town. Perhaps you'll find something you enjoy doing while I'm working."

"You are a very different mistress."

Constance finished her coffee, poured more into a travel mug, added sugar, and snapped the top shut. Seeing the confusion in Aramir's golden gaze, she went over to him and let her thumb stroke his cheekbone. "There is more to you than the bound slave, Aramir. Think upon him. I must run or I'll be late all day." She kissed him, gave Cocoa's ears a rub, grabbed her things, and rushed to the car.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Throughout the morning at the bakery, Constance found herself with boundless energy as she baked her goods, met with customers, staff, deliveries, and all the other things that made up her business. There was a satisfied, loving smile upon her lips that caused many people to pass comment, but though it brought a sparkle to her eyes, she didn't speak about either Aramir or about the necklace she wore around her neck.

Before rushing home at lunchtime, she stopped off at the stores and purchased clothing for Aramir, not wanting to keep him cooped up in her home. She couldn't take him shopping in the sweatpants, and this would be a good surprise for him. She wanted to introduce him to everything, to life outside her home, to give him a chance to do what he wanted to do and not what she ordered.

Laden with bags of clothes and accessories full of surprises, she opened the door with her hip. She laughed when Aramir scooped her into his arms and welcomed her with a deep kiss.

"Holy cannoli, what a greeting," she teased, when he let her up for air. "It's only lunchtime, not even a full workday passed."

"You left so early though, before dawn broke the sky. It felt a full day to me."

"I told you that's a baker's life. I'm up before dawn and usually home by noon, unless I have special cake orders or other designs I need to handle. During the wedding season, I'm at the bakery all day working on wedding cakes." Dropping the bags, she ran her fingers through his soft hair and pressed her lips against his.

His hands dropped, grabbed her butt and lifted until she wrapped her legs around his hips. Kissing her hard, he carried her to the sofa where he sat down. Breaking the kiss with a laugh, she tilted her center against his erection.

"Is this what I can always expect to come home too with you?" she teased, drawing her nails up his chest and shoulders.

"All I could think about was being deep inside you," he said, growling. "Now, shush!"

A playful laugh smothered by his kiss when his hands sank into her hair. His fingers pulled, and she heard her hairclip go flying across the room. Heavy locks tumbled down her neck. Her hands dug into his delicious shoulder muscles while he untied her sweater and opened it to reveal the lacy, red bra cupping her full breasts. His golden gaze lit with lust and let out another growl.

"Matching panties?"

"You'll have to find out, demon."

Snarling with pleasure, he pulled one of her legs out from behind him. Tugged down the side zipper and slid off the boot, he did the same with her other foot, tracing her arch with a finger. He flicked open the button of her jeans and then the zipper. Grasping hold of her hips, he pulled her away from her, made her stand only long enough to shove down the jeans.

A lusty grin curled his lips when he saw the red thong.

"Not a movement." He shoved the sweatpants out of the way. Freed, he tugged her back down, straddling his hips.

Her head went back and an undulating moan escaped when his thick length entered her velvety pussy, soaked with her wetness. She had been thinking of him all day, and cream dripped from her slit at each sensual thought of what he would do to her.

"Look at me."

Bringing her head down, Connie gripped his biceps and stared at Aramir's eyes. She enjoyed how his fingers gripped her hips so warm

and hard. He rolled his hips underneath her. Her inner muscles rippled as he moved deeper.

"Oh damn, Aramir, please..." She stared at him. "Move, demon, now."

Laughing with sensual delight, a devil's taunt in his eyes, he held her hips still as he fucked her hard and deep. He kept the momentum between them, watched her quake and shudder above him. Sweat broke out over their skin. Breath sawed in and out of their lungs.

Pressing her forehead against his neck, she whimpered, a combination of pleasure and pain. She was on the very edge, her fingers sliding up and down his biceps. "Please, please."

Wrapping an arm around her hips to keep her in place, Aramir moved a hand between their hips. Pushing back the taut hood, he began to flick and tap her clit in a passionate pattern. He watched her lean back, adding her own power to their lovemaking, driving against each thrust, while his fingers played her clit.

She shuddered hard. Then the orgasm tore through her. Her inner muscles clenched tight around him, soaking him. She continued to ride him until he swelled and burst deep inside her. They collapsed together against the sofa, breathing hard, sweaty bodies sticking together.

"Now that was definitely a wonderful welcome home," Connie said, chuckling after catching her breath. She lifted her head and gazed at him. She spread a series of quick kisses across his face, hitting his lips, nose and forehead. Her fingers trailed across his chest as she straightened her back. Wiggling her hips, she still felt him inside her.

Chuckling, he set her gently to the side. "Didn't want you to forget what's waiting for you." Rising, he lifted his sweatpants over his hips, gathered her strewn clothing, and disappeared for a moment.

Stretched out across the sofa, a succulent morsel for his eyes, she laughed. "Demon, how could anyone forget you?"

"You'd be surprise, Constance," he said, returning with her favorite robe and a damp cloth.

Flushed with warmth at the care he took with cleansing her skin, removing the stickiness between her legs from their lovemaking, she allowed him to help her rise and wrap the robe around her body.

"Hmm, after all this, I don't think I would ever forget. Now, I will enjoy coming home to someone other than Cocoa. Where is she?" She wrapped her arms around Aramir's waist and hugged him hard.

A friendly barking spoke up and she felt a tugging on a dangling tie of the wrap.

Glancing down, she saw her dog at their side and laughed at Cocoa's antics. She felt Aramir let her go and she crouched to hug and stroke her beloved pet. "Hey, girl, you enjoy having someone stay with you. Yeah, you two have a good time together." She chuckled at the face licking she got and then gave the frisky dog a thorough belly rub.

"We got along great. No messes in the house and lots of belly rubs," Aramir answered with a smile.

"Did you get a few strange looks during your walks?"

"A few. A bunch of questions about why I walk your dog. I said I was a guest staying at your home for the holiday season. I arrived during the night. It seems to satisfy most of their curiosity," he said. "How was your day?"

"Oh, I had lots of questions about your necklace and the smile you seem to place permanently on my face. It appears I have to make a lot of introductions about the new man in my life."

"Hopefully, no one had any ideas of usurping my place," he said, reaching over and kissing her smile.

She kissed him back a couple more times and shook her head. "Oh no, not this time. I'm quite happy with my golden-eyed demon." She ran a finger down his nose and tapped the end.

"I enjoy my green-eyed lady very much."

Connie leaned back and gave him a steely-eyed glare. "Did Mrs. Tomlinson pinch your ass when you walked Cocoa and try to proposition you? She is the busy-body on the block, always has to know the going-ons of everyone else."

"Multiple times," he said.

"Damn her! I need to march down and pop her one in the nose. She needs to mind her own freaking business once and for all, I swear."

Before she could do as she threatened, he wrapped his arms around her waist and held tight. He chuckled, tucking his face into her neck. "My valiant little mistress, defending me against all others."

"Nothing to laugh at, Aramir!"

He hugged her even more firmly, lifting her off her feet, and swinging her back and forth. "No, I want you to do nothing more than this for me. Only saying it means enough."

"You are one strange demon," she said, raising an eyebrow and giving him an odd glance.

He laughed aloud.

"Okay." She swung her feet. "Can you put me down? Not that I don't love being in your arms, but..." She fluttered her lashes in a fun look.

"You have plans."

"Other than being ravished on the sofa, yup."

"I enjoyed ravishing you on the sofa."

She laughed. "Please, my golden-eyed demon?"

"Very well." He gently placed her on her feet. "By the way, I handled the pinch fingers lady myself. She will not dare come near my ass again without facing consequences."

"Should I ask about them or does it involve fire and horns?"

He grinned in his wicked demonic fashion.

"Okay, I'll leave it in your capable hands. Come, I have lots to show you, and we'll have lunch together," Constance said, while she gathered the bags.

"What is all of this?" Aramir picked up what bags she couldn't, along with the washcloth and lacy lingerie, and followed her to the bedroom.

Something was different and it suddenly dawned on Connie what she had been struggling to put a finger on since she got home. Turning, she gave him an once-over. "Aramir? Why is everything clean and neat?"

He shrugged. "Nothing else to do. I found where you kept things."

"You cleaned?"

He nodded. "I hope you don't mind, but I availed myself to your computer system. I found myself enjoying what you called 'surfing the Internet'. It's a wonderful invention. I heard of it while trapped within the jewel."

"You cleaned and surfed the web?"

He nodded. "You are not mad with me?"

Laughing, she pecked him on the cheek. "You are a curious man."

"Demon, not a man," he said, letting his horns appear.

"Can you just let them appear anytime you wish?"

"Any part of my appearance, yes. I have a pair of swords I can make appear and use in defense if need be to protect my mistress. There is other defense magic at my disposal. Along with natural fire, magic belongs to a fire demon. I can't do everything I should because the jewel binds my power, keeps me subservient to it and my mistress." He shrugged, and his horns disappeared.

"Do you like cleaning?"

Clasping hands behind his back, he shrugged. "I am not sure who I am any longer. It's been a while since my will is my own, Constance. My will is tied to the jewel."

"The jewel owned by the current whim of the mistress."

He nodded.

Setting the bags on the bed, she placed a hand on his biceps where the silver bands wrapped around the muscle. "Perhaps, we can work it out."

"How do you propose we do this?"

"By getting you out of this house," she said with a smile and up-ended the bags. "I hope I got the sizes right. I never purchased men's clothing before. If not, we'll go back and exchange things for the right sizes, colors, or whatever you prefer."

Constance twitched the edges of the robe around her legs, and stared at Aramir's reactions when the clothing and accessories tumbled across the neatly made bed. Several pairs of jeans, khakis, dark pants, thick comfortable sweaters, shirts of various styles, packages of underwear, socks, some pajamas, a cotton robe, a couple of pairs of shoes, belts, and an outerwear jacket. In another bag, she picked out a variety of toiletries.

He sat down beside her amongst the clothes, holding a pair of jeans in his hands, and stared at her. "You got all this for me?" He lifted his gaze from the garments to her. His face was unreadable.

"I told you, I wasn't going to keep you confined naked to a room. You have your freedom to come and go as you please. I want you to do whatever you wish, Aramir, whether it's with me by your side or not."

"Whether you wear the jewel or not, Constance, I will always stand with you. My solemn vow."

She smiled. "Truly?"

"That is me speaking, not the power of the mystics or the jewel." He reached up to sweep back a lock of her hair, tucking it behind an ear.

Shifting closer, Constance straddled his legs, cradled his face in her hands and kissed him. She felt his tongue open her lips and let him pass. Their tongues met, parleyed, and retreated. She pulled back to look at him.

"This is not because of the clothes or because I'm ordering you, Aramir," she said, resting her forehead on his.

"I don't feel that coming from you or the jewel. It feels genuine between us, as it was on the sofa. I can tell the difference with you."

"It is. I believe it is becoming genuine which is the problem."

"Problem?"

"I don't want you to feel used any longer. I don't want mindless lust or sex."

"Constance?"

She forced herself to climb off his lap and stand free. When he reached for her, she held up her hands and shook her head. She lifted up the jewel. "What happens if this is removed from my neck?"

Aramir gazed up at her, surrounded by her gifts. "I return to the jewel."

"Could I call you back?"

"No, one call only per mistress."

"I'll never see you again?"

He shook his head. "You will be unable to see the flicker within the jewel. It'll seem like an ordinary jewel to you. Soon you'll have a feeling to get rid of it. Within time, you'll forget our time together."

"But you'll remember me."

"Forever," he whispered.

"Then tell me something," she said, returning to him, placing her hands on his.

"Whatever I can."

"How did you end up bound to the jewel?"

He closed his eyes and dropped his head. She curved her fingers under his chin and lifted his head.

"Tell me, Aramir, please."

Rising to his feet, he seemed to take on a different air. His shoulders straightened as he backed up against her dresser, his hands resting behind him. "Before the jewel, I was a prince of the fire demons, in line for the throne of all demons."

"Royalty? You're a prince?"

He nodded.

"Still?"

"My homeland is still in existence, as is my race, so, yes, I could still be considered their prince. Though, most believe I'm dead."

"What happened?"

"It was during a ball, I refused the affections of a sorceress. She wanted me in her bed. I was known as a ladies' man back in my time, but I had my limits and she..." He shook his head. "So cold, a heart so black, and riddled with hatred. I felt it pour over me. I couldn't touch her, let alone take her in bed."

"How did she...?"

"Black sorcery, I was a fool. I thought I was invincible, a powerful fire demon, a prince, and she brought me to the lowest. A bound sex

slave to a jewel called out to perform for the whim of a female, any female who sees the flicker within the ruby. Until the spell is broken when the necklace is removed from her neck. Then I disappear, she forgets, and I move to await my next caller." He held out his hands. "Here I remain, from prince to slave."

"Can it be broken?"

"Can what?"

"The spell binding you and the jewel? Can you be freed?"

He shrugged. "I read the scroll thousands of times, but never saw anything about freedom. It was only rules and what the mistress can and can't do to me."

"You don't know?"

"It's a hope I've long given up on figuring out, Constance."

"Is the sorceress alive?"

He clutched a hand around the jewel and closed his eyes. "Yes, she is alive. I still feel the cold energy emanating within the necklace."

"Is she close?"

"Perhaps I can find her."

"Then we must confront her and free you. Then you could leave and go wherever you wish. Return to your people even. How would that feel?"

Opening his eyes, his gaze returned to her. "I believe that if given the chance upon freedom, I would return to you, Constance. I found comfort here, a chance here."

"You haven't left this house. You don't know life outside this building. Give the world a chance before committing yourself. You have so much to offer this world. A powerful fire demon and a prince! Aramir, there is so much you can do."

"Are paranormals accepted? I saw some things on the Internet, but I couldn't quite tell."

"Over the last decade, yes, more are coming forward. Clusters of vampires and shifters are making themselves known. Rights and laws are being added to governments to deal with their special needs. This town is unique because paranormals are the founding families. It's a haven for them. Regular humans like me entered later. Our chief-of-police is a werewolf, along with most of the officers. A werewolf pack makes their full moon runs just outside of town, but most own shops or homes within town."

"Werewolves and vampires? They're here?"

She nodded. "There're some witches and wizards, too. A lovely young witch named, Shelly, works at the bakery with me, and I have a vampire baker who does our bread at night. He loves it."

"Any demons?"

"I'm sure we can find some around. If they're here, you can meet them at the Halloween party."

"Halloween? It's coming up?"

"The end of the week."

"A powerful evening, no matter what you believe."

"Good for magic."

He nodded.

She cupped his face and pressed a lingering kiss to his lips. "Then we have a plan. Try on your clothes, see what you like, prefer, or what you would rather exchange. I have no qualms about returning clothes to the stores. I'll go make us some lunch."

"Do you have to return to the store?"

"No, I work mornings unless something major comes up that needs my attention. Right now I'm free, so afternoons are yours."

"I don't want to interfere with your work—"

She stopped him by laying her fingertips against his delectable lips. "Sweet demon of mine, stop."

He smiled. "Well, you know I would love to keep you here all day long. Explore all kinds of ways and positions to take you around this home. We tried the sofa, which was delightful. Where else should we try?" He kissed, and then licked, her fingertips. He nibbled the sensitive pads.

She moaned at his erotic turn of things and shook her head. "Such a bad, bad demon."

"Only for you, my mistress."

She chuckled. "Later, darling."

He raised an eyebrow. "Later?"

"I want to take you outside and show you our town. Perhaps, you'll find a niche that fits."

"You really want to do this for me? Take me outside the bedroom and my status?"

She smoothed back a lock of his hair and smiled, "Yes, Aramir. I do." After another kiss, she left the bedroom, whistled to Cocoa, and decided what to make for lunch.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Rising out of the car after Constance parked by her bakery, Aramir brushed a hand through his hair and breathed in the luxurious scents surrounding him. All the delicious aromas drifted from the *pâtisserie*, from the natural autumn scents to a variety of others he couldn't put a name to right now. It was intoxicating. He leaned a hand against the car as it overwhelmed his senses, his eyes closed.

Soft hands touched his and she wrapped her arms around the nape of his neck. The rest of her petite body curled against his back. Her warm vanilla scent pushed out the others, allowing him to concentrate on her and nothing else.

"Aramir? Are you all right?"

"A little overwhelming the first time outside. It's been a while since I've been near so many others. When I walked Cocoa, I concentrated on her scent, which is strong, but this got to me."

Her fingers played with his hair, trailing through it, massaging his neck. "Did I push this too far? Do you want to go back?"

He turned to face her green gaze and shook his head. "No, you're right."

"Then what is wrong?"

Turning completely, he wrapped his arms around her waist. Her hands moved to his shoulders, but continued to play with a lock of his hair. He rocked them back and forth, centering himself on her scent, the feel of her in his arms, the thrum of her heart against the jewel he felt all the time.

"Aramir?"

Taking in a deep breath, he stepped back. He released his grip on her and instead entwined their fingers. "Show me your town."

She gazed at him, her free hand caressing his cheek in a quiet question.

He nodded. "Show me, I want to see your home. And I definitely want to try one of your beloved cannoli."

She laughed and walked with him. "All right, then. Welcome to my town. Let me show you Morelli's Bakery."



The bell tinkled when he opened the door for her. It was still busy inside, which pleased her. Most of the crowd turned to see who entered, and when they realized she had male company, the whispers and nudges got everyone else to look.

"Perhaps one quick announcement should do the trick," he whispered, stopping at her back and curling a hand around her waist, resting it below her breasts.

"Everyone, this is Aramir. Aramir, this is half of the town," she introduced with a wicked grin.

Laughter broke out from everyone in the crowd.

"Shelly, place two fresh cannoli in a bag and send them back to us. We're not bothering to move through this crowd. I want to show Aramir the town before the sun goes down," Connie called to the younger girl behind the counter.

"Oh, my—uh, sure. Wow, Connie, okay, two cannoli," Shelly said, shaking her head. A big smile appeared on her face, while her gaze stayed on Aramir.

Aramir watched the young girl and the rest of the crowd. "Did you ever do this with another lover before?" he whispered in her ear.

"That would be a big fat no," Connie said.

"That explains everything. We're going to get these looks everywhere, aren't we?"

"Oh, yes."

"I see. You're not leaving my side. Understand?"

"And the same goes for you, mister."

He chuckled low and wicked in her ear. When he saw a white pastry bag with the colorful logo carried above the crowd coming towards them, he reached out with a long arm and snatched hold of it.

"Thank you, everyone. Have a good evening and enjoy," Connie said.

Aramir opened the door behind him while they waved goodbye. They managed to escape, and she led him to the park, decorated for the fall holidays.

He bit into the fried pastry dough filled with the sweet, creamy filling, not caring about the confectioner's sugar dusting his sweater and fingers. His eyes widened in delight as the mixture of flavors rolled over his tongue. "Oh, wow, Constance."

"Holy cannoli," she said.

"I must agree with your funny little saying. You make one hell of a cannoli, mistress," he said.

She laughed and leaned against his shoulder. "Yes, I do. It's a secret family recipe. All in the flavoring."

"Of course it is. And in the baker," he said, dropping a kiss on her nose.

Tilting her head, she gave him a lingering kiss, flavored by cannoli.

"Now, tell me about your little town," he said, wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

Curling against him, she pointed out the different streets, naming them, talking about what stores were located where and who owned them. She explained about the childish scarecrows sitting on the benches. He chuckled when he learned the elementary school classes created them as a contest.

"What about this dance?"

"It's over at Town Hall which has a large ballroom overlooking the lake. Before the dance, every store will set up a station for trick-or-treaters for the kids until six. After that, there will be a big town barbeque. The kids head off for their fun time with watchers, teens get their own dance, and adults have a dance. It's an annual dance."

"Do you have a costume?"

"I've been working on one, but since you arrived..."

"I come with a built in costume," he said with a grin.

She laughed. "A very handsome one at that, too. There is a costume contest with different entries."

"Hmm, evil demon and his fair captive. Gorgeous mistress and her demon slave?" he suggested, tickling her.

"You are too much, Aramir."

Tilting her back in his arms across the bench, he playfully growled, nibbled and kissed down her neck. His hand trailed over her belly and hip.

"I do like the idea of a fair captive in my hands," he said, nipped along her jaw.

"Oh my, help me, save me from the savage demon," she trilled in a playful voice.

They burst into laughter.

Something cold rushed down his neck.

It wasn't a breeze.

He froze, laughter dying. Bringing her upright, he shifted on the bench and faced the direction of the cold. He knew the ancient cold, deep down in the gut.

"Aramir, what is it?" Constance grabbed hold of his hand.

"The store over there on the far western corner of the park. The one with the darkened windows and not decorated. What is it?" he asked in a low tone.

She leaned around him and saw the store. "That's the mystic store where I found your necklace."

"What do you know about it?"

"Only that it popped up in town a week or so ago. I never met the shopkeeper until I walked in that day. It seems she keeps to herself, not introducing herself or anything."

"Come with me. I need to see it." He rose to his feet and looked at her when their hands stretched, still joined.

"Why?"

"Please, Constance," he said, his darkened gaze pleading with her.

Rising, she nodded, stepped next to him. Wrapping another hand around his arm while they walked across the park, she kept quiet.

CHAPTER NINE

Pushing the door open, Aramir let Constance step inside first, but when he felt the coldness seep into his very essence. It throbbed into the jewel hung around her neck. He swept her behind him.

"Aramir?" she whispered.

"It's her," he said.

"What—"

"Well, now, look who is out of his little red prison," the woman said, walking out of the back room. Dressed completely in black, wearing high black boots, a necklace with a series of black pearls and pure white diamonds around her slender neck, she pulled her white hair in a flawless chignon and secured it with a hair clip of matching jewels. Dramatic makeup played up her dark blue eyes in a pale face and sizzling red lips.

"Rosezetta, the Sorceress," Aramir said, crossing his arms over his chest. "I knew it was your black air causing a stink in this fine town."

"After all these years, you still don't know how to control your tongue, stupid demon," she said in a waspish tone.

"Only when confronted by you. Somehow, someway, the necklace always ends up back in your hands."

"Of course. Unlike you, the jewel knows its master."

"You'll never be my master and that continues to mess with you, every second of every day." Aramir stepped over to the woman and leaned in until she could see every movement of his lips. "You never will master me."

The sorceress hissed.

Aramir grinned and straightened.

"What is going on here?" Connie placed a hand on Aramir's arm.

"It's her, Constance." Stepping back to Connie's side, he placed a hand over hers, linking their fingers. Aramir's gaze didn't move from the sorceress. "It's the bitch who put me in the jewel."

"If it wasn't me, I'm sure someone else would be bound to capture you." The sorceress turned her attention to Connie. "It seems, young lady, you don't know how to control him."

"What do you mean? He's here with me because I asked him," Constance said.

"You let him, a sex slave, out of the bedroom?"

"I don't require a sex slave twenty-four hours a day."

"Low sex drive?"

"Excuse me?"

"Woman, look at him?" The sorceress pointed at him.

Connie stared up at Aramir and smiled. "I've been staring at him since he appeared from the jewel. What is you wish me to see?"

"He's a sexual slave, built for a woman's pleasure, and nothing else. How can anyone not desire this man? Not want to fuck him all day and night?"

"Perhaps I desire other things in life. Such as work, or a real relationship over a simple sexual moment. Maybe I want him to have something else to do than wait in bed for me," Constance said, shoving her hands on her hips.

"Which I happen to appreciate," Aramir said, grazing Constance's forehead with a tender kiss.

"Unbelievable, this is not how to use this slave. You're the wrong woman to own the necklace. You have no control over him and that can lead to trouble. I can't risk the chance of losing any control over the jewel after all I did to create it and him. Therefore, I must ask for my jewel back," Rosezetta said, holding out her hand.

Aramir felt cold power push through the jewel and into Constance. Her fingers loosened from his grip. "Damn you, Rosezetta! Stop hurting her!"

"Please, simple magic. It's harmless to the pathetic mortal. I want my jewel."

Growling at the sorceress, Aramir faced Constance, lifted his hands and cupped her cheeks. "Constance, don't listen to her," he said. He drew her gaze to meet his. "Look at me. Come on, darling. I need you to look at me."

Her beloved familiar green gaze met his. She blinked as if coming out of a trance.

"That's it, Constance. There you are, darling. Listen to my voice and come back to me," Aramir repeated.

"Damn you, demon! No, little mortal, give me the jewel! I want my jewel back," Rosezetta interrupted.

Constance blinked again. Her hand came up and touched his against her cheek. "Aramir? What is happening?"

"She is using the jewel against you. She created it."

Constance gazed from him to the sorceress and back to him. "How can I fight for you? I only had one night with you, Aramir. There's too much I want to show you."

"Aww, the little mortal wants to fight me? How sweet?" Rosezetta snickered.

Aramir growled at the creator of the jewel. "Black-hearted bitch."

Constance placed a hand on his chest and brought his attention to her face. "Don't let her distract you. Look at me now."

Realizing what Rosezetta was doing to them, Aramir smiled at his clever lady. He brought her hand up and kissed her palm.

"Tell me what I must do to help you fight her? I have no magic, but I will support you."

He smiled, took her hand and shoved it under his sweater. "Keep it on my skin. Tuck the gem against your skin."

She slipped the necklace inside her shirt, pressed a hand against it, while her other hand caressed his lower back, curling her fingers around his waistband. "Anything else?"

"Let me do the rest."

"Aramir?"

He gave her a warm, comforting smile. "May I call my swords to protect you from danger, my mistress?" He moved his gaze in the direction of the sorceress and back to Constance.

"Yes, you may call your swords. I believe we are in danger from this sorceress and I want you to protect me," Connie answered, remembering his talk about the rules.

"Thank you, my mistress."

"Just come back to me in one piece."

"As you wish."

She grinned at the typical Aramir answer. "Kick her ass."

Giving her a precise bow at the release from the rules, his hands freed to protect his mistress. Aramir called forth his double swords, the ivory handles notched perfectly in his hands. He flipped the perfectly balanced blades.

Rosezetta sighed, crossed her arms under her breasts. "Really, Aramir, this is ridiculous. You can't fight me. I control the gem and you. Tell your little thing to give me my gem. You're wasting my time."

"You haven't changed during the centuries. Only became colder and bitchier, if that is even possible."

Her hands clenched at her sides. "Time for you to return to your jewel and learn a lesson, Aramir."

He swirled a blade in his hand. "Perhaps the lesson is yours to learn this time. I no longer belong to you, Rosezetta. I never belonged to you, in or out of the jewel."

"As before, that can be changed. You were always mine, even when you serviced the other women. I control you and the lady who chooses you. If you must insist on doing this, then we shall fight. It will only hurt you and your mortal."

"Not this time," Aramir answered.

She raised a hand and sent power straight to Constance and the jewel, but Aramir raised a blade and deflected it. Angering her, she sent another power bolt, this one to recall him to the jewel. Twisting, Aramir crossed the blades in front of his body, angled them, and blocked it, sending it back to her.

She screamed at the back blast. It hit her in the chest and sent her recoiling against the counter. "No!" she screamed, sliding to the ground.

"Aramir, the jewel!"

"What happened to it? Are you safe? Are you hurt?" He turned to look at Constance, afraid she got hurt somehow.

Constance lifted the jewel and showed him the large crack in the ruby.

"Did you get hit by her power?"

"I'm safe. I'm fine. No, you deflected it."

"Then it must be connected to her. I need you to stay here," he said and rushed towards the sorceress who ruined his life.

"If you kill me, you'll never be...free," she whispered between breaths. Her hand clutched the wound between her breasts.

"How do I get free of your infuriating curse? Where is the scroll? The scroll that goes with the jewel. Where is it? I want my scroll," he demanded, raising his blade.

"Destroyed."

"What?"

"I destroyed it."

"You damn bitch, free me from the curse! You have the power. Free me!"

She shook her head. Blood bubbled up to her lips. "Never. She can't have you."

"Why so vindictive and possessive over me? Why choose one who hates you?"

"Power, beauty, mine. I wanted you. I got you."

He crouched, lowered the blade. "Free me, Rosezetta, and free yourself. The wound is fatal."

"You never be free. Mine. Always," Rosezetta claimed before her eyes glazed over in death.

"Damn it all!" Aramir cursed and finished in a streak of Demonish. He lowered his blades in defeat.

"What the hell is going on in here?" The voice called out from behind them "You there! Drop the blades on the floor."

CHAPTER TEN

Turning his head, Aramir watched the uniformed man push Constance behind him and aim a gun in his direction. A test of his senses, and he realized the officer was a paranormal of some type.

"No, don't hurt him, Damien, please," Connie called out, pushing at the officer's arm.

"He killed Rosie, Connie," the man argued.

"To protect him and me," she snapped. "She's a damn sorceress, an ancient one who cursed Aramir. Listen to him first before condemning him. Please."

Placing his blades together, Aramir put them on the ground and stepped back. "Constance, please call the bakery and ask them to send over kosher salt."

"What the hell for?" the man demanded.

"To throw over the body and prove she's a black magic sorceress. If you throw salt on a dead sorceress, magical flames will appear from her. The color will determine what magic she uses. I'll guarantee you, this time you'll see black flames," Aramir explained.

"May I call Shelly?" Connie asked, pulled out her cell phone.

Damien nodded, holstered his gun, and moved closer to Aramir. "While we wait, start talking. Start with who are you?"

Aramir glanced at Connie, who encouraged him with a wave of her hand. "I am Aramir, bound fire demon of the heart flame necklace, enchanted by the sorceress, Rosezetta, almost four thousand years ago," he said with a bow of his head.

"Chief of Police, Damien Harding."

"Constance mentioned you are a werewolf?"

Damien glanced at Constance, who grinned and shrugged, and back to Aramir. "I am. I am Alpha of the Maple Pack. How did you come to be here?"

"Constance purchased my necklace from Rosezetta, here in the shop, yesterday afternoon. She said a spell, and I appeared to her," Aramir said, pointing to the necklace Constance wore around her neck. "Please don't ask her to remove it or I will disappear and neither of us wish that to happen."

"She can't call you back?"

"No, the magic will not happen again for her. There used to be an accompanying scroll that explained everything. I hoped it contained a release spell, but I'll never know."

"Why is that?"

"Rosezetta destroyed it."

"She destroyed it?"

"For some unknown reason, she didn't want to let go of her control over me, even in death." Aramir ran a frustrated hand through his hair.

"Shelly is on her way with the salt," Constance said. She moved to Aramir's side and wrapped an arm around his waist. "We'll find another way, Aramir."

Kissing her temple, Aramir encircled her waist and squeezed.

"Perhaps she lied to you. It could be hidden here," Damien offered, looking around the shop. He walked over to one area and fiddled with a few items on display. "We could go in and search, look for scrolls."

Aramir glanced over at the werewolf. "You would let us? Move through a crime scene?"

"If she is who you say so, I'll give you just cause. I have a shaman/wizard for a PCSI tech, and he can determine the differences. Speaking of that," Damien said, pulling out a phone and hit a button.

"Charlie, grab your kit and head over to Mystique Boutique. Got a scene that needs you. Call the doc as well, got a body for him to pick up. Yeah, only she's not who we thought. See ya in a few."

The door opened to reveal the young witch, Shelly, peeking her head around. "Hello? Connie?"

"Shelly, there you are. Got the salt?" Connie moved to the door.

Shelly held out the container. "Plain kosher salt, boss, as ordered. What happened in here?"

"Can't tell you, orders of the Chief. Go on back to the bakery, okay?"

The young witch nodded and handed over the container. "Be careful, boss lady. You and your handsome man."

"Thanks, Shelly." Connie closed the door and went back to the scene over the body. She held the container to the werewolf. "You should have the honors."

Damien took the container and looked at Aramir. He held it up. "What should I do?"

"Sprinkle a good amount over her, head to toe. Then step back."

Nodding, Damien turned over the container and shook salt over Rosezetta's head, down her body, and over her legs.

Within seconds of stepping back, the trio saw the reaction. The lingering magic within the body connected to the salt. Deep black flames rose over the body.

"Holy crap! Black magic sorcery flames. Didn't expect that one," another man called out entering the store. "Hey, Chief, Connie, sir. Looks like this Rosie Zetta was an all-around liar."

"Charlie, you seen this before?" Damien asked the shaman PCSI tech, nodding down to the black flame covered body.

"Do it all the time when a dead witch's magic is in questioned. Blue flames symbolize white magic and black flames for black magic. Who told you?"

"Aramir told me to do it. He's a demon. Rosie, known as Rosezetta, enslaved him to a necklace over four thousand years ago. Aramir, this is Charlie Saint Claire, a shaman and wizard and my paranormal crime scene investigator."

Charlie held out a hand to Aramir. "Nice to meet you. Demon, you say?"

Aramir shook hands. "Fire demon, but controlled due to restrictions of the necklace. Rosezetta mentioned she destroyed an accompanying scroll which held important information, including a release spell."

"Damn, that sucks. I'm sorry to hear of the troubles. Perhaps I can help figure out a spell. Could she be lying about the scroll?"

"It's a possibility, but I doubt it."

"Here's the necklace, Charlie. I can't remove it though or the spell will be broken," Connie said, moving closer to show the shaman. "When Rosezetta attacked Aramir, he reflected it on his sword and it hit her. The same time, the jewel cracked."

"The power came from her?" Charlie lifted the jewel in his hand to study it.

"It did," Aramir confirmed.

"Ingenious piece of work and craftsmanship," Charlie said, murmuring the symbols engraved along the bands.

"Aramir has those same bands and markings on his left biceps," Connie said.

"Keeps him connected outside the jewel."

"May I connect with the fire, my mistress?" Aramir asked.

Connie glanced over at him. "Yes, Aramir."

Reaching a hand towards the lit candles, a single flame jumped to his fingertip. He closed his hand around the flickering light and brought it closer to his body. He then opened his hand, showing the flame, larger than before, before he let it flow to each fingertip. Another second and they recombined into a larger flame, then a ball, which he juggled and moved.

"Before I was enslaved, fire was a part of me. My life, my magic, my heart was contained within the flame. Now, I can't touch it without asking for permission," Aramir said, turning the ball of flame into mystical blue before returning it back to the candle.

"Wow, that's some bit of power. I hope we can reverse the curse," Charlie said.

Connie wrapped her arms around Aramir's waist. Molding herself against his chest, she hugged him hard.

Resting his face against her hair, Aramir closed his eyes at the pain of all he had lost to Rosezetta. His arms enclosed Constance, the one beautiful thing he had gained due to the curse and the necklace.

"Charlie, deal with the scene and the doc. I see it as pure self-defense after years of torture. No charges brought against Aramir. I'm going to take them in the back and look around for scrolls, see if we can find anything."

"You got it, Chief. I agree with your assessment. I'll get to work and process the swords first so you can take them back, Aramir," Charlie said.

Aramir glanced between them. Running his fingers up and down Connie's back, he kissed her temple. "Thank you, both of you, for everything. Constance told me this was a wonderful town."

Connie smiled. She spread her hand over his heart. "A place where you can stay with me, Aramir, no matter what happens."

"Hmm, perhaps," Aramir said.

"Let's go take a look in the back then," Damien suggested, lifting a hand to let Aramir and Connie take the lead.

They walked with the werewolf to the back of the store to search for the special discovery that would prove Rosezetta lied and release Aramir from the spell.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Returning to the house after the search turned up nothing but useless scrolls and books—nothing that dealt with the necklace—Aramir knew Rosezetta had told him the truth. Pulling off the jacket, he tossed it on the sofa and then dropped on a cushion. A hand covered his forehead as a horrible ache of frustration raked his body. His curse truly was forever.

“Aramir? Are you all right?” Constance asked, her tone hesitant as she settled next to him on the sofa, a soft hand on his arm. “I’m so sorry we couldn’t find the scroll. Perhaps she hid it somewhere else.”

“No, she spoke the truth. She destroyed it. She would never release me. I doubt she ever created a release spell. The curse was for eternity.” Aramir leaned forward, resting his forearms on his thighs. “It was stupid of me to even hope of a release.”

“Then we continue as we are.”

“You have known me for only a day, Constance.”

“And I’m willing to risk everything for you,” she said, shifting to crouch in front of him. Her hands spread on his forearms. “I will wear

this necklace every day of my life to have you in it. Give me every restriction, every rule up front and I will say yes right here and now so you'll be free to do whatever you need. No one will need to know the truth of your origins."

"How little you know of me, of what she did, of what you will do to change your life for me?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"The unknown."

She shook her head. "So far, everything I have learned about you, everything you have shown me, I fell in love with and adore. I don't want to lose you."

Tilting his head, he stared at her. "You, Constance Morelli, are a very unique young lady and I'm honored to know you."

"I'm honored to have you in my life, Aramir, prince of fire demons, lover of the flame heart, guardian now of my heart," she said.

Rising, Aramir took her hands and drew her to the bedroom. Removing their clothes with few words, he took her lips in a raw, passionate kiss. If he had missed one of those energy bolts Rosezetta tossed around, he could have lost her, lost this wonderful new life with his beloved sweet chef.

"Aramir, my demon," she whispered against his lips. She leaned back and stared at him. Her fingers brushed through his hair, moving it away from his face and shoulders. "She could have taken you from me forever. I could have lost you in that shop."

"No, I know how to fight her."

"I could have lost you."

"Shh, my sweet chef. Shh," he whispered, sweeping his lips across hers. Pushing her down on the bed, he licked his way down her body, taking his time to make lasting memories of this passion-filled woman.

Her head thrashed from side-to-side when his teeth and tongue played with the taut nipples. He sucked one full breast in his mouth, while his fingers squeezed the other one. Her body squirmed under his while he continued to lavish attention on her.

Tucking his shoulders between her legs, he used his hands to open her most precious folds to him. Staring down at the pink and red flesh, flushed with her need, moist with her dew and cream, he breathed in her natural scent. She was so beautiful.

One lick took him from bottom to clit. He flicked and played with the little button, poking from the hood until her breathing changed.

He lifted his gaze from her cleft and saw her fingers clench the sheets. As his fingers stroked her folds, he leaned closer and began a thorough tonguing of her cleft.

One arm held down her hips when she lifted them, pressed against his mouth, rising to drive him closer to her needy body. His fingers and tongue continued to drive her wild. He drove her over the edge, into orgasm after orgasm, releasing them from her in waves. Sweat covered her body and her hair, damp with sweat, clung to her forehead, until she finally curled over him. She drove her hands into his hair and pulled him up.

"Stop, please, Aramir, no more, please," she said, breathless from the endless orgasms, her channel still shuddering around his fingers.

"No, must have more," he demanded, capturing her lips in a hard kiss, pushing her back down, shoving himself deep in her quivering pussy.

She exploded around him, screaming as another climax tore through her. Wrapping her legs around him—her ankles dug deep in his thighs and her nails clawing his back—she stared into his bronze-colored eyes.

"Love me, now, finish it," she ordered.

"As you wish, my mistress," he said and set up the deep, hard thrust. His long thick cock filled her, brush from clit to that special sweet spot. He planted his hands on either side of her chest. Pushing up slightly, he drove hard and deep, slapping their flesh together.

Constance's breathing hitched and quickened. Her body tightened around him and her channel clenched him so hard, milking him, covering him with her wet cream. She arched her neck back on the pillow.

"Aramir!"

"Now, Connie, now!"

Together, they reached the final, devastating peak. Collapsing in a sweaty pile of limbs and mangled sheets, Aramir gently pulled out. He spooned her against his chest, wrapping his arms tight around her, and kissing her hair. His fingers trailed gently over her arms, and he listened as her breathing slowed, evened out, and deepened as she slipped into sleep.

All the while, he tortured himself. He had a decision to make.



Later that evening, Constance felt things shifting around her. She opened her eyes when Aramir's natural warmth left her side and the

bed tilted. Turning her head, she blinked, as the chain of her necklace slid free from around her neck. She reached up with both hands.

"Aramir! No!" she cried, grabbing at the necklace to hold it in place. "Don't leave me!"

Sitting naked next to her, he stared at her with a sad golden gaze. The cracked ruby cradled in one palm while his other hand undid the clasp. Her hand wrestled with his to keep the necklace in place before he vanished completely while her other reached for the jewel.

"There is no freedom for me, Constance. I will always be bound to this damn thing," he said.

"Then stay with me. I'll never take it off."

"You can't wear it forever, beloved Constance. It's impossible."

She shook her head. "No, it will be my special piece, what I'll be known for. Your necklace. Don't leave me."

"I can't keep you tied to me like this."

"Like hell you can't, idiot demon. You stole my heart with your warm bronze eyes and seductive hands. I want yours. Forever."

"What about the spell?"

"Who cares about the damn spell? All I know is that you, demon mine, captured my heart and I'm not letting you return it. I want your demon heart. Forever." She pointed to his chest, holding onto the jewel with the rest of her fingers. She lifted the gem to her lips and kissed it.

He shuddered, his eyes closing as the magic raced through him.

"I order you to fix the damn clasp, demon."

"Yes, mistress." He reached up with both hands and secured the clasp.

"Slave, use your fire gift to melt the clasp so you'll never get the wrong idea to remove it again."

"Do you wish to be my only mistress?"

"For eternity."

"As you wish, mistress."

The blessed warmth near her neck told her he had done as she ordered. Constance smiled at him, wrapped her arms around him, pulling him down to the bed. "Come back to bed, my demon."

"With pleasure."

Biography

From the time she was a young girl, Nicole Dennis has crafted stories and created a personal library filled with dragons, fairies, vampires, shape shifters of all kinds, and romance. She has always had a fascination with fantasy, paranormal and the never-ending appeal and beauty of romance; all of these loves come together in her writing as she commits her characters and worlds to paper.

Nicole makes her home in Central Florida where she works in a quiet office. In her down time, she enjoys slipping into the worlds she has created and spending time with her characters to escape reality. She is also a human slave to two crazy cats—an angelic red tabby and a semi-demonic, black-orange calico.

Nicole loves to hear from readers and fans; so don't be shy! Find Nicole Dennis on the 'net or send her an email.

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