

Rosette

Black Rose

*Demon
in
Blue Jeans*

*Toni V.
Sweeney*



Demon in Blue Jeans

by

Toni V. Sweeney

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Demon in Blue Jeans

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To the Memory of Lucille B. Comer, Who
Encouraged me to Write

Praise for Toni V. Sweeney

"Demon in Blue Jeans is great fun and definitely

"Toni V. Sweeney," written as only she can!"

~Linda Lucretia Shuler, writer, Writer's Digest
Honorable Mention, Short Story

“Wasn’t that a great movie?” Kate asked as she slid into the booth beside Selena.

“Yeah!” Audrey agreed breathlessly, waving at a passing waitress. “I just looove Sean Donovan!”

“Oooh, ooh!” Jennie mocked, giving her a wide-eyed stare. “Don’t we just *love* those *Bad Boys*?”

“Huh, not me,” Selena declared, pulling the menu from Audrey’s hands.

“Well, *I* certainly do,” Kate replied, “and Mister Sean can put his shoes under my bed any time!” She plucked the menu from Selena’s fingers and studied it intently. “We’ll have four *Specials*!”

The waitress scribbled on her little pad, nodded, and walked away.

“Girl, how can you say that?” Selena stared at her. “You mean you’d like to be treated like the girl in that movie? He was so *mean* to her!”

“Yes, he was,” Kate smiled at the waitress as she placed a mouth-watering *Special Grill’r Burger Deluxe with fries*—their usual order—in front of her, “but when they got together—did you see those sparks! *Yee-Hah!*”

She gave a loud theatrical sigh.

“He’s so handsome—all that red hair and those green eyes—

“Wouldn’t touch ‘em,” Selena stated. “Just remember what my Grandma told me: ‘A *red-headed man is the Devil’s own chile!*’”

That earned her a scornful laugh.

“In that case—” Kate raised her hands above her head in supplication, “*Ole Debbil Satan*, send me your baddest *Bad Boy*, ‘cause I’m ready and waitin’ and definitely willin’!”

Outside, there was a loud clap of thunder, so violent that the glass in the little restaurant's windows rattled.

"Wow!" Kate peered out, looking upward at the sky. "Is it starting to rain?"

"No," answered Selena, picking up her burger. "That was just the Devil, granting your wish. Eat your fries. They're getting cold!"

Since the following day was Saturday, Kate slept in. Awakening late in the morning, she stretched languidly and lay there, looking up at the ceiling and thinking that the most exciting thing she was facing today was doing laundry and cleaning the apartment.

What a total waste of my day off! Why can't I have some studly guy snuggled here next to me? We could certainly put Saturday mornings to a much better use!

It wasn't going to happen, though, because she was alone in the bed and apparently fated to stay that way, if her present run of dateless Saturday nights—and any other opportunities—was any indication, so—

Dressed in jeans and T-shirt, she puttered around the apartment, pretending to tidy up. It wasn't difficult; Kate's apartment was notoriously clean, mainly because she never partied or did much else in it. When evening approached, she showered, and, seized by some whim she couldn't name, put on her sexiest *peignoir*, and poured herself a glass of wine, then sat on the little loveseat in the living room to drink it, toasted her empty apartment, then poured herself another.

Two hours and four glasses later, she was still sitting there, trying to determine if her legs would hold her up long enough for her to go to bed and wondering why she'd indulged so recklessly. Before she could make a decision, however, there was a

loud knock at the door.

Setting down her fifth, and as yet untouched, glass of wine, she tottered to the door, calling "Who is it?" in a singing trill that was nothing like her usual serious contralto.

"Special Delivery for Katherine Carter," answered a male voice.

Special Delivery?

"I haven't ordered anything." Kate wavered against the door a moment, putting out her hands to regain her balance.

She supposed she should look through the peephole and see who was outside, but the fish-eye seemed to be made for a six-footer and she had to stand on a kitchen stool just to reach it. At the moment, she didn't feel quite steady enough to go to the kitchen and carry that item back to the door, much less climb up on it.

The knock came again. "Miss Carter?"

Bad judgment—aided and abetted by the wine—won out. Sliding off the burglar chain, Kate unlocked the door, and pulled it open—

—and stared.

Robin Hood stood on the other side.

Robin Hood?

Yes, there was no doubt about it—it was the *Hero of Sherwood Forest*, pointed hat, thigh-grazing tunic, and tights, all in a deep foresty shade of Lincoln Green!

His eyes met hers and he smiled, the same gleaming, daring expression that had so often driven the Sheriff of Nottingham into a frenzy.

Kate slammed the door.

She took a step back, shook her head, blinked, and opened it again.

Robin was still standing there, looking a little startled, although the smile was still in place. He swept the hat off his head, making a grandiose formal bow.

"Art thou Mistress Kate, fair lady?" It was asked in a delicious British accent that sent chills down Kate's spine.

"Ye-e-es."

He began to rummage in the little bag on his belt that looked like nothing more than a velvet fanny-pack.

"Sign here, if thou wilt." He brought out a hand unit/notebook, handing her a stylus.

Kate took the notebook, reached for the little pen.

Either her fingers were drunker than she was or the stylus had a rough edge because she nicked her finger, "Oh!" and looked with dismay as a bright drop of blood splashed onto the little screen. She scrubbed the pen across the LCD dotted lie. It made a smeary red scrawl.

"Sorry." She started to hand it back, then stopped. "Let me try that again."

"Nay, it doesn't matter." He took the pen and notebook from her, glancing down at the red splotch which was soaking into the screen. "'Twill do just fine!"

The red spot disappeared.

"Aye—*just fine*." He thrust the instrument back into the pack and pushed past her. "Okay! Let's get started!"

"Started? What are you talking about?" It now entered Kate's befuddled brain that she had just opened her door to a total stranger who was presently barging into her apartment. "Who are you?"

He looked surprised—and just a bit embarrassed. "Oh, right. Guess I should introduce myself." His voice changed slightly, the British accent disappearing. "I'm the *Bad Boy* you ordered!"

"The *Bad*—" She stared at him, then began to laugh. "Oh, sure! This is a joke, right? Selena put you up to this? God, I hope you're not going to start

stripping!”

“I hadn’t intended to do it quite so soon, but if you want—” He lifted the hem of the tunic, revealing the waistband of the tights, and also a very flat, very taut belly.

“That won’t be necessary,” Kate informed him, pushing his hand down. The tunic fell to his thighs again. “Just tell me who you are.”

“But I just—” He stopped, eyes narrowing slightly, then pulled the notebook out of the pack again, pressing a key. “You *are* Katherine Elaine Carter, aren’t you? Usually called *Kate*?”

She nodded.

“Daughter of Sam and Helen? Sister of Toby?” (Nod, nod.) Residing at 76A Westminster Apartments, Macon, Georgia? Birthdate March Fifth?” (Nod, nod, nod.) The Kate Carter who, last night at the *Burger Grill*’r ask of the *Great Satan*—” Here he tapped the screen, cleared his throat and consulted something, “—and I quote, *Ole Debbil Satan, send me your baddest Bad Boy, ‘cause I’m ready and waitin’ and definitely willin’*!”

This was read in a monotone with no inflection at all. He looked up.

“—unquote. Did I get that right? He was dictating pretty fast by the time we got to that part.”

“Yes,” Kate admitted. “I said that, but I didn’t mean—Oh, my God!” Her eyes widened, one hand going to her mouth. “You don’t mean my wish has been granted?”

“God didn’t have anything to do with it, Kate,” the young man said gently and for just a second, she could have sworn she saw a wash of red float through his eyes.

“B-but how could *Satan* know what I said?”

There was a slight smile on his mouth, quirking up one corner. “The *Heavenly Father* isn’t the only one who’s omniscient, you know!” He returned the unit to his pack.

She didn't answer, just stood there, staring at him, not daring to think.

"Okay!" He slapped his hands together, rubbing them against each other, "Let's get started," and seized her hand. "Where's the bedroom?"

"Wait a minute!" Kate jerked her hand from his. "Just hold it!"

She backed away, putting at least six feet between them.

"Let me get this straight. The Devil sent you to me, because I asked him to?" He nodded. "Just like that?" Another nod. "Why?"

"Well, according to your file—"

"The Devil has a file on *me*?"

"He has a file on a lot of people. We know quite a bit about you, Kate. Such as the fact that you continually buy sexy little nothings although there's no one to wear them for, and then moan about *that* fact! You've turned down quite a few guys, it seems. Perhaps that's why you don't have any more dates on Saturday nights." He made a *tsking* sound. "Anyway, considering your little entreaty the other night, he decided it was time to see if you could be tempted, so—here I am! Now, if you'll just tell me where the bedroom is—"

He reached for her hand again, and once more, Kate pulled away.

"Hold it! You don't just grab a girl and drag her into the bedroom and start...uh.... Where's the romance in that? Where's the foreplay?"

"Foreplay?" He looked confused. "*Foreplay.*" Out came the notebook again. More pads were pushed, more screens rolled. He ran his finger down a column of words. "Foreplay—here we are: *erotic verbal or physical stimulation preceding sexual intercourse.*"

He snapped off the screen, stuffing the book once more into the velvet bag, "Right!" and took a step toward her, looking into her eyes, saying

quickly, "You're beautiful. Your eyes are like limpid pools. I drown in them. I want to fuck you forever."

He kissed her, an awkward little peck on the cheek, and stepped back, grasping her hand tightly.

"How's that?" He turned toward the only other open door in the room. "Is the bedroom through here?"

Kate didn't move. "Okay, fun's fun, but I think it's time you came clean. You're not a devil, are you?"

"Of course I am." He sounded insulted, but his gaze slid away from hers as he spoke, aiming for a corner of the room.

"You're lying," she accused. "Liars always avoid looking at the person they're lying to."

"I think I resent that!"

"Resent all you want," she told him. "*You're not a devil, are you?*"

"No," he said, with a sigh. "I'm not." The look he gave her was admiring. "You saw right through me, didn't you? Okay, I confess. I'm just a third degree incubus."

She must have looked surprised, for he went on, defensively, "Technically, devils don't go around seducing females, that's more the incubi's line of work, and since I'm coming up for evaluation soon, my supervisor gave me the assignment."

He paused, waiting for Kate to say something. She stared at him for another moment, then smiled. "So you're sticking to your story? That's you're a dev—an incubus?"

He shrugged. "It's the truth."

"And you're actually mine? All mine?"

"Until tomorrow morning at nine o'clock, anyway."

"Okay, I'll play along. Since we apparently have all night, can we be a little romantic, first?"

"Whatever you want. I'm easy."

"Let's sit and talk, get to know each other. I'm

not really one for jumping into bed with a complete stranger."

"If you'll pardon my saying so, you haven't been doing much jumping into bed at all!"

She ignored that. "W-would you like something to drink? Some wine?"

He shook his head. "I don't do too well with wine. Makes me hiccup."

The thought of a demon with the hiccups was totally absurd. She felt a laugh emerging—or was it latent hysteria?

"H-how about a s-soft drink then?" Struggling to swallow her laughter, she headed for the kitchen, pushing open the swinging door.

He followed behind her. "Do you have something diet, caffeine-free?"

Opening the refrigerator, Kate peered inside, thinking how absurd this conversation would be if he truly *was* a demon, saying out loud, "Sorry, no caffeine-free. Or diet. How about a ginger ale?"

"That'll do!"

He stood in the doorway while she popped the top on the soda can and poured the ginger ale into a glass, added ice, then pulled out a chair, motioning for him to sit down.

"My name's Zel, by the way," he said, as he reached for the glass, "It's short for Zellachrastides," and proceeded to give her a synopsis of his life—

"—so you see, this is my last chance," Zel finished, taking another swallow. "I've disappointed everyone. My parents are thoroughly ashamed of me. All my brothers made *First Degree Incubi* in six months. Some of them even went on to become full-fledged demons, but I've been stuck as a *Third Degree* for nearly ten millennia!"

He tilted the glass, sucking the last drops of ginger ale out of it, tongue licking around the single ice cube. His tongue was bright pink, almost

crimson, and for some reason, Kate found its color slightly...disturbing.... Well, slightly *something*, anyway. She wondered how it felt. Would it be as warm as its color, and smooth, or— *Who cares what texture an incubus' tongue has, anyway?*

She found herself thinking *she* might.

"If I louse this up, I'll be demoted to the *Seventh Hell*, and spend the rest of eternity roasting the toes of accountants who've been convicted of embezzling. That's the next worst job there is." He shuddered slightly. "I won't tell you about the worst one!"

"Don't worry." Kate put her hand on the one lying on the tabletop. *It* was definitely warm, almost burning, in fact. "I'm pretty sure you're going to ace this assignment."

"You think so?" He looked anxious.

"I *know* so," she responded with certainty. "Of course, you could use a few pointers."

"Like what?"

"Well, for one thing, you need to lose the *Renaissance Fair* look—especially the tights."

"But I thought Robin Hood turned you on."

Kate regretted ever uttering those words. "He did—when I was fourteen."

Zel frowned, "Didn't you say, *I think Robin Hood is sooo dreamy*." for an instant, his voice sounded so much like her own that she was startled.

"Perhaps I did, but—he's a fictional character, for crying out loud! Besides— Me and Robin Hood? Maid Marion might get jealous!"

Zel looked thoughtful.

"Surely, you can change your appearance."

In answer, he raised his right hand, waving it while his fingers fluttered gently.

In place of Robin Hood, sat Sean Donovan, red hair, black leather jacket, and all.

Kate studied him. "Close, but no cigar."

"But last night, you said that Se—"

"Never mind what I said last night. I don't want

to go to bed with Sean Donovan. I'd be totally embarrassed to go to bed with Sean Donovan! He's a celebrity. That was just talk! Wishful thinking! A fantasy!"

"How about this, then?" Once more the hand gestured, and another person sat in the kitchen chair, a young man with shoulder-length blond hair and sky-blue eyes. He still wore a T-shirt but this one was black with a Boris Vallejo screen print of a barbarian fighting a dragon, and his jeans were stylishly tattered, their ragged edges skimming the top of his Reeboks.

"Now that's more like it!" she exclaimed, approvingly. "Who is he? Who'd you copy?"

"No one." His voice changed again, younger and slightly hoarse—but definitely sexy-sounding. "He's me. I mean, this is the way I really look—except for the wings. I left them off. Didn't think they'd fit in your kitchen. Twelve-foot span, you know."

That made her smile as she envisioned his wings knocking things off the counters and sweeping the flowerpots off the windowsill.

"You have a beautiful smile," he said suddenly, and leaned toward her, placing a hand on her cheek. "You know, I was wrong about your eyes. They're not like pools. They're more like topazes, bright blue topazes."

Kate leaned toward him slightly, lips pursed, then stopped. "You said I was going to be tempted. What's my temptation?"

He smiled and shook his head. "That comes later. Now, you were about to—"

Kate kissed him, very, very gently, and he kissed her back, with just enough tongue—still cool from the ice cube—to send a tingle down her back. They both got to their feet at the same time, so quickly the chairs fell backward onto the floor, their bodies pressing together, and then he was lifting her in his arms and, without taking his mouth from

hers, blindly stumbling toward the bedroom.

Zel set her beside the bed. He was remarkably strong, she thought, to have carried her all that way without even becoming winded. In fact, at that precise moment, he looked as if he could carry her all the way to Atlanta and back without even panting!

"Now then—" One hand went to the black satin tie at the neck of Kate's *peignoir*. Her own automatically went over it, stopping its movement.

"Before we go any further, there's something you ought to know—"

He looked just a little impatient, but nodded. "And that is—?"

"I—" Now it was her turn to avoid his eyes.

"Are you embarrassed?" He guessed. "We can turn down the lights. I'll confess I'm a little concerned about what you'll say when you see my body. I'm not sure how much like a human's it is. Do you have scales?"

"Scales?" she looked back at him. "You have *scales*?"

"They're not big ones," came the insulted reply. "I can change their color if that'll help."

There was a pleading whine to his voice as if he saw his evaluation already being marked with a big, red *Failure*.

"Y-yes," Kate said, faintly. "P-perhaps you'd better do that."

"Okay." He was so agreeable she wanted to shake him. A wave similar to the others accompanied the word. "There. Done. Ready?"

"Actually—that wasn't what I was going to say."

"What was it then?" There was a definite swirl of red flowing through the blue eyes.

"I—Well—"

"Oh, for the Great Satan's sake, Kate—spit it out! Do you have a wart of your belly or did you

forget to shave your legs last night or—”

“I’m a virgin!” she shouted the words at him.

“—did you...A-a virgin?” He backed several feet away, staring at her as if she’d just announced she had an extra arm hidden under the *peignoir*. “You mean *virgin* as in *I’ve never done this at all?*—or just *I’ve never done this with a stranger?*”

“The former sentence for one hundred points, please,” Kate tried to dismiss it as unimportant and failed miserably.

“Hm. Well.” He hemmed and hawed a few seconds more and, inevitably, out came the hand unit again, somehow miraculously finding its way to his hip pocket when he’d transformed. Once again, buttons were punched, the screen scrolled, and Zel read intensely, nodding now and then and making comments to himself. “Unh-huh...I see...wow, I never knew that...! Hmmm...oka-a-ay.”

At last, he looked up, smiled, and de-activated the unit, but instead of returning it to his pocket, placed it on the bedside table. *Within reach if he needs it again*, Kate decided.

“No problem!” he announced, and flicked a finger at the bed. “Let’s sit down.”

Comforter, bedspread, and top sheet folded themselves. The pillows plumped invitingly. Kate allowed Zel to push her onto the bed.

“Don’t worry about it.” He placed gentle hands on her shoulders. “I know everything I need to know and I promise you, you won’t regret it—at least not right now, anyway.”

She forced herself not to think of that reminder of who he was and why he was here. She placed a hand on the one resting on her left shoulder, thinking it felt even warmer than before. “Zel—I’d like to ask you something.”

“I’m sorry, I can’t stick around longer than tomorrow morning.”

“That wasn’t the question. You mentioned

wings. May I see them?"

"I don't know, Kate—" He looked hesitant.

"Please."

Zel didn't answer, just backed away until he was standing at the foot of the bed. The bright blue eyes began to scan the very crowded little room.

It was filled with so many things. Besides bedroom furniture, Kate had her collection of dolls in an old-fashioned *étagère*—as well as some slightly valuable and delicate porcelain figurines, several potted plants on a windowsill, a vase of tulips sitting on her dresser, and two bookcases.

He shook his head and moved nearer the door.

"Where are you going?"

"I need room. I don't want to break anything."

He stopped near the door and pulled the T-shirt over his head, dropping it on a nearby chair.

"Wait!" Kate said. "I don't want to see your chest! I want to see your—"

Zel flexed his shoulders.

She cried out when the great, black wings burst from under his shoulder blades to unfurl and stretch up and above him. He didn't stop their unfolding, let them open to their full length—amid a leathery crackling—heard something break as it was struck by an expanding wing-tip, saw books being swept out of the bookcase. Zel moved slightly, and the other wing struck the vase of flowers on the dresser, sending it rolling across the counter-top, spilling water and flowers before it struck the floor and bounced.

Kate stared at him, mouth open—in *horror*, he decided.

"Guess you might as well see the rest of it, too," he muttered disconsolately, and smiled sadly, allowing his fangs to drop—not too far, didn't want them reaching past his lower lip or he wouldn't be able to talk. Then, he raised one hand, springing his claws to their full three inches.

Kate looked dumbstruck but her expression didn't hold the fear he'd expected. Rather, she looked...fascinated...just stood there, the blue gaze roving over him, his body, his wings...*as if I'm some sort of fantastic statue or something, damn it!* They lingered just a moment on the minute, freckle-like scales on his shoulders.

The silence in the room was so heavy it was making his ears ring...the whole world seemed to have died...no noise from outside, no sound of cars, animals, people...and then she did something he never expected.

She smiled, just stood there, smiling at him—a Satan-damned delighted smile as if he'd handed her something she'd always wanted but never expected to receive.

"Oh my God, Zel!" She threw herself at him, ignoring his plaintive, "Please don't say that!" wrapping her arms around his neck, pressing her mouth against his. He barely had time to retract his fangs to keep from shredding her tongue. His hands went to her waist to balance her as she climbed his body. His skin was hot, almost scorching, and she knew she wasn't imagining the heat emanating from it.

When she pulled away, her face was luminous and bright with passion, and—*oh, wow!*—was that *lust*? "I never realized you'd look like that!"

"So you're not frightened?"

She didn't answer, just released him and backed away.

While Zel watched, wondering just what the Heaven was going to happen next, she untied the ribbon at the neck of the *peignoir* and stood there with the soft and clingy garment hanging open, revealing the fact that she was wearing a pair of thong panties and nothing else.

She held her arms wide, embracing the room, breasts heaving. "T-take...me..." She seemed to

have trouble getting out the words.

“What did you say?”

She repeated those two words, and he didn’t need her to say them a third time. With a glance at the bed, measuring the distance from it to the surrounding objects—*thank Satan, it isn’t a four-poster!*—he swept her into his arms and onto the bed, hearing the lamps on the tables on either side crash and break as his wings knocked them to the floor.

It took two seconds to flip off her slippers and rip the thong from her slender hips. It flew through the air—he didn’t care where it landed! Retracting his fangs, he kissed her, felt her lips open. For an instant, their mouths locked together, tongues caressing each other. Zel pressed his lips against Kate’s neck, trailing kisses down her throat, raising himself to cradle and kiss her breast, while his other hand—with talons a normal length again—moved lower, finding startling dampness.

His hesitation was so slight she didn’t notice as what he’d read flashed through his mind: *...dampness is acceptable, preferable, in fact.*

Kate moaned, murmured something. He raised his head, not certain he’d understood. She whispered it again. “Use your teeth.”

“Damn it, Kate, I’m not a vampire!”

She caught his face in her hands, turned him to look at her, “Idiot! You can use your fangs for other things than biting, can’t you?” and released him and fell back onto the pillow, leaving him to figure it out.

He let his fangs drop to their full length this time, pressing the point of one against her nipple—not enough to break the skin, just skimming the tender flesh lightly—and was rewarded with a gasp that faded into a soft groan. Gently he stroked down her ribs, across her belly, grazing her skin with tiny indentations that blazed pink with unshed blood,

then faded.

He pressed his mouth against the dark mound, points of his fangs touching her most delicate part—carefully, cautiously brushing the needle-sharp tips back and forth—feeling Kate writhe beneath him, moaning quietly.

Suddenly, she stiffened and caught his hair in both hands, jerking his head upward. “Now! I’m ready—aren’t *you*?”

“Katy girl—incubi are always ready!”

She caught him by the shoulders and—startling him with her strength—pulled his body onto hers. Abruptly, he was sliding inside her, striking the delicate band of tissue, feeling it tear.

She turned her head, one hand pressed against her mouth to muffle her cry.

Zel wrapped his arms around her as he began to thrust in slow, deep movements. Somewhere in his mind came the thought, *Collapse your wings, fool!* as he realized that soon there was going to be enough flailing about that they might get broken!

The rest of the night was a confused swirl of emotion and sensation, interspersed with one orgasm, then a second, and a third, and a fourth.

In the morning when Kate awoke, Zel was gone. The hand unit was missing from the nightstand, the lamps were still broken on the floor, but there was nothing else in the bedroom to show he’d ever been there, other than a single long blond hair lying in the slight impression in the other pillow, and a tiny smear of blood on the white sheet.

In the living room, the little clock on the mantel began to chime the hour...*one...two...three...*and before Kate could touch it, the hair burst into flame, twisting and blackening and falling to ash on the pillow to be blown away by a sudden cold wind which whipped through the bedroom as the ninth chime sounded.

The Boss had erased any trace of his employee from the room.

****.

When Kate appeared at the little pizza parlor where she and the others always ate on Sunday nights, though she was very subdued, the glow of satisfaction was still with her, and she'd no sooner slid into the booth than Selena said, "My, don't we looked happy tonight?"

She peered at Kate critically, mouth pursed.

"No, more than happy. You look—" She pointed an accusing finger. "Kate! You got lucky, didn't you?"

"Shh! Not so loud!" Kate put a finger to her lips. *So it is true that people can tell just by looking at you!* "Everyone will hear you!"

Immediately there was an envious chorus of "Who? When? Tell us all about it!" and she smiled slightly, thinking of the way Zel's hair had tickled her nipples as he'd hovered above her, those delicate little kisses which had grown with intensity and familiarity, the way his body had felt against—and inside—hers. Her answer was very quiet. "Do you remember what I said Friday night?"

Selena greeted her explanation with a hoot of laughter, "Lord, girl! I hope you don't expect us to believe that? A devil, sent by *Satan*?"

"Zel's not a devil, he's an incubus," Kate corrected, but Selena ignored her, "Kate, surely you're not that stupid! Obviously, someone here heard your little speech, and followed you home, and got pretty damned lucky—that's all! No, don't shake your head at me! It's the truth. Just admit it. There's no things as devils or-or incu—whatever you call 'em!"

She looked concerned.

"I hope you had enough sense to have safe sex! You did, didn't you?"

Kate was startled. She realized that, as close a

friend as Selena was, she hadn't known she had been a virgin.

I'm certainly not about to admit it, now—and give her something else to lecture me about! She'd been so carried away by the wine, to say nothing of Zel himself, that she hadn't even thought about safe sex, or anything else. It'd be just like the Devil to send her some disease-riddled demon who'd give her herpes, or AIDS or some other Hell-incubated virus, but if that e-document she signed—in blood—was what she thought it was, she was damned already, so what did it matter?

Somehow, that calmed her, so she didn't even bother to answer Selena, just changed the subject by turning her attention to the two pizzas on the table.

"So—who wants pepperoni and who wants mushrooms?"

She thought of Zel often after that, missed him, too, telling herself it was foolish to feel so strongly about someone she'd only known for a few hours—even if the sex had been fantastic—and eventually managed to turn her thoughts to other, more mundane matters. Kate congratulated herself on keeping the way she felt hidden from everyone. She went to work, came home, went out with Selena and the others, had a few very chaste dates—somehow, after Zel, she had absolutely no desire to get into bed with any of those men—didn't buy any more sexy underwear, and felt she had her life under control, back to normal, keeping the image of a blue-eyed, blond-haired demon hidden in her heart.

She wondered what would have happened if he'd hung around. Would he have bought her flowers, or candy—perhaps something small but sweet, like a bracelet—for her birthday? He looked like the kind who'd do little things like that. Would they have walked together in the park, holding hands, or gone to a movie? She had no idea if Zel could come out in

daylight or not. Would he roar with laughter if he saw one of the vampire films she loved so?

It didn't matter now, did it? She'd never see him again.

And then, after six months, she began to see Zel everywhere—at the bus stop, crossing the street, in the library, and she couldn't understand why, after so long, his image would return to haunt her.

Another Friday night, another movie. Burgers afterward, laughing and talking about the film. This night, Kate was relatively quiet, no teasing or joking on her part. As she sat there, twirling her straw in her catsup—back and forth, back and forth—Selena slapped one hand on the tabletop so loudly it made everyone jump.

"All right! Enough is enough! It's time you quit mooning over that guy—that demon—whatever he was—is!"

Kate stared at her. "And here I thought I was doing such a good job of hiding it." *Lord, she hated the self-pitying whine in her voice!*

"Honey, you haven't been hiding *anything*! We've all seen just how—I don't know what to call it—how *affected* you've been by whatever happened, and I, for one, think it's time for it to stop."

Kate's expression didn't change and Selena made an exasperated sound.

"Look—I haven't been sleeping well lately and worrying about you isn't helping!" Catching Kate's arm, she said, softly, "He isn't coming back, Katie. He saw an opportunity, took it, and now, he's gone."

Kate sighed. "You're right, Selena, I know that." She looked up and smiled ruefully. "I'd almost convinced myself that I was over him, and then—it's so odd. Lately, I imagine I see Zel everywhere—"

There was movement near the entrance. Past Selena's shoulder, Kate saw Zel standing in the doorway. He was looking around the room, met her

gaze, and smiled, raising one hand to give her a frantic twiddle of his fingers. It reminded her of a puppy wagging its tail at sight of its master.

“—and now, I’m imagining I see him at the door! Excuse me—” She was on her feet, walking toward the waving figure, expecting at any moment it would change into the person who really stood there—a man waiting for his wife to return from the restroom, or a pimply-faced teenager who didn’t really need a burger and deep-fried potatoes—but he didn’t change. He stayed Zel, and the smile grew broader as she got nearer.

“Hello, Kate.” Two simple words but no one could imagine how her heart jumped as she heard them.

“It’s *you*, it’s really you!” She caught his face in her hands, kissing him soundly, ignoring the gasps coming from the booth. Zel hesitated one moment, then kissed her back, just as enthusiastically. “What are you doing here?”

He ducked his head. “I’ve been cast out, Kate.”

“*Cast out?* What does that mean?”

“I’ve been canned. Given the pink silk. Fired.”

“*You’ve been fired?* How can a demon be fired?”

“With great violence,” he explained with a wry twisting of lips.

“What about your evaluation?” she demanded.

“I aced that—just like you said I would,” he answered ruefully. “My supervisor was so proud of me he sent me out on every assignment that came in, but all I could think about was you, Kate. I was a total disaster where other women were concerned.”

She started to interrupt, but he held up a hand, stopping her.

“Oh, I was all right for a while. I’ve got that *foreplay* part perfected, and I didn’t get any more virgins so I didn’t have to worry about *that*, but when it came down to the crucial moment, I just...*wilted*. It really took an effort. Pretty soon,

the women wouldn't even talk to me. The last one wouldn't even let me in. Called her landlord. I nearly got bitten by his pit bull!" He raised his T-shirt, revealing ragged teeth marks in the hem. "I didn't want any of them, Kate—just you!"

"The *Big Boss* told me to get out. Said I wasn't even fit to roast the toes of embezzling accountants! Turns out, my being sent to you was more than just an evaluation." Briefly, he sounded bitter. "The *Boss* likes to do that to his employees sometimes—turn the tables, so to speak. He picks some demon or incubi at random, out of a batch of low-achievers submitted by their supers. I was the unlucky one—and I failed miserably!"

The blond head drooped dejectedly.

"I guess there's some prestige in being fired by *Satan* himself but I certainly didn't see it at the time! There's a lot of smoke and brimstone involved! I didn't know where else to go, so I came here. I've been following you around for weeks, trying to get up enough nerve to talk to you."

Thankful she hadn't imagined seeing him, Kate caught his hand, squeezing it tightly.

"I love you, Kate. I know that sounds trite, but I fell in love with you the minute you opened that door. You looked so cute, standing there, in that sheer, black thingy. Can I come home with you?"

She smiled. "I'd like that, Zel, but there might be a problem."

"How do you mean?" She could see Zel still had a lot to learn about the world mortals lived in.

"I barely make enough to take care of myself much less two people—unless you have skills of some kind?"

He laughed. "None that would be appropriate for this world!"

"What are we going to do? I don't want to lose you again."

He thought a moment. "Can you have pets in

your apartment?"

"Yes, but I don't—"

"I'm quiet, I'm housebroken, and I don't eat much. In fact, I don't eat at all!" The blue eyes were mischievous. "I can transform myself into a poodle when anyone's around."

Kate smiled, liking the idea. "It might work. It just might work." She kissed him again. "Come on, I want to introduce you to the girls."

Taking his hand, she led him to the table, saying as she stopped in front of it, "Girls, this is Zel, ex-incubus."

There was an instant straightening of backs, thrusting upward of bosoms, hands smoothing hair.

"So you're Zel." Selena gave him her best come-hither smile, "I've heard *sooo* much about you!" and the sentiment was echoed by Audrey and Jennie.

Kate looked at Zel. Though he was squeezing her hand so tightly it hurt, his eyes were gleaming as he looked down at her best friend. He hadn't actually done it, but she felt as if he'd just licked his lips. A sudden crimson flashed through his blue eyes as slowly, he displayed that soul-consuming, deceptively sweet smile.

She didn't like that smile. Not at all. *He said he loved me*, she reminded herself.

With his free hand, he took the one Selena held out to him. "You must be Selena. I understand you've had trouble sleeping. Perhaps I can help."

Suddenly, she realized that if *she* had been Zel's temptation, *he* had been hers, and as she watched him smile at each of her friends, she understood what her punishment would be. Zel might love her, but he was still an incubus and whether he wanted it or not, his demonic nature would always be triggered by an attractive female—and here were three of them!

She needn't have worried.

"I have a cousin who's an expert in sleep

disorders," Zel went on. "If you'd like, I could call him...?"

"Is he as cute as you?" Selena asked.

"In all modesty, I'll have to say "No," but on a scale of one to ten, he's a definite eight!"

Zel glanced at Kate. Squeezing her hand, he smiled as he whispered, "Don't worry, Kate. I'm yours for as long as you want me." To Selena, he said, "I understand he's thinking of leaving the family business and settling down."

She looked interested, as did the others.

"How many cousins do you have?" Audrey asked.

"Too many," came the answer.

"Enough questions, girls," Kate interrupted. Her hand tightened around Zel's. "Zel and I have to get home." Oh, how that word now made a little wiggle in her stomach. "We've got a lot to talk about."

Amid goodbyes and a final call from Selena to, "Remember me to your cousin," they left. Outside, however, Kate turned to him, suddenly trembling.

"Are you sure you want to do this? M-maybe you should go back, grovel a little, get your job back?"

"I don't think so," came the quiet answer. "If the Boss wants me back, let him come to me!"

Small chance of that, they both knew.

Total dismay swept through her. "He's expecting us to fail, you know, so he can gather two souls for the price of one."

"I know." Zel's answer was so calm she stared at him. "I wasn't born yesterday, Kate—far from it...and I've had several thousand years to observe the mistakes made by my demonic kinsman, as well as the mortals who fall into the Boss' traps."

"So, you think we can beat this?" She'd never heard of anyone winning over the Devil, not ever.

"I think we can give him a run for his money. Look, you love me, don't you?" Without hesitation,

she nodded. He looked pleased. "And I know I love you—after all, I've had it confirmed by Satan himself! I think we're both adult enough to know that—what's that old saying—the *course of true love never runs smoothly*?"

"I think it's just *smooth*," Kate corrected. "Ungrammatical, but true."

"So we keep that in mind," Zel went on, "and when the rough spots come, remember it, and when the good times come, remember it, too, and I think we'll do okay."

He kissed her again and this time, it was the gentle, fond kiss of a man who's been with a woman long enough to believe she knows she's loved without him saying the words.

"We can do this, Kate. We can weather any storm, take anything the Boss throws at us, if we believe in—and never lose faith in—each other." He held out his hand. "Kate Carter, I'll go all the way with this. Will you marry me?"

She placed her hand in this. "Gladly, on one condition."

"Which is?"

"Tell me your last name."

"Oh. That." He looked embarrassed. "It's *Amschönstenundeinliebendius*." Kate's mouth quirked slightly. "Don't laugh, please! It means the *most beautiful and loving one*."

She swallowed her laughter, thinking in that moment that he was indeed the most beautiful and loving, and the *dearest* person she'd ever seen—incubus or otherwise.

"Would you mind if I kept my own name?"

If the way Zel kissed her was any indication, he didn't mind a bit!

"Kate, if you want, I'll make it my name, too!"

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