



*Kate Hill*

*Wild Woods*

Changeling Press

# **Wild Woods**

## **Kate Hill**

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*The pain will come later.*

After a magical artist tattoos an intriguing demon on her skin, Madison meets a gorgeous stranger with an alarming reputation and a fiercely sexy winged creature with an attitude. She senses they are one and the same. Despite the danger surrounding them, she's drawn to them by an inexplicable force.

Half human and half demon, Brody has spent his life fighting against his evil birthright. Despite the hatred of the townsfolk, he uses his supernatural powers to defend them from his foul bloodline.

Neither Madison nor Brody can fight their lust or deny their love, but hell is out to get him. When everyone close to him, especially his destined mate, is targeted by eight generations of Blazewood demons, the only way to fight evil is with evil.

## Chapter One

Madison stared at the tattoo inked on her skin from mid-thigh to just above her hip. She'd wanted something for herself that she could enjoy in private but conceal at work. Actually, one of her coworkers had recommended this particular tattoo artist. Rumor had it that the woman possessed magical powers, and her tattoos reflected the image of the wearer's destined mate. That story, which had at first intrigued Madison, now frightened her. If the rumor held true, then her destined mate was... not quite human.

Though handsome, with a strong jaw and a well-defined nose, his wide-set eyes had an almost supernatural glow. The faint smile on his finely shaped lips revealed his needle-sharp teeth. His buzzed haircut exposed the pointed tips of his ears.

If this man -- or monster -- were real, she wondered what other bestial characteristics he possessed, for the tattoo only showed his face.

"You like it?" asked the tattoo artist.

Madison glanced at the dark-skinned woman with wild black hair and eyes so intense they looked almost inhuman as well.

"He's... beautiful. In a weird way, that is," Madison replied. "You know what's weirdest of all? It didn't really hurt. With my other tattoos I always felt something, but this --"

"It's my technique," the artist replied and turned away. Madison thought she heard the woman whisper, "The pain will come later."

Once again Madison stared at her tattoo. This was certainly an interesting start to her vacation.

First stop, the crazy tattoo artist. Next stop, a peaceful town in the mountains of New England. Hiking. Shopping in quaint little stores. Lounging among the smooth rocks in a cool stream on a hot summer day.

Madison could hardly wait.

\* \* \*

"Here you are, hon," said the gray-haired lady clad in a salmon-colored jogging suit and sneakers. Though elderly, the owner of the bed-and-breakfast where Madison had decided to stay had a lot of spunk. She continued, "This room is one of my best. You have your own private bath and a nice view of town."

Madison walked to the window framed by cream-colored lace curtains and gazed out. From here she could see the old-fashioned post office and the steeple of the little white church. In the gazebo that stood in the center of the park, a local country band played to a small crowd. Madison heard the twang of the guitar through the half open window. Though she wasn't a fan of country, the music enhanced the atmosphere of this New Hampshire town.

Beyond the town stood mountains covered in trees -- fantastic woods for hiking. Madison could scarcely wait to get out there.

Her gaze drifted toward a winding road that stretched out of town and disappeared into the forest. A few miles into the trees stood an enormous stone house seemingly dropped in a clearing. "Wow, look at that place," Madison said. "It's huge. How many wings does it have?"

The woman's easy smile faded. "I'm not sure. No one in town ever goes there. The owner is... well, take my advice, hon, and stay as far from that place as possible. There are no public hiking trails over there, anyway."

"I wouldn't trespass," Madison said. Not in a town like this. She pictured a roughneck wearing hunting camouflage and toting a shotgun running her off his property.

"Just keep to the trails on the east side, and you'll be fine. You're all alone?"

"Yes. I wanted some peace and quiet."

"Well, there's a young couple staying here, and they're into hiking and camping. It might be a good idea to get friendly with them. Walking through the woods alone isn't a smart idea."

"Thanks, Miss Jefferson, but I'm used to doing things on my own."

"Suit yourself, hon."

"Just out of curiosity, who owns that big house in the woods?"

A look of apprehension crossed her face before she replied softly, "His name is Brody Blazewood. His family founded this town in 1675. He's the last of his line."

Ah. A cranky old man, then. No wonder everyone avoided his house.

"Miss Jefferson, where do you recommend going for lunch around here?"

"Heidi's Diner. When you step out the front door, turn left and it's about a quarter of a mile down the road."

\* \* \*

After unpacking, Madison freshened up in the bathroom, then left Miss Jefferson's large old Victorian and headed for the diner. On the way, she stopped at the drug store for chewing gum. Walking through the door, she glanced down at her handbag and accidentally bumped into the person stepping out of the store.

"Excuse me," she said, moving away from a broad chest covered by a tan T-shirt snug enough to show off the chiseled pecs beneath. Wow. This body sure caught her attention. She tilted her gaze up toward a handsome, angular face accented by dark gold five-o'clock shadow. Wide-set blue eyes stared back at her. A jolt darted through her when she realized this guy resembled her tattoo -- except he was obviously human. No glowing eyes, needle teeth or pointed ears. A dusting of sandy hair covered his scalp, and the urge to touch it to find out if it was soft or rough almost overcame her.

"Sorry," he said.

They moved simultaneously to the left, then to the right in a misguided attempt to step out of each other's way. A faint smile on his lips, he took a step back and extended his arm for her to pass.

"Thank you," she said.

He nodded. His eyes blinked slowly, and the tip of his tongue moistened his lips. A little thrill shot through her, and her gaze again dropped to his chest, then lower to his long, lean legs encased in faded denim. Damn, this guy was gorgeous. He even had an eye-catching bulge in the front of his jeans.

Once again, she met his gaze and, after a lingering moment, he left the store.

"Blazewood was in for his monthly visit," said a hushed female voice from behind the prescription pick-up counter.

Madison glanced toward the young, auburn-haired woman who stretched over the counter, staring after the hunk who'd just left. Blazewood? No way. That athletic stud was the cranky old man from the mountain mansion?

"Uh huh," replied another woman, this one in a white pharmacist's coat. She pushed her metal-rimmed glasses up higher on her snubbed nose, her gaze fixed on the bottle of pills in her hand. "He bought first aid supplies again."

"Yeah. Makes you wonder what he does up in that big old house of his. He's probably a serial killer."

"I don't think a serial killer would bother with butterfly bandages and gauze. The cops were up there last year to search the place when that girl went missing. My cousin's friend, Matt, is on the police force, and he said other than the Blazewood's strange décor there was nothing suspicious out there."

"Judy, we have a customer," whispered the auburn-haired woman.

Pretending not to listen, Madison turned her back to them and studied the candy counter. She found her favorite spearmint gum, picked up two packages and then stepped toward the register. The auburn-haired girl smiled and rang up her sale.

On her way to the diner, Madison mulled over what she'd heard at the drug store. She couldn't get Blazewood's handsome face and sculpted chest out of her mind. Lately she'd been longing for male companionship. It had been over a year since her last date.

Madison had never been much for serious relationships. She enjoyed going out and having fun every once in a while, and she loved sex as much as the next girl, but



the thought of something permanent, of answering to someone and not being able to come and go as she pleased had always terrified her. Now, in her early thirties, she wondered if she'd sowed her wild oats enough to find something long term. That desire had prompted her visit to the strange tattoo artist with the almost childish hope that she'd magically find Mr. Right.

She reached the diner and sat at a table by one of the picture windows. After glancing at the menu, she decided on a grilled cheese sandwich with a side salad and root beer. She placed the menu aside and looked out the window, surprised to see Blazewood walking by carrying a shopping bag with a loaf of French bread and celery stalks sticking out the top of it. Again their gazes locked, and she realized he looked almost as stunned as she felt. This time she smiled and nodded, but he turned away quickly, his long legs devouring the sidewalk until he disappeared around the corner.

Maybe Miss Jefferson and the women at the pharmacy were right. His personality didn't seem pleasant, and he sure was strange. Maybe, like many handsome men, his ego had completely taken over.

Not that it mattered. She had met him by chance and doubted she'd see him again. If she did, they were merely strangers passing each other by. His resemblance to her tattoo had probably been just her imagination. Stories about the artist had intrigued her, and she'd spent too much time lost in romantic fantasies. Besides, if she were truly interested in finding a man, she wouldn't vacation in a small town with plans of solitary hikes.

No, Madison liked her freedom too much.

Since she'd eaten early, she had all afternoon to enjoy her new vacation spot. She decided on a short hike. Back at the inn, she changed into her boots, cargo pants and a long-sleeved T-shirt over a tank top. She tied back her long, dark hair and pulled her favorite knit hat over her head. Despite the summer weather, she knew if she didn't dress properly, the bugs in the woods would eat her alive.

A grin tugged at her lips. *Eaten alive*. Why did those words make her think of sexy Brody Blazewood? If ever a man inspired wishes of being eaten alive... She shook

her head. *Madison, you're getting desperate. Time to recharge the batteries for the dildo.* Maybe she should try that instead of a hike.

No, she'd come to enjoy some outdoor fun and, damn it, she intended to have it. She shrugged on her backpack and once again headed out. "Going hiking, hon?" asked Miss Jefferson, who peeked out of the open kitchen door, wiping her hands on a checkered dishcloth.

"Yeah."

"You take care."

Madison forced a smile, nodded and left the house. She hoped Miss Jefferson didn't turn out to be one of those people who couldn't mind her own business, otherwise Madison would have to find another place to stay. She'd never allowed anyone, family or friends, to invade her privacy -- which probably explained why her family kept their distance and she had no real friends to speak of, only work friends whom she rarely saw outside of the office.

Lately Madison wondered if she didn't take the lone wolf persona too far. Sometimes it would be nice having someone to hang out with. Why did commitment frighten her so much? It wasn't as if she had some disturbing past secrets or been in an abusive relationship. Perhaps because the world insisted that guys were the ones who needed to be roped into relationships, she questioned herself. In her gut she believed that somewhere out there waited a guy just like her -- one who wanted a companion but who needed private time as well.

In her experience most guys wanted too much too fast, and not just sexually. Once they took you to bed they thought of you as theirs, regardless of whether or not you talked about the whole commitment thing. Madison hadn't met a guy who intrigued her enough to allow him to think she was his property. Of course, when and if she met this marvel man, he probably wouldn't want her at all. Life was a bitch.

Taking Miss Jefferson's advice, she headed toward the trails on the east side of town. Soon she was involved in a brisk hike on a slight uphill grade. It wasn't the most challenging workout she'd ever had, but the rocky path required her concentration. The

fresh scent and beauty of the forest chased away any thoughts of depression or self-doubt and exhilarated her. For as long as she could remember she'd been a nature girl -- or nature woman, as the case may be, now that she'd passed the big 3-0.

When the path veered off in three directions, she paused, took a sip of water and glanced at her watch. It was getting late and, while the sun wouldn't set for a few hours, the woods would get darker first. One path led up a steeper hill and away from town. The one to her right was marked by a sign that indicated it headed back toward town. The path on her left looked narrower and overgrown. It was also marked by a wooden sign painted in red which showed a dead end near a stream after a short walk.

Madison decided to walk as far as the dead end, then turn back to town.

Drawing a deep breath, she released it slowly then took the narrow path. About a quarter of a mile in, she came upon a stone wall. Gazing over, she noted a drop of about fifteen feet into a stream. A large, flat rock rose above the rushing water.

A cool wind blew through the trees and, though she was sweating from the exercise and the warm summer day, a shiver darted down Madison's spine. Feeling as if someone were watching her, she spun quickly, her heart pounding. She saw no one except a squirrel perched on the branch of a nearby tree. Her gaze shifted toward the path, which continued through the trees.

"It's not a dead end," she muttered, taking a step closer. "It just gets narrower. That's all." Drawn by an inexplicable impulse, she walked a little farther. Dusk set in faster than she'd ever seen before.

"Shit," she whispered, her heartbeat quickening with fear. The path no longer existed behind her. A clump of trees and vegetation prevented her from returning the way she'd come.

Panic nearly overcame her. Then she forced herself to remain calm. She was only a few miles from town. The weather wasn't so cold that she'd freeze out here. She simply needed to keep her head.

*What about bears? Black bears inhabit these parts.*

*Madison, don't let your mind run away with you.*

She took out her flashlight and continued on her way. Humans had cleared this path, so that meant it had to lead back to town, right?

"Delicious."

Oh shit! She jumped and spun around, the flashlight clutched tightly in her hand. She swore a husky male voice had whispered...

"Madison, you're losing it, girl," she murmured and continued walking, though she couldn't shake her fright. Maybe Miss Jefferson had been right. Hiking alone was stupid -- or at least taking a path that looked like it belonged in a hillbilly horror movie was stupid.

"Wanna play?"

This time Madison gasped and ran. That was *not* her imagination. She heard the rustle of trees, but when she glanced over her shoulder, no one raced down the path behind her.

A dark clump of trees loomed ahead, and Madison dove into it. Running blindly wouldn't help her. The person frightening her probably knew these woods better than she did, and wherever he chased, she'd be at his mercy. Not that she was brave, but if she was going down, she'd go fighting.

Crouching in the trees, she noticed several broken branches nearby and grabbed the thickest, heaviest one. Then she turned off her flashlight and waited, trying to keep her breathing under control. Hell, she was so nervous she sounded like a rhino who'd just sprinted across the Serengeti.

Out of nowhere two booted feet appeared in front of her attached to a pair of long, sleekly muscled legs encased in dark trousers. If anything could stop a woman from breathing, it was her attacker appearing seemingly out of nowhere.

"I can smell you. Delicious. I could eat you," rasped that sinister voice.

"Eat this!" Madison leapt up and, wielding the branch like a golf club, slammed him in the gut.

He grunted and doubled over, but at the same time managed to rip the branch from her hand. Madison took off running again, hoping she'd slowed him down enough for her to find her way back to the path.

She headed in the direction from which she'd come -- or so she thought. Nothing looked familiar. Her flashlight blinked on and off, then died completely. "Damn it!" she said, on the verge of hysteria.

Powerful arms wrapped around her from behind and a big, hard body pushed her into the trunk of a nearby tree. She turned her head so that her cheek pressed against the bark. "Get the fuck off me!"

"Didn't anyone ever teach you not to trespass?"

Her terrifying captor turned her to face him, and Madison thought her heart might stop. Though he resembled Brody Blazewood, he clearly wasn't human. The snakelike slits of his pupils rested in irises such pale blue they seemed to glow. His pointed ears were pinned to his head, which was dusted with buzzed black hair. Finely shaped lips parted, exposing the needle-sharp points of his upper and lower canines.

It took a moment for her to realize he was staring at her curiously rather than viciously, despite his feral appearance. A strange feeling broke over her -- almost a compulsion to move closer to him rather than away.

What was happening? She didn't believe in monsters or magic.

*Then why did you go to the tattoo artist who could supposedly guide you toward your destined mate?* And her tattoo had been of something... inhuman. "This is impossible!" she said.

He tilted his head slightly to the side and narrowed his hypnotic eyes. His hands moved from her upper arms to ever so lightly caress her face. Yet they weren't human hands. His talon-like fingers tickled her cheeks, mostly due to the smoke-colored feathers covering his hands and forearms. Dark wings extended from his broad shoulders. Though he wore black trousers and boots, his sculpted torso was bare, every chiseled muscle exposed.

"Let me go!" She grunted and jabbed her knee toward his groin.

He shifted his stance to avoid the blow, and she managed to pull away from him.

Madison bolted, scarcely able to see. She nearly ran into a tree, turned sharply and lost her footing. Her hands groped as she slid down a steep incline and managed to grab hold of a root. Terrified, she tried to pull herself up, but her feet slipped, and when she glanced down she saw a rocky stream about twenty feet below. If she fell she'd definitely be hurt. What if no one found her?

No, that creature would probably track her and --

She didn't want to think about it. Why hadn't she taken the old lady's advice and not gone hiking alone? She pulled hard on the root and edged up the steep incline. Then an arm wrapped around her and a hand grasped the root, just above her hand. Madison had had about all the surprises she could take. She screamed.

"Stop that!" said her captor. "You're making my ears bleed."

"Good!" Again, she screamed but the sound was cut short when he covered her mouth in a kiss.

Madison's heart pounded as much from fear as arousal. She expected him to cut her with those ferocious teeth. Though his kiss was firm and demanding, it wasn't the least bit painful. In fact, it was just the opposite.

The kiss softened, then broke.

"Hold on to my neck," he said in a husky voice.

"I don't --"

"It's either me or the rocks below."

Madison didn't hesitate another second before wrapping her arms around his strong neck. He held her close to his warm, hard chest and his big, smoky wings beat as they rose into the sky.

*This has to be a hallucination.*

Yet she couldn't imagine something that felt this real. She felt his skin and the ripple of his muscles. With every breath she caught his scent -- as fresh as a mountain stream but with an underlying hint of incense. They rose slightly above the trees, and Madison felt lightheaded.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I think I might be sick."

"Great," he muttered.

"Why are you complaining? This whole thing is your fault." Maybe chastising him had been a bad idea. His fingers pressed against her neck, and within moments everything went black.

\* \* \*

"Don't you just want to eat her?" said a deep, sinister voice to Brody's left.

Glancing from the corner of his eye, he saw another winged demon in the shape of a man, except covered in charcoal colored scales. Reddish eyes gleamed in his angular face, and his red lips curved into a leering grin. The demon flew naked, his powerful muscles rippling in the moonlight, his thick cock stiff, as if aroused by the wind, and his rat-like tail lashing.

"No," Brody lied. He wanted to lick and taste every part of her. The feel of her firm yet rounded body and her delectable scent roused his lust more than anyone he'd ever met. Like most of his kind, Brody had a powerful sexual appetite, but this woman pushed his desire off the charts. The sensation was magical and almost irresistible.

"Come on, son, you said yourself she's delicious. All it takes is the taste of one sweet soul, and you join the party."

"I don't have a taste for sweet souls."

The demon chuckled. "The scent of your lust says otherwise. This human lights your fire -- literally."

"Get out of my sight."

"If you're not going to eat her in the traditional way, then at least eat her in the sexual way. You knocked her out. She won't know any better."

"I'll know."

"Sometimes I wonder if you're my son at all or if a shadowing angel got to your mother before me."

Brody glared at his father. His grip unconsciously tightened on Madison, and she moaned. He loosed his hold and momentarily closed his eyes, resting his cheek against the top of her head and enjoying the scent of her hair. His cock throbbed against the restraint of his trousers, and he almost wished he'd forgone his clothes and flown freely.

"I bet she's delicious."

"Don't get any ideas, *Father*."

"Don't worry, son. I know she's not for me." The demon held up his hands in submission. "Your fate is sealed."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"What the hell? What the hell," chuckled the demon. "She's yours, my boy. Always was. Always will be. Can't you smell it?"

"Smell what?"

"Magic. The worst kind."

Brody's heart skipped a beat. So magic was at work, after all. "Whose magic?" he demanded.

"I don't know, but I'd be glad to research further..."

"Don't do me any favors."

"Then do *yourself* a favor, Brody. Kill her now before it goes too far."

If his father called him by his human name, something must be wrong. Wait. Wrong for a demon meant right for Brody. "The worst kind of magic?"

"She'll destroy you."

"Isn't that what you want? To destroy me?"

"You have a warped way of thinking. I want to help you. All your life you've fought against your nature. My blood flows in your veins. Fiery blood. You can feel it burning, can't you, son? You won't be able to deny it forever."

"Then why are you worried?"

The demon grinned and winked. "Smartass kid. Don't say I didn't warn you." Brody's father disappeared in a gust of warm, smoke-scented wind.



By now he and his beautiful burden hovered over his mansion. He'd take her inside and, when she woke, return her to town.

Truly he hadn't meant to put her in danger. He'd just wanted to scare her a bit. Have a little chase. He never actually hurt anyone who didn't deserve it, but a guy needed to have some fun every now and then. After all, she had trespassed on his land.

Of course, she was new in town and probably hadn't heard the local legends yet. When he'd seen her earlier she had the look of a tourist. By her scent and the way she'd stared at him she was a tourist looking for romance. At the moment he'd be glad to oblige. Maybe dear old dad was right, and he should enjoy himself while he had the chance.

No. He'd never forced a woman in his life and only got rough when asked. It was his demon form. Whenever he assumed this shape his supernatural cravings took over. Supernatural cravings in a half demon body with a half human mind. Life really sucked.

He landed on the roof of the west wing and entered through a trap door. The house had been built with demonic desires in mind. After all, his ancestors had designed the place and had it built with what would now be considered slave labor.

The woman in his arms, he descended the narrow stone stairs, walked down a long corridor and jogged down another flight to the second floor. The guest rooms were dusty from lack of use, so he brought her to his bedroom and placed her on his big oak bed. Sitting beside her, he gazed at her and brushed a lock of thick chestnut hair from her face. His talon-like fingers and feathered hands looked so bestial compared to her delicate human beauty. He remembered the enticing sound of her heart pounding in fear and later, when he kissed her, in arousal.

*Fuck her.* That was his father talking. Brody's demon side. A side that desperately wanted to tear off this woman's clothes and --

His teeth and fists clenched, he stood and backed away from the bed. Then he spun on his heel and left the room.

## Chapter Two

Madison awoke with a headache. It took her a moment to recall the strange events prior to her blackout.

She jumped to a sitting position, her heart racing, and glanced around the enormous, dimly lit room. A breeze rustled against the black curtains of the open picture windows. The oak bed on which she rested had four posts carved into the shape of serpents. To her left stood a dresser with the same design as the bed, and to her right a half open door led to the bathroom. Through an archway across the room was a fireplace. Above it hung two paintings -- one of a swarthy man and one of a golden-haired woman, both naked, though the woman was strategically posed to hide her privates.

Speaking of naked --

She glanced down at herself in panic and sighed with relief upon seeing her clothes were still intact. She thought for certain that *thing* had wanted to --

The door creaked open, and she turned to see Brody Blazewood, who stepped inside, his gaze fixed on her and his expression unreadable.

"How did I get here?" she demanded.

"I found you in the woods. You were unconscious."

"It must have been that creature."

His brow furrowed. "What creature?"

She closed her eyes and pressed her hands to her temples in an attempt to sooth her throbbing head. "It seems unbelievable, but he was there."

"Who?"

"It looked like -- it had wings, but it was a man. Don't take this the wrong way, but it looked a little like you."

A smile tugged at his lips, and she expected to see sharp canines, but his teeth were normal. Nice and white, but normal. "You probably had a hallucination. Maybe you weren't quite out when I found you, and you thought --"

"I know what I saw!"

Folding his arms across his chest, he leaned a broad shoulder against one of the thick bedposts. "What were you doing in my woods, anyway? Everyone in town knows not to trespass on my property."

"I'm not from town."

"That doesn't give you the right to trespass --"

"I followed a path from the east side of town, okay? I didn't see any no trespassing signs."

He stared at her for a long moment, then nodded. "Come on. I'll take you back to town. You should probably get checked out at the hospital."

That wasn't a bad idea.

She stood rather shakily, and he stepped closer and grasped her upper arms to steady her.

Tilting her gaze up, she thought she saw his pupils contract into a snakelike shape. She blinked. No, his eyes were normal.

"Can you walk?" he asked.

"I'm fine." Still she didn't protest when he slid a strong arm around her and guided her toward the door.

Outside he held open the door of a sleek, black sports car. Madison slid into the passenger seat and watched him walk to the driver's side. The man was strange, but he had a damn fine body -- long and lean with broad shoulders, nicely muscled arms and a chest made for a woman to cuddle against.

He took the driver's seat, and she glanced at his long, hard-looking thighs. A telltale bulge in the front of his jeans hinted that he was either incredibly endowed or he'd noticed her as much as she'd noticed him.

It didn't matter. After the incident in the woods, the last thing she wanted to think about was getting close to a man.

Yet her attacker -- that thing -- hadn't been a man at all.

No matter what Brody said, she didn't believe she'd hallucinated. The experience had been far too real.

"I have a cell phone if you need to call someone," Brody said.

"No. Thanks."

For several moments they drove in silence, then she said, "My name is Madison."

Glancing at her from the corner of his eye, he nodded.

Wonderful conversationalist.

"You're Brody, right?" she said.

"How the good-ol' townsfolk love to gossip. What else did they say about me? Did they tell you about the bodies I have buried in my basement?"

"What?" she snapped, another jolt of fear shooting through her.

He chuckled wickedly. "It's a joke. Don't you know I'm your friendly neighborhood bogeyman?"

This guy seemed to thrive on his creepy image. Madison wasn't about to feed the dragon.

"You don't look that scary to me."

"Must be losing my touch."

*Not hardly.*

More silence, then she asked, "Why do they say those things about you?"

"Because I'm a Blazewood. My family has a... reputation."

"I heard one of your relatives founded the town."

"True."

"I'd think you'd be like royalty then."

"Royalty. Vlad Tepes and Elizabeth Bathory were royalty."

"So you're saying you're a rich psychotic?"

"I say very little, Madison. The rest of the town does the talking."

They arrived at the hospital and, surprisingly, he stepped out of the car to escort her to the emergency room. For once it wasn't busy, and the nurse took her immediately.

"I'll hang out here until you're ready," he said.

The nurse glanced at him with an apprehensive look, then shifted her gaze to Madison, who said, "You don't have to wait, Brody."

"No problem."

Madison followed the nurse, but glanced over her shoulder to see Brody seated on a chair, his long legs spread and stretched out in front of him and his buzzed head just visible above the magazine he'd picked up.

After her examination, which determined her to be in good health, Madison returned to the waiting area. Brody stood to meet her, and they walked to his car.

On the way back to Miss Jefferson's, Madison carefully studied Brody's handsome profile, admiring his strong jaw and longish, well-shaped nose. She noted that his ear, though a bit pointed, was still quite human and the lobe perfectly normal.

Even the ER doctor had suggested a dream or hallucination when she described a strange-looking man chasing her in the woods. By the expression on the doctor's face when she'd mentioned pointed ears and glowing eyes, she'd decided to omit the part of her story when the sexy beast had flown off with her. By the doctor's questions and certain tests, she knew he suspected she'd been using drugs or alcohol. Finding no evidence of substance abuse, he asked her about her mental health history. By the time she'd rejoined Brody in the waiting room, she'd started wondering if she wasn't a basket case, after all.

Now, sitting with him again, those strange feelings returned. Whenever she got in close proximity to the man little tingles rippled through her.

"Feeling better?" he asked.

"I would be if I knew more about that thing in the woods."

"Madison, I swear the only people in my neck of the woods last night were me and you."

The car stopped in front of the bed and breakfast, and he turned to her with a slight smile. Madison didn't return it, but stared into his eyes, willing him to tell the truth. "Then it was you."

"What?"

"You chased me. You rescued me. You --"

"Flew off with you?" His smile broadened. "As nice as that sounds, you're wrong. You had a rough night. Get some rest, and when you go hiking stick to the well-used paths." They held each other's gaze for another long moment, then he said, "I need to get home. I have a lot of work to do."

"What kind of work?"

"I'm a translator."

"What do you translate?"

"Fiction mostly. Sometimes documents. Madison --"

"Sorry. I'm holding you up. Thanks for the ride." She stepped out of the car.

He sped off so fast that she gave a little gasp and muttered, "Speed demon."

Madison glanced at her watch. Nearly ten o'clock. She hoped she wouldn't wake anyone.

Before she reached for the door, it opened. Miss Jefferson, wearing a robe and fuzzy socks, stared at her. "You're home late."

"I had an accident."

"Oh, dear. Hon, come in and sit down. What happened?" The elderly lady grasped her wrist and guided her to the parlor, where they both sat on the couch.

"I'm fine. I veered off from the path when I was hiking and ended up getting lost. I passed out or hit my head or something. Brody Blazewood found me and brought me to the ER, but I'm okay."

"You went into his neck of the woods, didn't you?" Miss Jefferson said, an ominous look in her light brown eyes.

"It was an accident --"

"Hon, what you do is none of my business, but you're new around here, and I should have warned you better about him. I'm not one for superstition, but the Blazewood family is evil. Always has been. Always will be. Remember how I told you his ancestor, Bently Blazewood, founded this town in 1675?"

"Yes."

"That same ancestor nearly burned it to the ground in 1685. As the story goes, he wanted a wife, and no woman in town would have him. In his anger, he went on a rampage. Finally a farmer's daughter, a girl named Elizabeth, married him. She died giving birth to his one and only son, Booth. Like his father, Booth didn't take a wife until his later years -- probably because he spent most of his time raping household servants. His wife also died in childbirth. Also like his father, Booth owned most of the town. His son, Benjamin, was sentenced for the rape and murder of a local woman and the slaying of her two brothers who tried to stop his attack. He was sentenced to hang but, according to the history books, he disappeared on the day of his execution, but not before leaving his new wife with child. She was one of the few Blazewood wives who lived to raise her son, Brand. The next few generations continued like the previous ones. The Blazewood men were rich, powerful and cruel, but they had a certain magnetism. Each one married some poor girl who had a son and usually died in childbirth. In the late 1800s, Blake Blazewood opened a textile factory. You can still see the building just outside of town, though the place finally closed when Brody's father, Birch, disappeared in the early 1970s. Up until then it was a sweatshop. Long hours for minimum wage and the paltriest benefits he could get away with."

"What about Brody?"

Miss Jefferson shook her head. "Girl, haven't you heard anything I've told you? They're all *evil*."

"What has he done? Rape? Murder? Slave labor?"

"He could have reopened the factory -- it was his, after all -- but he didn't. As for other crimes, he's never been accused of any, but then the Blazewood men are known for avoiding punishment for their crimes. They either buy their freedom or disappear."

"You're saying everyone hates Brody because of his family?"

"The Blazewood line cannot produce a decent man. It's like they're cursed, or should I say the rest of the town is."

"Why do people stay?"

"In olden times most of the families couldn't afford to leave. People have strong roots around here. All I'm telling you is be careful, Madison. There's something very wrong with the Blazewood line."

Madison couldn't argue with that. "Miss Jefferson, are there any stories around here about supernatural creatures?"

"Other than old Benjamin Blazewood disappearing before his execution, we have a few of your usual tales of ghosts and witches. I think there was something about a vampire too, back in the 1700s, but historians believe the poor girl was just buried alive. Personally I don't believe in the supernatural, but I do believe in the evilness in certain men." The woman stared hard at Madison to punctuate her words.

A quirky smile tugged at Madison's lips. "I get your point, and thanks, Miss Jefferson."

"My pleasure, hon. Now, are you hungry? I have leftovers in the fridge."

"I'm fine. Thanks. Just tired. I'm going to bed."

"Good idea. Tomorrow will be better."

Madison hoped so.

Upstairs, she undressed in the bathroom and stared at the tattoo on her hip. A shiver darted through her, and it wasn't just from fear. Was it her imagination or did her tattoo resemble Brody -- or the creature -- even more?

She should be in shock from her experience in the woods, or at least more frightened and less curious than she felt. Something drew her to Brody, and no matter what he or the doctor told her, she *had* encountered something supernatural.

After showering, she lay in bed and gazed toward the window as if expecting the sexy yet eerie winged man to appear on the other side of the glass.

\* \* \*



Brody stood by the open window in his bedroom, allowing the cool morning breeze to fan his naked body. He glanced down at the pearl stud earring resting in his palm.

When he'd returned from driving Madison home the night before, he'd found it on the stairs. It had to be hers since he never invited women home. Brody didn't have long-term relationships. He had fuck buddies. It was a lonely, pathetic life, but he couldn't have anything more.

At least he'd broken the family tradition of forcing women. More importantly, the Blazewood family line would end with him. All the Blazewood men before him had succumbed to their tainted blood, reveling in sex and violence -- usually combined -- until they claimed their full birthright and descended into pure demon form.

Closing his fist around the earring, he shut his eyes and remembered how Madison felt in his arms. He recalled her scent and her warmth. Most of all he remembered the way her dark eyes had met his with courage and curiosity.

He shook his head and walked to the bathroom. Just before he dropped the earring in the trash bucket, a feather-soft hand closed over his.

"Aren't you going to return her property?" said a feminine voice.

Brody glanced at the shimmering, golden-haired woman. She was transparent, yet her presence was as powerful as his demonic father's. More. He *liked* her, yet part of him couldn't forgive her. If not for her he'd have never been born.

Or perhaps that was harsh. Birch Blazewood would have stopped at nothing to find a mate when his time came to carry on the family line.

Still, it didn't seem fair that she'd willingly mated with Birch, birthed a half demon child, then became an angel in death.

"I can't see her again," he said.

"Because there's a connection between you."

"That's what Birch said."

"He wants you to destroy her."

"Sounds like you want the same thing, if you're telling me to see her again."

"Why are you torturing yourself?" She stroked his cheek, but he stepped away.

"You know what I am. The only way to end it is for me to stay away from women."

She laughed softly. "You hardly stay away from women."

"That's what safety is for."

"If that were true, you'd seduce Madison."

"Once won't be enough with her. She's already --"

"Fire in your blood?"

"You sound like Birch."

"If he hadn't interfered last night, I wouldn't be here. I wish I could help you more, my darling."

Brody curled his lip in disgust at the endearment.

She sighed and continued, "But I'm only allowed to even the playing field. Birch told you to destroy her or ignore her. I'm telling you to listen to your heart. The decision is ultimately yours."

Again Brody's hand hovered over the trash, his fist tight around the earring.

"Mother, is she --" He stopped and glanced around, but she was gone.

Still holding the earring, Brody returned to his room, sat on the edge of his bed and picked up the phone resting beside an onyx hourglass.

\* \* \*

Madison spent a restless night caught between dreams of winged demons and lying awake.

In the morning, she joined Miss Jefferson and the other guests for breakfast. As her hostess had mentioned, there was a young married couple, also a middle-aged man and two elderly sisters.

While the others chatted around the table, Madison focused on her pancakes while mulling over the events of the previous night.

Good sense told her to stay away from Brody Blazewood and his property, but she couldn't forget the creature she'd met. If it had meant her harm, it could have killed

her instead of saving her. Though she wanted to find out the truth, she had no desire to be the real-life version of the fictional too-stupid-to-live chick who walks into the monster's lair despite an avalanche of warning signs.

In her gut she knew Brody had been lying to her about the creature. What about her tattoo? How about the seemingly magical pull between her and Brody?

Hold everything.

Was she becoming so desperate for a man that she'd risk everything to pursue a winged monster with kisses hotter than magma?

"Maddy? Are you all right?" asked Miss Jefferson from where she stood by the kitchen door.

"Yes. Sorry. I guess I'm not very good company today."

"It's all right. I was just saying you have a phone call."

Madison's brow furrowed. Who would be calling her? She hoped nothing was wrong with her family. Her mother and father were getting on in years.

She stood and hurried to the kitchen, where the phone rested near a bowl of apples and bananas on the countertop.

"Hello?"

"Madison? It's Brody. How are you this morning?"

Her heart nearly leapt through her chest, and she hoped she sounded steadier than she felt. "Fine. Thanks."

"I found a pearl earring in my house last night. It must be yours."

She reached for one ear, then her other. He was right.

"Yeah. I didn't even notice."

"I can bring it to you."

"If that's out of your way I can come get it."

"No. I'm coming to town, anyway. I'll see you at the bed and breakfast around noon?"

"That's fine. See you then. Thanks, Brody."

When she finished the call, she turned to find Miss Jefferson watching her from where she was piling plates and coffee cups into the dishwasher. Though she liked the woman, her nosiness got on her nerves a bit.

"You're seeing him again?" asked her hostess.

"I left something at his house, and he's coming here around noon to return it. I'll meet him outside since I'm sure you don't want him in here."

"I'm sorry, Madison, but --"

"Don't worry about it. Besides, it's not as if I'm going out with him. He's only dropping off my earring."

Miss Jefferson raised a disbelieving eyebrow.

"What?" Madison asked.

"None of my business."

"Can I help you with the dishes?"

"Now, hon, *that's* my business. You're a paying customer."

"But --"

"Go on. Get out of here and have fun on your vacation. If you're not here when Brody comes I'll tell him --"

"Don't worry, Miss. Jefferson. I'll be here." Madison couldn't keep the faint smile from her lips. The woman was both annoying and amusing. Strangely, Madison liked her.

Madison decided to go shopping. She'd brought mostly athletic wear with her and when Brody arrived she wanted to look a bit more dressed up. Though last night he made it clear he liked his privacy, she'd felt the attraction between them. If he really wanted to avoid her, he wouldn't be making a special trip to drop off a fake pearl earring, right?

She headed out of the bed and breakfast and into the clear summer morning.

\* \* \*

Madison had just put the finishing touches on her makeup when the doorbell rang and she gave a little jump. Her heart pounded with anticipation. According to the time on her cell phone, it was one minute to twelve.

She smoothed the red sundress she'd bought at a local shop. Her red lipstick matched it almost exactly. She hadn't felt this sexy in a long time. Brody, despite his family's reputation and the fear of the locals, brought out the woman in her, and it felt pretty damn good.

Slipping into white, high-heeled sandals, she reached for the matching pocketbook, then made her way down the stairs. In the foyer, Miss Jefferson stood guard in front of the closed door.

"It's Blazewood," she announced, her gaze sweeping Madison from head to toe. "I was about to ask if you wanted me to get the earring for you, but it looks like you want to get it yourself."

"Thank you, Miss Jefferson," Madison said with an ultra sweet smile. She opened the door, and again her heart skipped a beat.

Brody stood, looking handsome yet guarded in black trousers, leather shoes with a tapered toe that made his feet look long and narrow, and a black shirt open halfway down his gorgeous chest. Madison longed to reach out and caress the sculpted expanse. Instead she curled her hands into fists to keep from acting on impulse.

"Madison," he said with a nod. A smile flickered across his lips. She noticed his strong jaw was dusted with golden hair -- scruffy yet sexy. She imagined how that stubble would feel against her cheek -- or, better, her breasts -- if he kissed her.

As if reading her thoughts, he glanced at her breasts in the snug red dress, then quickly returned his gaze to her face.

"Here," he said, extending his hand and opening his fist. Her earring rested on his callused palm.

When she took it from him, her fingertips lingered on his warm, rough skin, and she tingled all over.

"Thank you," she said.

Brody nodded, his intense blue gaze holding her captive. "I was wondering, if you don't have plans for lunch, would you like to --"

"Yes."

Miss Jefferson cleared her throat loudly, and they turned to her.

"Of course, if your friend would like to come, she's very welcome," Brody said.

Madison smiled and began, "She owns this bed and brea --"

"I'd love to come," said Miss Jefferson. "Don't mind if I do. I'll just get my purse and --"

"Miss Jefferson!" Madison snapped. "I thought you were busy today?"

"Nonsense, dear. I have time for lunch with you and --"

"You know his name," Madison said.

"Be right back. Don't leave without me," Miss Jefferson said and hurried upstairs.

"I'm sorry about this," Madison told Brody. "I'm just renting a room, but she's appointed herself my honorary mother while I'm here. If she keeps this up, I'll have to find another place to stay."

"Don't be so hasty. Truly caring people are hard to find."

"There's a difference between caring and interfering."

"I know what you mean. I have enough trouble with meddlers too."

"Here I come." Miss Jefferson walked downstairs. "Where to, kids? Heidi's Diner?"

"I was thinking about the Autumn Flowers Inn," Brody said.

"What? That place costs a fortune," Miss Jefferson exclaimed.

"I invited you," Brody said. "You don't have to pay."

Miss Jefferson narrowed her eyes at him. "All right, but I'm watching you, young man. Your kind are dangerous, flaunting your good looks and big bank account."

"I'm not flaunting anything." Brody's gaze locked on Miss Jefferson's with an almost deadly look, then a smile curved his lips and he added, "But thank you for the compliment."

Casting him a sidelong glance, Miss Jefferson brushed past him and said, "Let's get this show on the road, kids."

Brody and Madison again locked gazes. The humor of the situation struck her, and she chuckled. He laughed too and offered her his hand, which she took. An almost magical tingle shot through her. By the expression in his eyes he felt it too. What was it? Each time they met, Madison wanted to climb inside him, or better yet draw him into her.

"You look lovely today," he said, his voice soft yet husky.

"Thank you."

"Maddy! Brody! Get a move on," Miss Jefferson called from where she stood by Brody's car.

As they approached, the older woman snorted. "It only has two seats. We better take my truck."

Madison momentarily closed her eyes. This was almost a nightmare. She'd managed to train her family to respect her privacy, but it seemed she couldn't keep this woman out of her business without being totally blunt.

"I'll go rev her up," Miss Jefferson said. "Be right back." She headed for the garage.

"I don't believe this," Madison said. "I just met this lady. She's --"

"I think she's worried about you being alone with me. Like I said, I'm the local bogeyman."

"These people don't even know you, so how can they judge?"

"You don't know me, either," he reminded her. "They might be right about their fears."

Her gaze locked on his. "Are they? Should I be afraid of you? Last night you saved my life. That is, after you scared me over that cliff."

His brow furrowed. "Madison, I did no such thing."

"After lunch, we're ditching Miss Jefferson. I'd like to talk to you, Brody. Privately."

A diesel engine revved, a horn honked and Miss Jefferson drove a monster pick up out of her garage.

She called out the open window, "Let's go, kids. I'm starved."



## Chapter Three

Lunch at the Autumn Flowers Inn went well. As Miss Jefferson said, it was rather pricey, but the food was wonderful, and Madison loved the atmosphere. Inside the remodeled house, the rooms were decorated to reflect life in the 18th century. Simple wooden tables decorated with lace tablecloths made dining cozy yet private. Paintings of people dressed in period clothes adorned the walls, and the room in which Brody and the women sat had a fireplace with silver mugs and plates decorating the mantle.

"I can see why you wanted to come here," Miss Jefferson said. "I read the sign outside. This house was built by Bently Blazewood as a gift for his wife's family. Do you own it?"

"No," Brody replied. "I'm a patron only."

Miss Jefferson raised an eyebrow then returned to studying her menu.

Madison's stomach clenched. Was Miss Jefferson going to grill Brody all through dinner? She'd never get him alone. He'd probably run like hell after this meal and never speak to her again.

Not that it should matter, but it did.

Lunch went surprisingly well. Brody's quiet but pleasant manner was hard to resist, and his quirky sense of humor several times brought a smile to even skeptical Miss Jefferson's face.

After lunch, they returned to the bed and breakfast. No sooner had Miss Jefferson parked than Madison and Brody exchanged glances and, as if reading each other's minds, jumped out of the truck.

"Coming with me?" he asked.

"You know it."

They hurried to his car.

"Hey! Where are you going?" Miss Jefferson shouted, leaning out the window of the truck.

"I'll be back later," Madison said. "Or I'll call." She blinked in disbelief and muttered, "Damn, I'm starting to talk to her like she's my mother."

Brody chuckled and held the car door for Madison, who took a seat. Then he jogged to the driver's side. Seconds later, they sped down the road. She felt a twinge of fear, or rather apprehension. Once again she was alone with a man feared by the locals. Perhaps she should have been more careful, but it was too late now.

A strange silence settled over them. Only when he turned down a lonely road that headed deep into the woods did she ask, "Where are we going?"

"You said you wanted to talk in private."

"I wanted a private conversation in a public place."

A wicked grin tugged at his lips, and he glanced at her from the corner of his eye. "Too late."

"Yeah? What if I told you to stop this car right now?"

"Having second thoughts about the bogeyman?"

"Quit that bogeyman bullshit. If you were dangerous you'd have hurt me in the woods, or at least let me fall off that cliff."

"That was part of your hallucination."

"So you keep saying."

The trees grew higher and thicker, and the road grew darker until the clearing opened up and he parked in front of his stone mansion. "Are you coming in?" he asked.

"I could walk back to town."

"Or you could satisfy your curiosity. Feel honored, Madison. I invite very few into my home."

She didn't reply but held his gaze for a long moment, then opened the car door and stepped out. He walked around to meet her and offered her his hand, which she took. "You live here alone?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What about servants?"

"I have no servants. A cleaning crew comes weekly, but other than that I keep my own house."

"What about girlfriends?"

"Nothing steady."

"Boyfriends?" she asked with a quirky smile.

He shot her a look at said, "Get real."

They paused at the double doors and he let them inside. She glanced around the spacious foyer. It had two decorative archways, one to the right and another to the left, both of which housed authentic looking suits of armor.

"Madison, look up," he said.

She did as he asked, and a shiver ran down her spine. The tile ceiling depicted a muscular gray man with a black beard and enormous black wings -- like a demon or a fallen angel -- surrounded by gnarled trees. "Is that what you think you saw last night?" he asked.

Her gut tightened, and she stared at the tile creature. "Are you insinuating that I saw this when you brought me here and thought it was real?" she asked. Why didn't it seem so far-fetched now? Or at least more believable than a flesh-and-blood demon.

He lightly touched her back, and she jumped, lost in memories of the night before.

"I suppose it's possible," she said, then forced a smile. "You must think I'm nuts."

"Not at all. The mind can play tricks on us. Would you like to see the rest of the house?"

Wrapping her arms around herself, she closed her eyes for a moment. Had she hallucinated? Yet everything had seemed real. And what about her tattoo? Maybe that had been the reason for her runaway imagination. There was no magic. No destined mate. No winged man.

"Are you all right?" he asked. "I didn't mean to make you feel bad. I just thought it might help if you found a solid explanation for what you saw."

She opened her eyes and smiled at him. "It does. Sure, I'd like to see the rest of the place while I'm here. Thank you."

He nodded. His hand still resting against her lower back, he guided her out of the foyer and into a spacious dining room. The only thing that still seemed magical was the way she felt when he touched her. Heat seemed to seep from his hand into her body and melt down to the pit of her stomach. That wonderful heat stretched lower, and her clit tingled.

She needed to get her mind off sex. After all, he hadn't brought her here to make love, but to prove that she had been hallucinating, after all.

"This house is amazing," she said, glancing at the antique furniture and the ornate woodwork. "It's like a museum."

"There are lots of old relics around here, that's for sure." They stepped into a parlor decorated in earth tones -- rich browns and dark greens. It reminded her of a twilight forest. Several portraits of men and women in old-fashioned dress filled an entire wall.

"Are these your ancestors?" she asked.

"Yes."

Madison stepped closer to examine the portraits, in particular the men. Though she saw a family resemblance in their bone structure, something about Brody was starkly different.

"It's their eyes," Madison said. She glanced at him, then back to the portraits. "Your eyes are different. More... soulful, I guess, is the word I'm looking for."

He merely stood, watching her with look of curiosity.

As Madison followed him from room to room, she realized that, despite the strange beauty of the house, Brody must be lonely living here. "Do you like being by yourself so much?" she asked.

"Usually. My work requires quiet and concentration."

"What about fun?"

"What do you do for a living?" he asked, clearing wanting to change the subject.

"I'm a secretary."

"Do you enjoy it?"

"It's very boring. Now, what do you do for fun?"

A wicked smile tugged at his lips. Wrapping an arm around her waist, he pulled her so close that her breasts pressed against his rock-hard chest, and she felt the tickle of his breath against her lips. "I can think of a few things."

Despite the overwhelming desire to submit to his offer, somewhere in the back of her mind she realized she should at least make an effort to rebel. She pushed against his chest and, while he didn't release her, he loosened his hold the slightest bit.

His blue gaze held her captive. Madison's pulse raced. Her nipples tightened, and her pussy throbbed. She'd never felt anything like this before.

Brody's eyes narrowed and he looked almost as confused as she felt. "What is it about you?" he murmured. "I feel like --"

"I know you," she whispered.

"Do you?"

She nodded and this time when he drew her closer, she didn't pull back. Her eyes slipped shut and her lips parted beneath his firm yet gentle kiss. She welcomed his tongue into her mouth. Hers caressed it, their strokes wet and lingering. Everything about him aroused her. His body felt so hard and strong, and his firm lips possessed hers in a kiss unlike any she'd ever experienced before.

Brody's stiff cock pushed against her, and she thrust her pelvis closer to his. Her clit tingled and throbbed, desperate for his touch.

He moved his mouth from hers to kiss her neck. Little shockwaves of desire rolled through her. Smoothing her hands over his back, she relished the feel of his muscles. They rippled beneath her stroking hands, and she wanted to feel his skin.

"Brody," she whispered and tugged his shirt from his trousers. She fumbled with the buttons, unfastened them to part the fabric and splayed her hands over the broad

expanse of his chest. A dusting of golden hair tickled her palms. His stiff, pink nipples lured her closer. The tip of her tongue swept over one, then the other.

He entwined his fingers in her hair and caressed her, then he tilted her head upward. Their gazes locked, and he said in a husky voice, "I should take you back to town."

His words disappointed her. No. It was worse than that. They panicked her. If she couldn't make love to him, she wasn't sure she could stand it. Yet she wouldn't beg, no matter how much she wanted it, too.

"If that's how you feel," she said, staring deeply into his eyes and wondering how he didn't feel the magical pull between them.

"If I told you how I feel, we'd never get out of here."

Madison's belly tightened, and her clit throbbed. She straightened, and he rested his hands on her hips.

"Madison," he said, lust burning in his beautiful blue eyes. "You're making it hard for me to do the right thing."

"Then be a bad boy," she whispered against his lips.

He wrapped an arm around her and kissed her breathless.

"Oh, damn," she panted when their lips finally parted.

"You're so beautiful," he said, nuzzling her neck. "Irresistible. I wanted you from the moment I saw you, Madison. Don't know how I controlled myself."

"Oh, baby, keep talking. Or don't. Kiss me again."

"I'll kiss you," he said, his voice almost a growl. He picked her up and placed her on the oversized brown leather couch.

Madison stared as he pushed her dress up to her waist, exposing her bare legs and white satin panties, the crotch damp. In a moment of clarity she realized she was about to have sex with a man she scarcely knew. Yet she felt an almost magical connection to him.

His gaze drifted to her tattoo, and he tugged down her panties, tilting his head to the side to study the artwork better.

"Why did you get this?" he said, his voice a throaty whisper. His fingertips traced the tattoo.

"Don't you like it?" she asked, her heart pounding as much from anticipation of his response as from the sensation of his hands upon her. Again it struck her how much the tattoo resembled him and also the winged creature she had imagined. She wondered if he noticed the similarity.

"It's unusual." While he stared at the tattoo, his hand stroked her soft mound. His fingertips slid through her pubic hair, and his thumb swept over her swollen clit that peeked through the sable nest.

"I like the unusual," she breathed.

"Which explains your attraction to me."

"The artist supposedly connects destined mates through her tattoos."

He looked at her sharply. "A mate mark ritual?"

"A what?" she murmured. It was getting harder to concentrate with his thumb teasing her clit.

"It's an ancient magic."

"You know about magic?"

"I've come across certain texts when I do translations."

"Tell me more."

"Later." He knelt in front of her on the couch and bent, guiding her legs over his head.

Even if she'd wanted to protest, she wouldn't have had time. His warm, wet mouth covered her clit, and she gave a little cry of pleasure.

"Brody, oh, damn," she panted, caressing his buzzed head. His tongue laved her clit. He trailed the tip of it along one side then the other before licking the sensitive little pearl at the tip.

Madison wondered if a person could die from pleasure. Not only had she never been eaten by a man before, but she'd never been so attracted to anyone. Being licked and sucked by the sexiest dude on the planet was enough to send any woman into a

moaning, thrashing orgasm, and Brody seemed bent on giving her the best climax of her life.

His tongue thrust into her pussy, then he returned to her clit, lapping with rhythmic upward strokes. The orgasm struck her hard. Wave after wave of a massive sexual storm nearly hurled her into oblivion. Brody didn't stop licking until she lay panting and limp. Still floating in bliss, she didn't even care that her ass was sticking to the leather couch. Only when she felt Brody's body cover hers, the tip of his thick cock pressing into her wet pussy, did she open her eyes wide.

Completely naked, he loomed above her, his handsome face tense with desire.

"What about protection?" she asked.

"I've got it covered. Literally," he said, a hand braced on either side of her head, his eyes blazing. "Condom in my pocket."

Raising herself on her elbows, she glanced down. Brody lifted himself higher, the muscles in his powerful shoulders and chest bunching and his sleek abs tightening even more. She saw the latex covering his cock and sighed with relief. She wrapped her arms around his strong neck and said, "Go ahead. I can't wait. I've never felt anything this strong before."

He kissed her hard, pressing her onto her back and filling her with a long, controlled thrust. Again their gazes locked, and she caressed his face. Brody gently nipped her lower lip, then kissed her. The tip of his tongue traced her lips while he thrust in a slow, steady rhythm.

His motions quickly rekindled her passion, and soon she hovered on the edge again. Clinging to him, she lifted her hips in time with his until his thrusts quickened and all she could do was cling to him while he fucked her into the best orgasm of her life -- or so she thought. Almost before she'd recovered, another orgasm built. She wondered if he could keep up this kind of speed long enough for her to orgasm again.

"Madison, oh, fuck," he panted, then kissed her. His tongue thrust into her mouth in time with his cock in her quivering pussy.



She came a third time, this one even stronger than the last. Moaning and gasping, she clung to him so hard that her arms and legs ached. Somewhere beyond her own pleasure she felt him come. He tore his mouth from hers and shouted her name, his breathing ragged.

He relaxed onto her, and they lay for several moments. Then he pushed himself off her and kissed her forehead before standing. He removed his condom and walked to a small gold trash bucket by the door. Madison watched the play of muscles in his long legs and firm ass. The man was drop-dead gorgeous.

He tossed the condom into the trash, then picked up his trousers from where he'd flung them onto the coffee table and pulled them on.

"How about a snack?" he asked. "I'm hungry."

She grinned and stretched like a happy cat. "Just like a man."

"You don't want anything?"

"I'm starving too. Got anything chocolate?"

"Cookies?"

"Sounds good to me." She sat up, trying not to wince as she unstuck her bare ass from the warm leather.

Brody left to get refreshments, and Madison pulled on her panties. Still warm and tingly in the afterglow of the best lovemaking experience of her life, she smiled and approached the doors that opened to a porch rimmed by several rosebushes. The branches of a weeping willow shadowed one end. They danced in the summer breeze, and Madison thought a breath of fresh air would be pleasant.

She opened the glass and wood door and stepped out. The concrete felt cool and rough against her bare feet. She stepped closer to the weeping willow and gazed up. Her heart caught in her throat.

Crouched in on a thick branch, its reddish eyes glowing in the shadows, was a dark-skinned winged creature not unlike the one who had chased her in the forest the previous night. It smiled, exposing a mouthful of pointed teeth.

Madison turned to run inside, but the creature swooped down and backed her toward the center of the porch.

"What's the matter? Didn't Brody tell you about the family?"

"W... what?"

"Don't give me that wide-eyed look. I'm not my stupid son. You have no power over me, girl. And if I have anything to do with it, you won't have any power over him, either." The creature's clawed hands lashed out at her, grasping her roughly by the shoulders.

She screamed. The creature bellowed and released her abruptly.

Madison staggered backward, rubbing her scratched arms, and stared as the creature wrestled with another -- *her* creature.

Despite the smoky wings, clawed hands and glowing eyes, she knew without doubt *her* creature was Brody. They broke apart and circled each other, red eyes upon pale blue ones.

Brody's lip curled, exposing his sharp canines. "Keep your filthy claws off her, you bastard, or I'll --"

"You'll what?" chuckled the other. "You can't kill me, and you can't expel me. I'll keep coming, son. I won't stop until you accept your birthright."

"Brody --" Madison said.

He glanced at her. "Get in the house, Madison."

Edging nearer to the door, she glanced at the red-eyed monster, who offered her a leering grin. He trilled his tongue at her and said, "Later, Madison."

Again Brody flew at him, but before his fist connected, the red-eyed demon spread his wings and ascended. Brody flew after him, leaving Madison in a semi-shocked state.

"Madison, come inside," said a soft voice.

She spun, her heart pounding, and faced a gentle-looking, blond-haired... ghost.

Feeling lightheaded, she tried to regulate her breathing. Was she going to pass out again? What was her problem? Wasn't she stronger than this? Of course, she'd never faced supernatural beings before.

"It's all right," said the ghostly woman. "Come inside. You'll be safe. This is Brody's domain, and no one can enter without his invitation."

Madison's first impulse was to flee, but she had no idea what other monsters lurked in these woods. She stepped into the house. "Who are you?" she asked. "Or should I say what are you? A ghost?"

"I'm dead, at least dead to your world. My name was Kara Blazewood. I'm Brody's mother."

"I need to sit."

"Of course. I understand." Kara followed Madison to the couch where she and Brody had just made love. Instead of sitting beside her, Kara settled her translucent figure onto a nearby chair. A faint smile touched her lips. "Brody had nearly the same reaction the first time he saw me, and he's accustomed to... visitations, though of a vastly different nature. If Birch hadn't appeared to you, I wouldn't be able to speak to you right now."

"Birch. That's Brody's father. That *thing* is... and Brody. What is he?"

Kara's smile faded, and she held Madison's gaze. "What is he? He's in great pain, that's what he is."

Her words tugged at Madison's heart, but she needed complete answers. She felt she deserved that much. "That's not what I meant."

"I know. All the Blazewood men are demons. Literally. It's in their blood. Oh, they're born human enough, but tainted. If they surrender to their evil side, they descend after death and become full-fledged demons. So far Brody has rebelled. He's stronger than any of his ancestors."

"Does that mean you're a demon too?"

Kara shook her head. "I was human when I married Birch and gave birth to Brody. Birch descended before Brody was born, leaving me to raise him. We were safe

here, but whenever we stepped out of the house we were at Birch's mercy. I died in a car accident incited by Birch. Brody was eighteen at the time. We didn't have very long together, but it was enough for me to show him he's better than his demon side. It hasn't been easy for him. I can't say much more."

Madison's brow furrowed. "Why?"

"I'm only allowed to even the playing field. Birch revealed his demonic nature to you, therefore an angel is allowed to appear to you as well."

"You're an angel?"

She smiled. "Birch wants to keep you and Brody apart. Actually, it's worse than that. He wants Brody to destroy you."

"Why?"

"You know why." Kara stared at her intently.

The tattoo artist's words echoed in Madison's mind. *The pain will come later.*

"He's my destined mate, isn't he?" Madison said, her voice just above a whisper. She sighed and closed her eyes momentarily, then opened them quickly, hoping Kara hadn't already disappeared. Madison had the feeling she wouldn't stay long. "What did Birch mean when he said Brody can't expel him?"

Kara looked uncomfortable. "I don't know how much of this they'll allow me to tell you. Bently Blazewood, the founder of this town, was a full-fledged demon when he arrived here. His blood tainted the Blazewood line. He claimed this town, and it has always been haunted by his line. Only three beings in the universe, other than --" Kara raised her eyes toward heaven. "-- you know who, can destroy a demon or exile them to hell forever -- a stronger demon, a warrior angel or a shadowing angel. The Blazewood demons are an old and powerful line. Most other demons avoid them. Warrior angels generally deal with grand scale disasters. It's not that they don't care about a small town like this, but there simply aren't enough of them to be everywhere all the time. Shadowing angels are similar to warrior angels, except they're not pure. Their past is murky, but that dimness gives them the power to defend the weak against evil. They understand evil, you see, but they've overcome it."

"If Brody isn't a full-fledged demon, then is he a shadowing angel?"

A look of sadness passed over Kara's face, and she momentarily lowered her gaze. "No. Brody is half human and half demon, and he's struggled with this paradox all his life. Rather than surrender to his demon side, he uses it to keep this town safe. They don't realize it, but for decades he's been their protector against the Blazewood line. Most demons can only enter the physical world through a portal. Usually they influence mortals through subtle mind control, but some places allow them to enter the world in flesh and blood. These woods, the Blazewood property, is such a portal. The Blazewood demons can enter the town through these woods. Over and over Brody has chased them off. Birch has been the most persistent, probably because Brody is his son and if he can't make him submit to his evil side, the Blazewoods lose their hold over the town. Birch would be considered a failure."

"What about Brody? Would he be --"

"I have to go," Kara said. "I've already said too much. Ask Brody to tell you more."

"Wait, I don't know if I can handle this, or if I even want to." Even as Madison spoke the words she knew she'd never be able to stay away. Now that she knew she and Brody truly belonged together, how could she deny him? Most importantly, he seemed to need her. No one had ever really needed her before, and while the idea of it unnerved her, it also made her feel surprisingly good.

"The choice must be yours," Kara said. "As I've so often told my son, listen to your heart."

A sound from the porch drew Madison's attention. Her heart skipped a beat. What if it was another demon? Yet the porch remained empty.

When she turned back to Kara, she had disappeared.

Again she looked to the porch and let out a little shout of surprise upon seeing Brody, still in his demon form, looking through the glass. He opened the door and stepped inside, his expression fierce. Sweat glistened on his face and torso. Bloody

scratches marked his face and chest. A bruise spread over his ribs on his right side. His dark wings fluttered a bit, then folded against his back.

At the moment Madison couldn't sort out the overload of emotion.

"You're still here," Brody said, looking rather surprised. "I thought you might have taken off. I wouldn't blame you."

"You lied to me," she stated flatly.

His eyes narrowed.

"You lied about what you are," she continued, rising from the couch and approaching him.

"It's not the kind of thing I broadcast. I'm sure you understand," he said, not bothering to hide his sarcasm.

"Not even to a woman you scared off a cliff?"

He stared into her eyes -- most unsettling with those pale blue orbs with the snakelike pupils. "I didn't mean for that to happen."

Folding her arms across her chest, she demanded, "What did you expect to happen? Do you make a habit of frightening women?"

A quirky smile touched his lips. "Sometimes."

"Excuse me?"

"I spoke English." He strode toward her, and she instinctively backed away. His grin broadened, exposing his sharp upper and lower canines.

She stopped only when her back pressed against the wall. Brody braced a hand on either side of her head and spoke against her lips. "You're cute when you're scared."

"I'm not scared."

"Aren't you?"

"No."

"Maybe you should be." His mouth descended on hers in a kiss that was demanding, yet tender. Her lips parted, and her tongue darted out to meet his in frenzied strokes. Sliding her arms around him, she relished the feel of his big, hot body against hers.

Brody held her close, one arm snug around her waist and his other hand buried in her hair. When the kiss broke, she murmured, "So this is your bad side?"

"My demon side."

"I think I like it." She clasped the back of his head and pulled him toward her for another kiss. She bit and licked his lower lip, and he groaned, his arms tightening around her. His tongue caressed hers then he tore his mouth from hers to nuzzle her neck.

"You're bleeding," she said breathlessly. "Want me to clean your wounds?"

He looked skeptical, then shrugged and beckoned her with a clawed fingertip. The dark feathers on his arms glistened in the lamplight, and his wings rippled a bit.

## Chapter Four

Feeling like a lamb following a wolf, Madison let Brody guide her to the kitchen, where he opened a cabinet filled with first aid supplies. If he fought his demonic relatives regularly, he probably suffered injuries often.

She shuddered to think of what might happen to him out here alone if he was ever gravely wounded. "Do you have supernatural healing powers?" she asked.

"Not really," he said. "I heal a little faster than a normal human, but I'm quite mortal -- at least I am right now. I'm not a full demon. Obviously you've seen my goody goody side. It's not as much fun." He reached for her again, but this time she stepped away.

"Tell me more about demons."

"Demons, like angels, are immortal. You'd be surprised by the similarities between the two."

"Except one side is good and the other evil."

He glared at her. "Easy for you to judge, isn't it, mortal?"

"You're mortal too," she reminded him.

Brody snorted and reached into the cabinet, but she nudged him aside and found the necessary supplies. "Sit," she ordered. "I'm pretty good at first aid." She chose the appropriate antiseptic, gauze and bandages, then snapped on latex gloves and tended the scratches on his face.

She held his chin in her hand as she worked and tried to focus on his injury instead of his good looks. Her gaze kept returning to his, and the look in his glowing eyes made her legs weak. Still, she did a good job of appearing detached, or so she thought.

"You smell so good when you're turned on," he said.



"Brody --"

"Don't try to deny it. You find my dark side sexy."

"Not to mention your modesty."

"There's no such thing as a modest demon."

Madison raised an eyebrow. "Thanks for the newsflash. Now hold still." He did as she asked while she finished tending his face, then she moved to his chest.

That was probably a bad idea. The broad expanse of muscle aroused her so much that her nipples tingled.

"You're wet," he said with an evil grin. "I can really smell you now. *Delicious*. I can almost taste you, Madison."

"Behave yourself," she snapped. In his human form Brody would never talk like this, but the demon in him was wild. Hungry.

And so damn sexy that her hands actually trembled a bit as she used a gauze pad to clean away the blood that had trickled down his muscular belly. She glanced lower. His cock strained against his trousers, creating an enticing bulge that she longed to knead and caress.

"But, Madison, you're not making it easy for me to behave. A full-blooded human would have trouble resisting you. I'm half demon. Weak. Flawed." He took her hand and kissed her inner elbow. His tongue tickled the sensitive spot, and Madison's heart raced.

"And bleeding," she reminded him. "Let me clean you up, then we'll talk about how much willpower you'll need when we're together."

"Willpower isn't one of my strong points." He growled and pulled her onto his lap.

"I'm not sure I agree with that."

She clung to his neck and gazed into his eyes. His pupils had grown a bit larger, his expression so intense that she thought she might burst into flames just from his stare. Her fingers bit into his shoulder. His wing feathers felt surprisingly silky to the touch.

"You're not afraid of me?" he pressed.

She shook her head.

"Not even a little?"

"No."

He smiled, his teeth so sharp and white. "Liar."

"I'm not scared for the reasons you think."

"Enlighten me."

"I'm scared because you're alone out here, in danger from your relatives. I'm scared because we belong together, and I don't know what that will mean for us."

His eyes narrowed. "How do you know about my relatives?"

"Your mother told me."

The stunned expression on his face was priceless. "My *mother*?"

"We had a long talk while you were off fighting with your father."

Brody groaned, guided her off his lap and stood to pace the room.

He scrubbed a hand over his face. "I don't believe this."

"We belong together. You saw my tattoo. The artist who gave it to me connects destined mates through her designs."

He snorted. "And you believe that?"

"You of all people are skeptical of the supernatural? How else do you explain our connection? You felt it too. You said so."

"What if I lied?"

"You didn't."

"I'm a demon. Lying is in my nature."

"Is defending this town from evil in your nature?"

"My mother talks too much."

"So do you. Let me finish bandaging you so when you make love to me you don't get blood everywhere."

Her words momentarily shocked him into silence. She approached with bandages, and he stood still, his unsettling eyes upon her as she finished caring for the wounds on his chest.

"When I make love to you?" he asked.

Her task finished, Madison snapped off the gloves and tossed them into the nearby trash bin. Standing in front of her tall, sexy demon, she stared up at him and said, "Fuck me, Brody."

He raised an eyebrow. "What, now?"

"Yeah. Right now. This instant." She cupped the back of his head and kissed him hard. "My demon lover. My *destined* lover."

Their mouths plundered each other in a desperate kiss. Madison wondered how he managed to kiss her so deeply but avoid cutting her with those sharp teeth. She scraped her tongue over one of them, deliberately drawing blood.

He groaned and tightened his arms around her. "Don't do that, Madison. You don't know how bad I can be."

"Show me," she whispered against his lips. "Fuck me."

"I can't change back to my human form right now. I'm too keyed up."

"Who said anything about changing back?"

His brow furrowed, then he smiled wickedly, his eyes glowing. He swept her into his arms and covered her mouth in another passionate kiss. Brushing his nose against hers, he carried her out of the parlor, down a long corridor and upstairs to his room where he placed her on the enormous bed.

From where she lay, she gazed past the archway to the pictures above the fireplace. It was then she realized the man and woman in the paintings were Birch and Kara.

Brody stood near the bed and removed his trousers. He reached into the night table drawer, removed a condom and rolled it on his thick, hard cock.

She licked her lips at the sight of it. More than anything she wanted to feel it deep inside her again.

"Madison, this is your last chance to change your mind," he said.

Their gazes locked again. Lust burned in his eyes, rousing her desire even more. The man looked like he wanted to devour her, and she wanted him to.

"Once I start I won't be able to stop. Not like this."

"That's what I'm counting on."

A low growl escaped his throat, and a shiver shot through her before he covered her body with his. Bracing a hand on either side of her head, he kissed her.

Madison's hands roamed over him. His demon form was new to her, and she wanted to explore every inch of it. She caressed his wings and rolled her tongue over the interesting shape of his pointed ears.

"Madison," he purred, moving down her body to capture one of her nipples between his lips. His sharp teeth teased it, but didn't cause pain. Knowing that this wild, eerily beautiful creature gentled himself for her sake aroused her so much that a shiver rolled through her. She caressed his head while he sucked and licked her nipple. The hard little nub became so sensitive that his touch was almost painful. She gasped and moaned, and Brody moved to her other nipple. His hand dipped between her legs, and she momentarily froze, wondering if he would hurt her with his clawed fingertips. Ever so gently he palmed her soft mound, then used the very tip of a claw to tease her clit. The touch was feather soft, but so intense that she cried out.

"I love how you sound when you're turned on," he said, his voice almost a growl.

"You too," she breathed.

He growled again and dipped his head lower. He kissed her softly rounded belly and rubbed his cheek against her soft cushion of trimmed pubic hair. The tip of his tongue trailed over her tattoo, and he kissed her inner thighs.

Madison closed her eyes and relished the sensations. His breath warmed her clit before he licked then sucked it. He groaned, tasting her with lingering strokes of his wet tongue until she hovered on the edge of orgasm.

Then he covered her body with his and entered her with a long, slow thrust. She was so aroused that by the time he reached the hilt, she convulsed in a strong orgasm.

"Oh, Brody. It's so good. So fucking good," she panted, clinging to him tightly.

His lips brushed her forehead, then he kissed her. Their tongues stroked each other. Bracing most of his weight on his forearms, Brody caressed her hair and covered her face with kisses while thrusting into her drenched, throbbing pussy.

She climbed toward another orgasm. Holding him closer, she thrust her hips in time with his. Beneath her stroking hands, his wings twitched and fluttered. She slid her hands under his heavy feathers. The flesh beneath was warm and slick with perspiration. His hard muscles rippled and strained as he pumped. The man was so fucking sexy. Everything about him turned her on.

Grasping his buttocks, she cried out sharply. Her orgasm broke over her, and she quivered all over.

Brody covered her mouth in a kiss, thrusting over and over until she came again.

He growled and thrust harder and faster.

"Fuck me, Brody. Oh, yes! Fuck me!" she gasped.

He nipped her ear and nuzzled her neck, all the while teasing her with his thick, hard cock.

The next climax was so intense it was almost painful. He cried out and stiffened, then surged into her. He came so long and hard she thought he might never stop.

Panting, he rolled onto his back and dragged her to his chest.

Madison lifted her head to look at Brody and noted that he'd returned to his human form. She realized with a touch of surprise that she missed the pointed ears and silky black wings a bit. Yet it was good to see Brody's human side again.

He smiled and caressed her face. "That was unbelievable."

"Yeah." She grinned and kissed him. "It was. As much as I'd like to stick around, I really should get back to town. I think Miss Jefferson will be worried."

Brody's lips curved upward in a slight smile. "You're right. When can I see you again?"

"Tomorrow?"

"Around noon?"

She kissed him, and he wrapped his arms around her. Lying on top of him, she moaned softly and accepted his deep, passionate kisses.

Then he released her and they reluctantly dressed.

Brody drove her to Miss Jefferson's.

Before she stepped out of the car, he cupped the back of her head and pressed a lingering kiss to her lips.

"See you tomorrow," he said in a husky whisper.

"Tomorrow."

"One more thing, Madison. Promise me you'll never come onto my property unless you're with me. Birch has the run of the forest and --"

"Don't worry. I'm not stupid. The last thing I want is to put myself in his hands again. I won't set foot on Blazewood property without you around to protect me."

He smiled, a look of relief in his eyes. "Good. Pleasant dreams, Madison."

"You too." She kissed him again, then left the car and hurried to the door, which Miss Jefferson had already opened.

The old woman stared at Brody, who smiled and waved before driving off. The last thing Madison wanted was to deal with the nosy innkeeper, so after a brief conversation with Miss Jefferson she retired to her room.

After showering, she slipped into bed, but when she tried to relax her heart raced, and she tingled all over from the memories of making love with her gorgeous half demon.

\* \* \*

Driving home, Brody let his thoughts spun with the strange events of the evening. Madison was the first human he'd ever made love to who knew about his demonic nature. He'd fucked mortal women while in his demon form, but they had been blindfolded and tied to the bed -- willingly, of course. As much as he longed for violence while in that evil state, he had never stooped to abusing women. Should that

ever happen, he'd be damned, and Brody had no intention of surrendering to the family curse, at least as far as accepting a full demon nature.

Sometimes he couldn't control himself, so he'd learned to satisfy his thirst for blood by fighting demons who tried to enter the town through the portal. He'd even fought old Bently Blazewood once. The old man had nearly destroyed him and ended up crossing into town while he was still healing. That night a fire had swept through the center of town, destroying several businesses as well as a homeless shelter. His ancestor had always been a firebug.

Brody had offered his abandoned factory to the town to remodel as a new homeless shelter, but they had flatly refused. No one wanted anything from him. Sometimes he wondered why protecting these people meant so much to him. Then he rationalized that he didn't fight for the people, but for his soul.

Now that Madison knew the truth, Brody had yet another worry on his head. During the earlier fight with Birch, his father had threatened Madison.

*You'd do anything to protect her, wouldn't you?* The demon had smirked.

*Stay away from her or I'll destroy you.*

This had pleased his father greatly. *There's only one way you can hope to destroy me, son. Only a full demon can destroy another full demon. You'd have to follow me to hell.*

Brody understood the threat. Was the connection between him and Madison strong enough to drive Brody to hell to avenge her death?

It had nearly happened when Birch murdered his mother. The demon had sat beside a mortal driver and forced him to hit Kara. Brody had been furious enough to chase his father to hell, but that night, after Kara died, Brody had seen an angel for the first time. The angel had told him about leveling the playing field. She'd told him that despite his lineage, he wasn't damned -- yet.

As a half demon, Brody had little fear of hell. It wasn't terror that drove him to fight evil, but disgust. His father and the entire male Blazewood line sickened him, and their despicable legacy would end with him.

Now that Brody and Madison had joined, and Birch knew about it, she would be in danger unless he was around to protect her. A mate mark ritual, such as the one performed by Madison's tattoo artist, meant they were indeed destined to be together.

He had learned about such rituals while translating a book of old magic. When Madison asked about his career, he hadn't mentioned that a few of his clients were not quite human.

Like angels, demons were fluent in countless languages so they could influence just about anyone. Brody had inherited the talent for languages, and his other "special" qualifications made him desirable to those involved in paranormal studies.

"Madison, why did you go to that artist?" Brody murmured. If she had stayed away, they might not have met in this life. Yet if they were destined mates, nothing could keep them apart. If he descended, most likely she would follow. But didn't that work both ways? Now that he'd met her, if she ascended --

"No, you damn fool. It's not that easy. It's *never* that easy for someone like you," he said.

Now that he and Madison had made love, the magical pull between them had turned to something even more powerful. Before, when they'd been together, his mind had almost felt clouded by passion. Tonight, however, he had seen her quite clearly and felt a tightness in his chest that could only be described as love. True, intense love. They belonged to each other, and he could no more deny that than he could deny...

His demon nature.

Brody shook his head.

The angel said he was not damned, but how would he know when he was saved?

\* \* \*

The following day Madison slept until ten in the morning. It had taken her hours to fall asleep, and the excitement of the past couple of days had tired her more than she realized.



She awoke feeling refreshed and excited to see Brody again. After dressing in jeans and a lace-trimmed tank top, she packed a change of clothes and a few toiletries into her oversized purse, then walked down to the sitting room to wait for Brody.

Miss Jefferson was there sipping coffee and munching on biscotti. She offered Madison one and said, "What are your plans for today?"

"Brody will be here soon. I might stay at his place tonight."

"Madison, I know it's none of my business, but --"

"Miss Jefferson, I appreciate your concern, and I consider you a friend, but I'm not going to stop seeing Brody."

The older woman sighed and shook her head. "I hope you know what you're doing. No good ever came from the Blazewoods."

"You don't know Brody."

"Girl, neither do you! I've lived in this town all my life. You've been here for two days. You're saying that we locals don't know what we're talking about?"

"I'm saying that just because you've lived here all your life doesn't mean any of you have taken the time to get to know Brody."

"Which is smart."

"That's your opinion."

Madison and Miss Jefferson glanced out the window just as Brody's black sports car pulled into the yard. He stepped out of the car and Madison hurried to the door.

"Bye, Miss Jefferson."

"Don't say I didn't warn you."

Madison left the house just as Brody reached the front steps. They greeted each other with smiles and a kiss.

"What do you want to do today?" he asked.

"I'm new around here. What do you suggest?"

"A few towns over, there's a beautiful lake with a hot dog and ice cream stand nearby. Want to get some food, then go hiking around the lake?"

"Sounds great."

The afternoon started as a fun yet normal date, with Madison and Brody sharing hot dogs and ice cream, then enjoying a game of miniature golf before heading for the lake. She nearly forgot that she was dating a demon until they reached the relative privacy of the lake.

A few random people waded into the water, but during their hike, Madison and Brody were quite alone.

"Brody, I know you have special powers, but I can't help thinking about what could happen to you alone in those woods. You weren't hurt that badly last night, but what if --"

"I can handle myself, Madison. A few times I had some injuries I couldn't patch up, so I went to the ER -- in my human form, of course. No one in town ever asks me questions. One time after I showed up at the hospital with some deep scratches on my back, the police came to my house and searched for a missing person."

"A girl, right?" she asked, then added, "I heard a couple of women talking at the drug store the first day I arrived."

"Lovely town this is," he muttered. "Yeah. They looked for a missing girl. Did the women at the drug store mention she turned up a few months later? She and her boyfriend had taken off, then came back when they ran out of money."

"No. They didn't mention that."

"Didn't think they would."

"Brody, if everyone in this town hates you so much without even knowing you, why do you risk your life to protect them? They don't deserve it."

"I'm half demon, Madison. Do you think I do anything unless there's something in it for me?"

His words startled her a bit. They shouldn't have, but when he was in his human form it was easy to forget about his dark side.

"What's in it for you?" she asked. "Redemption?"

"I don't know. I think it's more about rebellion."

Madison drew a deep breath and released it slowly. "I understand. I've always been a little rebellious too. I like my freedom. Most people can't understand that."

"I know. Sometimes I just want to... escape."

"Me too."

"Madison, I'll always be there for you, but I won't try to smother you."

She smiled and squeezed his hand. "I appreciate that, but when it comes to you I won't mind a little smothering, but don't worry. I'll try not to be a control freak. If you need to go flying through the woods -- literally -- I won't stop you."

He chuckled. "Thanks."

"But if we really are destined mates, and we get serious --"

"We already are serious as far as I'm concerned."

"Then the only thing I demand --"

"Demand?" He raised an eyebrow, an amused expression on his face.

"Yes. Demand. I demand to be the only woman in your life. Sexually I'll do anything you want, but I need to be your only bedmate."

"All right. No more fuck buddies."

"Excuse me?" she demanded. "*Fuck buddies?*"

"Sorry, love. It's my demon side talking. Sometime it emerges even when I'm in my human form. Sex and violence bring it out. When you said you'd do anything I want sexually... Oh, baby, you have no idea how much that turned me on."

"Really?" Knowing this aroused her so much that she squirmed a bit. Her snug jeans pressed against her clit, and she almost wished he'd sprout wings right here and now, fly her back to his mansion and fuck her into oblivion.

"Don't look at me like that," he warned.

"I can't help it."

"Try, unless you want me to go demonic."

"You read my mind."

"Madison..."

She stopped walking and, when he turned to her, she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him. Hard. Her tongue slid between his lips, and his met it with passionate strokes. Groaning, he caressed her back and cupped her ass. She did the same, loving the feel of his tight butt beneath the worn denim. His cock swelled and pushed against her, and she thrust her hips closer and moaned, rubbing her clit against the firm bulge in his jeans.

Her hands slid up his back, and the muscles twitched. She felt the pressure of his emerging wings against her palms, and her eyes flew open.

Brody stared at her with glowing eyes, his breathing ragged. Sharp teeth glittered between his parted lips. When he spoke, his voice was a sexy rasp, "We need to leave. Now."

They ran back to his car. He dove in and tore off his shirt before his emerging wings ripped through the fabric.

"Maybe I should drive?" Madison asked weakly.

He glanced at her, curled his lip in a roguish grin, and shoved the key into the ignition. The car screeched as he backed up fast and sped down the road.

"Slow down!" she snapped. "I'm only human and, if you remember correctly, you're not immortal, either."

"Shit, you're starting to sound like a wife already."

"You're the one who said we're serious."

"Throwing my words back at me? Just like a woman."

"I am a woman."

"A woman who asked me to go demonic. What's the matter, sweet blood, change your mind already?"

"No, but if you don't stop driving to endanger, you'll be jerking off this afternoon instead of making love to me."

Brody growled and pouted a bit, but slowed down to the speed limit.

Luckily they passed very few cars on the long country road to his house. She hated to think of what would have happened if they'd driven through the center of town with Brody looking like the poster boy for gothic horror.

## Chapter Five

When they arrived at his house, Brody and Madison stepped out of the car. She walked toward the house, but he swept her into his arms and flew her to a round, medieval style tower on the west wing. Boards covered the arched window, but he kicked them in.

"Brody!" she screamed, clinging to his neck. "What are you doing?"

"You said I could do anything I want."

"Yeah, but --"

With one last kick, the window cleared, and he swooped into the tower and placed her on her feet. She glanced around while he lit candles in an iron floor candelabra. The room had a bed draped in black satin with red satin pillows. Iron chains attached to padded cuffs dangled from the head- and footboards. A carved wooden nightstand with a black marble top stood near the bed.

"Wow. I guess I don't need to ask what this room is for," she said.

"It's the bridal suite," he said, approaching her. He wore an almost taunting expression, and his black wings opened halfway, then once again folded against his broad back. "The Blazewood men only bring their wives here. Don't worry, Madison, I have no intention of carrying on the family line. If you choose me, you'll never have the pleasure of children, so you'd better be sure you want to bind yourself to me forever."

"I'm sure. And you have no idea what the future might bring."

He stared at her hard. "I will *never* spawn a half demon child."

"I agree. That isn't an option. Whatever happens, Brody, we'll work it out together. I already love you. The question is, how do you feel about me?"

His expression softened the slightest bit, and his serpent-like eyes narrowed. As if discovering something unbelievable, he murmured, "I love you enough to enter hell if it means avenging your death."

Fear shot through her, more for him than for herself. "I don't want that kind of love. I don't want you to join *them* and use me as the excuse. Please don't do that to me. If you descend, I might just follow."

"No." He pulled her into a firm embrace. "Don't say that, Madison. Never say that."

"Fine. Then promise me you'll behave."

He brushed the tip of his nose against hers and spoke against her lips. "I'll do my best." His mouth covered hers in a deep, tender kiss.

"Not here," she whispered.

"What?"

"I don't want you to behave yourself here."

Brody grinned. He picked her up over his shoulder and carried her to the bed, where he tossed her upon it. She landed with a gasp and stared at him, her heart pounding and her clit and nipples tingling. He roughly unfastened her jeans and pulled them off, yanking off her socks and sneakers along with them.

Gazing at her high-cut black briefs, he licked his lips, then used his claws to tear them off without so much as scratching her skin.

"Pretty feet," he said, grasping first one, then the other and kissing the tips of her pink-painted toes. His tongue tickled the sole of one foot, then he snapped the cuffs around her ankles. She tugged at the bonds, but they held firm, forcing her legs apart.

Madison pulled off her tank top. Brody took it from her and tossed it aside, then cupped her breasts and kissed the plump tops which swelled above her bra. His tongue snaked down her cleavage before he unfastened the front clasp on her bra. While she shrugged it off, he kneaded her breasts and rolled his thumbs over her stiff nipples.

Brody reached up and snapped the manacles on her wrists. Now she lay spread eagle, staring at him and shaking with anticipation.

"Please," she whispered, her full breasts heaving. "Please, Brody. I want --"

"I know," he said. Starting at her neck, he covered every inch of her with kisses. His tongue rolled over her breasts, and he sucked her nipples until she moaned with pleasure-pain. Her back arched, and she strained against her bonds, but she was completely at his mercy.

Brody kissed her stomach and dipped his tongue into her navel. His hands slid beneath her to squeeze her ass. He slid a claw along the indentation of her ass, the very tip of it teasing her sphincter. The ring of muscle contracted, and she shivered. Her clit ached, and her pussy throbbed. She wished he'd fill her with his cock. He positioned himself between her parted thighs and sucked her throbbing little clit.

"Brody, yes, oh, yes!" She gasped and writhed. Somehow being tied up made her feel strangely liberated. She was totally under his control and completely free to surrender to sensation.

He devoured her. His tongue and lips brought unimaginable pleasure. Two times he licked her to an overwhelming orgasm.

Madison's body trembled and heated. He licked her belly and caressed her breasts with his callused palms, then he thrust his tongue into her mouth while massaging her soft mound. He thrust two fingers into her soaked pussy while rolling his thumb over her clit until she came again. While she writhed and bucked as far as her bonds allowed, he continued stroking her. At the same time his lips drew on one of her hard nipples.

It seemed like every nerve was exposed. Sweat misted her body, and her heart pounded as she felt another orgasm building. Brody reached toward the night table and took a condom from the drawer.

Before he rolled it onto his huge, rock-hard cock, she breathed, "Let me suck it. Don't put it on yet."

Groaning with pleasure, Brody knelt over her head and bent his cock toward her mouth. The tip slid between her lips, and she rolled her tongue over the bulging head. She flicked the underside, then lapped the head again, tasting droplets of pre come.



"Fuck, Madison, you have a sexy mouth. Use your teeth. That's it... oh, hell."

She did what he asked. Her eyes closed, she licked and sucked until he pulled away, his breathing ragged. Panting, she opened her eyes and saw him kneeling beside her, his eyes aflame and his hand clamped around the base of his cock.

When he regained enough control to release it, he rolled on the condom, then quickly released her from her bonds. She reached for him, but he rolled her onto her stomach. Grasping her arms, he held them above her head and filled her pussy from behind with his thick, hard cock.

"Your cunt feels so fucking good," he said. "You're beautiful, Madison. I've never met a woman like you."

"Don't stop fucking me, Brody," she panted, her fists tight on the black satin sheets. "Don't stop."

He had no intention of stopping. He pumped fast and hard, his breath ragged in her ear.

Madison came again, her ass thrusting upward as his hips drove down.

"Madison!" he gasped.

"Yes, baby, I'm here. Oh, I need you so, so much. Please!" she screamed, and this time when she came she tumbled into blackness.

Brody gathered her into his arms while she was still half asleep. She stirred, offered him a smile, then snuggled against him as he carried her out of the tower and down a winding staircase. He brought her to his bedroom and placed her on the bed.

Madison slid beneath the covers and glanced at him. "Aren't you coming to bed?"

He shook his head. "I have some work to do. Relax. I'll be in my study. It's just across the hall if you need me."

She nodded and curled up on the bed. Through half closed eyes she watched Brody walk to his closet and pull on black pants. His smoky wings faded and disappeared. He put on a black T-shirt, and when he turned back to her, his face had lost all its demonic characteristics. Brody's calm blue eyes stared at her, and he smiled.

Before leaving the room, he approached and kissed her brow. "See you soon."

Madison nodded and drifted into sleep.

\* \* \*

Madison spent the night and the following day at Brody's. She explored his house, joined him for a workout in his awesome home gym, then got lost in his spacious library while he worked on his translations.

Around four in the afternoon, her cell phone rang. She glanced at the caller ID and saw it was the bed and breakfast. Madison closed the book she'd been reading and glanced at Brody, who sat across the room at his desk, deeply involved in his work.

With a sigh, she answered her phone. "Hello, Miss Jefferson,"

"I was wondering if you'd be joining us for dinner tonight."

"Brody and I --"

"He's welcome to come. I won't even charge you extra, considering he's already bought me lunch."

"I don't think it's a good idea. We wouldn't really be welcome."

"Maddy, I've thought a lot about what you said, and maybe you're right. We've never really given him a chance. Come for dinner around six."

"I'll have to ask Brody."

"Ask me what?"

"Miss Jefferson asked us to dinner at six."

"That's fine."

Placing the phone against her shoulder to muffle their conversation, she whispered, "Brody, you don't have to do this."

"I know. Tell her we'll be there."

"Are you --?"

"Madison." He glanced up and smiled reassuringly. "It's only dinner."

Returning to the phone, she said, "All right, Miss Jefferson. See you at six."

\* \* \*

Madison spent the next couple of hours worrying about dinner at Miss Jefferson's. Though the other guests at the bed and breakfast were from out of town and probably unfamiliar with Brody, Miss Jefferson could make the meal uncomfortable, depending on whether or not she was sincere about getting to know him.

They arrived just before six, and Miss Jefferson greeted them with a pleasant smile.

"We're having roasted chicken and vegetables tonight," she said. "Hope you like that, Brody."

"It sounds great," he said and offered her the box he was holding.

Miss Jefferson looked at it with a raised eyebrow.

"It's a cheesecake," Madison said. "It won't bite you."

Miss Jefferson smiled and accepted the box. On her way to the kitchen, she said, "Take a seat. The others are already at the table."

When they entered the dining room, the two elderly ladies and the young married couple were engaged in conversation. They all smiled in welcome, but their friendly expressions froze when Madison introduced Brody. Apparently they recognized his name from talk around town.

Madison was torn between the desire to tell them all to shove it and the need to run out of the dining room so she and Brody could enjoy a relaxed meal together. No chance for the latter. Brody pulled out a chair and held it for her.

She forced a smile and sat, then he settled into the chair next to her.

Miss Jefferson appeared carrying a basket of bread. She had already set the chicken and vegetables on the table, and the delicious scent filled the room.

Once their hostess sat, she said, "Dig in, everybody."

They passed around the food, and soon everyone was concentrating on their meal. Other than an occasional request for salt, pepper or more potatoes, the night was uncomfortably quiet.

Finally Miss Jefferson asked, "How are you all enjoying your vacation in town? Liz and Mark, how has the hiking been?"

"Great," replied the young, sandy-haired man.

His wife, also tall and blonde, nodded in agreement. They looked like the ultimate nature couple, from their khaki shirts to their dirt-and-grass-stained cargo pants.

"There are some good trails just outside of town by the lake on the south end," Brody said.

"We'll have to check those out," Liz said. "You own that big house in the woods, right?"

"Yes."

Another silence fell over the room. It lasted until the meal ended.

"We have cheesecake for dessert, if you'd like some," Miss Jefferson said. "Brody was kind enough to bring it."

The elderly ladies exchanged glances, then excused themselves, saying they'd like an early night.

Liz and Mark also refused politely, saying they planned to go out for ice cream.

Once the other guests had gone, Brody and Madison helped Miss Jefferson clear the table and clean the dishes.

"Everyone was a little quiet tonight," Miss Jefferson said. "I guess it must be the hot weather."

"It wasn't that hot," Brody said.

Miss Jefferson glanced at him and shook her head. "Why hide the truth? I think they might have heard some rumors about you, Brody."

He snorted. "Ya think?"

"Brody," Madison said softly and touched his arm.

"I'm going home. Thank you for dinner, Miss Jefferson."

"Hold on. You don't have to go."

"I think it might be a good idea," Madison said. "I'm going to check out too."

"Why are you being so hasty?"

"I'm not."

"Do what you like, Maddy." Miss Jefferson sighed. She picked up a pan filled with leftovers and said, "I'm bringing this across the street to my friend Alma. I hope you two will wait around to have some coffee with me before you take off."

They agreed and walked to the porch to sit on the old-fashioned swing until their hostess returned. Seated near Brody, Madison rested her head against his shoulder. He held her close.

"I don't know how you do it, Brody," she murmured. "How can you put up with these people?"

"Who cares about them?"

She tilted her gaze toward his. "I think you do, whether you realize it or not. You're not protecting them only out of selfish reasons. You're --"

Brody leapt off the swing and raced for the street, where a truck filled with lumber sped toward Miss Jefferson, who was halfway across. Birch Blazewood, an evil grin on his scaly face, sat beside the dazed-looking driver.

A scream caught in Madison's throat. She thought for certain the truck would smash the old innkeeper, but with superhuman speed, Brody swept her into his arms and ascended. He and Miss Jefferson landed in front of the inn. Brody's shirt hung in tatters since his smoky wings had torn through it when he'd changed into his demon form.

"Miss Jefferson, are you okay?" Madison asked, running toward them.

The elderly lady looked stunned. Staring at the demon who held her, she murmured, "Holy moly."

"Not quite, Miss Jefferson," Brody said with sardonic grin. "There's nothing holy about me."

"Brody, you need to get inside before someone sees," Madison said.

They quickly entered the house, where Brody placed Miss Jefferson on her feet in the living room. The old woman's legs nearly buckled, so he guided her to a chair where she sat, staring at him.

"Are you hurt?" Madison asked, kneeling beside the innkeeper.

"I'm fine, but what in the name of heaven is he?"

"Wrong place," Brody smirked. "Think lower."

"Brody, knock it off!" Madison snapped. The old lady was shaken enough. The last thing she needed was Brody's demonic sense of humor.

He strode to the window and glanced out.

"The truck is gone, but I'd better find Birch and run him out of town. I should have stayed home tonight. When I'm in the woods I can sense when demons are trying to break into town."

"Demons?" Miss Jefferson exclaimed.

"I should have known he'd do something like this," Brody said, pacing the room, his fists clenched. He absently reached up, pulled off his tattered shirt and let it fall onto the powder blue carpet. "Birch knows I love you, Madison, and he wants to drive us apart any way he can. He knew I was trying to fit in tonight. What a joke!"

"Maddy, what's wrong with him?" Miss Jefferson said in a loud whisper. "What in the name of heaven is he?"

"Not heaven!" Brody hissed through clenched teeth, glaring at Miss Jefferson with glowing eyes.

"Brody, that's enough!" Madison stood in front of him, her hands on her hips and her expression every bit as intense as his.

He continued pacing. "I thought if I racked up enough good deeds I might escape my fate. Bull. That's the thing about fate. You can't escape it."

"What about free will?" Miss Jefferson asked softly.

Brody glanced at her and snorted. "Funny you should mention that. Supposedly being half demon I have free will, but that's most of my problem, isn't it? I choose to make myself miserable. I chose to come here tonight, putting you, Madison and this town in danger. If I had stayed on my property, I would have sensed him in the woods and stopped him before he got to town. This is my fault."

"Brody, you are not to blame for your father's evil!" Madison said.

"He nearly killed Miss Jefferson so that I'd change into my true form right here in town," Brody said.

"That's *his* doing, *not* yours!"

"You keep telling yourself that, Madison, while Birch destroys everyone you care about to get to me."

A sick feeling washed over her. Was he right? Could their love put everyone she cared about in danger? Wasn't that why the Blazewood wives had married such evil men? They had threatened their families, at least that's what Madison had heard and also read in a local history book in Brody's library.

"I have to find Birch," Brody said. He cupped Madison's face and stared deeply into her eyes. "I'm so sorry." Glancing at Miss Jefferson, he added, "You too." Then he left the house despite the protests of both women.

Madison glanced outside, somewhat relieved that the night was now dark enough for Brody to blend with the shadows.

"Madison," Miss Jefferson asked weakly. "What's going on?"

"That's a very good question," said a soft voice. Kara had appeared on the couch, sympathy etched on her transparent face. "Perhaps I can help you understand."

Miss Jefferson took one look at the ghostly woman and fainted.

"Oh, dear," Kara said with concern. "I didn't mean to scare her so much. I'm just here to --"

"Level the playing field?" Madison asked with a touch of sarcasm. "Kara, just between us girls, maybe you should find another way to do that."

\* \* \*

After Kara's visitation, Miss Jefferson seemed much better, but Madison decided to stay with her that night. She hoped Brody would return soon, but hours passed without a sign of him.

"Miss Jefferson, I'm going to his place."

"I thought you weren't supposed to go there unless he's with you?"

"What if he's hurt and needs help? He's alone out there."

The woman hesitated a moment, then said, "You're right. He saved my butt tonight. The least I can do is see if he's still breathing."

"Miss Jefferson, you can't --"

"The hell I can't. My truck is a lot sturdier than your car. Let's go."

Within moments the women were on their way to Brody's woods. They'd nearly reached the house when Birch dropped out of a tree and landed in front of them on the road, leering.

Miss Jefferson looked startled, then her eyes narrowed. "He's immortal, right?"

"Yes."

"But he can feel pain?"

"From what I understand."

"Good."

Birch took a step toward the truck, and Miss Jefferson slammed on the gas. Her action surprised the demon so much that he didn't have time to fully avoid the truck. As he spread his wings and ascended, he struck the roof, and Miss Jefferson continued speeding toward the house.

Glancing out the window, Madison noticed Birch flying off through the trees.

"Nice shot, Miss J." Madison grinned.

Miss Jefferson parked close to the house, and the women hurried up the walk, looking nervously around as if expecting more demons to appear.

Madison rang the bell and pounded on the door, hoping Brody was physically able to answer. If he couldn't get to the door, they would need to break into the mansion.

Then the door opened, and Brody stared at them in surprise, then annoyance.

"Get inside," he ordered, and they obeyed. "What are you two doing here?"

"We were worried about you," Madison said. "Are you hurt?"

"Nothing worth mentioning. Madison, I told you never to come here unless I'm with you."

"Stop picking on her," Miss Jefferson said. "She cares about you, and so do I."



"Since when do you care?" Brody demanded.

"Since you saved my life tonight. You've been protecting this town, and no matter how you were born, you're not evil."

Brody shook his head. "I think I was better off when everyone was against me."

"Why, tough guy, can't take a little love?" Madison quipped, looping her arms around his neck.

"I need to get back to town," Miss Jefferson said, then shuddered. "But I'm not keen on the idea of running into that demon again."

"You're not going back to town tonight," Brody said. "It's almost midnight. We're all staying here, and I'll escort you back to the bed and breakfast in the morning. No arguments."

Miss Jefferson held up her hands in defense. "I'm not about to argue with a guy who sprouts fangs and wings. Just show me to the guest room."

A short time later, with Miss Jefferson settled for the night, Madison and Brody retired to his room.

They undressed, and Madison fussed over new scratches on his chest and ribs.

"It's nothing," Brody said, grasping her hands and kissing her palms.

"Why do guys always say that?"

"Trust me, if it was bad I'd say it. After a fight with Birch this is mild. Right now I just want to get into bed and make love with you."

"Okay," she whispered and slid beneath the crisp blue sheets.

Brody joined her. Looming above her, he nuzzled her neck and pressed a gentle kiss to her forehead.

Her arms slid around him, and he said, "Hold me tighter. I want to feel you really close, Madison."

She did what he asked. Closing her eyes, she clung to him, loving the feel of his warm skin against hers and the soft echo of his breath in her ear.

Again he kissed her. His tongue slipped between her lips, and she met it with lingering strokes. They tenderly explored each other's mouths while their hands roamed over each other's bodies.

Madison trailed her fingertips up and down his spine. She cupped his firm ass and kneaded it. Trapped between their bodies, his cock swelled.

He reached into the night table for a condom and lay on his back to roll it on. Madison watched, stroking his inner thighs and loving the feel of his hair-roughened flesh and the hard muscles beneath. She lightly squeezed his balls, enjoying their warm softness, such a contrast to his steely shaft.

"I love being with you," she said.

"You too. I never realized how..."

"What?"

"How lonely I was until we met. It hasn't been long, Madison, but I don't want to imagine a life without you."

"That's how I feel. We belong together, Brody."

"I don't want you to be hurt because of me, because of what I am."

Her brow furrowed at the pain in his eyes. "Brody, you would never hurt me, and you can't blame yourself for your father or any of the other demons in your family line. You're a good man."

"You almost make me believe that."

"Don't ever doubt it." She straddled him, her knees resting against his lean sides and her hands caressing his powerful chest. Heavens, she loved touching him, talking to him, being close to him. Until meeting this man, she hadn't felt complete. Now she knew exactly what she wanted and where she belonged.

Brody gently grasped her breasts and kneaded them. She leaned closer, and he captured one of her nipples between his lips and sucked it.

"Beautiful," he murmured, reaching down and stroking her clit.

Pleasure washed over Madison, and she rose onto her knees. Clasping his cock, she guided the head to her pussy and ever so slowly settled upon him, feeling his velvety hardness fill her.

She rocked upon him, controlling their pleasure.

Brody gently caressed her breasts. One hand fondled her clit while the other continued teasing her nipples, lightly pinching first one then the other.

Her heart pounding, Madison rocked faster. The pleasure increased, pulling tighter and tighter until the fragile line snapped and she came long and hard. Brody's back arched and his fingers bit into her hips as he joined her.

"Madison, I love you!" he gasped, his voice jerky with pleasure.

"I love you, Brody," she panted. "I love you so much."

## Chapter Six

Brody awoke with a start. His heart pounded, and his heightened senses picked up the approach of other demons.

Glancing at Madison, who slept blissfully beside him, he thought about how much she meant to him. He hated to wake her, hated to leave her, but he had no choice. He touched Madison's shoulder lightly and she moaned, but didn't wake, so he shook her a bit harder.

"Brody?" She blinked in the moonlit room. "What's wrong?"

"I need to go. Demons in the forest. More than one. Stay here." He stood and summoned his demonic form. As always when he changed, pleasure-pain tore through him. His teeth lengthened and sharpened, his eyes momentarily stung and the smoky wings burned as they emerged from his flesh.

A rush of power followed the change and, with that power, an indescribable sensation encompassed him -- almost like an itch just beneath the surface of his skin. No matter how he scratched it wouldn't stop and, strangely, he didn't want it to. His ancestors had told him it was the evil inside him, his true nature trying to claw its way out.

"Brody," Madison said, rising from bed, her beautiful, naked body enticing him despite the impending danger. He longed to squeeze her full, soft breasts and suck her plump clit until she screamed for release.

He cupped the back of her head and kissed her.

"I'll be back," he said and strode to the enormous window. He opened it and leapt out, spreading his wings and flying deep into the forest.

He met his father and grandfather, Booth, in a clearing. Like Birch, Booth had dark, scaly skin and red eyes. Though shorter than Birch, he was heavier set, his chest

wide and his arms and legs thick with muscle. Instead of a rodent-like tail, his resembled that of a rattlesnake.

"Time for a family reunion, son," Birch said.

"It's been a while," Booth said and curled his lip. He circled Brody with a predatory look. "How disappointing. But there's still hope for him."

"You're not getting into town," Brody said flatly.

"Told you he's stubborn, Dad," Birch said.

"That's because you weren't a strong enough father figure. The boy needs discipline." Booth's clawed hand lashed out at Brody's face. The force of the blow knocked him into the trunk of a thick oak tree.

Brody hissed, his fangs flashing, and leapt at Booth.

Both demons attacked him but Brody held his own.

The winged ones kicked, punched and ripped each other with strong, sharp claws.

Another demon joined the attack against Brody, this one with glowing green skin and obsidian eyes. Brody recognized him as Brand. With his appearance, a horrible realization struck Brody.

Birch knew with Madison's love, Brody slipped further and further from the family tradition. He had apparently called upon the other Blazewood demons to help him fully convert Brody.

The scent of smoke filled the air. Brody tore himself from Booth's clawed grip and ascended. Even from this distance, Brody saw flames engulfing most of the town square. That must be the work of the demon Bently Blazewood.

Birch rose beside him into the air and kicked Brody hard in the stomach. Instead of fighting back, Brody flew as fast as he could toward home. He needed to warn Madison and Miss Jefferson.

"We'll see you in town!" shouted Birch.

Glancing over his shoulder, Brody saw Birch and the others fly off. More demons appeared and followed them. Eight generations of Blazewood demons had arrived to terrorize the town -- all to drive Brody to hell.

Brody swooped onto the roof of his mansion, pulled open the door leading down and descended the stairs, taking several at a time.

When he reached the floor where his room was located, Madison and Miss Jefferson stood in the corridor, their faces etched with worry.

"Brody, you're hurt," Madison said, staring at his bleeding face and torso.

"I'll get some bandages," Miss Jefferson said. "And some trousers for you. Demon or not, you can't be flying around with your privates hanging out."

He brushed past the women and strode into his room only to pull on black trousers.

"Bandages are downstairs," Madison said.

"Forget me," Brody told them. "I want you to get into Miss Jefferson's truck and leave town. All my ancestors have decided to attack at once. They want me, and they'll destroy this town to make me join them." He closed his eyes for a moment, his fists clenched. "Maybe it's what I have to do."

"That isn't the answer," Madison said. "If you join them, they'll still haunt this town, except you'll be right along with them."

"I think she's right," Miss Jefferson said.

"No matter what, you can't stay here," Brody said. "I'm going to fight them, but there's no way I'll win. If I'm killed, you won't be safe in this house anymore."

"I'm not running," Madison said.

"I don't have time to argue. Bently has already set the town on fire."

"What?" Miss Jefferson shouted.

Brody grasped Madison's shoulders and kissed her. Gazing into her glistening dark eyes, he said, "I love you. Please go."

He strode to the window and glanced at her one last time before jumping out and flying toward town.

*Please do what I told you, Madison. It's the only way you'll be safe.*

\* \* \*

Madison and Miss Jefferson raced outside, jumped into her truck and sped to town.

They expected demons to pop out of trees, but saw none until they left the forest.

"Look!" Madison said, pointing skyward. A creature with enormous wings, almost like a giant bat, flew over the burning town square. Every few seconds it pointed its rat-like tail at a building. Flames shot out of it and burned its target to cinders.

Miss Jefferson drove to her bed and breakfast. She and Madison hurried inside to find it abandoned by the guests, not that Madison blamed them.

Something exploded outside, and the women ran to the porch. Miss Jefferson's friend, Alma, stumbled into the street and dropped to her knees. She glanced over her shoulder toward her house, which had crumbled to the ground.

Madison ran to the woman while Miss Jefferson hopped into the truck and parked beside them.

Alma didn't appear physically hurt, but seemed to be in shock. Madison helped her into the truck.

"I think Brody might be right about us getting out of town," Miss Jefferson said.

"You should go," Madison told her, buckling Alma into the front seat, then stepping away from the truck.

"Maddy! Where are you going?" Miss Jefferson demanded.

"To find Brody."

"Get back in!"

"Sorry, Miss J, but I can't leave him."

Madison realized a magical pull no longer drove her to him. Her connection to him had nothing to do with her tattoo. His heart called to hers -- a link between two destined mates -- and she would not abandon him.

With Miss Jefferson and Alma shouting for her, Madison raced through people's yards, hoping to reach the town square faster than if she followed the road. Somehow she knew Brody was there.

In the park, the fire demon -- probably old Bently Blazewood -- perched on top of the gazebo. He smiled, watching Brody fight four demonic relatives. Blood covered them, droplets flying from their wings as they clawed, kicked and punched each other. A glowing green demon leapt onto Brody's back, and its razor-like teeth sank into his arm. Brody grunted and managed to flip him over his shoulder. The creature landed flat on his back and melted into the ground in a greenish mist, then reappeared several feet away.

Madison's fists clenched, and her stomach twisted. Brody was injured and bleeding badly, but fighting. While his blows momentarily stunned his opponents, the full demons healed fast, falling and rising, propelled by their hellish powers.

Other demons flew through the sky. Screams combined with car horns and sirens filled the night as people tried to flee town while police attempted to keep order.

A fire truck zoomed by the park. On top of it squatted a laughing black and green demon. Glancing back at Brody, Madison felt completely useless. She couldn't help him fight demons, but she couldn't just stand here, either.

A couple with four young children stood by their car, which had stopped in the middle of the road. Madison jogged toward them. While the husband poked around under the hood, the wife tried to calm her children.

"What's wrong?" Madison asked.

"Car died. Again," said the wife, her voice trembling. "I told you to get it fixed, Toby, but no --"

"Will you shut it, woman!" roared the husband. "I'm doing the best I can!"

"Here." Madison took keys from the pocket of her jeans. "My car is parked at Jefferson's bed and breakfast. It's a red four-door. Take it."

The woman's brow furrowed. "Why?"

"Because I won't need it," Madison said.



"Thank you." The woman turned to her children and shouted, "Bree is gone! Where is she?"

Toby and Madison glanced around and Madison caught sight of the child, who had strayed too close to the battling demons. Birch crouched by a gnarled tree, his gaze fixed on the little girl. He seemed to have her under some kind of spell.

"Brody!" Madison screamed.

He turned sharply in her direction, and she winced as a demon's spiky tail lashed across his face. If she hadn't distracted him -- but she had no choice.

His gaze followed her line of vision to the child just as Birch snatched her up and flew off.

"Bree!" screamed the girl's mother.

Abandoning his fight, Brody took to the air, flying quickly after his father and the child.

"I'll get her," Toby said and reached into the back seat of the car. He pulled out a shotgun, then took off running. Madison followed.

Birch and Brody headed toward Blazewood forest. She and Toby couldn't run as fast as they could fly.

A horn honked, and Miss Jefferson's truck pulled up beside them.

Leaning out the window, Miss Jefferson shouted, "Get in!"

Madison and Toby didn't hesitate. "Head for Brody's woods," Madison ordered. "Birch Blazewood took this guy's daughter."

Miss Jefferson stepped on the gas. A bright light exploded overhead, and she slammed on the brakes, blinded by the glare.

"Now what?" Madison demanded.

The light faded, and another winged creature flew through the sky. It had a smooth scalp, ebony skin and pale gold wings. Distinctly male, its powerfully muscled body was covered in ultra-fine, glistening gold chain mail.

The creature grabbed two flying demons by their tails. They screeched, kicking and clawing, but he plunged a gold dagger into the heart of one and ran the other through the belly with a matching sword.

Madison glanced out the window of the truck and gasped in surprise. Kara's translucent face floated beside her.

"It's Rutendo. He's a warrior angel," she whispered, then disappeared.

"A warrior angel?" Madison repeated.

"What?" Miss Jefferson asked, once again speeding toward the woods now that she could see again.

"What the hell is happening?" Toby murmured. "I've never seen anything like this. It's hell on Earth."

The women didn't reply.

When they reached Brody's house, he and Birch were locked in battle on the rooftop. The frightened little girl crouched by the stone tower.

"I have to get her," Toby said, leaping out of the truck, rifle in hand.

Brody grasped Birch by the back of his neck and smashed him face-first into the tower, rendering him unconscious, but for how long? He gathered Bree into his arms and descended. No sooner had he placed the girl on her feet than Toby fired his gun at Brody, who staggered, his face contorted with pain and his hand pressed to his chest. Blood seeped through his fingers.

"No!" Madison shouted and ran toward her demon lover.

"You damn fool!" Miss Jefferson hollered at Toby, who had dropped the gun and picked up Bree. "He saved your kid's life so you *shoot* him?"

"He's one of those *things* who are destroying the whole town!"

"No, idiot, he's trying to save it!" Miss Jefferson said.

As Madison reached Brody, his glowing gaze met hers before he spread his wings and, with his remaining strength, flew off.

"Brody, wait!" she screamed and chased him, Miss Jefferson close behind.

He wasn't hard to follow. Weakened by the fatal shot, he crashed through the trees and landed in a clearing a short distance away.

Madison dropped to her knees and pulled him into her arms. He was heavy, and his blood seeped into her clothes. She pressed her hand to his chest wound, and he reached up weakly and rested his hand over hers. His eyes opened partway and tried to focus on her.

They didn't speak. At the moment neither could.

Kara appeared on her knees at Brody's side. She touched his face and smiled tenderly. Birch descended, his dark wings spread and a grin on his scaly lips.

"Well, he's on his way out." Birch chuckled. "Or should I say he's on his way down. Like it or not, half demons go to hell when they die. Now, Kara, get your translucent ass away from my son."

Kara stood and faced Birch. "You can't touch me, demon. Not any longer."

The beast curled his lip.

"Nor can you touch him," Kara added.

"Who says?"

"I say," rumbled a deep voice. Rutendo, the warrior angel, appeared in front of Birch. Before the demon could react, the angel's golden dagger slashed across his throat.

Birch grasped his neck. Brown blood poured through his fingers.

"Go to hell," Rutendo growled, and Birch disappeared in a cloud of dark smoke.

"Land sakes," murmured Miss Jefferson. She and Alma emerged from the trees and stared at the warrior angel. Truly he was something to see -- his features strong, handsome and fierce. Muscles rippled beneath his chain mail, and his golden wings contrasted sharply with his smooth, dark skin.

Rutendo approached Brody and sank to one knee.

Staring at the angel through teary eyes, Madison said, "What's going to happen to him? He's dying, and he's half demon."

"No," the angel replied. He placed his big hand to Brody's chest. Magically, his wounds vanished. Brody's eyes opened, and he held Rutendo's amber gaze. A smile

flickered across the angel's full lips. "He's a shadowing angel." He grasped Brody's upper arm and helped him to a sitting position. "Relax. You'll feel strong again in a little while. I'm Rutendo. A warrior angel. If you accept, I want you to protect this town and keep demons from entering through the woods. Your main problem will be old Bently. He ran back to hell when he saw me exile the other Blazewood demons. That means he'll be back -- with help, most likely. It won't be an easy job for you, but you've done well so far keeping the town free of demons. What do you say, Brody? Are you with me? It has to be your choice."

"Yeah," Brody said, then added. "Sir. I'm with you."

Rutendo clapped him on the shoulder, offered him his hand and tugged Brody to his feet. "Now you have the powers of a shadowing angel. That means if you're injured while fighting demons, you'll heal faster. When you kill demons here on Earth, they won't be able to return, meaning you have the power to exile them. That should make life easier for you. If they know they can't come back, they'll think twice about trying to trespass."

Brody blinked, then his brow furrowed in disbelief. "I'm an angel."

"A shadowing angel. You're still the same guy at heart, and you'll look just like you always have. Sometimes it takes evil to fight evil."

"Then I am evil."

"I wouldn't go that far, Brody. You *understand* evil. There's a difference. You've never committed a mortal sin. I don't know any evil being who can say that. You'll find that most shadowing angels are like you. Other beings can't usually tell them from demons, but we angels can sense each other, so don't worry."

Brody narrowed his eyes. "You're sure I'm what you want?"

"If I didn't trust you, I wouldn't have picked you. I've been watching you all your life."

"Why didn't you appear before this?"

Rutendo snorted. "Do you have any idea how busy I am? It's not just this world we watch over, you know. Don't worry. I'll be around. You're one of mine now, so you

can contact me telepathically. Kara will teach you more about your new powers, and other shadowing angels will contact you. You'll have to help each other."

Brody turned to Madison, who stared at him. She'd never felt so proud and happy in her life, but a part of her felt sad as well. His gaze flickered, and she knew he felt the same. "If I'm an angel, does that mean I can't get married?" he asked.

Rutendo grinned. "Rules are different for shadowing angels. Yes, you and Madison can get married. Now I need to go. The demons are out of town, and I'm getting a call from one of my shadowing angels in Hawaii, or is it Alaska? Some of these guys need to learn how to focus. Work on telepathy, Brody. It's important." Rutendo disappeared in a blink.

Madison and Brody embraced tightly. He pulled back just enough to kiss her and say, "I love you."

"I love you too."

"I better get an invitation to the wedding," Miss Jefferson said.

"You'll be first on the list," Madison told her before Brody covered her mouth in another deep, tender kiss.

## Epilogue

### One Year Later

After the battle with the Blazewood demons, Rutendo had somehow wiped the memories of the townspeople. Only Madison and Miss Jefferson remembered what really happened. To everyone else, their town had been attacked by a crazy cult group the police still searched for.

Though townsfolk remained wary of Brody, Bree's family had spread the word about how he had saved the girl's life when one of the cult members abducted her. They still gossiped about him, but their hatred had faded. They accepted the money he donated to rebuild the town and finally agreed to convert the Blazewood factory into a homeless shelter. Perhaps in time they would accept him as one of their own.

He and Madison married in the little white church, which had been untouched by the destruction. Though he continued work as a translator, he spent most of his time patrolling the woods and preparing for battle. Other shadowing angels visited from time to time, exchanging information and training with him. Their kind needed to keep their skills sharp.

Madison got a part time job at the town library, but spent most of her days at the mansion, keeping notes for Brody and taking calls from other shadowing angels. They kept a close network.

"I never would have thought an angel would need a secretary," Madison said one evening as she organized a collection of old books loaned to Brody by a retired shadowing angel in Canada.

"Think of yourself as my personal assistant," he said, sliding his arms around her from behind and nuzzling her neck.

"Do I get a bonus, boss?"

"My boner is your boner."

"I said *bonus*." She grinned, snuggling closer to him.

He turned her to face him. Held captive by his glowing gaze, she leaned nearer and caressed his silky wings. "Make love to me, my angel."

His mouth covered hers in a passionate kiss that could only be shared by two souls created for each other.

## **Kate Hill**

What do trips around the world, endless nights of breathtaking sex, and a muscular, 6-foot 3-inch, brown-haired, blue-eyed significant other have to do with Kate Hill? Absolutely nothing, but she can dream, can't she? In reality Kate is a single, thirty-something vegetarian New Englander who loves writing romantic fantasies. Visit her online at <http://www.kate-hill.com>, [www.myspace.com/katehillromance](http://www.myspace.com/katehillromance), or join her newsgroup at [groups.yahoo.com/group/katehill](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/katehill). Stop by Kate's Amazon blog at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).