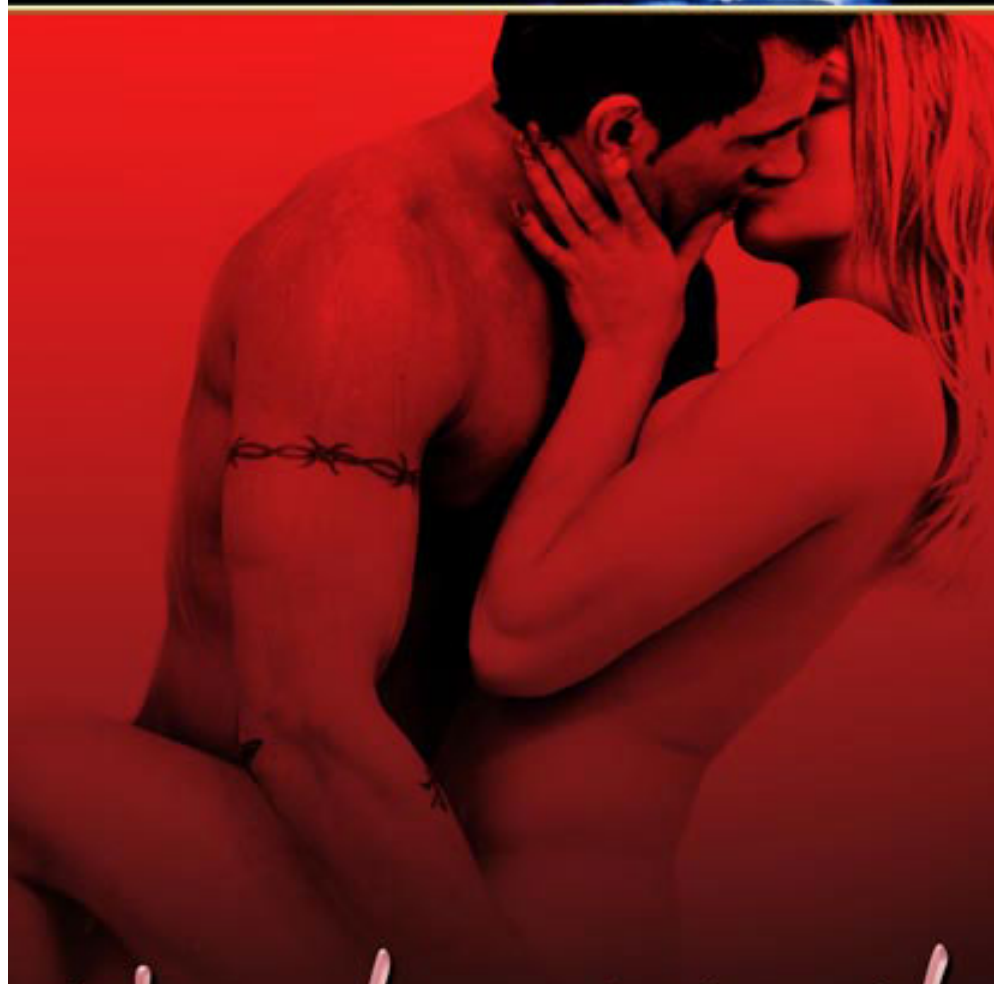


ELLORA'S CAVE TWILIGHT



Timeless Wrath
GOING DOWN UNDER
**LEXXIE
COUPER**

Timeless Wrath

Lexxie Couper

A book in the Going Down Under series.

Beatrice “Ricki” Sullivan is every man’s fantasy. Drop-dead gorgeous, she exudes a sensuality none can ignore. More than just a stunning face and body, she’s intelligent, kind, gentle...and madly, inexplicably in love with Evron, a man she’s known mere hours.

Evron McKenzie is troubled, struggling with undeniable anger that scorches through his veins. And the irrational feeling he is someone else, something *more*. Someone rich, powerful...someone to fear. But in Ricki’s arms, Evron may have finally found his place in the world. At last he is at peace.

So who is the seductive redhead who invades Evron’s dreams? Why does she urge him to touch a mysterious sculpture—a sculpture that seems to radiate death and sin? How can she make him hornier than he’s ever been in his life with just a look, and at the same time turn his anger into bloody, murderous rage? And, more frighteningly, why can’t he resist her?

Publisher’s Note: This story was previously published elsewhere under the title Deadly Sins: Anger, and has been revised for Ellora’s Cave.

Reader Advisory: Sex and violence abound in this terrifically intense tale; big-girl pants definitely required.

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



www.ellorascave.com

Timeless Wrath

ISBN 9781419927010

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Timeless Wrath Copyright © 2010 Lexxie Couper

Edited by Kelli Collins

Cover art by Syneca

Electronic book publication February 2010

The terms Romantica® and Quickies® are registered trademarks of Ellora's Cave Publishing.

With the exception of quotes used in reviews, this book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

Warning: The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. No part of this book may be scanned, uploaded or distributed via the Internet or any other means, electronic or print, without the publisher's permission. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000. (<http://www.fbi.gov/ipr/>). Please purchase only authorized electronic or print editions and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted material. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

TIMELESS WRATH

Lexxie Couper

Dedication

To my mad Aussie fangirl, Bobbi.

For reading everything I write and loving everything I watch.

Trademarks Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

Dumpster: Dempster Brothers

iPhone: Apple, Inc.

Mac: Apple, Inc.

New York Stock Exchange: New York Stock Exchange, Inc.

Porsche: Dr. Ing. h. c. f. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft Corporation

Post-It: 3M Company

Reeboks: Reebok Sports Limited Corporation

Sports Illustrated: Time, Inc.

Starbucks: Starbucks U.S. Brands

Technicolor: Technicolor Trademark Management

The Godfather: Paramount Studios

Twitter: Twitter, Inc.

Prologue

Ancient Persia, 520 B.C.

King Darius rubbed his throbbing balls, enjoying the sensation of hot blood surging into his already turgid cock. He stepped out onto his personal balcony, the dry wind from the distant Pulwar River warming his face and bare chest. Below him lay the heart of the Persian Empire. Persepolis. His to do with what he chose. *His* empire.

He lowered his head, casting a casual eye over the kneeling young man waiting patiently at his feet. Smooth brown back, firm muscles, narrow hips, broad shoulders. "You may begin."

At his command, the young thing bent forward at the waist and took Darius' cock into his mouth.

Yes.

The word purred through Darius' head and he curled his lips into a smug smile. The crushing of an enemy was always a delight, but the best came after the battle. When he had the eldest child, be it son or daughter, swallow his seed before the conquered father. Defeat of a city was glorious. Defeat of a man was supreme.

The squirming heat of his orgasm began to blossom in his core and he moaned, unabashed and loud. "I'm going to fill your mouth with cum," he whispered to the slurping, trembling man. Exquisite tension journeyed through his body. Up his spine, down again, through his balls and into his gut. "If you stop, you die."

The suction on his cock increased before the young man's tongue lapped at his balls in growing frenzy. If Darius didn't know any better, he would have sworn Behrooz was enjoying himself.

With a deep chuckle, he turned his head to the side, smirking at the silver-haired man restrained behind him. "Your son knows how to pleasure with his mouth,

Guamata.” He combed his fingers through Behrooz’s silky black hair. “My congratulations on teaching him well.”

“You *heyvoon!*” Guamata roared, writhing against the solid arms of the two gigantic men holding him. The two were Darius’ personal guards. They saw everything and said nothing. “Leave him alone!” Tears leaked from Guamata’s eyes, the sight more wonderful than Darius could describe. “*My shit in your teeth, leave him alone!*”

Darius raised his eyebrows. “*Your* shit in between *my* teeth?” He chuckled, giving his hips a slight shove, driving deeper into Behrooz’s throat. “Don’t you mean my shit in between *your son’s* teeth?”

Guamata lashed out, writhing in a feeble effort to break free, red hate flooding his wrinkled face. Darius smirked, enjoying the defeated usurper’s misery and torment immensely. “Remember to offer thanks for me to your gods tonight, Guamata,” he said with off-handed calm, turning away from the old man to study his slurping, cock-gobbling son. “For keeping you alive.” He waved his hand in a bored command and his guards left, dragging the gibbering man between them.

Darius watched for a moment, not really paying attention anymore. The pressure in his balls, on his cock, was exquisite. Behrooz really was very good. Perhaps, instead of having him killed, he’d keep him as a slave. His plaything and his alone.

Like you are my plaything?

Darius froze, a tight fist of dread squeezing his heart.

An image of a woman filled his head, like a shadow forms in smoke. A lushly sensual woman with white skin, fire-red hair and entirely black eyes. *You haven’t forgotten me have you, Custodian?* Blistering heat consumed him, devoured him with greedy hunger, and suddenly nothing existed except her. *Not after everything I’ve done for you?* She raised her hand and touched one long, talon-tipped finger to her chest. Immediately a pain pressed against Darius’ heart. Cold and black and cruel. *Not after the deal we made?*

The stench of decay and rot filled his nostrils, even as his body thrummed with unimaginable pleasure. Blood-red lips pulled into a smile, flashing fangs dripped saliva. Something touched his face, like the caress of a corpse, and his body vibrated with pain. Racking pain and unbearable rapture. Breath shallow, lips parted, Darius stared out at his city and saw only *her* – the bitch who had been there forever. A pointed tongue ran over bone-white upper fangs, her black eyes flashed evil mirth and, with a silent laugh and a toss of her flaming head, she buried her clawed finger deep into her hairless cunt.

He gasped, his cock somehow feeling the tight, wet, gripping channel.

Agony unlike any he'd known swelled through him. Agony that made his balls swell and his cock pump harder, faster, wilder. Reality rushed at him in a sickening blur as his hot seed burst into Behrooz's sucking mouth. Throwing back his head, Darius howled, the brutal orgasm burning through his body like a river of molten lava.

You see? The disembodied voice murmured in his head, each word like the kiss of a blade against his skin. *I didn't think you could forget Shahla. No one ever forgets Shahla. Or escapes her. Once you've touched the sculpture, you are mine. Forever.*

Chapter One
Sydney, Australia
Today

Smashing his fist against the cop's windshield was, Evron McKenzie had to admit, not a smart thing to do.

The bars separating him from the rest of Kings Cross were cold, gray and slimy. What made them slimy, Evron wasn't sure, but the substance smearing the steel lengths had a very familiar texture. He hadn't been brave enough to smell the slightly opaque gunk yet, and God knows he sure as hell wasn't going to *taste* it. If it was what he suspected, tasting would serve no purpose anyway. He'd never tasted cum before and, after getting a look at his recently released, personal-hygiene-deficient cellmate, he wasn't about to start now.

He stood in the far corner of the small enclosure, fists shoved deep into the front pockets of his jeans. Fury licked through his veins. Fury at his ex-boss; fury at the taxi driver who hadn't known how to get from one end of Pitt Street to the other – for fuck's sake, it was Sydney's main bloody street! It was a straight fucking line! How in the hell could they end up in Kings Cross? Fury at the dumb broad in the café who had called the cops when he'd lost his temper and pulled the dumb-fuck taxi driver out of the car at the *fifth* wrong turn. And fury at getting caught.

Most of all, however, fury at himself for losing his temper. Again.

He'd struggled his whole life with anger. A red beast of rage lurking in his veins, seething even when there was nothing to be angry about. The sigh that flared his nostrils was bitter.

He had no one to call to help him out this time. Being found in a dumpster as an infant and thrown from one foster home to another as he grew hadn't helped his solitary situation either. Who wanted to raise a kid who seemed permanently pissed

off? For five years he'd been called Evil Evron by one of his foster-dads, which only made his anger worse. Especially when Evron broke the hilarious son-of-a-bitch's nose. His anger had landed him in all sorts of trouble. The last time he'd been thrown into the slammer he'd called Nick, but as of this afternoon his ex-boss wasn't talking to him.

Evron sighed again. He couldn't blame the bloke, really. They may be best mates, but Nick only had so much tolerance. Calling him a "no-talent hack" had pushed that tolerance too far.

Evron dropped his head and stared blankly at the toes of his runners. "You have to control your temper, Evron. This is getting beyond a joke." All Nick had done was question his use of colour in an ad layout. Nothing to get ticked-off about.

Yes it was, a dark voice whispered in Evron's head, low, seductive and supremely arrogant. *You're better than him. You're more than this. And the time is approaching when –*

"McKenzie."

The gruff voice jerked Evron's head up and he ground his teeth. On the other side of the bars stood a scowling police officer. The very same officer whose patrol car now sported a shattered windshield, thanks to Evron's fist. Disgusted mud-brown eyes flicked over Evron, sparking another wave of simmering anger. It bubbled up like lava, eager to consume him. *Just who do you think you –*

Evron took a deep breath, wrenching back control. Just. He met the cop's contempt with a steady look. "That's me," he said.

The cop pulled a key ring from his belt and unlocked the door. "You've got a fairy godmother."

Evron frowned. "A fairy godmother?"

A drawn-out sigh left the cop, condescending and contemptuous. "Someone's posted your bail. You're outta here."

Evron's frown deepened. "Who?" He'd called no one. Shit, he had no one *to* call.

"How the fuck should I know? Some guy called Balionel or somethin'."

"Balionel? Who the hell's Balionel?"

"You think I know?" the cop snarled before sliding open the door and stepping back, right hand on the butt of his pistol. "Lookin' at you, I'd say one of your bum-chums."

Molars grinding together, Evron stared at the cop. "I'm not gay."

The cop gave a sharp snort. "I don't give a flying fuck, mate. Just get outta my face before I kick yours in."

Evron left. Before he did something he'd regret.

Again.

* * * * *

Standing outside the Kings Cross police station, Evron let out a long breath, dragging his hands through the scruffy brown mop that was his hair. Whoever this Balionel was, he'd taken off, leaving no number or message. Not even a Post-It with a smiley face. How the hell was Evron to buy the bloke a beer if he'd buggered off?

Anger stirred in his gut. Red and inviting.

Sucking in a deep breath, Evron counted to ten.

The slow count calmed him down. Just. It would do no good to lose his temper again tonight. He'd fucked up his life enough for one day.

A hooker strutted past, headed toward the Cross' main drag. Tall, slim, with an ass encased in skin-tight black leather and a wild mane of spun-gold hair tumbling over straight shoulders, she turned every man's head on the footpath. Including his.

Evron's cock twitched. Damn, she was hot. Hot and entirely edible. His mouth actually coated with saliva just at the sight of her. Something about her looked wrong though. Like she didn't—

A low black Porsche skidded into the gutter beside the hooker, powerful engine purring as the passenger window lowered. The blonde leaned into the window, her

magnificent ass stuck in the air, long legs growing even longer as her mini-skirt rode up high, partially revealing ass cheeks firm and toned and made for grabbing.

Scowling, Evron turned away. What was going on in his head if he thought a hooker didn't belong in the Cross? It was the country's home of sex and sin. You couldn't take ten steps without being propositioned by a hooker. Storming down the path, he headed toward the nearest pub. If he went home now, he'd only end up kicking the cat.

Okay, he didn't have a cat, but he had a nosy neighbour who did—an overfed Persian called Prince. Kicking Prince definitely fell into the “just plain stupid and mindlessly cruel” category. Besides, there was nothing waiting for him at home except some second-hand furniture and an empty fish bowl.

“Oi!” A balled fist thumped against his shoulder.

Evron turned, his scowl returning. A weedy strip-club hawker barred his path, leering at him with bloodshot eyes. “Wanna see the hottest girls in town?”

He shook his head, raising a deflective hand. “No thanks, mate. I'm right.”

“Whatayagay?” The hawker curled his lip, giving Evron's shoulder a sharp shove.

Red. Everything went red.

Blood pounding in his ears, Evron stepped forward, the crowded street around him fading away. “Touch me again, *mate*,” he growled at the offensive hawker, “and I'll break your fucking nose.”

“Oh yeah?” The weedy, smelly man poked a bony finger against Evron's chest, puffing up his own. “You and whose army?”

Deep within Evron's veins, the red beast of anger roared.

Even deeper, however, came a sense of destiny met. It was Evron's right to destroy a usurper. His right and role as king.

Evron blinked, a chill shooting up his spine. King? What the *hell*—

"Oi!" the hawker shouted, shoving at his shoulder again. "Are ya listenin' to me, poof?"

A cold smile stretched Evron's mouth. "I don't need an army, mate." His fists curled. "All I need is —"

"Honey!" A female's voice, low and husky with a soft American accent, cut across Evron's rage. "I'm here, babe."

Long fingers curled around Evron's left wrist before slipping down to force their way into his clenched fist. He turned his head, staring into the bluest eyes he'd ever seen.

In a heartbeat, every muscle and sinew in his body relaxed.

Calm. He felt calm. And —

"I'm sorry, hon." The woman's inexplicable apology took him by surprise, a slight frown creating a little line between honey-gold brows that were straight and serious. "I didn't mean to keep you waiting." She raised his hand to her mouth, pressing full lips against his flesh with gentle contact. Ribbons of bliss unfurled through his body, from hand to heart to groin. Evron gazed at the woman in silent rapture, struck dumb. Those amazing blue eyes made contact with his and a jolt of squirming anticipation shot straight to his cock. He pulled in a quick breath. *Wow*.

"Come on, babe," she murmured with a small, promising smile. "Let's go."

She took a step backward and, almost of its own accord, Evron's gaze dropped to her body. He sucked in another sharp breath.

The hooker. It was the blonde hooker he'd seen earlier. Holding his hand. Smiling at him.

"Honey?" With a gentle pressure, she tugged on his hand. "You coming?"

Without thought or deliberation, Evron followed, stepping away from the blustering hawker. The anger in his chest roared in indignation, robbed of its sustenance. Yet the sound, usually so dominant in Evron's life, was weak.

Ineffectual.

In just thirty seconds of contact, the mysterious woman had achieved something Evron thought unobtainable. She'd extinguished his burning anger.

Heart twisting, he followed her out of the ignitable situation.

Totally in love.

The pulse in Ricki's neck hammered. Christ, did it hammer.

She shot the man holding her hand a sideward glance. He walked silently beside her. Tall, dark and God-take-me-I'm-yours handsome in a brooding kind of way. The dark stubble on his square jaw did little to hide the fact he was drop-dead gorgeous. Nor did the small scar zigzagging his chiseled right cheek, just below his piercing gray eyes. In fact, if it wasn't for the cheap jeans and Reeboks rip-offs, she'd mistake him for a male model.

She was familiar with all the male models in Sydney worth a damn, however, and this simmering bundle of hotness wasn't one of them.

He was, in fact, a complete stranger to her.

So why did you just save him from a street brawl? 'Cause he's good-looking?

No. Because for some reason she *did* know him.

Every fibre in her body told her so. Thrummed to a fever pitch of familiar excitement, to be precise. A pitch she'd never experienced before but knew all the same. Which was plain lunacy, because until forty-eight hours ago she'd never set foot in Australia, let alone met someone from the country who made her feel as if she were about to erupt in a sexual geyser!

She shot him another look, nipples pinching into rock-hard points of willing flesh as her eyes met his. Goddamn she was horny. Her pussy was practically dripping. She wouldn't be surprised in the least to see a glistening line tracking their path on the

sidewalk. She'd never had this response to a man before. And if one of them didn't say something soon, she'd explode.

To hell with it.

"I'm Ric –"

"Why did y –"

With a low chuckle that made her already-eager pussy flutter some more, the man held up his free hand. "You first."

A hot pulse joined the flutter in her cunt and she hitched in a silent breath. *Oh God.* His voice sounded like smoke and whiskey. Had she thought she was horny before? Damn, she wanted to throw him against the wall and fuck him senseless. Instead, she tucked a lock of hair behind her ear, her hand shaking, the pulse in her pussy beating in time with the pulse in her neck. She was a flustered mess. And they hadn't even kissed yet.

Kissed?

She stumbled. Caught immediately by Mr. Hot-Hotter-Hottest.

Well, there goes my dignity, she thought, seconds before leaning into his body and pressing her lips to his.

Their tongues met. Fierce and savage.

Oh dear God.

He hauled her hips to his, tongue plunging into her mouth, rigid cock grinding against her crotch. She could feel its heat through the denim of his jeans and the leather of her skirt. Her heart skipped a beat. Another. Another. When he squeezed harder on her ass, her heart not only skipped a beat, it skipped a whole goddamn chorus.

Dragging his mouth from hers, his lips scorched a line up to her ear. "Tell me this is fate."

His voice sounded choked, as if he were struggling to breathe. It made her own breath quicken. He was as turned on as she was. And as mystified. "If there's another

word for it," she murmured, letting her head roll to the side so his seeking lips could caress the frantic pulse in her neck, "I don't know what it is."

He touched the tip of his tongue to her hot flesh, the simple contact making her pussy flutter again. "We need to go." His urgent whisper sounded strangled. "Somewhere. Anywhere."

He was right. If they didn't move soon, she *would* rip his clothes from his body and fuck him right there, despite still standing on the busy sidewalk with people gawking at them from every angle. The laws of Australia were completely unfamiliar to her, but she figured public fornication was a big no-no, no matter what country you were in.

She pulled in a wavering breath. Her agent probably wouldn't like it either. No doubt someone in the crowd had a camera or iPhone. All it would take was one Twitter account and bam! There would be her naked backside for all to see in glorious Technicolor...or whatever color smartphones used. How would her agent explain to the world the darling of the modeling industry being caught and charged for lewd and offensive behaviour in Kings Cross? Dressed like a cheap hooker, no less? How would he explain what she was doing when she didn't even know? "We could get a room," she managed to say. "Or my car is close by..."

Piercing gray eyes held hers and for a still moment he didn't move. All around them people jostled by, some dressed in suits, some dressed in casual wear, all laughing, swearing and having what appeared to be a good time. Three a.m. and it was only getting busier. Any second now she'd be recognized. She was surprised she hadn't been already. But Ricki didn't care. The universe had shrunk to just two life forms. Nothing but the man in front of her existed.

He dropped his head, placing his mouth to her ear. "I will follow you to the end of time."

And with that answer, Beatrice "Ricki" Whatley, the world's highest-paid model, fell in love.

* * * * *

Shahla watched the old man wheeze and cough. A frail, bony hand reached for the emergency call button, arthritic knuckles swollen, skin as dry as ancient parchment. Watery blue eyes, clouded with cataracts, rolled in agony as another attack on his heart left him gasping. His fingers flailed about in the air, seeking the alarm that would bring the nurse. Watching his dying struggles, Shahla let her lips curl in a cruel smile. Very soon it would be time to find the new Custodian.

A sharp buzz shattered the air and Shahla's smile vanished, her glare locking on the soft light flashing into life above the old man's head.

God! He'd reached the call button.

A short, round nurse hurried into the room, her expression poised, her movements cool and efficient. Only the best money could buy for the dying billionaire.

With a snarl, Shahla faded from the old man's conscience. It appeared as if the wait for the next Custodian would continue a while longer. But she knew who he was and she knew his anger was all-consuming.

Just the way she liked it.

Chapter Two

The drive to Evron's house was silent, unlawful and torturous. Neither he nor the stunning creature beside him spoke, perhaps still too rocked by the force of their meeting, perhaps too scared to break whatever mystical force had brought about its occurrence. The woman's car—a bright red rental compact complete with yellow-and-black label still stuck to the dash—moved through the dark streets of Sydney at a speed way beyond the posted limit. If the cops nabbed them they'd *both* end up in jail. She for driving like a maniac, he for finger-fucking her as she drove.

His cock, longer and harder than it'd ever been, ached, scalding blood pumping through its length. If it weren't for his jeans, it would be a pulsating poker pointing straight up. Christ, he was in agony.

And it felt wonderful.

He wiggled the three fingers of his right hand again, index seeking the sweetest spot within her sex. The woman's sodden pussy contracted and a swift gasp slipped past her lips. Shifting back to fourth gear, she flung them around a corner into a dark, narrow alley and hit the brakes, screeching to a stop under a flickering street light.

She stared out the windscreen, hips rocking slowly back and forth. "I can't wait."

Her blunt proclamation sent a surge of heat straight to Evron's cock and he moaned. "Neither can I."

In the span of a heartbeat, her hands jerked at his belt and yanked down his fly. His straining cock sprung free, the cool breeze of the air-conditioner biting at its fevered flesh. Yet before he could shiver, full, soft lips wrapped around its throbbing length and ecstasy flooded through him.

"Oh God Almighty." The words were almost lost in his groan, a groan that grew raw when long, sure fingers slipped around his balls. Ramming his head back against

the car's headrest, Evron stared at the roof, blood roaring in his ears. The warm, wet cavity surrounding his cock slid up and down, teeth and tongue teasing the glans just below the head until he was on fire. "Goddamn it!" he rasped, teeth clenched. "If you don't stop..."

Evron felt the woman smile.

And then her tongue curled around the base of his cock and licked at his balls.

It was too much. Utter bliss pervaded his body. Hot, squirming and alive. In spurts of jolting pleasure, he came. Eyes closed, heart pounding. "Holy fucking Christ!"

Still she didn't stop. Her mouth worked at his pulsating shaft, sucking its length, teasing its head. He writhed in the seat, one hand fisted in her glorious, silken mane, the other thrusting harder against her wet, creamy sex. Slurping sounds filled the car's cab, from her talented mouth and her sodden pussy.

Unbelievably, his spent cock began to stiffen. Barely minutes after erupting, his balls were swollen, heavy and ready to burst again. *God, how can she do this to me?*

He didn't know.

Fate.

The word whispered through his mind like pure light. Undeniable and serene. He pressed his palm to the exquisite curve of her spine. "Come up." The words fell from his lips in a ragged breath. Hell, he didn't believe it was possible to feel like this, as if he'd been turned into a being of concentrated pleasure. He wanted the woman responsible to experience that same rapture. "I want to..."

He didn't need to finish. Blue eyes flashing, the woman lifted her head. For a brief moment her honey-blond hair seemed to blaze with red fire, and then the illusion vanished. A small smile played at the corners of her mouth. "Do you have...?" She let the question dangle, the smile on her lips cheeky.

Without further provoking, knowing exactly what she was asking for, Evron dug his wallet from his back pocket and fumbled out a condom.

"Hmm, perfect." She took the small foil square in one hand as she reached over his lap with the other, her hand slipping down beside his seat. "Let's get more comfortable, shall we?" Her shoulder bunched and, with a sharp upward tug, she pulled on the release and dropped his seat flat.

Long legs straddled him before he had the chance to react, negotiating the handbrake and gear knob with ease. Gaze holding his, she brought the condom packet to her mouth and tore it open with her teeth, slipping the small circle of latex from its packaging. Wordlessly, she slid the slick sheath over his erection, his muscles coiling in anticipation as her fingers stroked his hard length. Despite being cramped in the confines of the car, she moved with a fluid grace that made his already straining cock twitch with eager interest and his breath grow more ragged. Goddamn, he was going to asphyxiate with raw lust and he didn't even know who she was.

Doesn't matter.

It did. A distant part of his brain—the rational part so often strangled by his rage—told him it did matter. He looked up at her, his pulse slamming against his neck, his hands automatically going to her hips.

Ask her name. Before she —

She positioned herself over his lap, stared him straight in the eye and impaled herself on his cock.

Tight, wet sex clamped around his organ. So hard and fast it almost blew his mind. Again. He gazed into her eyes, his balls throbbing, his breath beyond ragged. Fuck, he sounded as if he were hyperventilating. "Tell me your name."

Blue, blue eyes gazed back at him as her lips parted in a soft pant. Rolling her hips, she took him even deeper into her creamy passage. "Ricki."

Evron leaned forward and placed his lips against the smooth column of her neck, tasting her sweat on his tongue. Ricki. The name of his...

Fate.

The single word filled his head again, like a beam of light in a thunderous storm.

He pulled in a breath, tasting her on the air, smelling her on his skin, his every sense tuned in to the beautiful creature on his lap. *His* beautiful creature. His fate. He pulled away from her neck and stared up into her face, his blood roaring in his ears, his chest squeezing with absolute conviction. "Marry me, Ricki."

Ricki's heart stopped.

Marry? She gazed into the man's direct eyes, seeing passion and honesty in their silvery depths. Deep within the folds of her sex, his strong, engorged cock throbbed in perfect rhythm with her heart. She'd never believed in psychics and all that shit, but something about that synchronized beat—powerful, undeniable and harmonious—sent a shiver straight up her spine. Something about it was right. Not just on a carnal level, but on an elemental one too. Like it was the heartbeat of Earth. Of existence itself. Her nipples pinched into aching little nubs of flesh, rubbing against the material of the ridiculous boob tube she wore. Another shiver rippled up her back. *Marry him? I don't even know his name.*

Does it matter?

With one steady hand, she lifted his right hand from her hip and placed his palm on her heart. A jolt of joyous anticipation shot through her at the contact and she leaned forward, brushing his lips with hers. "Yes," she whispered.

The simple word charged them both. Their tongues clashed, teeth clicking together as passion consumed them. Ricki's blood burned as it ripped through her veins, the very air she breathed blistering her lungs. Impatient for skin-on-skin contact, she grabbed at his shirt and tore it open, pressing her hands to his smooth chest before seeking his nipples with her nails. A groan rumbled low in his throat and she caught it with her mouth, drinking from his lips like a woman parched.

Oh God!

His flesh radiated heat, almost branding her palms. It wasn't enough. Not wanting to break the hungry contact of their lips but unable to deny herself any longer, she

wrenched away and swiftly—savagely—stripped the boob tube over her head. Her breasts fell free, nipples tight and aching for his touch. She didn't have long to wait. Before the skimpy strip of material hit the dash, his mouth and fingers closed around the puckered nubs.

Bolts of raw sensation shot through her. Planting her feet on either side of the passenger seat, she writhed slowly, working his cock deeper into her channel. Wanting to feel every scalding inch of the massive organ within her sex. Even in the confines of the car, their connection felt sublime. What should have been awkward wasn't. What should have been cumbersome, comical, was sublime and sincere.

A soft breeze played over her ear and for a moment Ricki thought she heard a word on its caress. *Fate*.

Joy filled her soul and she turned her head to see who was at the car's window. To see who whispered that wonderful word...

Just as her lover dragged one strong hand down her back and buried long, seeking fingers between the cheeks of her ass.

She gasped, her sex squeezing tight as the tip of one finger pressed against the tight hole of her sphincter. Fear flooded her, followed by pleasure so pure and intense she forgot to draw breath. "Oh God!"

There was no invasion, just a firm pressure that turned into a steady rhythm as the mounting heat in her cunt swelled beyond containment. The same rhythm as her heartbeat. Perfect harmony. Undeniable synergy.

The cock inside her continued to work its magic, pumping deeper, deeper, its swollen heat stroking at the walls of her sheath with building force, sending her pulse racing and her mind soaring. Soaring, soaring, until she felt it—a squirming, twisting pressure igniting in the very centre of her sex. A heat that rivaled the hottest summer day, inching and worming until even the soles of her feet began to tingle in exquisite tension.

Just when she thought she was about to be engulfed in the inferno, the hand on her ass grew fiercely still. As if he were holding her frozen in time.

"I can't hold on any longer!" The ground-out admission fanned her breast in a hot pant. Lips that had so masterfully turned her nipple into a throbbing tip of concentrated pleasure dragged up to her jaw, her chin. A ragged breath was pulled through flaring nostrils. "God help me, Ricki," he moaned, mouth but a fraction from hers. "You feel so good, I can't hold on anymore."

The hoarse declaration pushed her over the edge. Or was it the raw desire in his blazing eyes? Ricki didn't know and she didn't care.

Her cunt clamped around his cock and, as his seed filled her sex in violent spasms, she came in an eruption of scalding shudders.

Beyond rational thought, beyond *any* thought, she threw back her head, crying out the first thing that came to her mind. A name. *The* name. The name of her future. Her fate.

"Evron!" A ripple of blistering release ripped through her very being and, throat stripped raw, heart pounding, she cried out again. "Oh God, Evron! Yes!"

* * * * *

The old man turned his head on the pillow, the smell of starch and disinfectant stinging his ailing sinuses. A very faint, very weak laugh slipped past his lips, humourless and drier than dust. His eyes gazed with blank focus at the far window of his bedroom, his mind remembering the view beyond. A view he had not seen in many, many months. He laughed again, the sound weaker still. Barely more than a hitched breath. "I've always hated you."

Outside, the lights of Park Avenue twinkled in the drifting snow but he didn't see them. He was alone. But not alone. He hadn't been alone since the bitch turned up and he'd come to suspect she'd been with him long before she'd made her presence known. She had, after all, been in the family since the beginning of time.

A ghost of a memory flitted through his head—his father's death, so many decades ago. Finally, with the burning stench of Hell filling his own breath, he understood the man's dying words. Understood them all too well. *The beauty of the sculpture is just another way of keeping the shit hidden.*

She was the shit, this she-Daemon whore. The shit *and* the god-forsaken sculpture. And the artist had been killed long ago.

Now, now, the bitch pouted, pitch-black eyes devious. *That's no way to talk to your lover.*

The words—disembodied and soulless—filled his existence. Insidious. Omnipresent.

Inescapable.

"You've never been my lover." He squeezed out the statement in a rasping gasp. He stared at the wall, seeing only her. "Just some cow with a bad fucking case of PMS who doesn't understand the word 'no'."

Ouzgal. The purred insult sliced his thin skin like razors, and for perhaps the thousandth time he looked for wounds that weren't there. Long, tapered fingers brushed up his bony thigh, scorching a trail of pain over his flesh regardless of the sheets and blankets covering him. *I've always been your lover. From the second you existed in the pus-filled pit that was your slut mother's womb.* Those fingers, tipped with talons the colour of blood, snicked over the length of his flaccid dick and, with a jolt of blistering pain, he had an erection. Large. Throbbing.

Pleasure rent his being, empty and despicable. He groaned, hating himself, hating her. Wanting more.

A smile curled the sides of her lips. A smile of death and damnation. *You see? Your mouth says no but your body has always said yes. Lust. Such a weakness in humans. It controls you. Owns you. A sin I almost admire. Yet it doesn't have the strength of anger. Nor the visual flare.* Fine nostrils flared with a low snort. *But it does have its uses. It makes your prick stand up. And it's with this very thing,* she tugged on his raging hard-on, black eyes glinting

with malicious glee, *you created my next lover*. She dug those blood-red talons into his pulsating, straining cock and another tearing surge of vile rapture possessed him. “The next Custodian,” she murmured aloud. “The one you didn’t even know existed. I’ll give him your regards, shall I?”

Pain ripped at his heart but instead of grimacing, instead of screaming in futile rage, he began to laugh. “You’ll have to wait awhile, bitch.” He wheezed, a choked gasp of empty mirth, enjoying the fury distorting her face even as his chest felt as if it were about to explode. “‘Cause I’m not going anywhere yet.”

* * * * *

“I’ve met someone.”

“I don’t care.”

Evron screwed up his face. So it was going to be like this, was it? He’d hoped Nick had cooled off a bit from their disagreement by now. *He* was the one who had the temper after all, not his best mate.

Switching the phone to the other ear, he cast a long look at Ricki.

He’d spent the last forty minutes watching her sleep, drinking in the sight of her perfection, wondering how he’d found an angel in a place so depraved as Kings Cross. He knew he was dangerously close to freefalling off the fine line between romantic and cliché but bloody hell, he couldn’t help it. Whoever his fiancée was, she brought out the poet in him—as corny as that hack poet was. He’d left the room only once, risking the five minutes of separation it took to grab a sketchbook and a charcoal stick. Thirty-five minutes later and he had a collection of images all capturing Ricki’s resting perfection. He may have lost his job as a graphic artist sixteen hours ago, but that didn’t stop him from wanting to create beauty on paper.

He cast a look at the last sketch still attached to the sketchbook, admiring its sensual lines. The soft black charcoal had captured them all so well. Full breasts nestled in the crook of her arm as she slept on her side, the gentle curve of her hip as it became her

slim waist, the tumble of her golden-silk hair fanning over his pillow. Lifting his eyes from the sketch, he lost his breath at the reality. God, he would never get enough of looking at her.

His cock twitched but, with a struggle greater than that required to turn the tide, he looked away. A dull buzz sounded up the phone line, telling him clearly Nick hadn't disconnected. His best friend waited for him. Silent. Hardly encouraging him, but there all the same. It was a start.

Evron screwed up his face again. Apologies weren't his thing. Or at least, they hadn't been. He shot a quick glance at the sleeping woman on his bed. What he didn't know about her could fill the Sydney Opera House ten times over, but one thing was for sure, since they'd first met, the red beast in his blood was quiet. Sleeping as deeply as she?

He let out a short sigh, dragging his free hand through his hair as he lifted the mouthpiece past his chin. "I'm sorry, mate." The apology slipped past his lips with uncharacteristic ease and—surprise, surprise—he didn't spontaneously combust on the spot. "I fucked up. You're not a no-talent hack."

There was a heavy pause from the other end, finally broken by a sharp exhalation of breath. "You're not getting your job back, Evron." Despite the blunt statement, Nick's voice sounded a little kinder. "I've already hired Flip Pascoe."

Who does he think he is? The question rumbled through Evron's head in a roaring snarl, deep, low and somehow consuming. *Destroy him!* A sudden surge of disgusted anger slammed through his chest. Powerful. Potent. Alluring.

Evron blinked and the voice vanished. As did his crushing rage. Just like that. He blinked again, casting Ricki a quick look. Had it really been there? Surely not? He returned his attention to the phone in his hand, his heart beating a little harder than it should. "Good for you, Nick." He nodded, letting his friend hear his smile. "Flip's a creative genius. He'll bring a helluva lot of new clients to the studio."

Stunned silence filled the line and Evron laughed. He could practically see Nick, mouth agape, staring at the phone in his hand.

"Who the hell am I talkin' to and what have you done with Evron McKenzie?"

Evron laughed again. "I told you, Nick. I've met someone."

His friend snorted down the line. "Who the hell is she? A miracle worker?"

"Funny," Evron said. "I ring to pour my heart out and you make jokes at my expense."

"Yeah, yeah. You deserve worse." Nick's truthful statement made Evron grin. "Give me the details. Name?"

"Ricki."

"Ricki what?"

Evron opened his mouth. Then stopped. He didn't know.

"Evron?" Nick prodded. "Is it a tricky question?"

Actually, Nick, it is a bloody tricky question.

Raking a hand through his already-messy hair, Evron shot the sleeping woman on his bed another look. "Ahhhh," he said into the phone, trying to ignore a heated twitch in his gut and chest. He wasn't going to get angry. It wasn't Nick's fault he felt a bit foolish. "Just give me a sec, mate. I'll call you back."

"You'll *what*?" Nick's incredulous shock blasted Evron's eardrum. "How fuckin' long have you known this bird?"

"Long enough to know she's the one," Evron replied before disconnecting. Nick *could* wait for the answer. *He*, on the other hand, couldn't.

He crossed to the bed, studying the woman stretched out there.

Did he wake her? They'd both been quite vocal during the last two hours, but screams of "Oh God", "Yes, yes, *yes!*" and "Harder! Don't stop!" shed little light on who she was. He suppressed a sigh. Something seriously strange had happened to them both tonight. It was in Ricki's eyes every time they made contact with his. He couldn't

explain it, but there was no way he could deny it either. Didn't want to deny it. If God or Buddha or whoever the hell it was pulling the strings decided he was to be with this woman, who was he to argue? Shit, if it were the fucking Vulcans he'd give them the proper split-fingered salute, say "Live long and prosper" and offer to buy them a beer.

But that still didn't give him a name. And, despite his heart being no longer his, he wanted a name. The call to Nick had brought him, albeit reluctantly, back down to earth. He needed a name.

As if she knew he wanted to talk, Ricki stirred. For a brief moment the hairs on Evron's arms prickled. How *did* she know? Just what *was* going on between them? A soft moan slipped from her lips and with the provocative sound, a sudden realization dawned on Evron. Clear, sharp and...disquieting.

He'd never told her his name, yet she'd screamed it more than once. The first time back in the car after only knowing him for thirty-odd minutes.

Evron's chest grew tight and a heavy knot filled his gut. But then Ricki rolled onto her back, arching her spine in a languid stretch, the perfect swell of her breasts shoving upward as she did so, and the unsettling thought vanished. Replaced by an entirely different thought and an entirely different tension in an entirely different body part.

Sapphire-blue eyes gazed at him from behind lowered lids and a sleepy smile curled her full lips. "Hey there, you."

He smiled, his head swimming with giddy joy for a wonderfully surreal moment. "G'day."

She stretched again, long, long legs reaching past the edge of the bed, toes wriggling on the end of slender feet. "I love hearing you talk." She folded her arms under her head and grinned up at him. "You sound so Australian."

Evron grinned back. "And you sound so American."

Slipping her hands from behind her hair, she reached out for his thighs. Slender fingers danced from knee to hip joint and Evron sucked in a sharp breath. His cock had

sprung to attention the second he turned from the phone and his body was sending him orders he desperately wanted to obey. But he couldn't. Not yet. Not until he had —

Total domination.

Evron blinked. "Huh?"

"You want answers." Ricki's husky voice slipped through his confusion, faint and almost inaudible. "How I knew your name, who the hell I am. Where we're going for our honeymoon, those sorts of things."

A chill rippled up Evron's spine and his scalp crawled with prickling unease. What the hell was going on in his head? Who the fuck —

Later.

"Later." Ricki echoed the strangely compelling voice in his head and he turned to her, feeling...not altogether in control. Her grin grew dirty. "After." Soft fingertips brushed his thigh, just below the heavy swell of his balls, and the strange fog rolling over him evaporated. He looked down at her and fell into the fathomless sapphire depths of her eyes.

Ricki's teasing fingers stopped skirting his balls, her hand taking possession of them with firm pressure.

Evron's head swam and his eyes closed for a second. He should stop her. He needed to ask some questions before he lost himself in her again. If nothing else, he needed to know her last name.

"Whatley," she whispered.

Another chill rippled up his spine—*Whatley? Is that her last name? How did she know?* — but before he could react, she was on her knees, her warm hands fondling his testicles, her even warmer breath caressing his cock. Soft, wet lips closed around the aching shaft and she sucked its length deep into the warm well of her mouth with such slow perfection, his legs almost collapsed.

"Goddamn it!" he ground out, tangling his fingers in the silky golden strands of her hair.

She wrapped her hot tongue around his ramrod length, sliding her mouth up and down, sucking in gentle, steady pulses, nipping with her teeth in all the right places.

"Fuck!" he groaned, legs wobbling. Holy hell, he wanted to pump his seed into her mouth. If she didn't stop soon, that's exactly what he'd do. Fill her mouth until his cum dribbled past her lips and glistened on her chin.

The thought sent eager blood surging through his veins. Or was it the way her tongue flicked over the little knot of flesh beneath the head of his cock?

"Fuck," he repeated, this time on a ragged breath.

The fingers on his balls moved to his ass, squeezing with the same even beat as her mouth, her fingertips sinfully, tauntingly close to his back entrance. Just when he thought he was going to erupt, when the liquid inferno roaring through him became too much to withstand, she pulled away. Cool air wrapped around his wet cock, rippling his flesh into goose bumps, and he growled in raw protest.

Before he could move, however, before he could ask what was wrong, what she was doing, her warm body pressed against his and her hands buried in his nape. Clear blue eyes stared straight into his. "We both know this is not normal, Evron, but I don't care. Not one little bit. Do you?"

He shook his head, unable to voice anything but the truth. "No."

She gave him a small grin. "Good." Tugging his head lower, she brushed his lips with hers. "Now here's a little tidbit for you. I'm twenty-five years old."

The tip of her tongue flicked at the corner of Evron's mouth, tickling and delicious. He closed his eyes, enjoying the delicate contact as his own age formed in his throat. "Thirty-six."

"Aaah." She slipped her fingers to his hard-on. "A dirty old man." Nails traced a slow line from the base of his cock up to its swollen head. The throbbing organ

twitched, greedy for more, and he suppressed a shiver. The desire to sink it into the slick folds of her sex was becoming paramount. Bordering on imperative. He hooked his hands around her hips and yanked them to his.

He grinned down at her, letting his hungry lust show in his eyes. "I'm not that old," he growled, seconds before crushing her lips with his. The kiss was fierce. His tongue plunged into her mouth, plundering its sweet, wet well with savage intensity. Claiming it as his. Possessing it.

Ricki whimpered, her response equal in its savagery. Her teeth sank into his bottom lip, her tongue whipped against his. When her fingernails scored a slicing path up his chest he pulled back, wincing in pain even as his blood boiled with rapture. A very low, very mischievous chuckle bubbled up through her throat. "Touchy."

Evron slid his hands from her hips to her breasts, cupping a heavy swell of flesh in each palm. He cocked an eyebrow. "Any time you want." With a quick grin, he pushed.

Ricki tumbled backward onto the mattress, a wicked chuckle filling the room as Evron followed and pinned her to the bed. His cock pressed against the warm junction of her thighs, aching to delve into her depths. He gazed down at her, feeling her breath on his face. "My favourite colour is red," he stated, dropping his head closer to hers.

Like the colour of my hair?

The voice whispered through his head. Harsh. Cruel. There and gone before he could even react.

Ricki wriggled underneath him, yanking his attention back to her. Her hips rolled until the head of his cock pressed against her velvety outer lips. "Red?" She shook her head, nails sinking into his ass cheeks as she spread her thighs wider. "Too angry. Blue's nicer."

The folds of her pussy opened to him. He pushed his hips forward—a fraction—watching her eyes flutter closed as his cock breached those satiny lips. "I hate *The Godfather*."

Neck arched, hips rising, Ricki pulled in a slow breath. "Me too. Love the sequel though."

Skin slick with sweat, Evron placed the tip of his tongue to the small dip at the base of her throat. He took a breath through open lips, tasting and smelling the beautiful creature now in possession of his heart. Salt infused with delicate flowers. "No family," he offered, voice shaky.

"One brother," she moaned. "And a bossy mom."

He lifted his hips, pulling away from her pussy just a fraction, delighted by her protesting groan. Gazing down, his eyes roamed her perfection, from the fine point of her chin to the sheer beauty of her dusky pink nipples. "Don't like cats." God, he was close to the brink. So bloody close...

With a forceful shove of her hips, she ground her sodden cunt against his burning cock, pushing him over the edge. "Who does?"

Chapter Three

Shahla narrowed her eyes. Who would have thought he was this strong?

The old man coughed and wheezed, rheumy eyes gazing at nothing. Not even her. It was close. Just a breath away. Just another beat of a tired, stressed heart. All it needed was one more *push*. Like a wisp of smoke, she threaded into his mind. Filaments of clinging anger and fury. Wrath. Beautiful, inescapable wrath. *Are you listening to me, old man?* She placed the question directly into his cerebral cortex, enjoying the flinching sensation that rippled through the gray lump of his brain at the scalding contact.

His dry, wrinkled throat worked up and down. "Yes."

She sent waves of incensed disgust into his brain, infusing serotonin into his system, vile intolerance into his temporal lobe. Chaos was a divine existence and the old man had known it for most of his life, ever since his father had touched the sculpture. It was time to reacquaint him with its beauty.

Even in death, you are a failure. She placed the statement directly into his head. *A disgrace. No matter how hard you sought to deny me, I always defeated you. A disgraceful failure who couldn't even find his soul mate. And you are alone now. Just a breath away from death and not a living soul or loved one to hold your hand.*

Fading back, she waited for the explosion. Of his emotions and his heart.

"I may not have found my Twin Heart, Shahla," the dying billionaire mumbled, "but I still gave you the biggest battle you've ever known."

True, Shahla gave him, gouging into his brain with razor slices of hot pain. But did you believe, even if you had found your Twin Heart, she would be capable of saving you from me? I mean, really, as if one lowly human could give anyone the power to defeat me. The one "fated mate" of my Custodian is just as big a myth as unconditional love. A notion evolved from the desperate minds of Custodians past, foolish enough to believe they had a hope of resisting

their blood-born role as my property. She stroked at his mind with filaments of concentrated contempt. *And you know it, old man, so stop being so pathetic.*

A scratchy rattle slipped through his lips. A laugh. Low...and free of fury. "I know what you want, Daemon," he mouthed, voice no more than a husky whisper. "But you can't make me angry anymore." Formless, wrinkled lips stretched into a smile. "You'll have to wait a while longer before destroying another life."

Shahla hissed. Molten rage tore through her. A blast of hatred hotter than Lucifer's blood rocked the room, lifting the dying billionaire from the bed in a tortured arc. The walls vibrated. Earth shuddered on its axis. For a fraction of eternity, existence wilted, whimpered and cowered.

And then she smiled.

I don't think so, old man. She sent a caress through the gasping man's limbs, curling a warm lick of pressure around his testicles. His heart—that weakest of human muscles—leapt into a frenzied beat, and her smile grew wider. *I'm over waiting.*

* * * * *

Holy crap! His cock barely brushed her labia and she was ready to come!

Ricki arched, fisting her hands in Evron's hair as his lips scorched a line from her jaw to her breast. Currents of sizzling heat radiated through her body, flooding her sex with wet pleasure. His mouth trailed across the swell of one breast, coming tantalizingly close to its straining nipple, teasing the puckered peak with a breath before moving to the other. God, she'd never wanted a man to suckle on her breasts so badly. The mere thought of Evron's tongue on her nipples sent waves of heat rolling to her core.

With a savage tug she directed his mouth where she wanted it.

"Suck," she ordered. "Hard. Now."

Warm, wet lips closed around the aching tip and she hissed in a breath as Evron's teeth nipped at it. Again. Again. Stabs of succulent pleasure shot into her centre with

every bite, hot, squirming and delicious. She pressed his head harder to her flesh, never wanting the sharp pain of his teeth and the exquisite ecstasy of his tongue to stop.

“Oh God.” The moan was low and raw as it slipped from her lips. “Evron, don’t stop.”

The suction on her nipple increased, almost pushing her over the edge. She writhed underneath him. Craving release. Hungering for more. A hand dragged down her body, seeking the damp heat between her thighs. Finding it with fingers both sure and steady. Concentrated pleasure ripped through her body, the little nub of flesh hidden in the folds of her sex a beacon for his fingers. He rolled her clit between thumb and index and her body ignited, flooding liquid heat, consumed by wanton desire. “*God almighty!*” She rammed her head back into the mattress, rolling it from side to side. Like the sustained note of a violin, her body thrummed, so close to eruption yet held in masterful control. “*Oh Evron, please. Please!*”

Evron played the tiny button of her clit like a maestro, summoning the waves of scorching tension rolling through her into a crescendo of rapture that drowned out all thought and destroyed all control. When one long finger slipped into the well of her pussy, curling and wriggling until it hit the sweetest spot of all, Ricki screamed, jerking against his hand even as he continued to suckle on her breast.

She opened her eyes, staring at the ceiling without really seeing it, its cracks and shadows unfamiliar to her. It didn’t matter. Only the man between her legs existed. The man at her breast. The man in charge of her senses. “Evron.” Her moan vibrated up her chest and she pressed her pussy harder to his hand. Pulses swept through her. Pulses of wet heat slicking her thighs with the fragrant juices of her orgasm. “Oh God, Evron, thank you.”

The mouth at her breast dragged away and a low groan tore from Evron’s throat, as if breaking the contact caused him physical pain. He gazed down at her, nostrils flaring with each ragged breath he pulled. “I’m not finished yet, babe,” he whispered with a

slight shake of his head. And to prove his words, he returned his lips to her body, scoring a burning path down her torso to plunder her cunt with his tongue.

He slathered at her throbbing clit, teasing it with the edge of his teeth. Ricki sucked in a swift hiss, feeling the echo of her orgasm swell and grow. Barely a heartbeat later it returned and she dangled on the edge once more. *Oh God, who is this man? And how can he make me feel sooo fucking good?*

Evron's hands — those talented, amazing hands — skimmed over her sweat-slickened flesh to cup and squeeze her breasts, long fingers pinching the nipples until all coherent thought vanished. Moans of hungry desire hummed low in her throat. Vibrated down through her body to bury deep in her clenching pussy, joining his lashing tongue in its pursuit of sweet, continued eruption. Orgasm after orgasm crashed over her. She was no longer human, no longer a person. She was a charged entity of sensual power and she reveled in its force.

When she truly believed she could take no more, when her body trembled on the verge of physical and emotional meltdown, Evron lifted his head and blew a gentle stream of cool air on her sopping, molten sex. "I have never been this happy." His murmur was low, his voice thick with emotion. Intense gray eyes burned into hers as he rose to his knees and crawled up the length of her body. "Ever."

"Me neither," Ricki answered on a sigh, spasms of clenching heat still pulsing through her core. A soft smile pulled at her lips as his head drew level with hers. "And I still don't know your last name."

Evron's returning smile made her heart flutter. "McKenzie. Evron McKenzie." He brushed a teasing kiss across her lips and settled his hips against hers. "Welcome to Australia."

And then, with a smooth but savage thrust, he buried himself to the balls in her heat.

Had she really thought her body consumed by pleasure before?

Control deserted her. Arching her back, she thrashed her head from side to side. "God! God! Oh GOD!"

Evron's hands curled around her shoulders. He pulled her harder, harder into his savage thrusts. She wrapped her thighs around his hips, locking her ankles behind his back to bring him even closer. Sweat dripped from their bodies. The air smelled of sex and passion. With every penetration a growl, fierce and carnal, sounded in Evron's throat, adding ripples of fevered excitement to Ricki's already euphoric state. His breaths grew harsh, shallow. She felt his heart hammering in his chest, thumping against her breast like the powerful blow from a sledgehammer. It was wild. Unlike anything she'd experienced before. Not even flesh seemed to stand between the joining of their bodies.

Blazing eyes locked on hers, so intense they bored into her very soul. For a split second Ricki swore they shimmered to black. His body snapped still, heart beating harder, harder. So hard it felt as if it were about to burst. And then with a violent shudder his hips jerked one final time, pumping hot seed into her wet, wet cunt. He threw back his head, letting out a hoarse cry, the raw sound of pleasure joined immediately by Ricki's screams as her own climax pushed her over the edge...

And she fell into the sweetest abyss imaginable.

* * * * *

England, 1606

The playwright stood at the back of the theatre, arms crossed over his chest, balls throbbing with furious hunger. He watched the players move on the stage, speaking the words he'd scrawled on parchment only this morning. Angry words. Words of betrayed love and shattered dreams. He understood them well. He *felt* them all the way to his tarnished soul.

Whose dreams have been shattered, William? The husky female whisper caressed his mind, insidious and seductive. *Surely not thine? You are the toast of Britain. Women lust for*

a tumble between your sheets, men ache for a nod of your head, royalty crave for an acknowledgement of their worth in every scene you create. The whisper became a feathery caress on his groin, invisible fingers stroking his balls until his head spun and his breath grew short. Everything you longed for, William. Everything deserving of a Custodian.

A smile pulled at William's lips, bleak and cold. "Ah, but are they my scenes, Daemon, or scenes of Hell you placed in my head?"

The fingers on his groin stilled, holding his sac in a perilously menacing grip. *Did you not hunger for success, William? Did you not crave recognition and value? Until you touched my form, you were but a poor poet longing for a life beyond his talent. Unmarried, unwanted, unknown. The grip grew tighter, squeezing. Did I not give you everything you wanted? A rich wife, a child, fame and respect? Everything and more?*

William watched the players—*his* players—move across the stage, the boy cast as Cordelia flowing with feminine grace, his eyes and expression projecting the mounting terror of the tormented heroine. The play would open this evening, by Queen Elizabeth's royal command, and William knew it would be met with the usual fanfare and adulation now synonymous with a Shakespeare production. His play would be adored, his reputation would be heightened, and he would take his pick of any one of the young things with smooth skin and tight buttocks who willingly offered themselves after the curtain fell.

All thanks to me, William.

The whisper in his mind thrummed with triumph. He ground his teeth, his balls aching, his prick stiff and hot with blood. Shahla was correct. Until he'd placed his hands on the Daemon Form, he'd struggled to survive on the pittance he made writing poems. When the sculpture appeared in the hovel he called home, he hadn't eaten for days. And then, the whispers started in his head, each one feeding his desires, each one nourishing the anger he'd kept imprisoned in his soul. The whispers fed his longing for success and the fingers he couldn't see fed his hunger for the dark depravity he'd kept

locked away with his anger. The Daemon Form stroked him, spoke to him, every moment of every day until no matter how hard he tried, he could resist her no more.

Shahla's fingers skimmed up the length of his rigid prick. *I have been thinking, William*, she murmured, and he suppressed a shiver, fighting to close his mind to the feel of her hot lips on his flesh. *I do not like the ending to this play. I do not like that Cordelia survives.*

He ground his teeth again. "Such the pity, Daemon. But I will not change it this time. You made me kill Juliet, you made me strangle Desdemona, you made me drown Ophelia but I will not end Cordelia's life, no matter what you do to me."

A deep, throaty laugh bubbled through his head as the fingers on his shaft turned into a firm fist. *Even if I take it away?* The fist pumped his length once and a galaxy of black heat swirled through his mind, delicious and excruciating at once. *Even if I take it all away? Every fawning peasant, every licentious slut, every slathering member of court?*

Shahla's fist pumped his erection again, brutal and vicious, and he could not suppress the moan of hideous pleasure slipping past his lips. *You will keep your pathetic happy-ever-after at the cost of your fame and success, William?* she whispered, lips burning his cheek, fingers working his prick. *You know I can take it away. Is the happiness of a character born in your head more important to you than the happiness of the one who gave you everything you ever, ever wanted? Is it?*

William stared at the players on the stage before him, his words flowing from their tongues, speaking of broken dreams and shattered lives. A message he understood all too well.

Is it, William? Shahla murmured, her lips on his ear, her hand on his groin. *Because if you want none of this fame, none of this life of success and riches, I can take it away. Just have your happy-ever-after, and your life returns to what it once was. You return to what you once were.* Her hot lips branded his throat, his chest, his stomach. *A pathetic excuse. A failure. Worthless and forgotten.* Her whispers sounded in his mind even as her mouth found his cock, her threat wrapping around his heart even as her lips slid over his prick.

Or you can change the ending to this play and keep the ending to your life just as it is meant to be, the ending worthy of my Custodian. He could feel her smug smile even as she drew his prick deep into her mouth. *What will it be, William? What ending do you choose?*

William ground his teeth once more and unfolded his arms, pressing his fists to his hips. "I have changed my mind," he called, his voice halting the players on the stage. They turned to stare at him, silent and frozen with expectation. "I think the play will have more resonance if Cordelia dies."

His players gaped at him, stunned, and he turned from them, his gut churning.

Very good, Custodian. Shahla chuckled, stroking his erection with firm promise. *Very wise.*

William Shakespeare closed his eyes and gave himself over to the dark lust consuming him, hating himself, hating the Daemon who knew him so well. So, this was the price of success? May he rot in Hell.

* * * * *

A bell chimed in the sweet void. Gentle and melodic and drilling.

Fighting with the sweet embrace of sleep, Evron dragged himself awake, biting back a silent curse. Who the hell was ringing the doorbell at—he shot the alarm clock a quick look—four o'clock in the fucking a.m.?

Ricki lay curled in his arms, breath regular, sublime body warm and still. Sleep had settled over her almost immediately after their last explosive orgasms, eyes drifting closed as she snuggled into his chest, a small smile playing over her lips as she murmured, "I love you," in a husky, drowsy voice.

He'd lain beside her, breathing in the musky scent lingering on her skin, wanting nothing more than to hold her forever.

The doorbell rang again, and for a stupid moment Evron almost believed the synthesized tones sounded impatient.

Stumbling from the bed, he crossed the room, collecting his discarded jeans as he went. A soft whimper behind him made him pause, the rustle of sheets turning his head. Ricki stretched on the mattress, gloriously naked body wriggling onto the space he'd just vacated. God, she was beautiful. Beautiful and his. Forever. A sleepy smile on his face, he turned and staggered down the stairs, the faint glow from an outside streetlight casting the hallway in long, reaching shadows.

The doorbell rang again.

"Yeah, yeah," Evron muttered, zipping his fly up over his cock. "Keep your pants on. I'm coming."

The front door loomed before him, the fuzzy silhouette of someone tall and thin visible through its glass panel. Whoever it was, their hand was reaching for the doorbell again.

"What's the hurry?" He yanked open the door, glare firmly in place. "Someone die?"

"As a matter of fact, Mr. McKenzie..." A man in a black pinstripe suit stood on the other side, lips stretching into an oily smile. "Yes."

Evron blinked, head still fogged by sleep and copious amounts of fantastic fucking. "What?" He rubbed at one side of his face, not sure he'd heard correctly.

"Someone did die," the man replied, his smile growing wider, bone-white teeth flashing in the predawn light. "Your father, to be exact."

Fury surged through Evron's veins. Immediately. He stared at the man on his front step, gripping the doorknob so hard his knuckles turned white. "Very funny, asshole. Now get off my step before I break your nose."

The man didn't move. At least not backward. Instead, he reached into the inside pocket of his jacket with his right hand, the movement so fluid it almost appeared snakelike. With a small but flamboyant flick of the wrist, he produced a card, the blood-red rectangle seeming to smolder in the dim light. "Please allow me to introduce myself, Mr. McKenzie." He smiled impossibly wider, silver moonlight glinting off slick

black hair. "I am Lucius Belial. Your late father's attorney. It is my unfortunate task to inform you of his passing and your inheritance."

Evron glared at Belial, his heart smashing against his breastbone as if it were trying to escape his chest. "I think you have the wrong man, Mr. Belial. My father —"

"Was Artan Smythe. The New York Stock Exchange giant. You are his only heir."

Evron laughed, the dry bark lacking any humour. "Christ! Did someone knock *you* over the head at the pub last night, mate?" He took a step back, grabbing the edge of the door as he did so, ready to swing it shut on Belial's smiling face. It was too damn early for shit like this and he wanted to get back to Ricki. "Piss off. I'm done with —"

"I assure you, Mr. McKenzie," Lucius Belial cut him short, "Artan Smythe *was* your father. I have the documents to prove it." Another card appeared in between Belial's fingers, so quick Evron didn't even see him move.

Evron dropped his eyes to the offering in the man's hand, his chest constricting. He could barely breathe. It was a birth certificate. From the New York Vital Records Office. Signed and stamped in nineteen seventy-four by one Mr. Garek Aznabaev. Recording the birth of a male child—Evron Franklin—to Mary Matheson, mother, and Artan Smythe, father.

A beat thumped in Evron's head. He looked up at Belial, trying to remain calm. Inside, his anger flexed and snarled, feeding on his agitated confusion. "And this proves what, exactly?" He narrowed his eyes. "That you have a computer and printer at home?"

Belial's wider-than-wide smile didn't falter. In fact, it grew, teeth looking more like fangs as the thin lips stretched. "Don't be silly, Mr. McKenzie." Black eyes bored into his. Digging. Seeking. "You know what this is. I don't need to explain it further. Did you think you'd escaped your past, your life, when you moved to Australia?"

Evron's knuckles popped as his grip on the edge of the door increased. "I have a copy of the very thing you're holding, Mr. Belial. Except mine has 'unknown' beside 'father'."

Belial's smile turned smug and for a split second his black eyes flickered with dancing flames. Evron blinked. *What the – ?* "It is surprising what money can do for a man, Mr. McKenzie," Belial stated, adjusting the cuffs on his suit. "It can buy you all the power you want." Another flicker of orange fire flared in the lawyer's black gaze. "And all the secrets too."

A bitter taste suddenly coated Evron's mouth. Bitter and infuriated. If what Belial was saying was true...

"*It is true, Mr. McKenzie.*" The man's voice reverberated with satisfied delight. "Every word. As a result of your father's death, you are to receive a princely sum befitting your bloodline. Everything your late father possessed is now yours. The first...item...shall be arriving shortly."

"What? At four in the morning?" Evron let out a sharp snort, every fibre in his being coiled to snapping point. He'd had enough of the fun and games. It was time to end it. Fixing Belial with a flat glare, he stepped forward. "It's been a real laugh, mate," he snarled. "But I'm not convinced. And I'm going back to—"

A wild hiss cut him short, followed by a screeching wail. Something hot and furry whipped across his shins and Evron leapt backward, his heart hammering as he jerked his stare down.

Prince, his next-door neighbour's fat and fickle Persian cat, ran across his front lawn, a smoky-black streak of wild fur and hissing malice. "Christ!" Evron gripped the door, watching it disappear under the side fence, its tail stiff, its ears flat to its head. "Stupid bloody cat." He turned back to Belial...

And found him gone.

"What the – ?"

He frowned, scanning his small front yard from the doorway.

Nothing. Just an empty square of grass and a quiet street filled with stretching predawn shadows.

Evron shook his head. “Creepy bugger,” he muttered, turning around. He closed the door behind him, ready to ascend the stairs. To rejoin Ricki in his bed. Maybe wake—

An invisible tug pulled on his body. Hard.

Like an unseen force had reached into his gut, twisted his insides into a knot and yanked.

A tug. And a voice. Like a black blade slicing away the light.

I have arrived, Custodian. It is time.

Another tug yanked on his guts. Harder. More insistent. Followed by that voice again. *Time to discover who you really are.*

His blood ran cold. And then, in a rush of heat so fierce he almost screamed, fury poured through him. Into him. Fury unlike any he’d known or experienced before. For a split moment, the desire to destroy—obliterate beyond existence—anything within his reach threatened to overwhelm him, its seductive pull like a burning chain around his soul.

Calling him. Pulling him.

Forget the female, Custodian. The voice, lower than before, whispered in his head. *Greater things await.*

Evron moved, the pull in his soul guiding him up the stairs.

The distant streetlights outside his home cast a dull yellow glow through the windows, long shadows leaping up the walls of the hallway beside him as he strode past his bedroom, heading for the loft stairs. His studio filled the small third floor—an easel, drawing board, his Mac, printer, an old, over-stuffed lounge and a bar fridge full of bottled water.

And now, something else. Something he could feel in his blood.

Something new. Yet something very, very old.

He took the steps two at a time, the voice in his head whispering words he didn't understand. The closer he came the more pervasive it became. Until, at the studio door, the whispers were screams of ecstatic triumph.

INJA AL, N!

Hand steady, heart hammering, Evron closed his fingers around the doorknob, the metal like molten iron under his flesh. Unbearable pain singed his palm, lashed up his arm, but he could not pull away. How could he? When the voice commanded him to —

Come, come, COME TO ME, NOW!

With the acrid smell of burning flesh stinging his sinuses, he turned the knob and entered his studio.

Then froze.

His work area no longer existed. Where once sat a desk, computer and drawing board now hung a sculpture. A sculpture of a naked woman unlike any he'd ever seen.

At least as tall as himself, it hung from a beam of twisted wood spearing the breadth of the attic ceiling. Four metal chains, thick and undeniably old, knotted around the beam in the centre of its length, each seemingly covered in a grimy filth that made him think of the bars in the Kings Cross holding cell.

He stared, unable to comprehend what his eyes told him to be true.

A sculpture. A fucking great big sculpture hung from his ceiling. As if some mad artist had set up an installation piece in his studio. A sculpture of a naked woman carved from blood-red marble suspended above the floor by the four metal chains. A sculpture of a naked woman crisscrossed by shining black chains wider than his wrist, each one binding her sublime body into a position of imprisoned, sexual subjugation, her arms behind her back, her wrists crossed over each other and chained to her ankles, her back bowed to thrust her full, high breasts forward. A sculpture of a woman created by the artist to be a creature of sexual slavery, her eyes closed, her lips parted, her legs spread wide to let one thick chain snake her right thigh and sink into the perfectly formed folds of her sex.

A sculpture that seemed to eat up the warmth of the room, leaving him chilled and shivering, and yet at the same time coated in a sweat that felt like rivulets of boiling water.

His throat squeezed tight, his mouth grew dry. His balls grew heavy. "Holy fuck!"

A low and soulless chuckle filled his head. *There is nothing holy about me, Custodian.*

A wave of blistering heat smashed over him, as if someone had thrown open the door to a furnace. Or the gates of Hell. He staggered backward, ass colliding with the door he'd just stepped through. Its edge rammed against his tailbone, black stars of agony exploding in his head even as his feet lost their battle with stability and he fell to the floor. The wooden floorboards slammed against his ass cheeks like bands of molten iron, flooding his body with new pain.

Yet Evron didn't take any notice.

Because at the very moment his butt hit the floor, a woman appeared. *The woman.* As if somehow stepping from the sculpture itself. Materializing from the blood-red marble in the same way smoke is born from fire.

Evron's mouth worked but no sound came out. He gaped up at her, heart thumping so savagely he felt the bones of his breastplate would splinter any moment now.

The woman stepped closer, eyes blacker than pitch fixed on him. *Salaam, Custodian.*

The words sounded in his head, a timbre so deep every hair on his body trembled. He knew it *came* from her, yet her lips — the colour of fresh blood — didn't move.

He tried to swallow but his throat seemed coated in dust. A deafening beat hammered in his ears and it was only when he planted his hands to them he realized it was his own frantic pulse. Holy shit! What the hell...?

The woman approached, long legs carrying her across the short distance with a serpentine grace that made his skin crawl. Hair the colour of hellfire tumbled from her head and over her shoulders in a wild mane, drawing his stunned gaze from her

shining, ink-black eyes to a voluptuously luscious body so perfect in creation, Evron's chest constricted in hot pain. God, who was this woman? And why was she familiar?

Not God, Custodian. Although He does know me. That deep, soulless chuckle sounded in his head again as black, pupil-free eyes caressed him. *I must say,* her voice murmured in his head, *He is never as happy to see me as you are now though.*

A feathering sensation caressed Evron's stomach, as if hot fingers brushed his skin, and he looked down, seeing nothing but his naked torso and open jeans, his cock jutting from his unzipped fly – *unzipped?* – in an erection that defied physical possibility.

Yes. The word whispered through his shell-shocked mind, glee turning it to a low purr. *This is more like it.*

A breath of blistering heat fanned his cock and as Evron lay sprawled against the door, incapable of moving, stunned beyond the capacity of rational thought, a pair of invisible lips closed around its throbbing length and began to suck.

He snapped into a rigid arc, his eyes slamming shut, a sharp hiss passing his clenched teeth. Formless fingers raked over his splayed thighs, tearing lines into his flesh despite the material of his jeans, scoring a path to balls already about to explode. Snaring their swollen shape in a grip neither gentle nor kind. "*Jesus!*" Evron cried, pleasure tearing through his limbs.

The son of the carpenter? The woman's voice rolled through his fevered mind even as her unseen tongue rolled around his pulsating cock. *He is not here. But if you prefer the male form...*

A shimmer flashed behind Evron's clenched eyelids, a blurring of form and colour, and an image of a man filled his head. Michelangelo's David – the embodiment of human perfection – smiled at him, lifting his right hand to suck on the extended middle finger as he gripped his own turgid cock with his left.

A surge of lust – hot and greedy – roared through Evron and a strangled groan burst from his lips.

The vaporous mouth gobbling his shaft plunged deeper down his length. The throaty chuckle he was already beginning to dread echoed in his mind. *Interesting. It seems Darius' tastes run strong in your blood.* A force of pressure slid along the sweating space between his balls and his ass. Something that felt like a finger of liquid fire pressed on the tightly puckered hole. Pressing, pressing...in.

Exquisite pain flooded through Evron. He slammed his bunched fists against the wall. Once. Twice. Waves of raw pleasure ricocheted through him, from cock to balls to ass and back to cock again. He stamped his heel on the floor, teeth clenched. "Oh God. Oh God!"

So the cunt in your bed is just a pretence.

An image of the sleeping Ricki smashed into Evron's head, shattering the image of Michelangelo's David masturbating. Utterly. With a snarl of contempt, he sprang to his feet, the pressure on his cock and ass disappearing immediately. "Fuck you!" He bit back a low growl, glaring at the woman. She still stood beside the sculpture, as if she hadn't moved toward him at all, her fingertips stroking one of the thick chains suspended from the ceiling, her eyes shimmering black flames.

One fiery-red eyebrow arched and her mouth twitched. *Temper, temper.*

"Who the fuck are you?" He bared his teeth in a snarl of disgust, fury razing the lingering filaments of pleasure in his groin. "And what the fuck is going on?"

The woman's blood-red lips curled in a slow smile, pointed fangs glinting in the dim light of the attic. *I am Shahla, Evron McKenzie. I am the sculpture. I am wrath. I am the Daemon Form.* She came closer without a step, pitiless eyes boring into his mind, her heat wrapping around him like the arms of a lover.

"And," she said aloud, her voice like a dying breath, "I am yours."

Chapter Four

Ricki woke. Jerked from sleep by her own force of will.

She'd been dreaming. Evron had been kissing her, his tongue exploring her mouth as his hands explored her body. Raw pleasure rolled through her, stealing her breath and flooding her pussy. And then, as the kiss deepened, a shadow fell over them both. A shroud of black, blistering heat that consumed the very light around them.

She'd pulled away from Evron, scared. But it wasn't Evron who held her at all, but a creature of hideous proportions—twice the size of a normal man, with muscles that bulged and rippled under red, leathery skin. A massive, pulsating cock leaked putrid pus from its swollen, bulbous head, and immense venous wings engulfed her in their span as the creature opened its mouth to reveal needle-sharp teeth and a long, lashing forked tongue. *Beatricccccccce Whatleeeeeeeeeeeey*. Her name sounded like tearing flesh. *You are –*

She sat up. The room around her—Evron's bedroom—was silent. Dark. Rubbing at her face, she shoved the terrible dream from her mind. Or attempted to. A chill rippled over her and her flesh broke out in goose bumps, pinching her nipples tight and making her scalp prickle. "Damn." She scrubbed her hands over her face again. "What a dream."

Reclining back on the bed, she rolled to her side, sliding her hand across the mattress, reaching for Evron. She needed to snuggle back into the security of his arms and let his hard warmth dissolve the nightmare's chill.

Except he wasn't there.

Beatricccccccssssssssssse.

Ricki jolted upright, peering into the blackness of the room, her breath catching in her tight throat. Another chill, this one colder than the Arctic, shot up her spine and her nipples pinched to painful tips of fear. Had she really heard that?

"Evron?" Her voice sounded weak, somehow falling flat in the silence of her lover's dark bedroom. "Evron? Not funny..."

Nothing.

Not a sound. Not even the whisper of a muffled breath.

"Evron?"

A blast of scalding air smashed against her, knocking her flat on her back.

Heart hammering, Ricki scrambled off the bed, sprinting across the room to the door as if the Devil were on her tail.

And found it locked.

* * * * *

"Mine?" Evron stared at the woman before him, every fibre of his body telling him to get the fuck out of his studio. Now. "What the hell does that mean?"

The woman—Shahla—smiled, fangs flashing at him. "It means everything..."
Custodian.

Myriad images slammed into Evron's head. A city in a desert, a crowned man with a black beard, a fiery furnace and a flaming scrawl of indecipherable glyphs. As each image flared bright in his head, his anger grew stronger. Hotter.

He ground his teeth, glaring at the naked woman before him. He wanted answers. And if the bitch thought she was going to frighten him with her supernatural look-I'm-a-sculpture-but-I'm-giving-you-head bullshit, she was wrong. All she'd achieved was to piss him off. "Enough of this Custodian crap." He took a step toward her. "Who are you, and what the fuck is this crappy piece of bargain-basement art doing in my studio?"

Shahla's black eyes narrowed and a low hiss sounded in the back of her throat. *Do not speak so of me, Custodian. The power in the Form is the power of the Nine Circles of Hell.*

"Well, the Nine Circles can—"

Go to Hell? Shahla laughed, the sound making Evron's flesh crawl. *I have so much to teach you, Custodian.* She took another of those gliding steps, backward, reaching out to caress one smooth extended arm of the sculpture. A featherlight sensation whispered up Evron's arm, from elbow to shoulder, mirroring the stroke of Shahla's fingers, and his balls lifted high toward his body. *Hell is exactly where I come from.*

* * * * *

The knob refused to turn.

No matter how hard Ricki twisted it—and she twisted it so fucking hard the skin on her palm tore—it wouldn't turn.

She wrestled with the doorknob, the blackness of Evron's room pressing against her like a suffocating cloak, a scream trapped in her throat. Bands of scalding heat assaulted her from behind. An invisible assault on her body that made her weep and tremble. Formless heat licked at her ass, her thighs, her shoulders. Reached between her legs and tongued her cunt.

Oh God, what is happening?

Terror crashed through her.

Terror and something akin to—God save her, where was her mind?—pleasure. The bands of heat, insubstantial and cruel, traversed her flesh, flicking at her nipples, dipping into her bellybutton. With every burning contact her heart pounded and her cunt contracted, flooding with moisture that, had she not been in a state of petrified arousal, would have been as blissful as an orgasm itself. She yanked on the doorknob again, desperate to escape.

Escape what?

She didn't know.

Where's Evron?

An icy numbness slammed against her pounding heart. She didn't know that either.

Girl, you have to get outta here! Now!

She opened her mouth, the scream trapped in her throat ready to burst free.

And the invisible lashes raining over her body solidified. Transforming into pliable fingers of oily black brimstone that plunged into her mouth. Her cunt.

Beeeeeeeeaaaatricccccccsssssseeee...

Molten lava scalded her very soul. Before she could move, unseen arms clamped around her waist and, with a savage jerk, she was yanked off her feet. Flung backward through the air until, meters above Evron's bed, she froze. Suspended. Back arched in a painful upside-down U, breasts so close to the ceiling her nipples almost brushed it.

Scalding fingers delved into her clenching pussy, seeking the spot deep in the folds of her sex that barely an hour ago had been stimulated to ecstatic rapture by Evron's pumping cock. She writhed, held aloft by God knows what, terror screaming through her mind.

And even then—assaulted and defiled—her body betrayed her. Craved for more.

Oh God, Evron, help me!

Seeking, delving fingers plunged deeper, deeper, into her cunt. She felt a breath on her cheek, smelled sulphur—acrid and sharp—on the boiling air. Of their own accord, her eyes opened. To stare into the daemoniac face of her assailant.

And finally—no force in Heaven or Hell able to stop her—she screamed.

And screamed.

And screamed.

* * * * *

Evron clenched his fists, his nails sinking into his palms. "You're from Hell?" He ran a contemptuous look over her naked body, ignoring the sexual perfection of her

form. "Well, you can go back there straight away. And take your pathetic junk with you. It's stinking up my studio."

Shahla laughed, running her fingers over the beautiful curve of the sculpture's right upthrust breast. A hot shiver rippled through Evron and his right nipple distended into a hard tip, as if ready to be caressed again. The woman's lips played with a smile and her black gaze dropped to his chest, studying the small circle of puckered flesh with obvious satisfaction. She touched the tip of her tongue to one pointed fang and looked at his face again. *I am not going anywhere, Custodian.*

Her smile stretched into a playful grin, the words purring directly in his head. Evron bit back a growl of pissed-off fury. There was only one person he wanted in his head, and this bitch with the black eyes and smug attitude wasn't her. Something told him, however, that "pissed off" was exactly what Shahla wanted him to be.

I am of the Achaemenes bloodline, she continued, feathering her fingers up and down the defined lines of the sculpture's rib cage, of which you are the last. We are connected. Almost one. It is your job to tend to my care. The Daemon Forms are older than life. Older than time. We were created by Lucifer. We are the heart and the knowledge and the sin. We belong to no one. A bloodline belongs to us.

"We'?" Evron pulled a face, disgust coating his throat. "You mean there are more of you?"

A chuckle reverberated through his body, like a sick growth hiccupping its way along healthy flesh. His stomach turned but his eyes stayed locked on the blackness of hers. "There are seven of us, Custodian," she said aloud. A smirk flitted across her cruel, beautiful features. "Seven Forms. Seven Sins."

Evron swallowed. A part of his mind—the small, rational part that rarely raised its voice—still clung to the notion that the whole thing was just a nightmare. A fucked-up one to be sure, but still just a nightmare. Had to be. Seven sins? It was like some bad Hollywood movie.

The rest of him, however...

His gaze flicked to the sculpture.

There was no denying a marble sculpture, the likes of which would put Auguste Rodin to shame, now hung in his studio—and no matter how hard he tried, he could not ignore the residue of carnal pleasure still heating his blood. Hot, squeezing pleasure sent little licks of lust through his veins so his cock remained alert and hungry for more. But being connected to the thing? He was an artist, he understood the connection one could seize upon when viewing artwork, but make them horny? Give them head?

No. He didn't believe it. He couldn't.

Pulling in a slow, singeing breath, he stepped forward, eyes narrowed, fists clenched, lip curled in a silent snarl. "I don't care who 'created' you. I don't give a rat's ass about any bloodline, I know all I want to know and my heart is exactly where I want it to be. So you can just pack up the psychic bullshit, pull that lump of stone from the rafters and *get the fuck out of my head.*"

And before the bitch could morph or dissipate or whatever the hell she did, he spun on his heel, slamming the door behind him, and headed down the stairs.

Three steps down, his home disappeared.

* * * * *

Pain tore through his heart. A blistering stench of sulphur stung his nostrils and then a man—oldish but still young enough to sport a hard-on—filled his head. The man, vaguely familiar, stepped forward, existence seeming to fold open before him as he crossed an opulent room, approaching a bed on which lay a woman, naked save for a pair of black fishnet stockings and thigh-high blood-red boots. With a vigor belying his advancing years, the man crawled onto the bed, snaking his way up the body of the woman, cock bobbing between them as his balls dragged up her thighs and rested on her shaved cleft. The woman wrapped skinny legs around his bony hips, moaning with melodramatic gusto when the man buried a frenzied hand between her thighs and claimed her left breast with his mouth.

"You're a master!" she cried, the words as hollow as they were absurd. "Yes! Yes!"

The man pulled away from her nipple, grinning down at her, his face feverish. "A master!" Sweat streamed from his high forehead, dripping onto her sagging tits. "Your master. Your *king*!"

"Yes! My master! My king! Fuck me, Master. Please fuck me now!"

With a hurried fumble and a savage grin, the man shoved his swollen cock into the woman's cunt.

"You bastard!" she shrieked, thrashing beneath him. "You fuckin' bastard!" She punched at the man's humping back, at his shoulders, his arms. "Where's ya fuckin' condom, you fuckin' bastard?"

Still pumping and thrusting into her, the man looked up, ignoring the screaming, spitting woman. Eyes the exact same colour as Evron's pinned him through the nothingness the world had become. "Hello, son," the man said, gravelly voice almost identical to Evron's. "Say hello to your mother."

* * * * *

The world came back to Evron in the form of a pair of black, pitiless eyes.

You didn't know that, did you, Custodian? Shahla's smoky voice filled Evron's head as reality twisted and rolled around him. You didn't know your father fucked whores despite his phenomenal wealth. He was the direct descendent of Darius the Great, once ruler of the known world, the most powerful king of Persia, and he sired you with a five-buck whore picked up from the corner of 10th and 42nd. You didn't know that, did you? An almost-perfect lineage. Not too bad for a forgotten, no-talent hack at the ass-end of the world, is it? All the answers await you. When you touch the sculpture. When you place your flesh against it and let its soul seep into yours.

She laughed. Seconds before everything went black.

Again.

* * * * *

He woke, sleep slipping from him in languid caresses.

He lay still, gazing with sleepy eyes at the ceiling, and let a long sigh ease from his chest.

Then it hit him.

Fuck!

He sat bolt upright, jerking his stare all around him.

Bedroom. Walls. Window. Dawn breaking outside. Not a cloud in the dusty-pink sky. He snapped his attention to the mattress, his pulse thumping in his ears. He was in his bed, naked, the sheets crumpled about his legs. Ricki slept soundly beside him on her belly. There were no black eyes, no blood-coloured sculpture of a bound woman, no ageing billionaires to be seen.

Stunned realization punched the wind from him and he collapsed back onto the bed. A dream. The whole goddamn thing had been a dream.

He raked his hands through his hair, not sure whether to laugh or curse. Jesus, *what* a dream. The creepy fuck at the front door, the sexual sculpture in his studio...all a dream. Shaking his head, he pulled in a deep breath.

And burning sulphur filled his lungs.

"Good morning, sexy."

Evron jumped, heart slamming into his throat. *Holy—*

He turned, forcing a smile to his face as he gazed down at Ricki, watching her stretch beside him. The sight of her naked beauty should have sent his hormones into overdrive. *Should* have. His chest squeezed tight. "Good morning, Mystery Woman," he said, hoping to hell he sounded relaxed. "Did you sleep well?"

She began to smile, the faintest hint of a dimple creasing her cheek, and Evron let out a silent breath. *Idiot! You imagined that hellish stink!* He ground his teeth, disgusted

with himself—until he saw her smile fade, a tortured light flicking in her beautiful eyes. “Actually, no.” She pulled on her bottom lips with her teeth. “I had a bad dream.”

A weak chuckle gurgled up through his throat, like the last bubble in a forgotten bottle of champagne. “Me too.” His gut churned, a sick knot he didn’t want to examine. He smoothed his hand along the curve of her hip, grateful for the warmth of her flesh under his palm. “Guess we shouldn’t have eaten that leftover Chinese in the fridge last night.”

Even to his own ears, the joke sounded forced.

What wasn’t forced, however, was the sudden urge to climb out of bed. To leave the sublime creature beside him and run—no, sprint—up to his studio. To throw open the door and see what was hanging there. To touch it.

To caress it. With his fingers, his lips. His dick...

“It was horrible.” Ricki’s fingers, light and hesitant, touched his chest. “Horrible. Chinese food couldn’t do that.”

For a sharp moment the red beast, silent since the previous night, snarled. *What does she want from you? A fucking scientific explanation?* “Well, what would?” The question burst from him in a savage snarl. “An overdose of fucking a complete stranger?”

She flinched, her eyes wide, like he’d cut her with a razor. Guilt smashed against him, a tsunami of vile self-hate and disgust, making him sick. Drowning the red beast in a pummeling flood of regret. He stared at her, words stuck in his throat. Christ, what the fuck was wrong with him? Where the *hell* was his brain? “Ah, shit, Ricki.” He ran a hand up her shoulder, brushing a lock of hair from her forehead. “I’m sorry. That wasn’t fair. Or nice.” He looked into her eyes, stung by the fear he saw in them. God, *he’d* made her feel that way. Any thought of what awaited him upstairs, of the creature who proclaimed herself a Daemon Form—whatever the hell that was—torn from his head.

“I’m sorry,” he repeated, threading his fingers into the thick tangle of Ricki’s hair at her nape. “I guess my dream messed me up as much as yours affected you.” He leaned

forward, placing a soft kiss on her forehead. The fact she didn't jerk away from him, slap him or smash her fist into his nose eased the churning turmoil in his gut and he kissed her again. "Wanna tell me about it?"

She shook her head, her eyes unreadable. "No."

He held his breath, letting her have the next move.

She regarded him without a word for what felt like a lifetime before, with a little sigh and a slight wriggle, she inched closer to his body. Her nipples brushed his chest as the tops of her thighs pressed his and she slid one hand up to his jaw, cupping it with a trembling hand. "Just make me forget it."

He held back his smile. Just. "I can do that."

Eyelids fluttering closed, she smoothed her hand down his shoulder, his arm, sliding it over his hip to cup his ass, and nothing, *nothing* but the feel of her in his world mattered.

Lips softer than silk pressed against his jaw. Chin. Mouth.

When the warm tip of her tongue touched his, the blood in his veins turned to liquid heat and with a raw groan he rolled on top of her, flattening her to her back. Their hips aligned, the moist readiness of her pussy slicking his already-rigid cock. He shook his head, gazing down into her face. "You have a power over me, Mystery Woman."

The haunted look no longer clouded her eyes and she stared at him with such intensity and trust, his throat squeezed tight. "Then I best use it for the good of humanity." She gave him a small smile, rolling her hips to let the lips of her pussy play over his cock.

Evron moved slightly, nudging her wet, satiny sex until it parted to his hard desire. A low growl rumbled in his chest. "Humanity can just wait in line." With a fierce thrust, he plunged his aching shaft into her tight, hot cunt. Like two pieces of one puzzle, they joined, the muscles of her sex closing around him so firm and tight he could barely think.

“Oh Evron!” Ricki arched into him, nails sinking into his shoulders, long legs locking around his hips. Imprisoning him against her flesh. He didn’t mind. There was no other place he wanted to be.

He dropped his head, charting a path over the most perfect collarbone known to man, his lips tasting her sweet saltiness as they lingered in the little dip at the base of her throat. She drew in a hitching breath, the sound making him smile against her skin before he dragged his lips across her breastplate to the heaven that were her breasts. He took one rosy peak in his mouth, rolling the tip between his teeth until she whimpered and writhed in ecstasy.

Action and reaction became instinctive. Without words, Ricki demanded he scour away the torment of her nightmare. Her body, a thing of divine beauty and perfection, pushed him to barriers he’d never dreamed, hauling him through those barriers with a mere touch of her tongue, a brush of her fingers. Her cunt pulsed and contracted around his cock, sucking its straining length deeper into the sopping folds until his balls smacked against her ass. She wormed a hand between their sweat-slicked bodies and, cupping the heavy sacs, pressed the pad of her middle finger firmly on his anus.

The contact was electric. A wave of tension blasted through him. If she inched any deeper, he would lose all hope of control. He lifted his head, ready to tell her to stop. To wait.

And saw Shahla.

Like a gossamer shadow thrown over Ricki’s form.

What the —

Pressing her hips higher, eyes closed, breath short and ragged, Ricki squeezed his balls with her hand. “God, Evron!”

Why praise God? Shahla’s voice caressed Evron’s senses, hot and colder than death all at once. *I am sooo much better.*

With a wink and a chuckle, she faded from sight.

But not from touch.

Insidious hands scorched a path over Evron's back, dancing down the throbbing lines left by Ricki's nails to his hips. His ass. And as it was in the studio, his body reacted.

Blood, boiling to the point of exquisite agony, tore through his veins, surging into his already turgid cock. "Evron!" Ricki moaned, pulling him closer with her thighs. Like melted wax, Shahla's hot hands slid over his ass cheeks. Scalding his flesh. Evron jerked in pain, ramming deeper into Ricki's gripping cunt. "Oh God, Evron! More!"

Yes, Evron. Shahla's breath played on his neck. Blisteringly hot. So much more awaits. When you touch the sculpture.

A finger of liquid heat joined Ricki's on his anus and he bucked again. Hateful ecstasy ignited in his balls, fusing with the new contact to become something vile and exquisite.

Eyes slammed shut, he threw back his head.

Shahla was there. Even as he *felt* Ricki's satiny skin press against him, in his head he *saw* the bitch from the sculpture. The Daemon Form.

Saw her and – God help him – wanted her.

Pale breasts, full and heavy, brushed against his face. It was impossible, but he felt them all the same. As Ricki drew her mouth over one of his nipples, Shahla dragged one of *her* nipples over *his* mouth. She was not there, but he felt the hot, puckered tip of flesh on his lips all the same. And before he could stop himself, he touched his tongue to it.

Yes!

"Yes!"

Ricki moaned beneath him, teeth pulling at his nipple, hand cupping his balls as Shahla – a vaporous presence that filled him with dread – pressed against him. Fingers on his ass, *in* his ass, breasts on his face, in his mouth.

Evron arched and jerked frantically, fighting with a primitive greed that threatened to consume him and leave nothing but a shell of depraved lust. He knew he needed to stop Shahla before he was lost to her. But knowing and doing were two very different things.

As Ricki moved beneath him, undulating in perfect harmony with his thrusts, Shahla's lips, teeth and tongue explored his body, licking a line of fire from his shoulder to his hip to his ass. "Jesus!" Fangs, hotter than molten steel, sank into the back of his thigh and he let out a scream, flinching in pain and ramming harder into Ricki's cunt.

He felt Shahla's chuckle on his flesh. *Wimp.*

Fuck off, he spat silently, anger twisting through the rapture in his veins.

There was another chuckle and then he felt her tongue lash out, flicking at his anus like a whip, sending a jolt of lust straight into his ramrod cock. *Make me.*

Livid rage ripped through him.

Turning his head to the side, Evron stared into the mirrored cupboard door—into his own fevered, tortured eyes. He plunged deeper into Ricki's cunt, skin afire, heart pounding. With every inch of his being he struggled to force from his mind the sensation caused by Shahla's touch. Every shudder of repulsed pleasure incensed him further. Lust and ecstasy became one. It drove him. Pushed him to the limit. Only one thing could save him.

Ricki.

The more he tried to escape into her body, however, the more insidious Shahla's caresses became, and the more taunting she grew. *Who is the cunt between your legs?* she whispered, talons scorching up his back. *Why was she dressed like a hooker last night? Why hasn't she told you what she does when she's not fucking you?*

Evron closed his eyes. Something akin to murderous rage took great bites out of his mind. The very air around him thrummed. He sank his cock into Ricki's warm, tight pussy, seeking relief from Shahla's torment. Seeking the bliss of Ricki's body and soul.

Ouzgal. Shahla's fingers found his nipples, pinching in time to the thrust of Ricki's hips, perverting the pleasure of her touch. This whore's soul cannot save you. She is beneath you. Beneath the son of the Achaemenes bloodline. I am your only saviour. Only in my form will you find relief. In my lines will you find wealth. And power greater than God.

An image filled Evron's mind. The sculpture. The Daemon Form. Dominating the world. And Evron, overlord of it all.

Blood, hungrier and hotter than ever, pumped into his cock.

Power. Wealth. No more the worthless, unwanted orphan. No more the lapdog to a bitch who sells herself for sex.

In a split second, fury erupted in Evron's blood. His eyes shot open and he stared straight into Ricki's face. *Get out of my fucking head!*

Ricki had never felt so on fire. The intensity of their fucking was unlike any she'd dreamt possible. It was as if they'd been reduced to their base instincts. Nothing existed but the pleasures of their flesh. It drove her wild.

Evron's cock plunged into her pussy, pumping with such savagery she cried out. Not in pain, but rapture both carnal and primitive.

His fingers curled into her shoulders, blunt nails cutting her flesh as he yanked her harder, harder, into each thrust. His eyes, boring into hers, burned with a fevered light that was exciting and frightening all at once.

A black blur suddenly whipped through the air, as if something had been flung across the room behind Evron's back. It made her blink, and for a disorientating moment she could have sworn it was a book. There was a blast of heat and everything rippled. As if each and every object in the room was suddenly charged with life.

The shadowy form of a woman seemed to rear up behind Evron and Ricki sucked in a hiss. But then Evron's hands buried into her hair and her eyes jerked back to his, everything else forgotten. "You," he growled, the sound so animalistic, a shiver raced up her spine.

When his lips found her neck and his teeth sank into her flesh, her heart stopped. Pain, hot and blinding, exploded in her body. She cried out, throwing back her head. “OH GOD! EVRON!”

As if it was the trigger waiting to be pulled, the agony of Evron’s bite sent her pussy into spasms of gushing pleasure. Cum flooded her thighs. Hot and wet and creamy. Her orgasm consumed her.

And nothing existed anymore except that.

Evron bit into Shahla’s neck. Going for blood.

There was a cry – hoarse and filled with pain – and the woman in his arms bucked, legs clamping his hips, cunt gripping his cock.

It was her voice that chilled his blood. Froze his heart.

Not Shahla’s voice, but Ricki’s.

He blinked, tongue pressed to a warm neck, the taste of sweat and perfume...and blood in his mouth.

Ricki!

He jerked back. And saw the woman he loved lying in his arms.

A whisper of contact seared across his back, five burning lines as fingers traveled his spine. *Tsk, tsk, Custodian. So full of rage. Fury. Such a family failing.*

“Evron,” Ricki moaned, lips parted, eyes closed. “Oh my God, Evron.”

A cold thought – quicker than a gunshot – pierced through his head. *I almost killed Ricki...* And then her wet sex contracted, milking his cock with pulsing pressure, and his body took over, succumbing to the ecstasy. All coherent thought razed away.

Scalding tension ripped down his spine. His balls rose. His ass tightened.

Lifting his head, he stared into the mirror once more.

And saw the sculpture of the bound woman. Free of its chains. Devouring the space of his room. The blood-red marble wet with –

Everything you want can be yours, Custodian, Shahla's voice whispered.

A scream of violent release and potent rage tore from Evron's throat. His seed pumped into Ricki's cunt, each thrust more powerful than the last. Suddenly his journal shot across the room, as if yanked from the far dresser by an unseen hand, smashing against the mirror, shattering the glass into a thousand tiny shards that bit into their flesh like a thousand tiny blades.

Ricki's terrified scream sliced the air, even as her cunt constricted. A final pulse that squeezed the last spurt of cum from Evron's cock.

And all the while, deep in his head, Shahla laughed.

Chapter Five

“So?” Nick dropped into the seat opposite Evron, reaching for the cold beer already waiting for him. “Know her name yet?”

Evron raised his own glass, giving his best mate and ex-boss a smile. The bar was packed, a bizarre mix of grimy construction workers, polished lawyers, local celebrities and tourists. There were no books or women with red hair and black eyes, no men dressed in black pinstripes, smiling like a maniacal shark, eyes blazing with flames. Nothing except the rowdy pub patrons and his best mate. “G’day, Nick.” He ignored Nick’s chuckled question. “Flip working out?”

Nick raised his beer to his mouth, brown eyes regarding Evron with a certain curiosity. They’d known each other for quite a while and Nick had no delusions about Evron’s temper. He’d been witness to its eruption more than once.

“Flip’s doing just fine, Evron.” He took a drink and wiped the foam from his top lip with the pad of his thumb. “But you haven’t answered my question. Do you have a name yet? Or has she realized you’re a bloody pain in the ass and bugged off already?”

For a split second Evron saw red, infuriated by Nick’s tone. Who the fuck did he think he— “No.” He shook his head, cutting the incensed thought dead. “She hasn’t bugged off.”

Nick’s eyebrows shot up. “And she knows you’re a mean-tempered bastard?”

A jolt of guilt, hot and stinging, shot into Evron’s chest. The taste of Ricki’s blood suddenly filled his mouth, her screams of pain his head. No, she didn’t know he had...anger issues...but when he was with her, he didn’t. Not unless the Daemon Form made an appearance, that was, and since the mirror had inexplicably shattered, the bitch had been M.I.A from his head. Which was totally fine with Evron.

He had no idea what the hell was going on. Shit, who could? A man appears in the middle of the night and tells him he's the son of an American billionaire? A woman appears from thin air and tells him he's the direct descendent of some ancient Persian king? That everything he'd ever wanted could be his if he touched some perverted, sexually depraved sculpture? And while we're at it, ladies and gentlemen, where the fuck had the sculpture come from in the first place, huh? Could someone tell him that, please?

He'd been tempted, after helping Ricki clean up the broken mirror, to head up to his studio to look at it again, but he'd resisted. Just. There was still a stubborn part of his mind that refused to accept the whole thing. It was insanity. A fucking mental hiccup. It had to be.

There was nothing mental, however, about the tug on his chest. The tug that wanted to pull him back to the sculpture. It was physically painful, like an unseen hook punched through his flesh. Painful and worrying. When Ricki left to retrieve her belongings from her hotel, he'd bolted from the house. He'd had to get out. The tug had grown almost impossible to deny. Speaking to Nick would give him the chance to clear his head, to figure out what the hell was going on.

He hoped.

Raising his glass, Evron regarded Nick over the frosted rim with a level gaze. "She knows everything she needs to know about me."

Nick's eyebrows shot up again. "And what's that? That you're an out-of-work graphic artist with no family, prospects or money?"

A surge of belligerent rage rolled through Evron, but he squashed it. He knew Nick. The insults were born from concern, not malice. He gave his friend a sarcastic smirk. "Funny bastard, aren't you."

Nick gave him a grin. "As funny as that ugly face of yours, mate." He took another mouthful of beer, settling back into the chair. "So tell me, one minute you're calling me

a no-talent hack, the next you're taking it back and telling me you're in love? Something's going on. What is it?"

Tell him about me, Custodian.

Evron froze.

"Evron?" Sharp worry cut through Nick's voice. "You okay, mate?"

The sounds of the bar faded away. A featherlight caress brushed his thigh and his balls shrank up, trying to escape the inevitable touch. But actuality meant nothing to Shahla. If she wanted to touch him, taunt him, she did. Hot fingers curled around his left testicle, holding him frozen. *Tell him aaaall about me, Custodian. Bring him home to visit. I feel positive he'll appreciate good art when he sees it.*

Contemptuous anger shot into Evron's chest. He clenched his jaw, ignoring the unseen fingers manipulating his balls. Or trying to. "I'm fine." He forced his voice to sound level and relaxed. Raising his beer, he drained the glass.

Nick didn't seem convinced, but he carried on, as all good mates do. "So, tell me about this wonder woman. At least give me a name."

Shahla.

"Ricki Whatley." Evron snapped out Ricki's name, squirming as the hot fingers on his balls slid to his cock. "She's from the U.S."

Nick's glass froze midway to his mouth and he looked at Evron as though he'd suddenly grown an extra head. "Ricki Whatley? As in the *supermodel* Ricki Whatley? Ricki Please-Let-Me-Die-In-Your-Pussy Whatley?" A snort erupted from his nose. "Yeah, right. Pull the other one, mate."

Evron frowned. He shook his head at Nick, disquieting unease tickling the back of his mind. "A supermodel? I think you've got the wrong name, Nick. Or woman."

Has he? The voice that whispered in his ear was ripe with smug glee. Whatever was going on, Shahla was happy about it. Evron's gut twisted. A supermodel?

He shifted on the seat, the room suddenly too small, too loud. The air bristled with electricity. A live current looking to kill. His grip on his empty beer glass tightened. A supermodel? *Didn't mention that in her intro, did she?* Shahla whispered. *You'd think it would rate more importance than her opinion of cats. Or Al Pacino movies.*

Evron's eyes narrowed, his pulse rapid and thumping in his temples. Somewhere off to the left, a glass fell to the floor. Then another. Followed by a surprised shout.

She keeps secrets from you, Shahla stated, manifesting before Evron like a translucent mist of sin. Every day millions of men and women stare at her image. Lust after her. Masturbate over the pages she adorns. She sells herself for the gratification of others. A scalding claw dug at the head of his cock, making him hiss in pain. A breathless breath tickled his ear. *Whore.* Fangs glinted in the dim light of the pub as, with a slow smile, she dissipated away to nothing again. Just a presence he felt on his flesh. In his mind.

Nick laughed. "No offense, mate, but I can't see you pulling a supermodel, no matter how 'brooding' those good looks of yours are."

Evron's blood turned hot.

And somewhere in the pub a chair toppled over, a yelp of shock following the crash.

These Americans, Shahla whispered. They aren't to be trusted. She tsked, the sound sarcastic and snide. *What is it about Custodians that attracts the deceptive? The devious?*

Evron blinked, disconnected from his body. He watched his best mate digging around in a large satchel. A bag Evron knew contained client sketches and presentations. "I tell you what," he was saying, "I've got the latest *Sports Illustrated* in here. Ricki Whatley—the *model* Ricki Whatley—is on the cover. Now, where the... Ah, here it is!" With a flourish, he pulled out a thick, glossy and obviously well-read magazine and slapped it on the table.

"Now," he looked at Evron, grinning broadly. "Tell me that's not the same wo—" Nick stopped, his mouth falling open. "You're fucking kiddin' me!"

Evron stared at the magazine, dull anger pounding in his ears. There she was. On the cover. His Ricki.

“Holy shit!” Nick gaped at him, obviously reading the expression on Evron’s face. “Holy *shit*! How the fuck did you get *her*?”

How the fuck did he do that?

Fate.

It was *that* voice again. The same deep, ambiguous voice he’d first heard the night Ricki saved him from beating the shit out of the hawker in Kings Cross. The same voice whispering the same word. Fate.

A moment of serenity filled him. Peace unlike any he’d known...as the voice and the word reverberated through his soul.

Then it was gone. Leaving Shahla’s low, daemoniac chuckle ringing in his ears.

Unable to contain it, a wave of anger crashed over him. Red, boiling anger.

Just *who* in the hell was pulling his strings? God? The Devil?

You are, Custodian, Shahla stated. From the moment Darius stroked my marbled breast, your destiny was sealed.

“Jesus, Evron.” Nick shook his head. “Don’t be a bloody idiot. I’m envious, mate, as envious as all hell, but don’t be thinking Ricki Whatley’s gonna settle down with a no-name Aussie artist. I don’t know what she’s playing at—fuck, who knew she was even in Australia?—but supermodels don’t marry blokes like us.”

No, Shahla purred. They don’t.

Cold contempt flooded through Evron. Cracking to incensed ice. “This one does.” He fixed Nick with a flat glare, daring him to argue. “Tomorrow, in fact.”

Nick shook his head. “You’re outta your mind. It’s gotta be a practical joke!” He stabbed the cover of the magazine, punching his finger against the perfect curve of Ricki’s left breast. “I love you like a brother, Evron, you know that. But fair dinkum, mate, what’s a woman like this doing with—”

"ENOUGH!" Evron leapt to his feet, blood pounding through his veins like a sledgehammer. Across the room, a bowl of peanuts flung along the bar, striking a woman in the chest so hard she squealed. A bar stool slid across the floor, colliding with another.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa." Nick stood, stunned confusion on his face. He held out his hands, palms facing Evron. "Steady on, mate."

The table slammed forward, smacking against his crotch. A strangled "oof" burst from his lips and he dropped to the floor in a thud, groaning.

Evron glared down at him, oblivious to his pain. The world pulsed vivid red. No. The world *was* red. Justified red. Vile red. The red of fury and power and might. "I've had a gutful of this shit," he snarled. "And I am not your mate."

Spinning on his heel, he stormed across the pub, stare locked on the closed exit doors. They swung apart, flung open with such force they ripped from the brick wall and skidded along the footpath.

Silence fell over the crowd. Broken immediately by squeals of terror as every glass in the place abruptly went hurling through the air.

But Evron didn't stop. Or care.

It was time to get to the fucking bottom of everything. Starting with Ricki.

* * * * *

Shahla enveloped herself in Evron's fury as he barged from the drinking house, wrapping herself in its power, letting its baking heat flow through her stone. She smiled, playing the tip of her tongue over her left fang. The power of the Custodian had manifested itself in Evron already, incredibly strong and undeniably powerful. He wasn't aware of it yet, didn't know what he was doing, but he would soon. The moment he touched the sculpture, everything would become clear.

It was unusual for The Gift to come before The Caress. Unusual, but not troubling. What trouble could it possibly cause? He was still a mere mortal, and no mortal had ever bested a Daemon Form.

Tapping into his cerebral cortex, Shahla luxuriated in the pure anger rolling through Evron's being, bathing in its potent force. She held her glee in silent check, more than satisfied with the morning's events. It wouldn't be long now. Soon, very soon, Evron would succumb to her allure and stroke his flesh against her stone. And when that happened, Hell would come to Earth.

As it was meant to be.

* * * * *

Paris, France, 1805

The emperor looked down at his sleeping lover, admiring the fine curve of her shoulder where it turned into her neck, the porcelain perfection of her skin, the heavy curves of her breasts.

A twinge of tension made his cock spasm and he pulled a slow breath in through his nose, the delicate scent of Josephine's perfume filling his body. *Dieu*, she was beautiful. A thing of divine beauty. The Almighty's finest creation.

What a shame you have to kill her.

The emperor started. He tore his hungry gaze away from the sleeping woman, looking across his private room to the great gold doors, behind which hung the sculpture. He couldn't see the Daemon Form, and the permanently locked doors prevented anyone else doing so either, but he felt her. Hot hands skimmed down his naked torso, flitting the line of his growing erection before the tip of a claw circled its emerging head.

A groan sounded in his throat. Of pleasure. Regret. Anger.

I warned you the slut would deceive you. Another claw found his cock, teasing the sensitive glans below its head. She speaks to her lover every moment she can. She and the Hussar plot to overthrow you. A third claw dug into the tip of his cock, piercing and punishing. They plan to kill you and rule France side by side.

The emperor's lips curled away from his teeth. "Human weapons cannot harm me," he countered, voice softer than a breath. "You have made me invincible."

No, not invincible, Custodian. Your anger is powerful but your heart is weak.

Tight discomfort wrapped itself around the emperor's chest, almost as though his body chose to illustrate the Daemon's word. "My heart is weak because I lost it." A single tear slipped from his left eye as he gazed back down at Josephine. "Lost it to a mortal woman created by the Almighty."

You don't need a mortal female, Custodian. You need me. A mortal female cannot give you power. But she can take it from you. A breath blew at his ear, a thin stream of blistering heat smelling of sulphur, death and agony. The emperor filled his lungs with it. Shahla was correct. Josephine had, for a time, made him feel blissfully calm, gloriously relaxed. Free of the strength his anger provided. France had suffered because of it. Insurgents arose everywhere, safe in the knowledge that Napoleon the First had grown complacent. Forgiving.

Love was weak. *He* was weak.

He ran his eyes along Josephine's perfect form, his chest constricting tighter still.

She needs to be punished.

He closed his eyes, conflict knotting in his stomach. No, he loved her. Theirs was a love that made the stars weep. How *could* he punish her? His *cherie*, his —

She has lain with other men and laughed about your...size.

Napoleon stiffened. Cold anger sliced into his chest and he narrowed his eyes, studying the woman sharing his bed.

She laughs about your size and calls the Hussar her...big man.

He ground his teeth, his hands burning with the need to wrap around Josephine's neck. He could strangle her in their bed and no one would care. He was Napoleon Bonaparte. Emperor. How dare the woman he'd elevated above all others deride him so.

You could kill her now. Punish her. She weakens you, Emperor. She mocks you and disrespects you and laughs at you with her lovers. Punish her now and let this farce be ended. Shahla's breath fanned his cheek, her fingers stroking his cock until it stood rigid and eager again. *Punish her, my emperor, and let the world see how truly powerful, how truly mighty you are.*

He opened his eyes and stared down at his wife, his blood hot, his lust dark.

Fuck her now, Custodian, show her what she dismisses and then punish her for her sins. The she-Daemon flitted her hands up his torso, midnight eyes filling his head. *Make her weep your wrath. Make her beg your mercy.*

Lips pulling away from his teeth in a slow smile, the emperor of France slid his hands up his deceiving, unfaithful wife's legs, his erection righteous and angry, and shoved her thighs apart.

He was weak no more.

"Time to beg, *cherie*," he murmured, sinking his cock into Josephine's folds before she fully awoke. "Time to scream."

* * * * *

"Do you have any idea how stupid you sound?" TJ ranted down Ricki's cell phone, his heavy Brooklyn accent even heavier with ire. "Married? To a guy you've known, what? Twelve hours? Christ Almighty, Beatrice, do you *know* how hard I pressed the studio to get you this role?"

"Don't call me Beatrice, TJ," Ricki muttered, ignoring the knot of uneasy doubt twisting in her belly. She couldn't, however, ignore the sobering thought floating

through her head. *He's right, y'know, Ricki. Getting married tomorrow is the definition of stupidity.*

"Your film career's about to hit the big time," TJ went on, voice growing louder. "You've been handed your dream opportunity, the one you told me you wanted more than anything in the world and you're telling me you're giving it all up for some nobody you picked up on the *street*? A nobody you fell in love with? Who falls in love in less than a friggin' day?"

Nobody, Ricki. TJ's right, this is insanity.

She ground her teeth, staring out the bedroom window at Evron's quiet suburban street on the other side of the glass. "I'm not giving it up, TJ, just putting it on hold for a while."

"Until when? You realize you've been an idiot?" Her agent's accent grew thicker still and Ricki grimaced. She'd never heard TJ this annoyed, and he'd been her representation since she was fourteen. If it wasn't for the imposing New Yorker, she'd probably still be doing Walmart catalogs back in Missouri. He'd held her hand at her father's funeral, he'd visited her every day when she was in hospital with acute appendicitis. He'd been her rock in a world of surreal excess and extreme.

But he's right, Ricki. You know he is. Stop thinking with your heart and think with your head. You know almost nothing about Evron and you've got to admit, some odd stuff has been going on since you met him. That voice in your head, knowing Evron's name without being told, your dream last night –

She shut the unsettling thought down and let out a ragged breath. She didn't *want* to remember that dream. She didn't even want to think about remembering it. "I'm not being an idiot, TJ, and I know how hard you worked to get me this opportunity."

"Then come back home for a bit," TJ said quickly, as if sensing her uncertainty. "Maybe Australia wasn't such a smart idea on my part after all. This is a damn intense role you're researching and I should be by your side every minute of it."

Gnawing on her bottom lip, Ricki turned her back on the deserted street outside. Landing the highly coveted lead role in the upcoming Tarentino film had been a dream come true. The next step in an already stellar career. Researching the role had presented some problems though. She didn't know the first thing about being a hooker, let alone one suffering schizophrenia, but because the famed director wanted to spring her casting on an unsuspecting world, walking the streets in the U.S. had been out of the question. She was too damn famous in her home country. It was TJ who'd suggested the covert trip to Australia. The perfect country to go unnoticed. According to TJ, aliens could be having coffee at the Kings Cross Starbucks and no one would give a shit.

Ten minutes after hitting the streets, however, she'd seen Evron arguing with that weedy little man outside a strip joint, her heart had burst into song, her head had gone all fuzzy, her lips began to tingle and the rest, as they say in the classics, was history.

She shook her head. "No, TJ, I'm staying here. I want this more."

Tense silence followed her statement. She gnawed on her lip again, her heart beating faster than it should.

"Is he blackmailing you?"

TJ's abrupt question made her mouth fall open.

"What's he got? Pictures? Video? We can deal with this, honey. It's no problem. Just tell me how much he wants and I—"

"He's not blackmailing me, TJ." Ricki cut him off, hoping he heard the warning tone in her voice. "He's not holding me for ransom. He's not a fanatic fan. Hell, I don't think he even knows who I am."

"All the more reason to get out now, Beatrice," TJ interjected. "Christ, you're one of the most famous women in the world. What kind of man doesn't know who *you* are? A weird one, that's what kind. One to be avoided."

"TJ, enough!"

He stopped at her sharp snap and she could almost see him pacing his office, flipping a pen back and forth in his fingers in a rapid blur the way he always did when stressed.

Is he thinking of you...or his commission?

The dark thought slinked through her head and she scrunched her eyes closed, a ribbon of self-disgust threading through the churning unease in her stomach. That wasn't nice. Or called for. TJ Fredrickson had nothing but her best interests at heart and she knew it.

That dream still has you edgy, Ricki. Admit it. Something about it felt too...real.

She pressed her free hand to her face, scrubbing at her eyes. "I'll make you a deal, TJ," she said, the words far too shaky for her liking. "I won't get married tomorrow if you'll give me two weeks to decide what I want to do about the movie."

"One week."

She shook her head. "Two. And you're not allowed to bug me every day on the phone. Or send a minder looking for me. I've already told the one you sent with me that he's on paid vacation until further notice."

"Okay, two. But when those fourteen days are up, if you're not back here, I'm flying to Australia and punching this Evron McKenzie in the nose."

Ricki rolled her eyes. "I'll talk to you in two weeks, TJ. Go out and buy me a wedding present. Something expensive."

She waited, hoping to hear her agent laugh. He didn't. "Just one more thing, Beatrice, before you go," he said, and she closed her eyes again at the disapproving tone in his words. "What are you going to do, now you're so very much in love and want nothing more to do with everything you once did? Become a housewife? If you give it all away for love, what else do you have?"

"Happiness," Ricki answered before pressing her thumb to the disconnect key and ending the call.

She threw her cell phone on the bed and dragged her hands through her hair. As much as she knew it was the sensible thing to do, she didn't want to tell Evron they should wait a couple weeks to get married. Damn it.

Slumping onto the mattress, she reached for the small sheet of paper lying on the bed beside her, a lump forming in her throat as her gaze roamed over it. Evron's little engagement present he gave to her this morning. The most perfect, breathtaking drawing of herself she'd ever seen. How the hell could she go back to the states, leave him, after he'd presented her with something so beautiful?

Beatricccccccce...

She spun around, every hair on her body standing on end.

"Hello?"

Beatricccccccccccce...

Like the touch from a corpse, a chill raced up her spine, spreading across her scalp. Goose bumps broke out over her flesh, nipples pinching into rock-hard nubs that pressed against her t-shirt.

A sudden blast of heat flayed at her, all the more blistering due to the icy fingers feathering down her back. Around her ribs.

"Jesus," Ricki ground out. A hideous feeling of déjà vu washed over her. As if she'd been here before. Perhaps in a dream...

Beatricccccccccccccccce...

"Fuck this." She stepped away from the bed, irritation thinning her lips. She needed some coffee. She was jet-lagged, sleep-deprived and missing Evron. Which all added up to some seriously spooky craziness going on in her head. Striding across the room, she stepped into the hallway, lowering her gaze to the sketch in her hand. Evron truly was talented. The way he'd captured her so —

The pit of her stomach flip-flopped and she stumbled to a halt, her breath catching in her throat. Damn it, she felt...

Horny.

Sly heat wormed into the junction of her thighs, dampening the crotch of her panties. She frowned, pressing her legs together, her heartbeat quickening.

Goddamn, she wasn't just horny, she was...

A very soft, very low sound floated through her mind. A chuckle. Almost inaudible. And a word.

Come.

Her pussy fluttered. Grew wetter. Prickled with eager blood swelling her folds. Her clit ached, a tiny world wanting, needing to be sucked.

Come.

Hurrying forward, she headed away from the stairs leading down to the kitchen. Coffee could wait. Another damp wriggle of anticipation flittered in her cunt, stronger this time. Compelling. She climbed the stairs, stroking the wooden rail with her fingertips as she went. Something called her from the attic of Evron's home. Something she needed to see.

The door to the room stood closed before her, but as her foot—free of shoes and silent on the carpet—landed on the last tread, it swung open.

Come...

The delicate scent of roses wafted from the room, sweet and inviting. Ricki pulled in a deep breath, a soft smile curling her lips. Roses were her favorite flowers. They always made her feel warm and safe, bringing back memories of her childhood, her grandmother. Grammie had grown the most beautiful yellow roses, petals like dusted gold, scent like the breath of Heaven. Perhaps she would find a vase of the flowers in Evron's attic? Perhaps...

She stepped through the doorway, peering into the dark. The scent of roses grew stronger. Thicker. Thicker. Suffocating in its cloying strength. Pouring into her lungs. Choking her.

Coughing, she stumbled backward, her heart pounding. Fear ribboned through her. What was she doing here? *How* had she gotten here? Why couldn't she —

The air cleared. Just like that. The subtle smell of paper, pencils and a menthol aroma she associated with magic markers slipped into her nostrils and she shook her head, snorting at her own foolishness. "Idiot." What on earth was she so freaked out about? Nothing. "You truly are an idiot, Beatrice Whatley."

Chuckling at her stupidity, she took another step into the dark room and stopped again. Wet, worming tension returned to her pussy with gripping force, impatient for attention, and she gasped. God, she wanted to fuck. Now. Hard, brutal fucking. She wanted to be used and used and used again. Her sex throbbed, the crotch of her jeans drenched with her juices. As soon as she discovered what was in this room, she was stripping off and returning to Evron's bedroom. The desire to sink her fingers into her slick, creamy cunt was acute. Almost aggressive. Furious.

The darkness of the room closed around her, embracing her with greedy love as she patted the wall beside her, seeking the light switch. For one still moment, Ricki thought she saw movement in the shadows and then her fingers finally connected with the switch and the room burst into light.

Ricki gasped. A sculpture hung from Evron's rafters.

A sculpture of a woman bound by chains into a position of undeniable sexual imprisonment.

It repulsed her.

It aroused her.

Her mouth went dry and she licked her lips, staring at the suspended piece of art. *Oh God, I want that to be me.*

Without warning, an invisible force tugged on her hips — strong, painful, yet oh so highly sensual. As if a hook had buried into her sex, pressing on that sweetest of spots. *Come. Caress me, stroke me...*

Ricki took a step forward. The sculpture looked so tactile. As if the deep red marble was freshly painted.

In blood. In cum...

A curtain of incandescent air brushed against her. Like a lover's embrace. Encouraging her to come closer, closer, to the chained woman.

Touch me...

Smiling, the heat in her cunt symbiotic with the heat on her flesh, Ricki reached out her hand. Evron's sketch floated to the floor, forgotten as her fingertips touched the sculpture's slick, wet marble. Right on the woman's left nipple.

A squeezing jolt shot to her sex. Piercing like a wet tongue.

"Holy Hell!"

Yes, something like that...

Ricki drew in a ragged breath, gazing at the suspended artwork. Hesitantly, she raised her hand again, brushing the chains this time. Immediately, another stab of liquid heat jabbed at her cunt—*kiss me*—yet this time she didn't pull away. Her eyes traveled the complicated crisscrossing of the chains, following the sublime form of the woman entrapped by their steel, studying the perfect shape of her lips. She placed the pad of her index finger to those pouting, full lips. What would they feel like against hers? What would it be like to kiss such a perfect specimen of...

Kiss me. Taste me. Let your tongue wet my stone...

Pulses of hot tension radiated through her, from finger to cunt. Breath short, nipples rock-hard, Ricki moaned. Just a kiss. What harm would a kiss do? No one would know. No one would care. Just a kiss of those lush, blood-red lips. Just one touch. One kiss...

Her lips parted...

"NO!"

Ricki jerked stiff, spinning around.

"What the fuck are you doing?"

Evron stood in the doorway, his eyes cold. Angry. Like a storm about to erupt.

"Evron!" she gasped. "What... What?" Heart out of control, Ricki stared at him, like a small animal trapped by a stalking beast. "I didn't mean to..." She faltered for some reason, suddenly very scared.

"It's time for answers, Mystery Woman." His voice was low. Flat. His eyes narrowed, his fists clenched and Ricki squealed as the door slammed shut behind him. "I've had a gutful of secrets," he murmured, stepping deeper into the room, his gaze locked on her. "I want to know the *real* Ricki Whatley. Not the cardboard cutout I've been fucking."

She is planning to leave.

Evron's heart stilled, and for a moment nothing but one word registered. Leave. Ricki was going to leave him. Agony ripped through him. Colder than death.

"No." The denial fell from him in barely a breath.

Yes, Shahla hissed, stepping before him. Translucent and surreal. Black eyes glinting with malice. *Ask her.*

Evron stared through the Daemon Form's sinful shape, glaring at Ricki. Hot blood surged through his veins, melting the icy shards splintering his heart. "What's an American supermodel doing picking up men on the streets of Kings Cross, Ricki?"

Eyes the colour of the sky grew wide, a shimmer of guilt flashing over them. "I didn't think you'd recognized me," she said. "You never —"

"When were you planning to tell me you're leaving?" Evron cut her off. "Before or after you finished laughing at me?"

Ricki shook her head. "Laughing? Evron, why would I laugh at you?"

Shahla glided closer to the sculpture, fangs bared. *She dares to deceive the Achaemenes bloodline. Foolish whore.* The red curtain of her hair tumbled down her back, caressing the

curve of her ass. She reached out, dancing blood-red claws along the delicate line of Ricki's jaw.

Ricki flinched, not even aware why, and cold fury devoured Evron. *Get your fucking hands off her*, he snarled with silent hate at Shahla.

Hush now, Custodian. Don't be like that. Red lips curled into a cruel smile. *The whore likes a bit of Daemon in her. Only last night, Xesham had her gasping and moaning for more.*

Evron froze. *What?*

Shahla laughed, moving behind Ricki, claws tracing lines up and down her bare arms. *Xesham was quite taken with her. He said she brought out the...animal...in him.*

A shudder rippled through Ricki and she took a step forward. Away from Shahla's invisible presence. "Evron? What's going on?"

You should have been there, Custodian. You should have seen the way the whore arched and writhed and moaned when Xesham sank his teeth into her tits, his tongue into her dripping slit. His cock into her cunt.

"What's going on, Evron?" Ricki demanded. "Why are you so angry? I don't understand what's happening."

Shahla laughed, the sound ripe with glee. She wrapped her hands around Ricki's hips, nails seeming to pierce the smooth skin there. *She wasn't thinking of you last night, Custodian. She was only thinking of herself. She wasn't thinking of you when Xesham made her scream.*

"What is this sculpture, Evron?" Ricki almost yelled, cheeks wet with tears. "Did you make it? Why is it chained—"

She wasn't thinking of you when Xesham—

"Why is—"

When Xe—

"Shut up!" Evron roared. "Just shut the fuck up!"

Violent rage exploded in his head, his chest. Blood pounded through his veins with such volatile force, great shudders racked his body. He glared at Ricki. At Shahla.

For a split second—just a frozen moment in time—Evron swore he heard the very air crack, and then, with a choked gasp, Ricki fled. Shoving past him. Out the door.

Sinful body undulating with laughter, Shahla leaned back against the sculpture, hooking her elbows around two of the thick chains, her black eyes flashing. *Poor little whore. Perhaps she misses Xesham?*

With a silent snarl, Evron turned and bolted from the room, after Ricki. “Don’t walk away from me, Ricki!” His shout shook the walls. “Not without an explanation.”

“An explanation for what?” Ricki shot back, vaulting down the stairs two at a time. She paused at the bottom, long enough for Evron to see the tears on her face. The pain in her eyes. “For not telling you my life story in the whole twelve hours we’ve known each other?”

She spun around, hurrying along the hall toward his bedroom.

He caught up with her, grabbing her wrist and yanking her around. “Goddamn it, Ricki,” he snarled into her face. “We’re not done yet.”

With her free hand, Ricki slapped him squarely across his cheek. “Get fucked!”

A red pulse thumped in Evron’s head and his eyes narrowed. “As you wish.”

He pushed her against the wall. Hard. Ramming his hips to hers. Anger coursed through him, heating his veins with molten steel. Smashing her wrists to the wall, Evron whacked her knees apart with his, slamming his cock against her crotch. Ricki writhed beneath him, mashed between the wall and his body.

She glared up at him, breasts heaving. “Don’t you dare.”

He bared his teeth at her. “Didn’t seem to have a problem last night.” His mouth crushed hers, tongue plunging past her lips. Demanding. Taking. Their teeth clashed as she writhed against him, trying to whip her head away. A burning passion he’d never known before ignited in his gut. A sense of conquering empowerment. Of control. Who

was Ricki to think she commanded *him*? The direct descendant of the most powerful king in history? Pride filled his hammering heart. *He* was an Achaemenes! Royalty, goddamn her!

Cock a rigid length of hot lust, he shoved harder against her hips, the sound of a whimper deep in her throat enraging him, arousing him, even more.

God, this woman drove him wild. Dragging his lips from her mouth, he pulled back. Just enough to look into her eyes. He wanted to see the submission in their sea-blue depths. He wanted to know she knew her place. "Look at me, Ricki." He snarled the order, feeling her panting breath on his face. Her body quivered beneath him, soft and subtle and so fucking *there* he was almost giddy. "Look at me. Now!"

Ricki jerked, flinching at his shout. Yet her hips, once pressed flat to the wall by his weight, now pushed back, the warm crux of her pussy rubbing his cock through the flimsy material of her skirt. Urging. Insistent. "Go to Hell!" she spat, struggling against the grip on her wrists.

"Hell has nothing I want."

Blue eyes flashed at him. "Well, there's nothing you can have here."

And with that, Ricki shoved him away and took off.

Chapter Six

Her pulse thumped in her throat like a massive triphammer. She could hear Evron following her. Could feel his eyes boring into her back, a physical touch that sent shivers down her spine and into her damp, throbbing sex.

He was going to catch her. She knew it. Even as she stamped into the lounge room to retrieve the keys to her rental, to get as far away from him as possible, she knew he was going to stop her. Stop her and fuck her.

And she wanted him to.

No you don't! a part of her screamed. The part that still shook with pain from his cruel words. The part that still trembled with fear she didn't understand. A fear of that weird, disgusting sculpture.

But the rest of her, the part controlled by sensations of the flesh, wanted Evron to throw her down and fuck her senseless. To use her body. At the thought, her pussy contracted, already wet and hungry for his cock.

God, what was wrong with her?

She skirted the lounge, narrowly avoiding Evron's snatching grasp. Where the hell were her keys? She'd left them—

Evron's fingers curled around her left wrist. Stronger than a vise. With a savage jerk, he pulled her around. Burning gray eyes locked on hers. "We're not finished yet."

A massive force shoved against her body, as if an invisible wave suddenly slammed her from behind. Her body smashed against his, knocking the air from her lungs. Heat wrapped around her immediately, radiating to her core as Evron's strong hands jerked her hips to his. The feel of his cock—long, hot and harder than steel—sent bolts of squirming tension straight into her sex. She shoved at him, furious. With him and her

own traitorous body. After the way he'd spoken to her, she wanted nothing to do with him.

Liar.

Never had she been so conflicted. The desire to get away from Evron, to run out his door and never see him again was so powerful her blood sang with it. But the desire to drown in his assault, to meet him on the battlefield as his sexual equal, to conquer and be conquered, was just as driving. It wasn't only her body that wanted to be consumed by him. Her heart did too.

God Almighty, where was her mind?

Evron shoved harder against her crotch and a flood of wet heat pooled in her pussy, even as she struggled to push him away. He lifted her from the floor, his fingers digging into the muscles of her ass, his rigid cock scalding the lips of her cunt despite the silk of her panties and the denim of his jeans. Lust and anger filled her body. Knotting her hands in his hair, her breath short, her pussy wet, she yanked his head up. "Let me go!"

For a split moment she thought he would. A shimmer of regret—confusion—flashed across eyes blazing so intensely she felt the burn on her face. Then the moment passed and he shoved her against the wall, knocking the very wind from her lungs as his mouth captured hers once more.

Teeth and tongue brutally hard, he plundered her lips, hands raking up her body to cup and squeeze her breasts, swollen with passion, through the cotton of her shirt. She arched into him, wanting more. Wanting flesh-to-flesh contact. Hate consumed her, not for herself or Evron, but for the cursed material keeping his hands, mouth, teeth from her nipples. "Goddamn you, Evron," she ground out, yanking on a fistful of hair until he looked into her face.

Their eyes connected and there was no need for words.

Nailing her to the wall with his hips, Evron grabbed at the V of her neckline and ripped her shirt apart. Material scraped over her nipples painfully, a fire that set her

cunt alight. Before the sting could leave the tender peaks of flesh, however, Evron's mouth and hands found them, sucking one aching nub past his teeth to tongue it cruelly while he pinched and twisted and squeezed the other. She slammed her head back into the wall, biting on her lip to hold back a cry.

He was hurting her. She despised it. And she wanted more.

The rod of steel ramming at her cunt grew harder, more insistent. Each ferine thrust filled her with hungry desire. Every brutal shove of his cock flooded her with fear. Anger fueled him. She knew it. She felt it burning in his body. Like a living beast that only existed for fury. Yet there was lust too. So primitive, so *consuming*, her heart clenched and her cunt contracted.

Who *was* this man?

Get away! the rational part of her mind cried.

No! answered the rest.

The teeth on her nipple grew fierce, sinking into the sensitive tip with wild intent. She gasped, squirming in Evron's hold. A growl rose from his throat, low and utterly animalistic. He lifted his head, eyes beyond feverish. An inferno devoured him, consuming him from within. Her breath caught. "Oh God! Evron..."

"Is this like your dream, Ricki?" he asked, his words tortured and raw. "Is this what Xesham did to you? Is this what you want?"

"Zee...Xesham?" She frowned, shaking her head. "Evron, I don't know what—"

He moved. Fast. Pulling her from the wall.

For a disorientating instant, Ricki thought she saw the sofa shift, jerked by an unseen force. The piece of furniture slid to Evron's feet, the sound of metal scraping floorboards filled the air and, with savage intent, he threw her facedown across the back of it and tore her panties to shreds.

All he could hear was his heart.

Pounding in his chest. Like the blows from a giant hammer.

Hot blood roared through him, hot anger boiling it in his veins.

He grabbed her hips and yanked her ass up, pulling her cunt closer to his cock. With each ragged breath he pulled, his body filled with her essence. The scent of anger, fear. Passion.

His cock strained against his jeans, aching for release. He would show her what a fuck was. He would teach her what it was to be conquered. Controlled. And when he was finished fucking her cunt he would fuck her ass, and when he finished there, he would sink his cock, still wet with her juices, into her mouth and fuck her there too. The final crushing blow of a defeated rebellion.

Fury roared through him. Rabid. Furious. Clawing at his mind and tearing great chunks from his heart. The desire to punish Ricki, to show her just who she was dealing with, who she had deceived, was powerful. A force so potent it was almost a living thing.

Crush her.

A mighty pain suddenly sliced through his chest. Stealing his breath.

He snapped into a frozen arc, racked in agony.

And it was then, with Ricki's gasp of frightened rapture echoing in his ears, he heard it. That same serene, mellifluous voice saying that same single word.

Fate...

An entirely different presence touched his soul, his heart. One of great harmony and unending peace. One that brought another desire swelling through him, crashing over his anger. Fighting it.

Love.

Love for this woman who made him feel safe. Who filled him with a serenity he'd never before experienced. The pain evaporated.

Life had become a crazy-assed, surreal dream since they'd met but it was meaningless without her. The hollow sense of rejection that had devoured him when Shahla whispered of Ricki's alleged departure was testament enough to his need for her. Without her, the world would cease to exist. He'd succumb to the Daemon Form and whatever Hell it came from. Their meeting had been fate. So was their love. And in their love, he found a reason not to be angry anymore.

He had no cause to be.

Fate well met, the pure voice said. *Be strong, Evron McKenzie.*

Peace flooded Evron. Peace and regret. He looked down at the woman bent over before him, his throat squeezing tight, his eyes stinging with tears. "Christ, Ricki," he ground out, wrapping one arm around her waist and the other around her rib cage, pressing her back into his body. "Christ, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Forgive me. Please forgive me."

For a moment she didn't speak. Or move.

His chest grew heavy and he held his breath. *Too late, Evron. You're too late.* He straightened from her, his hands slipping down her rib cage. Only to be stilled by Ricki's.

She pressed her butt closer to his cock, her fingers threading through his, gazing at him over her shoulder. "Show me." Her whisper stroked his tormented soul as she placed his hands on her breast, her crotch. "Show me how sorry you are."

Her words — their intent — sank into his soul.

With a groan of sheer happiness, Evron buried his face into the curve of her neck, breathing her in. He closed his eyes. He hadn't lost her at all. And he would spend the rest of his life making certain he never hurt her again. "I love you, Ricki."

The fingers of her left hand threaded through his, sliding them over her mons until they brushed the satiny smooth lips of her pussy. "I know, Evron." Her index finger pressed his, pushing its pad past those gloriously wet lips. "Now shut up and show me how much."

He didn't need to be told again.

Curling his hand, he plunged deeper into her sex, feeling her juices slick his skin. She arched, grinding against his denim-trapped cock, pressing her breast harder into his other palm. The pressure in his jeans reached breaking point, the coarse material rubbing the pulsating length of his erection, adding to the exquisite torture of contact. Fuck, he was close. So close.

"I need you inside me." Ricki's statement was throaty and low. She looked at him over her shoulder, eyes smoldering, lips parted. "Now."

Without breaking contact, Evron yanked open his fly, the buttons flinging across the room with a pop. His swollen, throbbing shaft sprang free seconds before—with a slight shift of weight and a fluid thrust—he plunged into Ricki's creamy pussy.

The muscles of her sex clamped around him, wet, tight and eager. "God, Evron! Yes!"

He pumped harder, each thrust sinking him deeper into her heat and deeper into love. She guided his hand to her clit, the tiny little nub of flesh like a fervid button under his finger. "Here," she whispered.

Evron's breath grew short. Pleasure rolled through him, engorging his already turgid cock until he could feel her sex squeeze around it like a tight sheath. The soft slurping sounds of penetration fed the dizzying waves of rapture crashing over him, drowning him. He cupped one perfect breast in his right hand, pinching its hard, puckered nipple between thumb and index, rolling it in rhythm with the thrust of his cock. Ricki moaned, soft but undeniably demanding. She was as close as he. He could sense it. Feel it. Hear it. In the clenching of her cunt. The whimpers from her throat.

The sweet flush of eruption almost upon him, he dropped his head to her neck once more, wanting to taste and feel her all at once.

To Evron, the world stopped, listening to their ecstasy. A tone filled the air, deep and pure. A great bell rung on high. Sounding a destiny charted in Heaven and met on Earth. Evron hung on a beat...

"Now! Now!" Ricki cried out, arching into his stabbing cock, taking him deeper. "God all-sweet-fucking-mighty, *yes!*" Her sex contracted. Grew hotter. Wetter.

His own orgasm hit him like an explosion of concentrated pleasure, bursting from his loins in great shudders that left him gasping and filled with bliss. "Jesus!" he ground out. Tears stung his eyes. Sweat slicked his brow. "Oh Jesus Christ, Ricki!"

He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her close, awash in pleasure beyond comprehension, bliss beyond measure. "Oh Ricki," he murmured into her neck.

Ricki's sex held him in fading pulses. "It's never been like this before, Evron. It's never felt so good."

Evron raised his head, wanting to see the woman he loved.

And stared into the soulless eyes of Shahla.

Fangs flashed in a cruel smile. *That's just what she said to Xesham last night.*

With a howl, he stumbled backward. Glaring at Shahla. Just as the Daemon reached out for Ricki.

He clenched his fist. "Don't even think about it!"

All about him, red. Not just a tinge, but thick, viscous red. As if he looked out at the world through a veil of blood. His chest squeezed, the muscle buried in its cavity pounding. Agony carved through it, stabbing pain through his body. Blisteringly cold. Numbingly hot.

"Evron?" Ricki frowned at him. "What's the —"

Shahla's laugh sliced into Evron's head. *I'll touch who I want, Custodian. The whore is yours, after all. Which makes her mine as well.* She gave him a sly wink—and plunged her hands straight into Ricki's chest

Ricki's spine snapped straight. Her eyes bulged. A scream tore from her throat and, as Shahla laughed, Ricki began to thrash, suspended in midair. Held by the fucking Daemon Form.

You disappoint me, Custodian, Shahla chuckled. I thought you would be more open to the benefits I offer, what with your pathetic existence. But you're just as stubborn as the old man. Perhaps more so.

"LET HER GO!" Evron roared. The air cracked. A lamp abruptly leapt from its side table and smashed against the wall. Across the room, the TV screen exploded, glass spewing from the gutted appliance like fireworks. "LET HER GO NOW!"

Shahla's eyes flashed black venom. Why? She's a Daemon-fucking whore, Custodian. She's beneath you.

Ricki's scream grew louder. Evron could almost hear it stripping her vocal cords, shredding her throat. Beyond control, his fury devoured him. Red and murderous, and for the first time in his life, Evron welcomed it.

The air snapped. On the other side of the room the bookshelf spun away from the wall, spitting hardcovers and paperbacks across the floor. His body screaming its own agony, Evron clenched his fists, sights locked on his dangling, writhing lover and the bitch that tortured her. The room bent around him. Reality warped, sucked in by his raging will. "Let. Her. Go. Now."

Shahla laughed, lifting the squealing Ricki higher. *Make me.*

He struck out. Without thought or hesitation. A lethal bolt of displaced fury, aimed straight at Shahla.

Who immediately disappeared. Leaving Ricki suspended in the air.

Directly exposed to Evron's released rage.

The air cracked as the discharged rage struck her. Punching her writhing body through the air until she smashed against the far wall in a bone-crunching smack and slid to the floor. Still.

Evron screamed, sprinting to her side. "NO!" He collapsed to his knees, stricken with pain and guilt.

Shahla's laugh filled his head, triumphant. *Temper, temper. Now look what you've done, Custodian*, she said, heat licking at Evron's cold, numb face. *I can fix it, Custodian. All you need do is touch me.*

Wild knocking on the door cut through Shahla's fading laugh. "Evron? It's Nick." The knocking grew louder. "What's going on? Open up!"

Evron stared at Ricki, his fingers on her neck. A pulse still beat there. Weak and faltering, but still there all the same. "God forgive me." Grief choked him. "Ricki, I'm sorry."

"Evron?" Nick shouted from outside. "What the fuck's going on in there?"

Evron lifted his head, tossing a look at the closed front door. With a *whoosh* it slammed open, so suddenly Nick almost fell flat on his face.

"Holy shit, mate!" Nick took a step into the chaos of Evron's lounge room, eyes wide, mouth open. He stared at the jagged, splintered mess that was the door's lock, at the gutted shell of the television. "What the hell have you been doing?" His eyes fell on the motionless form of Ricki and the blood drained from his face. "Shit! It's really her!"

Evron leapt to his feet, shoving his dick back into his jeans. Tears burnt his flesh like acid, but he didn't care. "Call an ambulance." He shot a glance over his shoulder, found his phone amongst the shards of television on the other side of the room and "threw" it at Nick.

Nick gaped at him, barely catching the flying hand-piece before it whacked into his chest. "Evron, what—!"

"Call an ambulance!" Evron snapped. Boiling, turbulent fury stripped his blood. "Do *not* leave her side until you see me again. Whatever you do, do not come upstairs."

He cast a quick look around the room. There was nothing he could use as a weapon. Nothing except his anger.

He didn't understand *how* he was doing it, how he moved things with his mind, but that didn't matter. What mattered now was ending the whole fucking situation. Once and for all.

Turning back to Nick, he leveled his best mate with a pinning stare. "I'll explain later. Just do what I say." Crouching, he reached out and brushed a strand of golden sun from Ricki's cheek. "I'll be back, angel," he whispered. "I promise."

Shooting Nick one last glance, making certain he was indeed calling an ambulance, Evron strode from the lounge room. Up the stairs. To his studio.

Had Shahla thought he was angry before?

She hadn't seen him angry. Yet.

Chapter Seven

He took the stairs two at a time.

The studio door loomed before him. Closed. On the other side hung an object from the very depths of Hell. An object with more power than Evron could imagine. Nothing, however, was going to stop him from sending the goddamn thing back. Return to fucking sender.

He sent out a solid wave of force and the door ripped from its hinges.

Sulphur spewed from the room seconds before a creature beyond insanity flew through the shattered doorway and struck him in the chest.

Seriously, Custodian, Shahla's voice boomed as the hideous creature's talons tore at his flesh. *What do you possibly think you are going to do? Kill me? Destroy me?* There was a hollow laugh, just as the blood-red Daemon sank fangs the size of daggers into Evron's shoulder.

He screamed, agony ripping through him. His shoulder felt as if it were on fire. Hacked into by blades of steel.

With a crunching thud he fell backward against the stair treads, sliding to the second-floor landing, the Daemon still atop him, attacking. Needle-sharp talons slashed his face, gashing his cheek. Warm blood gushed from the wound, filling Evron's mouth as he screamed again.

Giant wings lashed at him, leathery membranes like sheets of fire. Each blow scorched his skin, each strike tore charred flesh from his body.

Christ! He was going to die.

My pet gets a little cranky when mortals mess with the will of Satan, Shahla stated, words punctuated by the snarling hiss of the Daemon. *Xesham is not known for his agreeable nature.*

Evron's muscles coiled tight and his stare snapped to the perversion of God upon him.

Xesham?

An image of Ricki being assaulted and abused by the hellish thing shot through his head. Her pain filled him. As did his rage.

Like lightning, a vase whipped up the stairs, smashing against Xesham's gaping maw. Followed by another. And another. Flowers scattered everywhere, water evaporating with a hiss as it hit Xesham's burning hide. The Daemon reared back, raising its freakishly muscled arm to deflect the blows.

The small defensive move was all that Evron needed.

With a violent whiplash of his body, he bucked, knocking Xesham momentarily off balance.

The sound of a window shattering under tremendous force filled the room. A jagged shard of broken glass flew up the stairwell, slicing past Evron with lethal speed, sucking at his hair in its wake. The glass blade embedded itself into Xesham's chest and the Daemon screeched, oily black blood spurting from the wound.

Evron sent another shard of glass shooting toward it, slicing a clean slit through one large, outstretched wing. A high-pitched wail pierced the air and the Daemon staggered backward, glaring down at Evron with dead, burning eyes.

It opened its mouth and hissed, rows and rows of teeth dripping with Evron's blood.

Evron growled, scrambling to his feet. "You fucking bastard!"

He flicked his eyes to the left. A splintering sound tore through the chaos, like a giant tree being felled, and a large chunk of the sidewall ripped from its structure, smashing against the approaching Daemon.

Xesham's massive wings beat furiously, the creature gibbering in rage. Pieces of wall rained down on Evron, a hailstorm of plaster and debris biting into his face and arms, but he didn't flinch, nor stop his assault. If this fucking ugly piece of shit thought it was going to stop him getting to the sculpture, it was wrong.

Reaching with his raging mind, Evron grabbed anything—everything—he could, flinging items at the snarling Daemon, an onslaught of objects, once inert and harmless, now weapons of fury wielded by a man pushed to the edge.

A clock tore through Xesham's left wing, a butcher's knife through the Daemon's side. The micro stereo system, used only the night before to play a Coltrane CD while Evron and Ricki made love, whipped from his bedroom dresser and punched a perfect rectangle through the Daemon's right wing, its trailing power cord popping Xesham's eye like a bubble. Black pus spurted from the ruptured orb, followed by a grotesque ooze that defiled the air with an unholy stench. Xesham squealed, shredded wings flapping.

And still Evron didn't stop.

The toaster burst from its place in the kitchen and flung up the stairs, whacking against Xesham's face, a cleaver in hot pursuit. With a snick, the blade carved away half the Daemon's face, vile jelly oozing from the gaping wound.

Feet planted, Evron stood motionless, objects flying past him with deadly speed. Another crack rocked the house and Xesham cringed, bloody head jerking toward the sound.

Evron stared at the Daemon, a cold grin on his face as every pane of glass in the house tore past him. Severing Xesham's wings at the joints. Its arms at the elbows.

The Daemon dropped to its knees. Squealing. Shrieking.

Evron held out his hand and, with a creaking snap, a shattered stair rail flung into his palm. “Was it good for you too?” he asked on a whisper. Eyes locked on the wailing, thrashing Daemon, he swung the sharp piece of wood above his head and brought it down in a blurring arc. Straight into Xesham’s heaving chest.

Xesham’s squeal rose to a piercing pitch. It bucked, it writhed and then, mouth agape, bloodied wing stumps flailing, it vanished. Leaving the wooden stake embedded in the stair, black blood and putrid innards dripping down its length.

Evron looked up the stairs to the open doorway of his studio, anger growing more cold and deadly with each second. “Here I come, bitch. Ready or not.”

The first wave of heat struck him before his foot hit the third-floor landing, the second immediately after, wrapping around him like a molten vise.

You killed my pet!

A fist smashed into his chest. Punching his heart. He gasped, stumbling backward. Agonizing pain sheared into his body and his knees buckled. *I will punish you for what you have done to Xesham, Custodian!* Another invisible blow struck his heart. Another. *I will teach you to kowtow to me as all Custodians have before you!*

He fell backward, his breath stuck in his throat. His chest burned, a crushing force attacking his heart. Christ, he was having a heart attack. It felt as if he were having a —

The hearts of my Custodians have always been their weakness. Shahla’s voice scraped at his mind, claws of invisible smoke raking at the pounding organ in his chest cavity. *It must have something to do with the endless anger born there.* She tortured him again with a savage punch and Evron cried out, the sound strangled and weak.

Fight back, Evron. For fuck’s sake, fight the bitch.

The voice in his head was his own. And yet it wasn’t. Somehow it was the voice of a king, a playwright, an emperor, a billionaire. Multiple voices, multiple accents all layered atop each other to form one single voice thrumming with one single command — fight her.

It was enough. He let out a choked roar, visualizing the she-Daemon as he struck out with his mind.

Shahla screeched, a furious squeal of surprise, and suddenly the squeezing pressure on his chest vanished. *Heyvoon!* Her curse was venomous. And distant.

Evron pictured her floundering under his mental attack, drawing the image in his mind with rapid strokes of his imagination before lashing out again. Hurling his rage at her cowering form. Sweat beaded on his forehead, his blood roared in his ears. In his head, he visualized Shahla reeling backward, and as if the blow was a physical force, the sculpture hanging from the rafters in his studio shuddered.

"Time to go home, Shahla," he ground out, staggering toward the open door. He struck out again, punching a blow of concentrated hate toward the image of Shahla he held captive in his mind.

Another screech ripped through reality, louder and far more incensed. He pushed forward, storming toward his studio even as suffocating heat smashed against him.

I am home, Custodian. The formless fist slammed into his chest again, driving him back a step. *There is nowhere I would rather be than inside your twisted, bitter soul. Its fathomless fury nourishes me.* She hit him again, this time in the stomach, the throat, before snaring his heart in a cruel grip. *It makes me oh so powerful. And horny.*

He bellowed, throwing himself forward. He knew Shahla was not there to grab, but he lunged for her all the same, imagining the scalding firmness of her body under his as he slammed her to the floor. "I would rather stick my dick in a fetid dingo," he snarled.

He lashed out once more, and as before, the sculpture on the other side of the open door shuddered.

Shahla squealed. For a fleeting second, Evron swore he saw her in the flesh. Stumbling away from him, black eyes stunned, face contorted in pain, a drop of black blood leaking from her nose.

He let out a roar, throwing himself at her again, only to pass straight through the evaporating form in a crashing fall.

Shahla's laugh sounded in his head, smug and malicious. Yet, even in the triumphant notes, he heard her apprehension. He leapt to his feet, his stare fixed on the sculpture. Was it Shahla's true existence? Or just the tomb in which her daemonic being rested?

Destroy it. Destroy it now.

Again, the voices in his head that were one commanded him to action. He reached out with his mind, grabbing from the back of his studio the old inkjet printer he'd long since retired, and flung it at the hanging sculpture.

The printer bounced off the blood-red marble, shattering into a shower of plastic and circuitry.

Evron let out a hiss, staring at the motionless artwork.

Did you really think that would work, Custodian?

Shahla's smug chuckle reverberated through him and he ground his teeth, snaring his ancient Mac from beside his drawing desk and throwing it at the sculpture. It exploded into pieces but he didn't pause, whipping his back-up server, his desktop easel, the drawer full of stencil knives at the taunting sculpture.

His head rang with drilling pain, his blood throbbed in his temples, his body ran wet with sweat. He threw everything in his studio he could grab with his mind at the suspended Daemon Form.

And still, it didn't move.

Shahla chuckled again. *Surprised?*

Evron bit back a silent snarl, his glare fixed on the sculpture. A physical attack wasn't working.

Nothing will, little human. Now behave yourself before I punish you.

His lip curled. "Pretty bloody certain you've threatened me with punishment already, bitch."

He struck out at the sculpture. A savage mental blow fueled by an image of Shahla writhing in pain.

The sculpture shuddered, the chains holding it above the floor creaking under its weight. *Stop it, Custodian*, Shahla snapped, pain-laced fury slicing into his head. *Stop it now!*

Evron clenched his fists, sweat stinging his eyes. “Fuck you, Shahla.” He lashed out again, each blow to the sculpture like a steel fist slamming into his head. But he didn’t stop. He couldn’t. His hate wouldn’t let him. It was time to —

Fuck me, Custodian? Shahla’s voice slithered through his mind. *What a wonderful idea.*

A hideously pleasurable heat suddenly assaulted his body and he snapped into a rigid arc, his balls rising as liquid tension licked a path straight to his cock.

Evron clamped his teeth together. He knew what Shahla was up to. “It won’t work,” he snarled, fists balled as he shut out the pleasurable sensation and stepped into his dim studio. The Daemon Form hung still before him, radiating heat, hate and sin.

Care to bet? A brutal mouth closed around his cock, sucking at its length with a determination that tightened his balls. The air shimmered before him, and as she had done the very first time they met, Shahla stepped from the sculpture—a wisp of voluptuous mist that turned into a creature of devious intent. A tongue folded around his cock, a finger pressed to his ass. *Better men than you have tried to resist me, Custodian*, she said with a soulless smile. The finger at his sphincter turned into a rod of penetrating steel, sending exquisite pain rushing through him. Evron bit back a groan.

He was *not* going to succumb to her.

He narrowed his eyes, moving forward again. He didn’t have a clue what he was going to do yet, but one thing was certain—at the end of this day, the fucking ugly piece of carved stone was *not* going to be in his house.

Shahla watched him stalk toward her, blood-red lips curling into a slow smile. Her nipples were pinched and erect, pointing straight at him, and she reached up, flicking at

one with talon-tipped fingers. Shots of excruciating bliss ripped through Evron's chest and his knees buckled, cock and balls instantly on fire with hunger.

Shahla laughed, tonguing her fangs. *Come on, Custodian*, she urged, pouring angry lust into his head with each word. *I'm waiting*.

With a silent snarl, he charged...

Stopped once again by hands with no form. They pulled at his cock, sliding from head to base in a rhythm so debauched his balls contracted into hard sacs of hunger. He could almost *see* his cum, surging through the vas deferens, ready and eager to spurt free.

A silent roar filled his head and he shuddered. The red beast of his anger salivated for blood, enraged by the games Shahla played. For once, Evron agreed with it.

Teeth ground together, ignoring the primitive, sinful greed throbbing in his loins, he stared hard at Shahla. At the sculpture. "Get the fuck out of my house."

The finger in his ass slipped deeper, rimming the orifice with deliberate intent. *No*.

Evron's eyes narrowed. And then, with as much force as he could, he punched out at the Daemon Form with his mind.

Immediately, boiling energy smashed into him. He flew across the studio and slammed into the wall, dropping to the floor in agony.

Peals of laughter echoed around the room. *Did you think it would be that easy, Custodian?* Shahla stepped toward him, naked body undulating. Bare feet planted lightly on either side of his spread legs and she squatted down, slick cunt lips brushing his thighs. *Did you really think I would be susceptible to your pathetic mind?* Her hand slid to the slit between her open thighs and she plunged in a finger.

Evron's body erupted in explosive pleasure, a cry tearing from his constricted throat. Every muscle and joint throbbed with pain and rapture. Every fibre craved more.

Shahla's face loomed before his, pitch-black eyes supremely triumphant. "You may as well give up now, Evron McKenzie." Her hot breath fanned him. She dragged her hands up his chest, finger still slick with her own juices. The musky scent assaulted Evron's nose, mephitic and repugnant. "You *are* going to touch me. We both know it." She traced her tacky finger along Evron's bottom lip, eyes boring into his. "You're going to touch me, stroke me, fuck me—and then we shall devour Earth together. Why fight it?"

Her face drew closer, closer, and then her lips captured his. Cruel and savage and brutally hungry.

Evron jerked his head away, gagging. Perverted lust tried to strangle his fury. Tried to reach into his soul, his very being.

Shahla chuckled, claws sinking into his jaw. "Touch me, Custodian. Fulfill your purpose. The Achaemenes bloodline serves no other."

Evron's cock throbbed. He was losing. Drowning in carnal pleasure.

His eyes slid to the right, seeing nothing but the enslaved woman bound on her knees, waiting to be fucked. The sculpture. His *destiny*. The goddamn fucking Daemon—

A small triangle of white paper caught his eyes. Poking out from under the sculpture's bent right leg, almost hidden by its light-eating shadow. Almost.

His drawing of Ricki.

Love—powerful and pure—swelled though him. Ricki Whatley. His beautiful Mystery Woman. He remembered how he'd felt when he'd created the drawing—content, calm, blissfully happy.

She was his destiny, not some hellish, possessed sculpture. She was his fate, his—
Twin Heart.

The words rang through his head, pure as a golden bell.

Evron turned his eyes back to Shahla.

Whatever the fuck his *body* was feeling, it had nothing to do with his heart. He knew now, beyond doubt, that's what Shahla wanted, needed. His heart. Burdened with rage and belonging to her.

But that was never going to be. Because from the moment he met Ricki, his heart belonged to her. The second they touched, his anger began to die. She was kind and patient. Kinder than anyone he knew. More patient of his moods than anyone should be. She made him happy. Truly, utterly and for the first time in his life happy. And why shouldn't he be? He had a beautiful woman who loved him for who he was. There was no reason for him to be angry anymore. At all.

He looked into Shahla's pupil-free black eyes, smiling slowly. "And there's nothing you can ever do that will change that."

Opening his heart and mind, he channeled all the love in his soul for Ricki, all his happiness and contentment, into a single, undeniable thought. And sent it spearing straight into the heart of the sculpture.

Shahla reared back, eyes snapping wide. *NO!* Her scream punctured the air. *NO, NO, NO!*

Her perfect, pale flesh rippled and steamed, pus-filled blisters erupting over her naked limbs. She arched her back. Screamed once more.

And was gone.

Leaving Evron leaning against the wall of his studio. Totally alone.

Breath ragged, body throbbing with pain, he looked at the place where the Daemon Form had once hung, devouring the light and life of the room. Now there was just empty space. "Never was much of a fan of sculpture anyway," he muttered before climbing to his feet and limping from the room.

The woman he loved needed him. Almost as much as he needed her.

Epilogue

Los Angeles, USA

Eight months later

Ricki rolled her hips and gazed down into Evron's eyes, her hands fisted in his hair, her tight sex squeezing his cock. "Damn, I'll never get sick of this."

He smoothed his hands up her long thighs and cupped her ass cheeks. "What?" he murmured, pulling her harder into his thrusts. "Sex in a limo?"

She laughed, a low, throaty sound that vibrated all the way through her body to pulse around his stiff shaft. "Sex with you. Period."

A wave of dizzying pleasure rolled through him and he gripped her butt harder, very close to release. *Ah Evron, who would have thought you'd be this happy...* "Is it cliché of me to say the feeling's entirely mutual?"

She pushed her hips forward in a slow stroke, taking him deeper into her pussy as she lowered her head to his. "A little." She grinned. "But you're an artist, not a writer, so I'll forgive you."

He chuckled, sliding his hands up her back, the silky fabric of her evening gown like cool liquid under his palms. Pure happiness flowed through him and he laughed again, letting Ricki see his smile. "Oh, you are a cheeky one this afternoon, aren't you, Mrs. McKenzie."

Grinding her clit against the base of his cock, she closed her eyes and whimpered, the grin still on her lips. "Mrs. McKenzie. Mmmm, I'll never get sick of *that* either."

He pressed his hands to her shoulder blades, pulling her closer to his chest. "Again," he said, lowering his head to the base of her throat, "I am forced into clichés and must say ditto."

Ricki moaned, bowing her neck under his lips. "Do you think anyone would notice if we didn't turn up?"

He smiled wider at her husky question, sliding his hands back to her bottom. "Possibly." He charted a slow path along the line of her collarbone to her shoulder. Her gown was strapless and he took his time exploring the smooth perfection of her shoulder, his cock growing harder in her wet heat, his thrusts growing faster. "I'm sure several Academy members may notice your absence." He slipped his left hand under the bunched material of her dress and cupped her breast, dragging his thumb over its puckered nipple as he moved his lips up the column of her throat to her ear. Fuck, he was close. So bloody close... "Not to mention your director, TJ and about a thousand paparazzi and screaming fans."

Ricki's breath hitched, her pussy constricting around his cock. She was close to losing herself in her pleasure. As close as he was. He could feel the exquisite tension in her body. It mirrored his own. "Besides," he continued, nibbling on the sensitive flesh behind her ear in just the way he knew drove her wild. "I want to hear your acceptance speech."

She hitched another breath, rolling her hips faster, taking him deeper, deeper into her core. "Who says I'm winning?"

The squirming heat at the base of his spine radiated into his balls. *Oh God, Evron, not much longer...not much...you can't...so good...* The soles of his feet began to prickle. "Me," he ground out, nostril flaring.

As if the word pushed her over the edge, Ricki arched into his thrusts, a raw cry bursting from her throat, her hands tugging on his hair. "Oh fuck, Evron, yes, yes, yes!"

He slammed into her harder, his balls rising, his fingers digging into her flesh, and let out a choked groan as his own release detonated through him. Claiming him. Owning him and consuming him. *Yes, yes, God yes!*

Ricki slumped against him, pressing her forehead to his shoulder, a soft laugh shaking through her breath. "I think I crumpled your tux."

Evron chuckled, stroking her back in languid caresses. "I think I creased your dress."

She lifted her head and gazed down into his face, her eyes still smoldering with passion, her cheeks still flushed with pleasure. "I'm a supermodel-slash-actress. It's not creased. I'm setting a new trend."

A beat of sheer happiness throbbed through Evron's chest. He brushed his lips over his wife's, more at peace than ever. "Love you, Ricki."

She pulled his head back to hers and returned his kiss, her lips lingering on his mouth with deliberate intent. "Love you back."

A gradual pressure on Evron's stomach told him the stretch limo was stopping and he let out a contented sigh, smoothing his hands up Ricki's back one more time. Eight months of wedded bliss, eight months of comfortable ease, eight months discovering and exploring and getting to know everything about each other and he still marveled at how lucky he was. How, finally, fate had given him reason to be happy. Genuinely, truly happy.

He gave her a lopsided smile, tucking a loose tendril of what had only fifteen minutes ago been her immaculately coiffed hair. "I think we have arrived at the Kodak Theatre, my love. Time to tidy ourselves up and face your —"

"Driver," Ricki cut him off, a small grin playing on her lips as she leaned sideways and pressed the intercom button connecting the private passenger section of the limo with the cabin. "There's something I need to do. One more time around the block, please." Her tight pussy muscles squeezed his cock — still buried deeply in her sex — and he sucked in a ragged breath, fresh, eager blood surging instantly to *all* the right places.

Her eyes sparkled as she smiled at Evron, rolling her hips ever so slightly. "Actually, better make that two times," she amended. "I don't really want to rush it."

The End

About the Author

Lexxie's not a deviant. She just has a deviant's imagination and a desire to entertain readers with her words. Add the two together and you get darkly erotic romances with a twist of horror, sci-fi and the paranormal!

When she's not submerged in the worlds she creates, Lexxie's life revolves around her family—a husband who thinks she's insane, a pony-sized mutt who thinks he's a lap dog, and her daughters, who both utterly captured her heart and changed her life forever.

Living in Australia makes it a bit tricky for Lexxie to pop by for coffee, but she still loves to chat! Contact her by email or find her at her website or her blog (lexxiecouper.wordpress.com)

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at www.ellorascave.com.

Tell Us What You Think

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at Comments@EllorasCave.com.

Also by Lexxie Couper

Stone's Soul



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at www.ellorascave.com for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

www.ellorascave.com