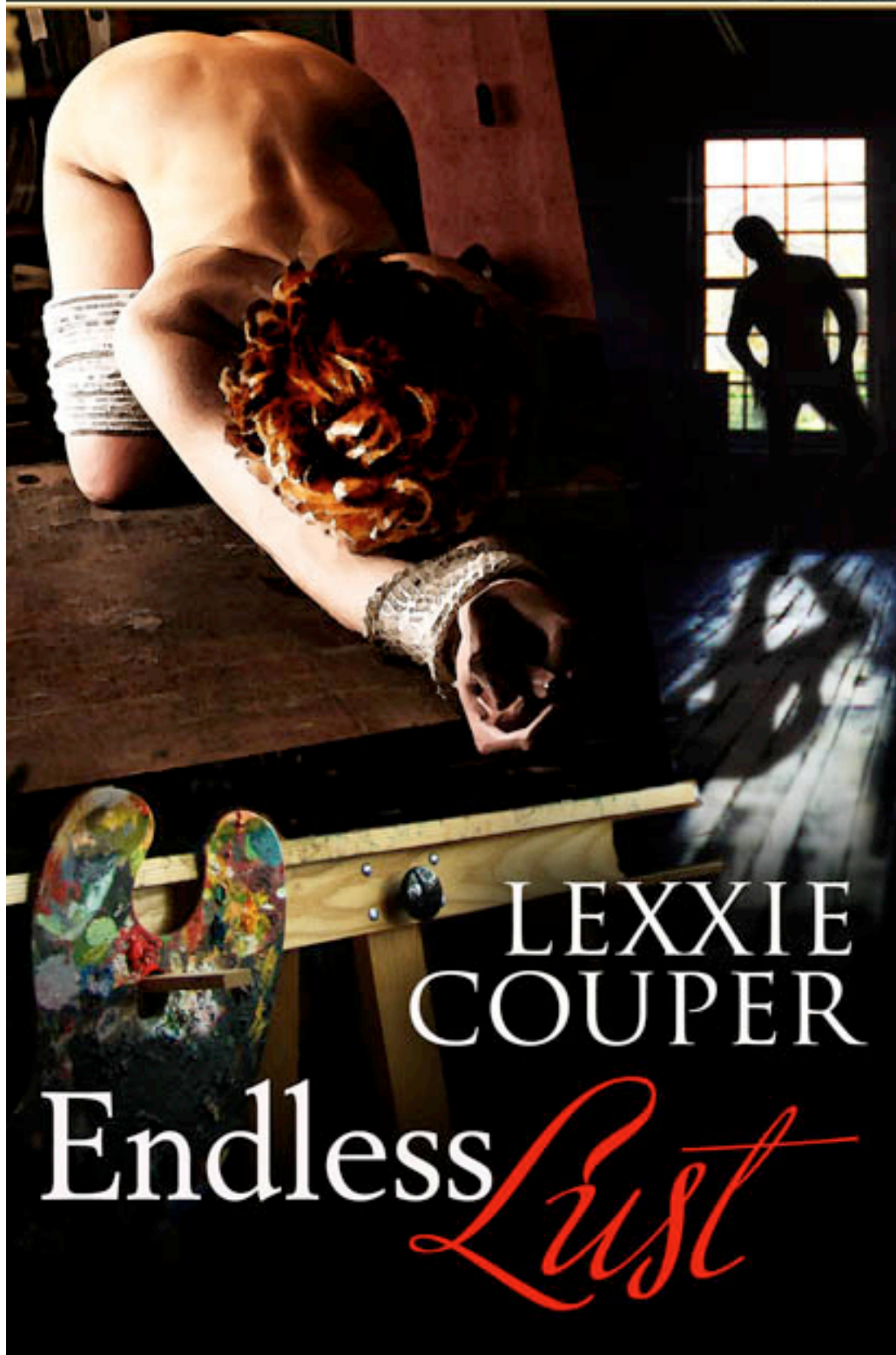


ELLORA'S CAVE *SHIVERS*



LEXXIE  
COUPER

Endless *Lust*

## **Endless Lust**

*Lexxie Couper*

*Seven Deadly Daemons, Book Two*

Cate Sinclair is ruled by lust. Day and night, awake and dreaming, an unseen force plies her with pleasure to the point of pain. Each orgasm wrenched from her exhausted body stealing her energy, her very essence, until insanity seems a sweet relief.

When Eamon enters her life, Cate's uncertain if the gorgeous, enigmatic man is her salvation...or the cause of her worst nightmares.

Ellora's Cave Publishing



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Endless Lust

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# *ENDLESS LUST*

Lexxie Couper

## *Dedication*

*For Kelli, who knew I could do it.*

## *Author Note*

I spent seven years at art school before spending a short period of my “grown-up” life as a graphic artist. To all the amazingly talented artists I’ve studied and worked with, I thank you for your influence on my life. More than one of you found your way into this tale. Who you are is up to you to decide...

## *Trademarks Acknowledgements*

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## Chapter One

*Sydney, Australia*

Cate Sinclair knew she was losing her mind the morning she woke from a deep, dreamless sleep to find a hickey on her neck that hadn't been there when she went to bed. Alone.

She studied the love bite in the mirror of her bathroom, tension knotting in the pit of her belly. "What the hell?" She leaned forward, squinting at the angry purple bruise just beneath her right ear. "How did...?" Raising her hand to her neck, she pressed her fingertips to the mark.

A jolt of white-hot electricity shot straight to her core, flooding her sex with moisture.

Cate gasped, stumbling back a step, the familiar throbbing between her thighs making her breaths shallow. She swallowed, her gaze finding her reflection in the mirror once again.

*That didn't happen, did it? I didn't almost come by just –*

Cutting off the surreal thought, she slid her stare back to the mark on her neck – and froze.

It was gone. The love bite was gone.

*Gone? I think you mean it was never there in the first place.*

She twisted her head to the side and pulled her hair, a sleep-tangled mess of deep brown curls, over her shoulder. Stretching her neck as far as she could, she searched the side of her throat for what she swore was there just a second earlier.

But nope. Nothing. Just her skin – unmarred by a mark from some phantom mouth. A little tan thanks to weekends at the beach enjoying the midsummer sun, a little dry for the same reason, but not adorned with any kind of mark or bruise.

With a frown, Cate let out a short huff. Okay, so she was just losing her mind then.

*Not your mind, Cate. Your job. If you don't hurry up and get to work.*

With a curse, she flicked a quick look at her watch. Damn it, she was going to be late.

Stripping off her pajamas – or the closest thing she had to pajamas, an old AC/DC T-shirt and cotton knickers – she climbed into the shower and turned on the water, jumping when the icy spray hit her in the chest. She couldn't be late. She had a presentation this morning. Today was the day she finally showed Enigma Advertising's creative director (a perverted bastard with hands prone to wandering too close to his genitals during meetings) that she was capable of stepping into Xander Dupont's overly talented shoes.

She squirted some shampoo onto her palm and scrubbed her hair. It was a mistake, of course. Not the position at Enigma. She was more than capable of replacing Dupont. She knew it, the rest of the agency knew it, and in her gut, she knew the creative director knew it as well. He was just making her jump through the hoops because he was A) a git, and B) a chauvinistic git.

No, the mistake was washing her hair. The wild mop of curls atop her head would take forever to dry. But because she'd been a lazy-assed sod the night before and hadn't washed her hair after a late-afternoon surf, she'd look like she'd dunked her head in a barrel of motor oil if she didn't wash it now. Between motor oil and out-of-control but clean and shiny curls, she'd take the latter.

*This is what you get for being ridiculously sleep deprived, she chastised herself, rinsing the shampoo from her hair with savage speed. Fucked-up sexual nightmares, weird hallucinations about nonexistent hickeys and insane hair that looks like you've killed a cat and stuck it on top of your head. A cat with a perm, no less.*

Cate snapped off the water – still icy cold – and grabbed a towel. She rubbed down her body, the soft cotton sucking up the beads of water with thirsty efficiency. Thank God she'd indulged herself and bought some decent –

A jolt of liquid electricity sank into her sex and Cate cried out, stumbling sideways. "What the fuck?"

She scrabbled for the vanity, her knees shaking as unmistakable pleasure made her pussy squeeze tight. She was having an orgasm. *Jesus, what the hell?* She was having –

Something warm sucked on her clit.

She bucked, wet feet slipping on the wetter tiles, and fell to the floor.

And still the suction on her clit continued, growing fiercer. Hungrier.

Cate lay on her back, legs splayed, breaths ragged, shallow. She stared unseeingly at the ceiling, one hand gripping her damp towel, the other fisted tightly on the floor. She twisted, trying to fight the surreal pleasure filling her. This couldn't be happening. It couldn't.

In response, whoever – whatever – was sucking on her clit retaliated. Something thick and wet stabbed into her folds. A tongue? Cate cried out, her hips flying upward, her pussy flooding with hot cream. "Oh God!" She bucked again, her orgasm ripping through her, the tongue in her sex wriggling madly, lapping, plunging deeper. Over and over.

She rolled her head, eyes squeezed shut, legs muscles taut and shaking. Something she couldn't see was fucking her with its mouth and she was coming. She was –

The invasion stopped. Just like that.

Cate went limp, sore muscles unclenching as she fought for breath. She opened her eyes and stared wildly around the bathroom. Her heart slammed in her throat, her sex throbbing with her climax.

*Alone, Cate. There's no one here.*

She ran her tongue over dry lips, shaking her head. No. There had to be someone. She hadn't just imagined that. She *hadn't*.

Dragging her palms over the cold tiles, she pushed herself into a sitting position, searching the small room.

It was empty of any other soul. The air was still, motionless. Nothing moved. Not even the blue glass hummingbird hanging in the small window. Not so much as a breeze had been present.

*You are losing your mind, Cate.*

She let out a sharp breath, her forehead creasing. Rising to her feet, her knees far too wobbly, her body feeling drained, she looked at herself in the mirror.

No.

A heavy lump formed in her throat. The love bite was back.

She shook her head, denial rolling through her like thick sludge. It wasn't back. It wasn't there. Period. How could it be?

Turning from the mirror, she hurried to her room, ignoring the fading pulses of pleasure in her womb, the slick moisture high on her inner thighs. She would get dressed. That's what she'd do. She'd get dressed for work, get in her car and drive.

None of this had happened. None of it.

She would drive to work, have her meeting with her leering, masturbating boss –

*"Going to fuck you."*

The whispered voice growled in her ear a second before she was pushed backward. Not a gentle shove, but a violent punch to her chest that sent her flying across the room. She slammed into the wall, the textured surface scraping her back as she dropped to the floor, her teeth clicking together in a painful jolt.

*"What the fu –"*

Something wet plunged into her mouth. Hard. Demanding. Hands ripped at her flesh. Fingers shoved into her sex, wriggling deep inside her, seeking the innermost heat of her body. She writhed, dark ribbons of unwanted pleasure spearing through her.

*This can't...what...what...!*

Unseen teeth bit at her bottom lip. More fingers scratched at her nipple. Pinched it. Twisted it. She cried out, the sound muffled by a mouth that wasn't there. Hands mauled her breasts. A heavy weight pressed down on her, something large and solid shoving between her already-splayed legs to push them wider apart.

Heat blasted the side of her face, like a hot breath panting in her ear, against her throat. The weight pushing down on her hips grew heavier, something rock-hard and oh so hot sliding upward...

Her earlier arousal vanished, replaced with terror. She lashed out, her arms connecting with nothing.



Nothing.

*Nothing's there, Cate. Nothing is –*

It stopped. Everything.

Cate lay on the floor, staring around her empty bedroom, her breath tearing from her in rapid gasps.

The air was still, the room silent.

She swallowed, her mouth dry, and let out a strangled whimper when the sour taste of garlic and bad breath slid over her taste buds.

*No, you're imagining it. You have to be.*

Her heart thumped, forcing blood through her veins and making her chilled limbs tingle with heat.

*That didn't happen, Cate. Get up. Get to work. Now.*

She scrambled to her feet, unwilling to blink. Unwilling to close her eyes for even a second to a room mocking her with its emptiness.

And it *was* empty. As empty as the bathroom had been. As empty as it had been when she'd fallen asleep the previous night.

*There's no one here. You know what that means, don't you?*

She drew in a slow breath, raising a hand to her mouth to wipe at her lips. Her dry lips.

*Nothing happened to you, Catey.*

So why did her body ache? Why were her breasts swollen with an unspeakable, disturbing desire? Why were the insides of her upper thighs damp with an orgasm her body told her she'd had?

She turned and looked at herself in the mirrored door of her cupboard. Not a mark marred her skin. Not even the love bite.

A tight knot rolled in her stomach.

"It didn't happen," she growled to her reflection. "Go to work. Get your promotion and then make a doctor's appointment, a cat-scan, an MRI."

Her stomach clenched again but she ignored it. What other option did she have? Either admit she was crazy and check herself into the nearest booby hatch, or go to work.

With a determined glare, she jerked open her cupboard and snatched out a pair of jeans, followed by an old Astro-Boy T-shirt. Her hands shook, her muscles seeming to resist her brain's commands. With a muttered curse, she yanked on her jeans, her still-damp skin making them cling to her legs. She didn't care. Nor did she care she'd completely neglected to put on underwear first.

Fuck it. She didn't need underpants. She needed to get to work. That's what she needed to do.

*At least put on a bra.*

A slight movement flashed in the corner of her eye and she snapped her head around, staring into her bathroom through the open door across the hall. The glass bird hanging in the closed window spun slowly on its line, its wings spread, its beak open in a perpetual cry.

Silence stretched through the bedroom, sliding over Cate where she stood half-dressed. She swallowed, staring hard at the bird.

Its slow rotations ceased; its movement stilling until it hung motionless again.

Without removing her stare from the glass ornament, Cate quickly donned a bra, her heart beating faster as she hurried to dress...

And felt the featherlight caress of something soft—a *paintbrush*?—stroking against her belly as she fought with the armholes of her T-shirt.

She screamed, staggering backward, blinded by the garment. Her heel snagged on the bedroom rug and she fell, her raised arms still tangled in her T-shirt. Her hip smashed into one solid post of her bed frame, the oak column punching into her bone as she toppled sideways onto the bed.

Agonizing pain shot through her, spearing down her leg. She cried out, her arms inexplicably bound by a shirt that now felt like strong, coarse rope, and still the brushwork continued on her belly. Stroking higher, following the line of her rib cage, her breasts, and she couldn't do anything about it. Then the brushstrokes were replaced with tongue strokes...

She was in full-blown panic mode. Flailing wildly in a petrified attempt to free her arms, to understand what was happening. Thrashing on her bed as her hip screamed in pain and a tongue lapped at her breasts and nipples through the lace of her bra. She recognized the panic. *Knew* she should fight for calm.

But she couldn't. All she could do was flail on the bed, choking on wild sobs, as another orgasm began to build.

All she could do was gasp and whimper and arch her back as the tongue laving her breasts became a mouth sucking on her nipples. Sucking hard.

And when she came once more, her climax as brutal as the mouth on her breasts, she swore she felt the brushstrokes again. Soft and delicate and purposeful. Painting her body. Creating her even as her orgasm destroyed her. Sucked the energy from her.

Cate sobbed in fear, in rage. "This isn't happening! This isn't happ—"

A tongue plunged into her mouth, swiped at her lips...

And then she was alone.

*Alone.* And freaking the fuck out.

She struggled upright, ripping her T-shirt from her head, knowing exactly what she would find in her room.

Nothing.

Cate pressed her face into her hands, dismayed at how they trembled, at her racking sobs. "God, what the *fuck* is going on?"

She stayed like that for a long time, pulling in slower, steadier breaths, counting to ten, then twenty, then thirty. When nothing happened, when no unseen assailant wrenched another orgasm from her drained body, she opened her eyes.

Her bedroom. Just her bedroom. Just *her* in her bedroom.

*What does that mean? You truly have lost your mind?*

Forcing calm into her limbs, she climbed from the bed. Her feet stumbled a little beneath her, her legs not just wobbly but weak, and for an unsettling moment her head swam, a sickening sensation of vertigo claiming her. She turned and placed her palms on the edge of the bed, seeking support. After everything that had just happened, the last thing she needed was to faint. God knows what would happen to her while she was out of it. Hell, she may come to and discover she'd been abducted by aliens.

A hysterical laugh bubbled in her chest and she straightened again, crossing to where her discarded shirt lay in a crumpled heap on the floor. She may be losing her marbles, but at least she still had her sense of humor—as lame as it was.

She retrieved her shirt from the floor, cold dizziness washing over her as she bent and straightened. Nothing touched her for the split second she was blinded and vulnerable by her shirt sliding over her face. No mouth or tongue or brush traversed her body.

*Because it was all in your head, woman. Go insane if you must, but do it after you're promoted.*

Cate crossed to the cupboard again and withdrew her biker boots from the second shelf, the tangible texture of worn leather against her fingers comforting. Her mind clung to the physical sensation. Her boots were real. She could see them *and* feel them. Her pulse a steady thumping beneath her ear, she turned to her bedside drawer and withdrew a pair of socks—purple with puke-green images of Jabba the Hutt—before perching herself on the edge of the bed and covering her feet. The right first, followed by the left. The routine comforting her further.

Nothing unnatural happened. Nothing touched her while she did so.

*You see? In your head. Sleep deprived and hallucinating.*

Suppressing the urge to hurry—*just in your head, remember*—she grabbed her boots next. The sound of each one thumping against the floorboard as she planted her feet into their snug interiors eased her frayed nerves even more. She could almost let herself believe the faint throb between her thighs was from the pressure of her jeans rubbing against her crotch and not the ghost of her earlier clim—

She killed the thought with a shake of her head, snapping to her feet. “Not going to think about it, Cate.”

*Not at all.*

She left the bedroom, her boots making a nice, solid, *real* thud-thud with every step. Real. *This* was real. The wild beat of her heart began to slow, the strength began to return to her muscles, the energy to her body, and she let out a soft albeit trembling

breath. Retrieving her worn but ever-faithful work satchel from the dining table, she cast one last look around her small apartment.

"This isn't the scene of a Hollywood movie, Cate." Her voice fell from her lips with determined contempt. "This is just your apartment. There are no invisible hands, no sucking mouths or lapping tongues. It's all just a product of stress and too many weird-ass dreams lately."

She let out a steadying breath and crossed to her apartment door. Carter McCullum was going to promote her to art director of Enigma Advertising this morning. He may not have decided that yet, but he would. She was made for the job. She'd earned it. It wouldn't be productive to keep the chauvinistic git waiting. He'd just have to deal with her wild mane of untamed curls, whether he liked them or not.

*Then hurry the fuck up.*

The thought whispered through her mind the very second she closed her fingers around her doorknob. A split second before she realized she hadn't cleaned her teeth. "Damn it."

She thought of her bright, sunny bathroom and the neglected toothbrush waiting for her on the vanity counter. Her bright, sunny bathroom where she'd so recently experienced...

*Nothing, Cate. In your mind. Just in your mind.*

Cate hovered at the door, fingers gripping the knob. Maybe she could go to work without... With a rising sense of desperation, she ran her tongue over her teeth. Nope. She had to clean them. If nothing else, the taste of bad breath and garlic—*no, morning breath; just morning breath*—still lingered in her mouth. She had to go back to the bathroom.

The throb between her thighs grew heavy again. Insistent.

Driving her nails into her palms, her jaw clenching, she turned and hurried back to the bathroom, snatching up the tube of paste and her brush without looking in the mirror.

*Why not? What do you think will be there?*

She scrubbed at her teeth, punishing each one for her still being here when she should be on her way to work.

Her pulse thumped fast in her neck. Her hands trembled.

Foam slicking her lips, she bent at the waist, her shirt rising up her back slightly as she scooped water into her mouth.

The glass hummingbird moved on the end of its nylon tether. Once. A gentle, slow spin she caught out of the corner of her eye.

A slow rotation that ended with its open-beaked face pointing at her.

Straightening from the vanity bowl, Cate wiped her lips with the back of her hand, her pulse pounding in her ears, her gaze fixed on the glass bird.

It didn't move again.

Still, her mouth was dry when she turned from the vanity and every step she took was faster than the last, until she was almost sprinting by the time she reached the door of her apartment and yanked it open.

Stifling, stagnant air lashed at her the moment she burst out into the hallway, the building's air conditioning failing, as it always did, in the midsummer heat wave. Cate didn't care.

"Jesus," she muttered, flicking her closed door a quick glance. When had cleaning one's teeth become so harrowing?

She scrunched up her face, dragged her hands—still shaking, she was disgusted to see—through her damp hair and let out a long breath. "Okay, Sinclair, fun's over. Time to get your arse in gear. McCullum's not going to promote you if you're late. Nor looking like you're two steps away from the loony bin."

\* \* \* \* \*

He threw down the brush, his breath bursting from him in ragged pants, his cock a thick rod of aching steel jutting from his groin.

He'd pushed it too far this morning. That was dangerous. He had to take it slow. He'd been warned to go slow, but once he'd started...

Closing his eyes, he sucked in a steady breath. The intoxicating smell of oil paints, linseed oil and sex seeped into his being and his prick jerked, an insistent spasm demanding attention. The combination of smells always made him think of *her*, his inspiration, and he opened his eyes to study the canvas before him.

She lay stretched naked, her body reclining over the end of an unmade bed, her pale perfection a counterpoint to the tousled black sheets beneath her. He let his stare roam over her limp arms and legs, traversing them with his gaze in the same way his brush had caressed them when he'd painted those perfect limbs only a short time ago.

What would he give to have his hands—his *real* hands—journeying her body in the same way? His real hands, his real mouth, his real...

His cock grew stiffer, his balls rising up at the idea.

Swiping a hand over his brow, he drew another slow breath into his body and stepped up to the canvas, retrieving a wide brush from a can of white paint as he did so.

Staring hard at the image of his inspiration spread out before him, her lips parted in sexual rapture, her gaze holding his in an expression of wanton promise, he raised the dripping brush and swiped it over the still-wet painting.

He needed to start again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Trapped in the small confines of her car, Cate shivered. For the entire twenty-minute drive to work, the constricting throb between her thighs had made it almost

impossible to concentrate on the road. Every time she'd thought it gone, an unbidden memory of the morning's surreal events would slip through her mind and her sex would constrict again, an urgent need for that which she wanted so fucking hard to forget. Even the infuriating inner-city sludge of metal that was peak-hour traffic hadn't abated her body's response. Every time she pressed the clutch, every time she applied the brakes, her inner thighs brushed together in a soft caress and her pussy would pulse all over again with renewed want.

At this rate, she'd be a squirming mess by the time she made it to work.

A sudden horn blasted to her left, making her jump. She swung her head toward the jarring sound, the whole world washing white for a delirious second before slamming back into stark clarity. A man waved his fist at her from behind the wheel of a gleaming Mercedes convertible, the glaring summer sun bouncing off his hairless pate as he nudged his sports car into the miniscule space between her car and the bus in front of her.

She held up her hand, giving the man a sarcastic wave as she tapped her brakes. Dickhead. Just because his car was more expensive than hers, he thought he could –

*"Hurry."*

The softly groaned word scraped at Cate's mind and she hissed in a gasp, snapping bolt-upright in her seat. "No. No. Not again.

She gripped the wheel, her nipples pinching tightly as her body prepared for what was to come.

Nothing. No caresses, no hands. Just her in her car, stuck going nowhere.

Another horn blasted and she flinched, checking her rear-vision mirror. An old man in a faded yellow Volvo made a "hurry up" gesture, his thin lips puckered in a disapproving scowl. "Hurry up," he yelled, his almost-inaudible shout wafting through Cate's open car window.

Cate let out an exasperated groan, her face flooding with heat. "Jesus, Sinclair, maybe you should just skip work and head straight to the doctor's."

Shaking her head, she pressed the accelerator. No, she wasn't going to do that. She was going to work and getting her promotion and if she didn't hurry up, she was going to be late.

Really late.

Cate snorted. *Wonder if McCullum's felt himself up yet while he's been waiting?*

Ten minutes later, she flung her little car—a cheeky Kermit-green VW Golf—into her allotted space in Enigma's parking garage. She didn't wait for the elevator, taking the stairs two at a time to the foyer. Her face would be red and her breasts heaving by the time she made it to the advertising agency's main floor but at this point, she didn't care. Heaving breasts and flushed cheeks were small prices to pay for the art director position. *Hell, might even help you land the job*, her inner voice snickered.

"Hello, Bec," she threw at the pocket-rocket blonde behind the front desk as she hurried by, hitching her satchel's strap higher up her shoulder. "Can you let Mr. McCullum know I'm –"

"He's waiting for you in conference room four, Cate."

Cate's heart froze. Not because of the words bubbling out of Bec Buckley's mouth, as horrible as they were. She stumbled to a halt, her stare fixed on the polished chrome wall behind Bec and her desk.

*It's back.*

She lifted her hand to her neck, her fingers brushing the deep purple bruise below her right ear. The love bite.

Her pussy fluttered with greedy interest the second her fingertips made contact with the hickey and Cate bit back a low moan. No. This wasn't happening. It was all in her head. It was all in her –

"Someone got lucky last night," Bec smirked, stroking the pencil in her hand like it was something far less narrow but just as rigid.

"I didn't –" Cate began, but stopped. She looked at the love bite reflected too clearly in the chrome. What could she say? She had a freaking hickey on her neck.

She suppressed another moan – this one having little to do with surreal, inexplicable pleasure and a lot to do with dismay – and left Bec to her smirk. Fuck it. She didn't have time to waste.

The door to conference room four was closed when she arrived and she allowed herself two harrowing seconds to gain her composure. This was it. On the other side of the door was a large man with her future in his hands...or his balls, if he'd begun the fun without her.

"Art Director Cate Sinclair," she whispered, before taking one last, steadying breath and swinging the door open.

"Cate!" Carter McCullum's booming voice almost made her jump. "I didn't think you were going to get here."

The agency's creative director rose from the seat at the head of a long beech table, but Cate's attention wasn't focused on him.

Her attention was fixed on the tall man standing – arms crossed in nonchalant calm – to McCullum's right. A man with shaggy, ink-black hair, shoulders so broad they would have made Atlas jealous and fathomless black eyes. A man dressed in black trousers, black shirt and a black leather jacket that did nothing to hide the body underneath that was made for fucking.

A man more utterly, sinfully sexy than any Cate had ever seen.

Cate's pulse leapt into her throat, the throbbing in her pussy erupted with new force and her lips parted. *Dear God, he is –*

"Cate," McCullum went on, obviously uncaring Cate hadn't yet looked at him, "allow me to introduce Eamon Fallen-Black. Engima Advertising's new art director."

## Chapter Two

Cate stood rooted to the spot, her blood roaring in her ears. *Enigma Advertising's new...* She shook her head. No, she hadn't heard that correctly.

"Eamon comes to us from our London parent agency," McCullum stated, the pride in his voice more than reverent. "He's more than capable of replacing..." He paused, and for some reason the unexpected second of silence made Cate's stomach knot. "Xander Dupont."

At this point, Cate knew she should acknowledge her boss. At least give him a pointed glare for the kick in the gut he'd just delivered. But she couldn't drag her eyes off the man who had appeared from nowhere and taken her job.

Those dark eyes of his held her imprisoned. They studied her face with an indolent intensity before sliding to her throat.

"Christ on a pony, Cate," McCullum suddenly burst out, and this time Cate *did* jump. "Is that a hickey?"

Eamon Fallen-Black's nostrils flared. The love bite below her ear throbbed. Almost as powerfully as the throb between her thighs.

She slapped her hand to the side of her neck, her cheeks filling with heat. "I..."

McCullum's guffaws sank into her confusion and she jerked her stare from Fallen-Black's stunning face. Her boss ran his gaze over her, from the bruise on her neck to the junction of her thighs and back to the love bite again. "Got some action last night, did we?"

Hot anger shot through her. Anger at McCullum's lewd question, at his decision to give her position to someone else—a man who hadn't yet uttered a bloody word. Anger at the silent man and anger at a mark on her neck she couldn't explain and didn't want to contemplate.

She tilted her chin, the caress of hair tumbling over her shoulder making her nipples pinch into pebbled tips—another thing to be angry about. "I screamed the house down," she all but growled, holding McCullum's stare.

Her boss's eyebrows shot up, an uncharacteristic blush turning his already ruddy complexion magenta. "Err..."

From the corner of Cate's eye, she saw Fallen-Black move, a slight straightening of his impossibly broad shoulders, an even slighter flexing of his fingers against his biceps. The weight of his black stare sent her pulse into overdrive and she clenched her jaw.

Nine in the morning and she wished to hell the day was already over.



Turning to the new, possibly mute art director, she gave him a narrow-eyed stare, ignoring the rising flurry of butterflies in the pit of her stomach. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Fallen-Black, and I look forward to working with you."

It was a lie of course. She didn't look forward to working with him. He'd taken *her* job. The position she'd busted her ass for over the last five years. The position rightfully hers after Xander Dupont's unexpected and abrupt resignation two weeks ago. She didn't look forward to watching Fallen-Black step into the art director's position, no matter how damn sexy and gorgeous he was, when she knew she could have done the job so very well.

He studied her, still silent, his expression bordering on bored. And yet his eyes...his eyes seemed to burn with an emotion Cate couldn't decipher. Fury? Contempt?

Desire?

*Oh for fuck's sake, Cate. Now you're thinking the new guy is –*

She cut off the ridiculous thought before it could finish forming in her head. Just as Fallen-Black slid his attention to the mark on her neck and his nostrils flared again.

The flurry of butterflies in her belly fluttered lower, taking up residence in her pussy, and Cate let out a disgusted sigh.

*Right, that's it. I'm outta here.*

With a curt nod at her boss—chauvinist git—she turned and left the conference room, throwing a blunt, "I have work to do," over her shoulder as she pulled the door open.

More than one colleague swiveled their heads in her direction as she strode across the studio floor. She heard the odd whisper, a few "poor Cates" and one "it's wrong" before she made it to her workspace. She wanted to scream. She wanted to go back into the conference room and demand an explanation from McCullum. She wanted to go home.

She wanted to step up to Eamon Fallen-Black, bury her hands in his shaggy black hair and crush his lips with hers.

Cate's pulse sped furiously at the ludicrous, wholly startling notion. She dropped onto her seat, staring hard at the massive, twenty-seven-inch monitor of her Mac without seeing it. Damn it, what the hell was going on? What higher power decided today was the day she would lose both her mind *and* her promotion?

*God?*

She didn't believe in God. Not the old bloke with snowy white hair and flowing robes, anyway. She believed in karma and hard work, and both had let her down today.

Turning on her computer and snatching at her mouse, she opened the job currently sitting at the top of her in-progress list. The glossy, red apple—a logo for a local high school tutoring business—hung in the void of her workspace, millions of megapixels giving it an amazingly realistic look. The clichéd logo was a nod to the old-fashioned idea of a student giving a teacher an apple.

It was the last job assigned to her by Xander Dupont, an intern's job meant to humiliate her after she'd turned down his coffee invite two days before he'd suddenly left the agency. She hadn't touched it since he'd left, however; something about it made her...edgy. Uncomfortable. Which was absolutely ridiculous, but that's the way she felt all the same. Every time she opened the file and looked at the almost-finished logo, she felt...*wrong*. Like guilty and scared at the same time. And irrationally angry.

Maybe if she'd said yes to Dupont's coffee invitation, *she'd* be the one standing in conference room four talking with McCullum, instead of Mr. Eamon I-don't-need-to-say-a-word-because-I'm-that-sexy Fallen-Black.

"Bloody hell, Cate," she muttered, huffing at the errant curls hanging in her eyes. "Could you be any more pathetic? Suck it up and get on with the job. Or Mr. Fallen-Black may sack you."

Leaning forward, she wriggled her backside on her seat. What kind of name was Fallen-Black anyway? Pommie?

A low sigh rumbling up her throat, she placed her fingers on her mouse and dragged the cursor across the digital apple...

And paused.

*What the...?*

High on the left corner of the white void surrounding the apple was a faint, thin gray line; a row of text in a point size so small it was barely legible.

And she sure as hell hadn't typed it.

Squinting at the gray line, she moved her cursor over it and changed the font size to eighteen.

Her heart slammed into her throat.

*temptationdesirelust*

Cate stared at the text, sudden fear choking her.

*temptationdesirelust*

She blinked, mentally breaking the letters into three words.

Temptation. Desire. Lust.

Screwing up her face, she leaned closer to her monitor. "What the hell?" What were the words doing there? Who had typed them? And why?

Before she realized what she was doing, she'd lifted her hand to her neck and pressed her fingers to the mark she still couldn't explain.

A sudden surge of wetness shot through her pussy and she gasped, jerking her hand away from her throat.

*Jesus.*

Her head swam, as if she'd been starved of air for a long moment. Her pussy throbbed, as if she'd been...

"Fucked," she whispered.

*Slams his fingers into her...*

A shard of something hideous sliced through Cate, a memory so real her sex constricted on a cock that wasn't there. The memory of a dream. Or perhaps nightmare.

*Slams his fingers into her ass and...*

Her pussy contracted again, hard, the flash of dream slamming into her. She bit back a gasp, grabbing at the edges of her desk as a short, sharp orgasm shuddered through her. Possessing her, draining her.

Leaving her panting.

Scared.

And turned-on. Too turned-on.

Jesus, she needed to get some help. Before she went in —

A hand fell on her shoulder and she squealed. An honest-to-goodness squeal.

"Shit, Cate!" Bec dropped into a crouch beside Cate's seat, her heavily painted eyes staring at her with obvious concern. "What the fuck? Are you okay?"

Slumping against the backrest of her seat, Cate let out a ragged breath, dragging her fingers through her hair. Her head swam again, as if her brain had been deprived of oxygen. Closing her eyes, she rubbed a palm over her face. Bloody hell, she just wanted this day to be over. She wanted to go home.

*Really? To the very place this lunacy all began?*

At least then she was in her own space. If another inexplicable orgasm claimed her at home, no one was around to see. "Yeah," she nodded, opening her eyes to offer Bec a weak smile. Damn, she really did feel...woozy. Worn out. "Yeah, I'm okay. Sorry."

Bec gave her a long, level look that said quite clearly she thought Cate's answer was bullshit.

"No, really," Cate insisted, forcing the words to sound calm. "I just wasn't expecting —"

"To have your promotion handed to a fucking gorgeous hunk of man in black?" Bec offered, an expression of part-sympathy, part-hunger flashing over her pretty, pixie-like features. "Yeah, that kinda sucks, doesn't it?"

"Kinda sucks" didn't begin to describe it, but Cate wasn't in the mood to discuss it with Bec. Not when her pussy was still throbbing and constricting from a totally sudden and completely unnerving orgasm.

"He's looking at you," Bec went on, her voice lowering to a conspirator's whisper.

The moment the blonde uttered the statement, Cate felt the heavy weight of an unwavering stare. She lifted her head, her own stare locking with Eamon Fallen-Black's where he stood at the studio's entryway.

Her pussy contracted, her nipples tightening at the sight of an unreadable light in his eyes.

"He is so fucking hot," Bec gushed, her fingertips stroking the top of her right breast, which almost spilled over the neckline of her snug shirt. "He's not wearing a ring. Wonder if he's married. Or seeing someone."

Cate dragged her gaze from his, her pulse thumping way too hard. "I don't care."

"So if he asks you for coffee like Xander did, you going to say no?"

Cate's mouth went dry just as the love bite below her ear began to sting. "I've got work to do, Bec," she muttered, placing her hand on her mouse and dragging the cursor across the screen once again, deleting the mysterious line of text.

Beside her, the oversexed receptionist chuckled. "Whatever." Rising to her feet, Bec gave Fallen-Black a long gaze before strutting in the direction of the foyer, hips swaying with such suggestive motion, Cate wondered how the woman didn't snap her spine.

A soft caress feathered her cheek and she jerked, finding the new art director still studying her from the other side of the room. He watched her long enough to make Cate shift on her seat before, with an almost imperceptible narrowing of his eyes, he turned his back on her and walked toward the foyer as well.

\* \* \* \* \*

She didn't *see* him looking at her for the rest of the morning. But Cate felt him. Watching her. Studying her. Yet every time she tore her attention from the digitally constructed apple on her monitor, she only saw the back of his head, his black hair gleaming with glossy health under the harsh studio lighting. Or his hawkish profile as he made his way from one workspace to another. He never came near her – nor did her gutless boss, for that matter – and by mid-afternoon she was convinced he'd left.

"That'd be right," she murmured, making herself a cup of tea in the lunchroom. "First day on the job and he skips out early."

She threw her spent teabag at the rubbish bin and took a sip from her cup, convincing herself the disappointment unfurling in her stomach was due solely to the man's apparent lack of dedication to a job that should have been hers. *Not* from the loss of his intense inspection.

*You really are insane, Cate.*

Returning to her workspace, she glared at the apple on her monitor. It was perfect. So perfect she could almost taste its tart, crisp flesh. So why did she feel so dissatisfied with her work? And why did she –

A tiny gray line in the top-right corner caught her eye. She blanched, her stomach rolling.

*You know what it's going to say, don't you?*

Selecting the text with her mouse, she tripled its font size, her throat squeezing tightly upon recognizing the familiar words written in Helvetica Narrow.

*temptationdesirelust*

Cate closed her eyes, pressing her hand to her mouth. Okay, this was getting ridiculous.

*And the whole day hasn't been?*

She opened her eyes again and straightened in her seat. She wasn't going to let this get to her. She *wasn't*. Someone had to be fucking with her. And she had a job to do.

Deleting the line of text, she continued working on the apple. It was close to being finished. All she had to do after polishing its construction was incorporate the company's name beside the apple, creating the words "City Teach Tutoring" as if they were formed by a thin ribbon of apple peel. It was a hokey design, but if she could make the peel effect work, at least it would look striking.

An itch at the back of her neck made her look over her shoulder. Her heart, already enduring one hell of a workout for most of the day, thumped harder. Eamon Fallen-Black stood by the desk of the studio's copywriter, his dark eyes trained on her.

She shifted in her seat, swallowing thickly as she turned back to her computer. Damn it, why did he have to be so bloody gorgeous?

Shutting out the unnerving image of the new art director from her overwrought mind, she dragged her cursor across the workspace beside the apple. "Work to do, Cate," she muttered, creating a text window. "Work to do."

She typed *City Teach*, her attention fixed on her monitor.

And stopped. Again.

The words *Twin Heart* occupied the space where the words *City Teach* should have been.

Cate frowned. "What *now*?"

She hit the delete key repeatedly, watching the letters disappear.

TRAEH NIWT

"Okay, that was weird." Placing her fingers on her keyboard, she typed *City Teach* again.

*Twin Heart* appeared on the monitor.

Cate's pulse thumped in her neck. She jabbed at the delete key, ten sharp stabs of her finger. The words disappeared again, one letter at a time.

The sensation of a heavy weight prickled her back and she shot a quick look over her shoulder. Fallen-Black studied her, no longer even trying to pretend he was occupied with someone else.

Cate turned back to her computer. "Let's try this again," she murmured.

She stared hard at the twenty-seven-inch monitor and hit the keys again. Hard.

CITY

*Twin*

A numbing chill stole over her. She licked her lips, her head feeling stuffy.

Placing her fingers back on the keyboard, she typed the word *Teach*, this time watching the keys as her fingers struck them.

T

E

A

C

H

Catching her bottom lip with her teeth, her gaze moved slowly up to the monitor.

*Heart*

*Twin Heart*

The two words hung in the empty space beside the digital apple, written in simple Helvetica Narrow typeface.

Cate frowned, refusing to acknowledge the prickling unease threatening to claim her. "This is ridiculous. There's gotta be something wrong with my keyboard."

She lifted the slim bank of keys and studied it, top and bottom, before returning it to the desk and swirling her mouse around on its thin pad a few times, watching the cursor blur across her screen. It was stupid, but so was the idea of words she hadn't typed appearing on her monitor. Words like "lust", "desire" and "temptation". Words like "twin" and "heart".

Removing her hand from her mouse, she placed her fingertips on her keyboard and typed the first thing that came to her mind.

*The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.*

The letters appeared on the screen in clear, 1280x800 resolution, twelve-point Helvetica Narrow.

*Twí nhear ttwin hea rttwí nhea rtt winh eart.*

Cate's breath caught in her throat, her blood rushing loudly in her ears. She closed her eyes as a tingling sensation swept through her body.

What the hell was a Twin Heart? And why did those two words make her feel –

The sound of someone clearing their throat directly to her right made her jump and she snapped open her eyes, her throat growing tighter at the sight of Eamon Fallen-Black standing beside her desk.

It was too much. Too, too much. "Either this silent stalker treatment you've got going is some new form of staff assessment," she snarled, glaring at him, "or I have something stuck to my face you want to tell me about. Whatever the answer is, you're really beginning to freak me out."

He didn't say a word. Just stood there radiating smoldering arrogance, his gaze almost a physical touch on her face before it slid to her monitor.

An audible intake of breath made his nostrils flare, his jaw bunching for a brief second before he returned his attention to her, his expression unreadable.

Cate narrowed her eyes, the words “bugger off” about to form on her lips – when the absolute silence of the room sank into consciousness.

Not a sound could be heard, not even the distant thrum of the building’s air-conditioning. She swiveled her head side to side, taking in everything around her, her belly flip-flopping.

The studio was empty.

Not just empty, but dark, the overhead lights switched off, every desk lamp and light table in the same state. Apart from her and Eamon, there wasn’t a soul in the place. Jesus. What the hell?

She flicked a glance at her watch, the knot in her gut twisting. 7:46 p.m.

Her lips grew numb, the blood roaring through her veins growing cold. She was suddenly scared. How could she not notice everyone leaving? The late hour?

“Do you know why Xander Dupont was fired from Enigma Advertising, Ms. Sinclair?”

Fallen-Black’s sudden question, delivered in a deep voice with a smooth English accent, made her pulse quicken. A wicked shiver shot up her spine and her nipples, already hard with fear, puckered into painful points. She bit back a moan. His voice was aural sex but at the same time, the question petrified her.

*Why?*

At her failure to answer, Eamon cocked a thick, black eyebrow. “He was caught masturbating over your desk.”

Cate’s mouth fell open. A split second before the man turned on his heel and walked away, the darkness of the empty studio eating him up in a matter of strides.

Lips tingling, heart racing, she stared at the dark space where he’d disappeared. All around her the studio sat silent, the low hum of the fluorescent bulb in her desk lamp like the sound of a hungry mosquito hanging in the air. Fallen-Black didn’t appear again.

Letting out a shaking breath, Cate swung her stare to her desk, studying everything sitting on its smooth, clean surface.

*Clean?*

An image slammed into her – Xander standing exactly where she was sitting now, his designer jeans bunched mid-thigh, lean muscles taut, his eyes squeezed tight, his handsome face scrunched in undeniable pleasure as his long-fingered hand choked a dick even longer, pumping it with wild strokes until he –

Cate jolted to her feet, her stomach rolling. She gasped, the overwhelming urge to take a shower making her skin crawl. She hadn’t known Xander had been fired. Had he ejaculated on her desk? Was his semen drying in the tiny crevices between the keys of her keyboard even now? Jesus, had some of it landed on her teacup? Her pencil? The very pencil she’d been chewing on all –

*Stop it!*

Her own voice roared in her head, loud enough to make her flinch. She pressed her hand to her mouth, fighting to calm herself, staring first at her desk then into the darkness around her.

She had to go. She had to get out of here. Now.

Snatching up her satchel from its place beside her monitor — *did Xander's cum splash there?* — she hurried away from her workspace, not even bothering to switch off her lamp or computer. She didn't want to touch anything. She wanted a shower. She wanted to feel clean.

She wanted to get out before she screamed.

The darkness wrapped itself around her as she all but sprinted through the studio, more than one desk and stool striking her hip or thigh with painful force when she failed to dodge them in her haste. With each one, her pulse pounded harder. Faster. She bit back a whimper of frustration. Since when had there been so many workspaces on the studio floor? How could there be so many stools and chairs left standing in the walkway?

*And while we're questioning, Cate, how did it get so late so quickly? Why didn't you notice that? Why didn't you notice everyone had gone except Eamon Fallen-Black?*

Cate's foot struck something unyielding. Shards of pain shot through her toes and she stumbled, gravity sucking at her with greedy force. She threw her hands forward, a distant part of her mind knowing she was going to slam into the floor —

And let out a squeal when two hard, warm hands closed around her biceps and hauled her upright.

"I've got you," Eamon murmured, his towering frame looming before her, his intense black eyes locked on her face — right before Cate instinctually wrenched herself free and swung her fist in a wild left hook, smashing her knuckles against his jaw.

His head rolled to the side, a low grunt escaping, a frown dipping his eyebrows. Cate didn't wait to see what he did next. She ran for the foyer, through it, past Bec's desk and its polished chrome wall to the heavy, reinforced glass door opening out to the floor's common area. With more strength than she thought she possessed, she yanked it open and threw herself over the threshold, ignoring the lift five steps away in favor of the stairs.

Her footfalls bounced around the cold concrete well, a shattering echo she felt all the way to the bottom of her stomach. Her blood roared in her ears, her gasping breaths burned her lungs. But she didn't stop. Not until she was at the bottom. Bursting through the door, she sucked in the musty, stagnant air of the parking garage, her heart still racing.

She shot a look over her shoulder, half convinced Fallen-Black was going to stride through the slowly closing door behind her; half convinced Xander Dupont was, jeans around his knees, hand strangling his —

"Damn it, Cate! Stop!"



Her shout reverberated around the empty car park, each word suffocating its predecessor in a distorted echo that only highlighted how alone she was.

*Alone. Just like you'd been this morning when you woke with the hickey on your neck.*

The surreal thought was enough to get Cate's feet moving again. She bolted for her car, threw her satchel onto the passenger seat, kicked over the ignition and floored it, propelling the small car out into the nighttime streets of Sydney.

Away from Enigma Advertising and Eamon Fallen-Black.

Toward the wholly questionable safety of her apartment.

Her stomach churned even more.

## Chapter Three

It took Cate a good fifteen minutes to pluck up the courage to slide her key into her apartment door lock when she got home. The trip had been uneventful, with no traffic jams, rude Mercedes drivers or impatient, elderly Volvo drivers to torment her nerves. But by the time she'd turned onto her street—a quiet, one-way lane crowded on one side with parked cars—her heart had started slamming against her breastbone again.

She stood motionless, the fingers of her left hand curled around the doorknob, the key like ice against the fingers of her right, the silence of the hallway around her a deafening roar that made her want to scream.

Gnawing on her bottom lip, she stared hard at the plane of wood before her. “What are you waiting for?”

The door didn't answer.

“Is there something waiting for me on the other side?” she whispered, her throat thick. “Like, maybe my sanity?”

Still the door remained silent.

*Jesus, Cate. Get a grip.*

Grinding her teeth, she slid the key in the keyhole, gave it a swift turn and pushed her door wide open.

Her living room sat before her in the exact condition she'd left it—*left? Don't you mean fled?*—that morning, heavy curtains still drawn, shutting out the day's heat and leaving the space heavy with pregnant shadows.

She huffed out a disgusted snort and crossed the threshold before closing the door and throwing her keys—now not so icy cold—on the side table. Stomping over to her armchair, she dropped into it, snatching at the television remote as she did so. Nothing was going to happen to her. Nothing. This was the real world and in the real world, women didn't have unexplained orgasms at work. In the real world, the words one typed on one's keyboard were the words that appeared on one's monitor.

In the real world, she wasn't scared of her own apartment.

With a tired sigh, she turned on the TV, squinting a little at the sudden bright light in the otherwise dark room as she flicked through the stations, stopping when she found a rerun of a mindless sitcom. “Just what I need,” she murmured, scrunching down into the familiar comfort of her chair and tossing the remote aside. “Canned laughter and predictable zingers.”

Onscreen, the promiscuous bachelor insulted his divorced brother about his chosen attire for a visit to a strip joint.

Cate released a slow breath, letting the banality of the moment wash over her. Whatever had been going on today, it was finished. Done with. Tomorrow she'd start the day refreshed and her computer would write exactly what she typed. Period.

*"Going to fuck you now, Cate."*

She jerked her stare from the television—and gazed up at a man standing before her.

He towered over her, his features shrouded in darkness.

*"Going to make you mine."*

Her heart leapt into her throat, her pussy constricting immediately at the sound of his voice. "Yes," she moaned.

He grabbed her wrists and yanked her from the chair, spinning her around to throw her against the wall. Hard. His hands ripped at her clothes, her shirt first, tearing her neckline apart, the soft cotton screaming as he jerked the garment over her shoulders. She moaned again, the raw sound captured by his brutal mouth, his tongue plunging past her lips before she could stop him. He sucked at her bottom lip as his hands moved to her breasts, cupping the curves of flesh with greedy hunger.

She bucked against him, her pussy wet. So wet.

He pinched her nipples, his fingers working the distended points of flesh, pulling, flicking until she bucked again, her sex throbbing and heavy with a caustic desire she couldn't deny.

She whimpered, the sound escaping his ravishing kiss. He snarled, jerking back just enough to spin her until she faced away from him. His hands reclaimed her body, rough and unforgiving. He slammed her against the wall again, one hand groping her breast, the other wrapped around her neck, forcing her head to the side.

*"I'm going to fuck you now, Cate."*

The words didn't leave his lips but he spoke them all the same. A promise she ached for him to deliver.

Still forcing her head to the side, his eyes ablaze with lust, he pressed her upper body to the icy concrete wall, the heat of the hand on her breast a burn she would feel forever.

*"I want you so badly."*

His hand raked from her breast to her fly, yanking it open, his fingers plunging between her legs. He entered her, two fingers. Delving deeper. Deeper.

She felt his palm grind against her clit, concentrated pleasure shooting through the swollen nub of flesh into her very center. *Oh yes...yes...*

He plunged his fingers in and out of her sex, his hot breath ragged against her neck, his cock rubbing against the cleft of her ass cheeks, the denim of her jeans an insubstantial shield. And then his dick pressed her bare flesh—skin on burning skin—and she stood crushed between him and the wall, naked and whimpering words she couldn't fully understand. Pleading words, begging him to stop, to give her more.

For a split moment she wondered where her clothes had gone. Where had they gone and how had he made them disappear? But his hungry mouth assaulted her neck and that brief moment of lucidity was ripped away when a raw cry escaped her lips. A word she did understand — *yes*.

She cried out her acquiescence in a single sound and his fingers drove deeper inside her. Wriggling. Squirming. Seeking her very womb. Stretching her.

Filling her.

*"You're mine, Cate. Mine!"*

The statement sank into her ear. Even as her climax detonated in her core and incinerated her to —

Cate jolted awake, her scream echoing in her ears.

\* \* \* \* \*

He staggered back from the canvas, his brush falling to the cold floor beneath his bare feet, paint splattering his ankle in a fine spray. Fuck, he felt...

Sucking breath after breath, he stared at the painting before him. Sweat ran down his temples, stinging his eyes, but he didn't blink. Didn't take his eyes off his latest creation.

Cate Sinclair stood pressed to a wall, her breasts crushed against its rough concrete surface, her spine arched, her ass—so perfect and tight and round—taunting him. Waiting for him as her juices streamed down her smooth, spread thighs.

She'd come hard for him tonight. He'd pushed beyond the rules set by the Daemon and Cate had come for him with such force, the musk of her release filled his very breath. He could taste her on the air.

He pressed his fingers—fingers he'd painted buried deep in her cunt—to his lips and touched them with his tongue.

He groaned, his eyes rolling back in his head. Cate's cream coated each digit. He shoved his fingers into his mouth and sucked, lashing his tongue over their lengths as he took her pleasure into his being. His cock pulsed and jerked, so hard even the air sliding over it made him want to cry with agonized need.

Staring at the painting, he withdrew his fingers from his mouth and wrapped them around his straining dick.

He would prime the canvas again soon. He would cover it with white paint in preparation for his next work, his next masterpiece.

But first he would paint *this* image—this wonderful, sensual image—with his cum. He would pump his cock with fingers still slick with Cate's juices and watch his cum spurt from him in thick wads. He would coat her in his release and as his dick grew flaccid, he would wait for his creation to dry a bit so he could start again.

He needed more. He needed more *now*.

He needed her. All of her.

He was growing tired of waiting.

\* \* \* \* \*

A glaring white light stung Cate's eyes, shadows leaping and twitching around her like epileptic ghosts. She struggled upright, her hands finding the padded arms of her chair, her stare flicking around her living room.

Jesus. A dream?

She blinked, licking at her dry lips. When had she fallen asleep? What time was it?

Pulling herself higher into a sitting position, she shot the wall clock a quick look—3:49 a.m.—before squinting at the television mounted on the wall. White noise poured from the speakers as what looked like a billion tiny black and white dots writhed with erratic gusto on the plasma screen.

Dragging a hand through her hair, she leaned forward in the chair and fumbled for the remote. The fading pulses of her dream orgasm whispered up her spine but she ignored them, giving the television one last frown before killing the power.

Exhausted, she slumped back into the comforting softness of her seat, studying the blank screen in the darkness of the room, her body aching like she'd just run a marathon. Since when did digital televisions play white noise when the signal was lost?

They didn't. She knew that.

*Is that really important now, Cate? Surely the question you should be asking yourself is, why did you just have the horniest fucking nightmare of your life? And just who was the man doing the fucking?*

She let out a trembling breath, attempting to remember the face of the man from her dreams. His features seemed to taunt her—almost visible and yet completely unidentifiable. As if a fog shrouded him. Concealed him.

Another hitching breath fell from her lips and she swiped at her sweat-damp hair. She didn't know who it was, or at least, her mind wouldn't reveal that information if she did. Like most dreams, not just the erotically terrifying, she had no hope of retaining anything. Details evaded her attempt to recall them, slipping through the fingers of her consciousness like mist, leaving her with nothing but the base emotion of the dream—in this case, dominating lust and shameful supplication.

She shook her head, raking her hands through her hair again. Damn, she didn't just feel aroused with sickening submission. She felt exhausted. No, more than exhausted.

Insubstantial. Like a part of her had been leached away.

And sore. Really sore.

*If you turn the light on now, you know what you'll find, don't you? If you look at your breasts, the inside of your thighs, you know you'll find bruises. If you look at your neck, you know what will be there.*

Hickey.

She caught her lower lip with her teeth, refusing to give the word sound.

She didn't need to though. Her mind knew and her fingers listened, rising to her neck to press her flesh with trepidation. Her fingers encountered something different this time – moisture.

The saliva from her dream lover's mouth and lips and tongue.

"This is crazy," she whispered, the sting of tears behind her eyes. "I need help. Like now."

"I am here, Cate Sinclair," a deep voice cut with a velvet-smooth English accent said from behind her. "And you *do* need –"

She threw herself out of the armchair and stumbled backward, her stare locking on Eamon Fallen-Black.

His dark gaze seemed to bore into her, an inescapable hold. Her heartbeat slammed in her throat, pounding so hard she thought it might choke her. Fallen-Black? In her home? Cold shock ripped through her, dark and tinged with darker excitement. Jesus, was he the one responsible for her dreams? Her hallucinations? Her orgasms?

"What the *fuck* are you doing in my house?"

He took a step forward, holding her stare with his. "I've come to –"

Before he could finish, she ran at him. Fast.

Her shoulder slammed into his gut, driving him backward. Off his feet. He grabbed at her, his hands raking up her back even as momentum rammed him to the floor.

She smashed her fist to his jaw, the contact shuddering up her arm and into her shoulder. The pain didn't stop her though. She scrambled over his body, propelling herself forward. God, she had to get away. She had to get a –

A sharp growl came from behind her, the sound chilling. She bit back a yelp, her stare locked on the shadows before her. Somewhere hiding inside them was her front door. Escape.

*If you hadn't turned the telly off, you'd be able to see better, y'know?*

The ill-timed thought ran through her mind just as two hard, strong arms snared around her waist and shoulders.

"Let me go, you fuck!" she screamed, thrashing in his grip as he yanked her back to his body.

Her ass pressed against his groin, the rigid length of his cock rubbing at the crevice between her butt cheeks and filling her with petrified rage.

She heard him groan, a thick sound that seemed to vibrate through his body and into hers. His dick grew thicker, stiffer. His fingers drove into her flesh.

"Oh, you fucking –" She bucked against him, her fury rising. As if every growing inch of his cock fed her anger. How dare he? How *dare* he?

He tightened his grip on her arms, yanking her closer. "Cate," he rasped in her ear, English accent almost lost in the rapid panting of his breath. "You must—"

She slammed her heel into his foot. Hard. "Let me fucking go!"

But he didn't.

His body curved against hers, his lips pressing to her temple. "I'm sorry," he whispered, "but I must do this."

Then he threw her across the room.

She fell onto the sofa, her teeth clicking, legs askew. Fallen-Black's stare raked her body in a swift inspection, lingering between her thighs, and another groan slipped past his lips.

Cate's heart beat out of control, her heels and palms slipping on piles of silk-covered throw pillows as she scrambled to regain her equilibrium and get off the couch. The lust in the man's eyes was unmistakable. As was the sheer power in his frame. *Oh shit. Please no...*

He appeared across the room in less than a blink—a dark blur of unnatural speed—and dropped on top of her, straddling her hips and grabbing her wrists with his hands.

"No!" she screamed, bucking beneath him. His groin pressed to the curve of her mound, the heavy weight of his cock burning her flesh through the leather of his trousers and the denim of her jeans. "No, you fucking prick. *Get off me!*"

His eyes glinted, a weird golden light. "So feisty."

The murmured words should have filled Cate with terror. Instead a wicked, sick throb of excitement pulsed deep within her sex, making the crotch of her jeans damp. His nostrils flared and she bit back a wail. God, he could smell her. She instinctively knew. He could smell the sick, perverse arousal rolling through her.

*Cate! What is wrong with you?*

She bucked. "Get off me, you fucking bastard!"

He held her harder, squeezing her hips with his thighs and her wrists with his hands. His strength radiated from him, undeniable and feral. It stirred something primitive in Cate. Her pulse quickened, her nipples becoming aching points of need.

How the hell could she be turned-on?

"So passionate." His stare roamed her face. "A living entity of passionate force. A creature of sheer talent and elemental... I've never felt such..." His jaw knotted with tension as he stared into her eyes. "If I didn't know better, I'd think my heart had..."

A low growl rumbled in his chest and before he finished the nonsensical sentence, he snared her chin with one hand and crushed his mouth to hers.

Heat flooded through her. Golden and potent. He plunged his tongue into her mouth, exploring the inside of her lips, her slick teeth. She fought against him, her fury fueling her wild heartbeat. Her disgusting, contemptible arousal drenching the crotch of her jeans.

*Sick. So sick...*

He fisted his hands in her hair and deepened his assault on her mouth. Stabbing with his tongue, biting at her lips, sucking at them. Possessing her mouth with increasing hunger. She whimpered, twisting her head, desperate to free her lips from his. But he wouldn't let her. He sucked at her tongue, drawing it into his mouth, rolling it with his own.

A low moan vibrated in her throat, the sound ambiguous. For a brief moment she pushed her hips against his, not in battle but in acquiescence.

*Sick sick sick.*

It didn't matter. Sick as it was, she was aroused. No, aroused didn't come close. Horny. Downright fucking horny. Lord help her, she was in *agony* she was that turned-on. She rolled her hips, aching to feel his steely length rub against her sex. The friction of her jean made her whimper, a shudder rocking her body. Oh God, why wasn't it his cock?

Hot shame flooded her, almost as scalding at the wicked lust claiming her body. She fought against him, but to get away or to bury her hands in his hair, she didn't know. She bucked into his pressing weight, nerve endings tingling, breasts swollen, nipples hard.

*Jesus, Cate. This. Is. WRONG!*

Fallen-Black moaned, his rigid erection grinding against her pussy, his fists tightening in her hair. Lost to whatever lust consumed him. Provoked him. It was a carnal sound, the likes of which she'd never heard someone make before. It was aural Viagra. She had to have him. Had to have his cock deep inside her...

She had to get away.

*Now, Cate. Do it now or you'll be lost. Do it or you'll be begging him to fuck you. Do it now! NOW!*

She slammed her palms against his ears. Hard.

He reeled away from her, staggering backward across her living room floor, eyes squeezed shut, face contorting with agony.

"I don't know how you got in," Cate ground out, each word raw with unspent lust, "but if you don't get out of my house *now* I will rip your dick from your body and shove it down your fucking —"

He scattered into a million pinpricks of light.

One second he was there, the next he was nothing but blinding whiteness, as if someone had shattered the sun with a single blow and it ceased to exist.

There. And then gone.

Leaving Cate alone in her living room.

She scrambled off her sofa, her heart not just slamming into her throat but trying to burst from it. What the hell was going on?



She stared around the room, her mind telling her what her eyes refused to believe. Eamon Fallen-Black was gone.

Ripped from space before her very eyes.

Mouth turning dry, Cate dragged her hands through her hair.

*What if he hadn't really been here? What if your mind's cracking further?*

She crossed the floor on uncertain legs, to the last spot he'd stood, waving her hand before her with each step. Her fingers encountered nothing but air and she let out a ragged breath. Jesus, what had she expected? To feel him standing there even if she couldn't see him?

A ripple of something warm and tight shot down her spine, spearing into her sex and making her womb feel heavy. Full. Was it at the absurd thought of touching him? After what he'd just done to her?

*What he'd just done to you? Cate, he's not here. He was never here. How could he be? It's just not possible. How could he be here one second and not the next?*

She scrubbed at her face with her hands, her pulse thumping in her neck. "This all has to be a dream," she muttered, turning to her bedroom door. "First a faceless man fucks you with his fingers, then Fallen-Black appears out of nowhere, babbles on with shit that makes *no* sense, fucks your mouth with his tongue and then disappears in a puff of nothing." She dropped onto her bed, flopping backward to stare at the ceiling. "The *only* explanation is a dream."

*That's one seriously fucked-up dream.*

Another tight ripple traveled her spine, the sensation puckering her nipples. She lay motionless, pulling in breath after steadying breath. She'd never felt so...so...off-kilter. Sure, she'd had unsettling dreams before but nothing like *this*.

This was beyond surreal. Seeing Fallen-Black, the man who'd stolen her position at work, in her home? Succumbing to his kiss? Attacking him? If she let herself believe it so, her palms still tingled from when she'd slapped his ears seconds before he'd disappeared.

She held up her hands, squinting at them in the room's muted light. *Did* they still sting? Without knowing why, she drew them to her face, pressing them against her nose to breathe deeply.

An indefinable scent slipped into her nostrils, like cool spring mist and summer wind. *His* scent. The throb between her thighs quickened, grew more demanding, the tiny nub of her clit prickling with sudden heat.

Cate frowned, pulling her hands away to stare at them.

"Okay, this is getting weirder and weirder. Now you're getting turned-on by the smell of your palms?"

Yes. Because they smelled like...

"For the love of God, Cate!" She flung herself off the bed and stormed to her tiny bathroom. "Don't even think about saying it."

She refused to let the ridiculous thought finish. Instead, she snapped on the cold tap and shoved her hands under its gushing stream. Her hands didn't smell like...no, didn't smell, period. She was washing them just to wake herself up, that's all. Too many odd dreams in one night did that to a person. Made them a bit loopy. Once she got herself settled, it was night-night, Cate, sleep tight, see you in the morning. Alone. Without any mysterious, job-poaching Englishman lurking in the shadows waiting to pounce on you, kiss you, make you feel –

*"Damn it, woman! Shut up!"*

*Or should that be wake up? Maybe you're still asleep?*

Cate jerked her gaze to the mirror, staring at herself. Her eyes seemed too big for her face, her lips too full, her cheeks too flushed. There was no way she looked like she'd just woken from a deep sleep. She looked...

*"Fucked."*

She uttered the word on an exhaled breath. Whatever was going on with her sleeping mind, it was making her body horny and her head scrambled. To let a man she despised kiss her? To kiss him back? Even for a split second? Yeah, her brains were scrambled.

*But he wasn't here, Cate. He couldn't be. If he was, how do you explain the vanishing act?*

She scrunched up her face, confusion overwhelming her. "Wait a minute," she muttered, shaking her head. "Am I asleep now? When did I wake up? Before Eamon spoke to me? After? When he disappeared?"

*Were you asleep then, Cate? When exactly do you think you woke up from this dream? When did you fall asleep in front of the television? Did you really wake up then?*

She stared into her reflection again, the mirror's surface revealing no answers. Only more questions – the fading love bite on her neck, the lips red and swollen from brutal kisses, the scent of Fallen-Black in her nose and on her hands...

"No." She shook her head again. "It's just dreams. Just freaky, fucked-up dreams. Wash your face, wash your hands and go back to bed. You may have lost your promotion but that's no excuse for being late tomorrow. Besides, you need to track down McCullum and have a bloody good argument with him. Be damned if he's going to avoid explaining why he'd given your job to some out-of-the-blue pom."

The words felt hollow, the hungry throb in her sex somehow mocking them. Mocking *her*.

She splashed water on her flushed face, rinsed her mouth out once, twice, and then stormed back to bed.

The first thing she was going to do was demand McCullum tell her if Xander Dupont *did* in fact jerk off over her desk.

*Do you really want to talk about Xander?*

The question slithered through Cate's head and she bit back a sob. She didn't want to think about Xander Dupont again. Not now. Not before going back to sleep.

*Then think of Eamon...*

"Oh for fuck's sake," she snarled.

Tossing the sheets from her body once more, she shoved herself from the bed and stomped out of the room. There was zero point trying to sleep now. She may as well make herself a coffee and jump on the treadmill.

*There are other ways of making yourself sweat, Cate.*

Her pussy contracted at the suggestion, a quick, squeezing pulse that stole her breath and made her feet stumble.

She stopped in her kitchen and leaned her hands against the counter. There was something seriously wrong with her. Something...perverted. And she didn't have a damn clue what to do about it.

*Go back to sleep. Go back to your bed and go back to –*

*"Why won't you fucking hurry up?"*

The voice came from her bedroom, a whispered moan so soft she barely heard it. She straightened from the counter, her palms momentarily burning as the chill from the granite left her hot skin. Her blood roaring in her ears, she turned, facing the door to her room, open mere inches.

Someone was in there.

She licked her lips, her mouth dry, her stare fixed on the dark opening. She didn't remember pulling it closed after her.

But if she hadn't, why was it almost shut?

Another groan whispered from the room, this one so faint she couldn't discern any words at all and yet, at the low sound, her sex squeezed.

She swallowed against the lump in her throat and stared at the door.

There couldn't be anyone in there. The only way in was through her apartment door or the windows, and since she hadn't seen anyone go wandering through the living room in the last few minutes, nor heard any of the old wooden-framed windows protest at being disturbed, she knew she was alone and her bedroom was empty.

And still, she heard a noise. A voice.

*Are you going in there?*

Her teeth caught her bottom lip, no wetter for her tongue's most recent swipe.

*If you don't, Cate, you may as well kiss your sanity goodbye. You know there's no one in there. If you don't prove that true, your stupid, sleep-deprived mind will have won.*

The narrow strip of blackness mocked her. Her room sat waiting. Silent.

*Go in. There's no one in there.*

She pulled a slow breath, her pulse pounding in her neck. She wished it would calm the hell down. How was she to hear anything with that bloody –

Another groan, even softer still, wafted through the open doorway.

Cate narrowed her eyes, sinking her nails into her palms as she bunched her fists.

"There's no one in there, Sinclair," she stated, fighting against her own worrying need to flinch at the low sound of her voice in the quiet.

Pulling in a deep breath, she crossed the living room floor and pressed her palm to her door, pushing it wide without pause.

A cool tickle traced a line down her back, like a small brush following the line of her spine.

Or her shot nerves playing tricks with her head. Again.

And that was it. Apart from the muffled noises of Sydney beyond the window, she didn't hear anything. Apart from the shiver racing up her spine, she didn't feel a thing.

Nothing.

She shook her head, releasing her pent-up breath in a ragged snort. "You're pathetic."

Five steps later and she was at the foot of her bed. Untouched since she'd last left it. She climbed onto the mattress and crawled up its length on all fours. Damn, she felt tired. Really tired. She could barely keep her eyes open.

The pillows puffed out a sigh of air as she dropped flat to her stomach, the sheets rippling in a low, billowing wave around her.

Sleep. That's what she needed. Not a shrink, not a doctor. Just sleep. Everything would be better in the morning.

She squirmed herself into a comfortable position on the bed, hugging one of the pillows to her chest and face. Sleep, perchance to dream.

"God, I hope not," she mumbled, eyes closed, limbs heavy.

Her apartment remained silent, and the last thing Cate heard was that low whisper — *"almost dry"* — then the sleep she so desperately needed claimed her, and the words were lost to the dreamless nothing on the night.

## Chapter Four

Her computer was shut down when she got to work the next morning. She studied it from a distance, her teeth worrying her bottom lip, the small pulse beneath her ear ridiculously loud and strong.

Her desk was tidy. Her notes and thumbnail sketches of her current job were packed away neatly and *not* in a haphazard pile beside her keyboard like they had been when she'd fled the room like a little girl scared of shadows. Her teacup sat next to her desk lamp, pristine, empty of the dregs of yesterday's contents.

Someone had tidied her desk after she'd run away last night. She could only assume it was Eamon Fallen-Black.

She chewed on her bottom lip some more. What should she do? Track him down and tear him a new one for touching her stuff? Find him and say thank you? Apologize for being such a loony? Beg him to throw her across her tidy, organized desk and finish what he'd begun in her living room in the wee hours of this morning?

Ask him why the fuck she was dreaming of him in the first place?

And while she was at it, *who the hell is he?*

She let out a sigh, the ragged sound turning into a snort of self-contempt before it finished.

*Get your act together, Cate. Go find McCullum, ask him why he's given Eamon your position, glare at him a bit and then get over it. Move on. And for heaven's sake, stop trying to surreptitiously look around the studio for the arrogant English bastard. He's probably well and truly settled into the corner office by now. Y'know, the one that would have been –*

"I'm sorry I scared you last night."

Cate squealed as Eamon's deep voice rumbled at her from her left, a high, breathless squeak that felt ripped from her toes. She spun to face him, her pulse not just pounding in her neck, but in her temple. And, she was disgusted to realize, her pussy as well.

"Hey, hey, hey." He held out a hand as if to touch her arm but let it hang between them instead, a concerned frown knotting between his straight black eyebrows. "I didn't mean to scare you," his frown dipped deeper, "again."

Cate sucked in a jerky breath, giving Fallen-Black her own frown. "That's...I'm not..." She shook her head, staring at him. "I'm sorry," she finally managed to say, the pulse in her neck steadying. Somewhat. The pulse between her thighs, on the other hand... "You just startled me, is all."

His dark gaze ran over her face, lingering for an infinitesimal moment on her lips. The sudden memory of his savage, hungry kiss filled her head and her nipples pinched into hard points, foolishly stimulated by what never happened.

"Well," he murmured, his attention returning to her eyes, the corners of his mouth curling into a soft smile, "I didn't mean to do that either." He stood silent for a few seconds, his frame seeming to tower over her, the subtle scent of what could only be expensive aftershave threading through her breaths. God, he smelled good. Like fresh rain and sandalwood.

*Cate. Stop it.*

"I wanted to apologize for my rude behavior yesterday."

The words seem to brush against her, unexpected and unsettling. She frowned some more, a ripple of tension rippling through her. She didn't want him to apologize, damn it. Nor did she want to be turned-on by him.

*But you are. So what are you going to do about it?*

"It was uncalled for and unprofessional," Eamon continued, his accent tickling her nerve endings. Or was it the way he looked at her? As if she was the only thing in his existence?

*Really? You're going with that clichéd –*

"And I can tell by your silence you think so too, so I'll just go away now and leave you a –"

Cate blinked, what he was saying finally sinking into her head. "Oh, sorry, no," she gushed, her cheeks heating. "I didn't..." She caught her bottom lip with her teeth, her frown returning.

Eamon, however, laughed. A low, smooth chuckle that sent a damp lick of arousal straight into her sex. "I think we should start this all over again." His dark eyes twinkled at her and his smile stretched wider, turning his already handsome face into a downright gorgeous one. "Hello, Cate. I'm Eamon Fallen-Black. I've just moved to Australia and know no one. Is there any chance you'll let me buy you coffee tonight after work so I can apologize for my deplorable behavior yesterday?" His smile turned almost sheepish. "And apologize for stealing your promotion?"

Cate's heart thumped in her throat. Coffee?

In a whirlwind of images and sensory ghosts, the memory of her dream lashed through her – Eamon's lips on hers, his tongue in her mouth, his hands holding her wrists, his erection grinding against her...

"Yes."

The agreement fell from her lips before she could stop it, her nipples pebbling further, her clit aching in her folds.

*Twin Heart...*

Soft words whispered through her head, as if blown from far away on a gentle breeze.

Eamon's eyes narrowed, their dark depths almost appearing to glow golden-red, as if they reflected an unseen light, only to return to their fathomless black so quickly Cate wondered if she'd imagined it. Why not? She was imagining all sorts of other things about the man. That his eyes changed color wasn't anything odd at all.

He nodded, a single dip of his head. "After work then."

She watched him turn and walk away, her pulse pounding in her ears. What was she doing? Coffee?

*Surely you don't plan on being nice to him, do you, Cate? Simply because he was nice to you just then? He took your job, remember? He took it! Or are you saying yes because of the way he kissed you last night? That was a dream, woman. A dream! You do remember that, don't y –*

"Shut up," she snarled, taking the last few steps to her desk and dropping her satchel onto the tidy surface.

Settling herself in her seat, she switched on her computer, her heart still thumping way too fast. Coffee with a man she'd had the horniest dream about? A dream in which he'd forced himself on her? Sick sick sick.

The large screen in front of her flickered to life, its colors saturated and vibrating with frenetic energy, its start-up sound not the standard chime but a low, scratching rasp—like the sound of a paintbrush dragging across a dry canvas.

"Odd," Cate muttered, the unusual sound pulling her from her uncertain thoughts about Eamon.

She opened Photoshop, the digital manipulation program instantly filling the screen with City Teach Tutoring's unfinished logo.

Cate's breath left her in a rush, her mouth an instant desert.

*The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog* was typed beside the apple.

Nothing else. Definitely *not* the words she'd seen yesterday. The ones she'd left on the screen.

She studied the nine words. If she deleted them and typed them again, what would they say? Gnawing on her bottom lip, she aligned her text cursor beside the letter G and hit delete.

The words disappeared, letter after letter until it was just the apple hanging on the screen.

"Okay." She let out a slow breath, resting her fingers on the keyboard. "Let's see what happens."

The

Goi

She blinked. That wasn't what she'd expected.

*What did you expect? The? Or Twi?*

She continued typing.

Quick

*Ngtom*

"What the hell?" She pulled a face at her monitor.

*Brown*

*Akeyo*

A low pressure began to thrum in Cate's ears. She stared at the letters, not wanting to put them together. Not wanting to finish typing.

But she had to. She had to see...

*Fox*

*Uco*

*Jumps*

*Mecat*

She jerked her hands off her keyboard, her breath stuck in her throat.

"This can't be happening."

Goi Ngtom Akeyo Uco MeCat

She didn't need to finish. She knew what it said.

*Going to make you come Cat*

Almost of its own accord, her left hand slid to the keyboard, her index finger coming to rest on the E key.

She shook her head, her blood not just roaring in her ears, but pumping with such pressure she felt sure her eardrums were about to burst. "No."

Her mind—or her body—didn't listen. Or didn't care. With a gentle push, her finger depressed the E, completing the spelling of her name.

*"Cate."*

The voice whispered through her mind a second before a mouth closed over her throat and sucked.

She stiffened in her seat, incapable of moving. Two hands roamed her body, traveling over her torso with slow intent. They cupped her breasts, squeezing each one as the sucking mouth on her neck slid higher, turning into a nibbling bite under her ear. She ground her teeth together, too afraid to let her lips part. If they did, she didn't know what would come out. A scream? Or a moan of unhinged pleasure?

*Please, no! Not now.*

Her plea fell on deaf ears, whether hers or the unseen...*thing*...fondling her, she didn't know. The hands massaged her breasts, pinching and flicking her nipples, nipples hard with a base sexual response she couldn't deny or control.

The mouth slid to her ear, a warm, wet tongue tracing its inner shell. Or was it a small paintbrush? God, she didn't know anymore.

*"Want you so badly."* The voice filled her head in a panted moan. *"Come for me, Cate. I need you to come now."*



Without preamble, the hands plunged to her groin, fingers stroking her folds, rolling over her clit with ungentle urgency.

She sucked in a whimper, forcing her body to remain still even as she wanted to thrust her hips forward and spread her legs wider. How did she fight something like this? How did she battle against the sheer, insane lunacy of being pleased by an unseen lover hell-bent on making her come?

Why should she?

*Because it's wrong, Cate! It's wrong and sick and it can't be happening!*

But it was. Again. And her body, her pussy, was responding. The fingers played over her clit, stroking and teasing, rubbing the unprotected button of flesh as if her underpants and jeans didn't exist, until the soles of her feet began to tingle. The mouth at her ear nibbled and sucked on her lobe. She closed her eyes, her hands curled into tight fists, her ass clenching as her pussy lips began to swell with prickling blood flow.

She was going to come. Just like *he* said she would.

*No. Stop it, Cate! Stop it!*

The fingers between her thighs slid up and down on her clit, pushing her higher, higher, closer and closer to the edge. She gritted her teeth and opened her eyes, staring at her computer monitor and seeing nothing but a swirling kaleidoscope of colors. Colors and brushstrokes...

And then she was coming, hard, her hips thrusting upward, no longer in her control as her orgasm smashed through her body. Claiming her.

Taking her faster to the swirling darkness of colors.

"Oh fuck," Cate moaned, tight spasms pulsing in her sex, her inner muscles constricting on a cock that wasn't there, had never been there, and even that surreal acknowledgement did nothing to destroy the wanton pleasure possessing her.

And then it was over.

In the space of a breath, the hands left her pussy, the mouth left her ear.

She sat motionless, exhaustion stealing through her very existence. Her muscles quivered, her fading orgasm seeming to suck the energy from her with every weakening throb. She closed her eyes again, wanting to cry. Wanting to rush to the bathroom and shower.

Wanting...

*More.*

"No." She drove her short, blunt nails into her palms. "No. You don't, Cate."

Opening her eyes, she stared at her monitor. The words there were simple, the unfinished sentence terrifying.

*The quick brown fox jumps o*

"It never happened," she whispered, her gaze jerking from one word to the next. "It never happened. You're losing your —"

Something hot and wet dribbled down over her top lip. Hand trembling, she raised her fingers to her mouth, swiping at the warm moisture before holding her hand before her.

Blood.

Her nose was bleeding.

\* \* \* \* \*

The paintbrush fell from his fingers and he collapsed to his knees, gripping his cock in his hand and pumping its length. Pumping hard and fast. Faster. Feeling his grip grow tighter as he imagined it was Cate's cunt.

Soon. Soon. He couldn't hold off much longer.

And he wouldn't have to.

This time the painting had moved on the canvas; had actually writhed as his brush stroked, guiding her form. This time he'd heard her whimpers of pleasure.

This time he'd not only felt her pleasure in his mind, he'd felt her *body*.

Soon. So very soon.

\* \* \* \* \*

Her nosebleed stopped as quickly as it had begun. She made her way to the bathroom and cleaned up her face, splashing cold water on it in an attempt to reinvigorate herself. Fatigue fogged her vision, making everything appear cloudy for a few long moments. She splashed more cold water on her face, letting it trickle down her throat and over the inflamed part of her skin the mouth had branded. Except there was no love bite there. Not even a reddish mark.

*Because it didn't happen, Sinclair. It's all a product of your sick-as-fuck mind.*

Returning to her desk, she lowered herself into her seat, her knees shaking violently as her center of balance shifted. She pulled in a slow breath and counted to ten, reading the words she'd typed earlier.

"Time to say goodbye to the fox," she muttered, selecting the line of text, "and hello to City Teach Tutoring."

She typed in the tutoring company's title, refusing to let out her relieved cry when the correct words appeared on her monitor. Normalcy wasn't something to be celebrated. Normalcy was normal. The day was normal. It had to be. She couldn't let it be anything else.

Five minutes later she was hard at work, the draining effect of her mysterious orgasm fading in the exhilarating buzz of creating good design. She didn't see Eamon for the rest of the day. Nor did she see their boss—a situation she was more than convinced was the result of McCullum's guilt and less the migraine he was allegedly struck down with.

It was only when Bec sidled up to her, somewhere around 5:15 p.m., a far too knowing smirk on her bright red lips, that Cate realized she'd steadfastly refused to look up from her computer all day. Or think about the coffee-sharing experience about to unfold.

"So, you *did* say yes to the pom, I hear?"

Cate gave the young woman a sideward frown, trying to keep her focus on the digitally created apple twirling on the monitor before her.

"Going out for coffee with this one 'cause he's better-looking than Xander?" Bec went on, perching her twenty-something-year-old butt on the edge of Cate's desk. "Or is it more like sucking up to your new supervisor? Show him your boobs and he'll let you play art director with him? That kinda thing?"

Cate's mouth fell open and she twisted in her seat, glaring at the agency's receptionist. The urge to tell Bec to fuck off was on the tip of her tongue—and then she saw Bec grin.

"That's what I'd do," the other woman said, leaning toward Cate. "He's so fucking gorgeous I'd show him my boobs, my twat...hell, I'd show him anything he asked. There's something about him that just makes me feel..."

An expression unlike any Cate had seen before on Bec's face—contemplative—softened her young features.

"Inspired," Bec finally finished. "Like there's something inside me wanting to get out. Something elemental. Something..."

The confession trailed away, leaving Cate to stare up at the receptionist. Elemental? Had Bec I-can-knot-a-cherry-stem-with-my-tongue Buckley really said *elemental*?

*A creature of sheer talent and elemental...*

Fallen-Black's murmured words from her dream whispered at her subconscious and she drew in a wobbly breath. And then another when Bec commented in a low mutter, her gaze tracking something moving over Cate's left shoulder, "Speak of the devil..."

The girl lurched off Cate's desk, adjusting the ridiculously tight skirt asphyxiating her hips before thrusting out her perky breasts and affecting a sultry smile. "Mr. Fallen-Black," she all but purred.

Cate didn't need to turn to know Eamon now stood behind her. She could feel him—a smoldering frame of six-foot-four intensity. But she swiveled her chair anyway. Her pussy immediately clenched, her ass did the same. Her nipples rubbed against the lace of her bra with abrasive urgency. Damn it, if she didn't know any better she'd swear she was on the cusp of yet another lust-driven climax.

*Ah, but you do know better, don't you, Cate? The dreams...both asleep and awake...you know very well what an orgasm feels like of late. And you very much want the man behind you to give you one.*

"Rebecca," she heard Eamon say, his smooth English accent not helping the constricting throb between her thighs.

Bec flicked a suggestive glance over him, from head to groin and back up again. "Bec. Please."

Eamon's silence made Bec shuffle her feet. "Well, I better let you two go then." She gave Cate a lewd grin. "Leave you to your coffee...and stuff."

The innuendo, plus Eamon's continued silence, sent a silly lick of damp tension straight to Cate's womb. Her pulse quickened. Snatching up her satchel, she jerked to her feet, glaring at Bec as the young girl tossed her another suggestive smirk before wandering back in the direction of the agency's foyer.

"I'm sorry," she muttered, turning to Eamon.

Black eyes flickered golden heat, capturing her. "Don't be."

The relaxed, casual humor of the morning was gone. Back was the intimidating man who oozed dominating arrogance. Cate's already lust-swollen sex grew heavier, wetter, and she bit back a soft moan. No, this wouldn't do. She wanted to go have coffee with the man with the sheepish smile and stumbling apology, not the arrogant English bastard.

*No you don't.*

Fallen-Black swept out his arm, gesturing to the main door. "Shall we?"

For the briefest heartbeat, Cate could have sworn she felt something soft, slick and wet trace a line up the inside of her thigh, and then it was gone, leaving her hard nipples harder and her heart racing.

Eamon cocked an eyebrow.

"Okay," she panted, tugging her satchel's strap over her shoulder and walking away from her desk, her steps jerky and quick.

*God, woman. Get a grip.*

By the time she made it to the door, she'd sucked down five deep breaths. By the time she passed Bec at the reception desk, she'd forced her pace to a more fluid stride. By the time she made it to the elevator, she'd achieved complete, professional calm.

When Eamon crossed the threshold of the small, confining space, his subtle scent permeating the air, his frame devouring the lift's interior, Cate was one hundred percent in control of her body and her lust.

So when the same soft, wet sensation brushed over the curve of her pussy, a feathering caress that lingered on her folds, she didn't gasp or cry out. Just.

They rode the lift in silence, Cate too worried her voice would tremble if she spoke. She was losing her sanity. She didn't doubt that anymore. Losing her sanity and going for coffee with the most gorgeous man she'd ever seen, who not only turned her on so much she'd had a freaking wet dream about him, but who also terrified her with his undeniable, brooding mystery.

She balled her hands into fists, driving her nails into her palms. She was starting to sound like a bloody Mills and Boon novel.

The dull clunk and jerk of the old lift, followed by a soft chime, told her they'd reached ground floor. The doors slid apart and a sudden flush of heat washed over her. She was really doing this; interacting with a work colleague outside the studio. And not just any work colleague, but the man who now, as the new art director, had creative control over her work.

*Join me for coffee this evening, Cate.*

Xander Dupont's request whispered through her head, as confident and conceited as it had sounded more than two weeks ago. A shiver rippled through her, and with it came an image of the previous art director standing at her desk, trousers bunched around his thighs, his hand –

She drove her nails harder into her palms. It served no purpose to think about Dupont now. Not while she was so unsettled. Not unless she wanted to throw up. Maybe after her stomach stopped rolling and she gathered some courage. Maybe.

Two minutes later, she found herself sitting at a small table tucked away in the back corner of the cafe next door to Enigma Advertising, doing everything she could not to stare at Eamon as he ordered them both coffees.

More than once she caught herself sneaking a sideward glance at him. Bec was right. There was something potent about him that stirred an unknown awareness deep within her. It was indefinable, but there all the same. Every time her gaze fell on his face, she felt...what? Connected? No, that couldn't be it. That was the stuff of clichéd romance novels, and she sure as hell wasn't a heroine in one of *those* books. So what was it?

She didn't know. Perhaps it was residual emotions from her dream about him. Yes, it was a fucked-up, somewhat horrific nightmare, but try as hard as she did, she still couldn't deny she'd been intensely aroused.

*Aroused? Huh, that's a bit of an understatement, don't you think?*

She ground her teeth, ignoring the thought. Or trying to. Maybe what he made her feel *was* purely sexual. Was that the only reason she'd agreed to coffee? Because he turned her on? Was she really that superficial?

No. There was more. Something beyond her understanding. Something –

*"...in Sydney?"*

Eamon's deep voice rumbled in her ears and she blinked, embarrassed to realize she'd completely missed the beginning of his question.

He looked at her, his dark eyes on her face, his towering frame relaxed in the necessarily trendy but wholly uncomfortable bistro chair.

*In Sydney? In Sydney? God, what did he ask?*

"Almost ten years," Cate offered, taking a guess he'd asked her how long she'd been living in the city. "I moved here to study art and graphic design at Sydney Uni and never went back home when I finished."

Those midnight-black eyes never swayed from hers, his gaze penetrating. "Home was?"

"A little town called Gunnedah, situated on the edge of the Outback."

"Were your parents artists? Or spiritual people?"

It was an odd question, but then again, Eamon was already proving not to be your typical man. She shook her head. "No, although my dad loved to draw. I grew up shearing sheep, plucking chooks and driving tractors."

A small smile pulled at one side of Eamon's mouth. "A farm girl then."

Cate nodded, feeling her own smile play on her lips. "A farm girl." A sense of relieved calm rolled through her, the tension coiling her muscles flowing away. "But I always wanted to be a famous movie poster designer. That or a princess."

Eamon laughed, the sound rich and comfortable.

Cate let her smile fully form on her lips, enjoying the way her pulse fluttered at his response to her confession. This felt good. Eamon was much more casual than he'd been in the elevator. She liked it. "What about you?" she asked, nodding her thanks to the waitress as the woman placed a squat espresso before her. "You said you haven't been in Australia long? When did you leave England?"

"Two days before I started work at Enigma."

"Wow, and you don't even look jetlagged."

A small smile pulled at his mouth. "I was...on leave back in the UK before I left. Perhaps that's why. I wasn't really keeping normal hours."

"Leave? Why? Were you on holidays?"

He raised his coffee to his lips. "You could say that."

Cate frowned. What kind of answer was that? Everything about Eamon Fallen-Black was...odd.

And yet still so goddamn sexy. Damn it.

"What's the name of the agency where you came from?" she asked, a soft tingle snaking up her spine. "I must admit, I always thought Enigma was a boutique agency started by McCullum. I never knew there was a parent agency in the UK. Were you the art director there?"

He chuckled. "Are you trying to ask me if I can do the job, Cate Sinclair?"

She blushed, realizing how rude her bombardment of questions must seem. Or maybe the heat in her cheeks was due to the throb in her pussy at the sound of her name on his lips?

*Really, Cate? God, you're woeful. Maybe you really are one of those heroines. Just waiting for the alpha male to sweep you against his chest and have his forceful way with you.*

Her cheeks grew hotter. "No," she blurted, trying not to squirm on her seat. "Sorry, I'm just curious, is all."

"I have directed many artistic projects," he answered, "but this is my first in such an...intimate environment."

Cate studied him, wondering about the almost undetectable pause in his answer. Once again, his response seemed to make little sense even as it answered her question.

"I knew the position at Enigma was where I needed to be," he continued, raising his espresso to his mouth, "and I came. Tell me, Cate—if you wanted to be a movie poster designer, how did you end up at Enigma?"

She shrugged, his abrupt switch in focus back to her a little unsettling. "There's not much call for movie poster work here in Australia. And I couldn't bring myself to move to the U.S. Bit hard to visit the folks when I'm that far away. At least this way I can still drive back to the farm three or four times a year."

He raised an eyebrow, that same smile curling the side of his mouth again. "And the princess?"

She grinned. "Not many princes here in Australia either, I'm afraid."

He nodded. "True. Have you thought of moving to the UK?"

Cate laughed. "Too cold for me. I like it hot." The second the words passed her lips, warmth flooded her cheeks. "Err...I mean, I like the *weather* hot."

Eamon's smile stretched wider, allowing Cate to see a glimpse of his perfect white teeth. "Pity."

The single word sent a shard of squirming pressure into her sex. She didn't know what his ambiguous response meant—pity she only liked hot weather? Pity she wouldn't move to the UK?—but it didn't seem to matter. At this point, her body was spiraling out of control where Eamon Fallen-Black was concerned.

A moment of silence stretched out between them, broken only by the soft sounds of the café. But even that was distant. Unimportant. Eamon's gaze held hers, so intense she could barely draw breath. How had this happened? How had they gone from laughing one moment to this...this...staring contest?

Unable to bare it any longer, she looked away, turning her attention to people around them. "Have you been in the design industry for long?"

For a split second, Eamon's eyes seemed to grow darker. "Long enough to know how to make people respond to sensory stimulation the way I want them to."

The unusual answer made her look back at him. He was drinking his coffee, studying her over the rim of his cup.

*Fair dinkum, he is so gorgeous.*

*And so goddamn enigmatic. Argh.*

"Tell me, Cate," he took another slow drink from his coffee, "are you responding right now?"

Her heart slammed against her rib cage. She flicked her gaze to the hand holding his cup.

"You have paint on your fingers." She blurted out the first thing that came to her, too...*stimulated* for her own peace of mind.

A stillness fell over him before he lowered his cup and cast an indifferent inspection at the tiny flecks of deep red around his fingernails. "I like to paint in my downtime."

"Oh?" Cate raised her eyebrows, her heart racing. "Still life?"

His dark eyes seemed to shimmer that strange red light. "Abstracts."

For reasons she couldn't understand, the answer made her mouth dry. "I'd love to see them sometime."

His answering chuckle surprised her. "Is this the part where I say, 'Come back to my apartment and I'll show you my etchings'?"

She laughed, glad for the break in tension. "You etch as well?" She grinned. "You really are a Renaissance—"

Something brushed over her left breast. Something cool and wet. Something familiar.

Her breath caught in her throat, her anus and pussy contracting, her nipples pinching tight. *Oh no. No.*

The caress continued. Long, steady strokes that followed the curve of her breast, as if an unseen hand explored her flesh with a wide, soft paintbrush.

She sucked in a hitching breath, her gaze holding Eamon's, her body instinctually wanting to arch into the invisible touch.

*No...not now...not again...*

"No etchings, I'm afraid. Although I do like to sculpt," Eamon said, nothing in his voice or expression indicating he was aware of her flustered state. "But enough about me, what of this lack of handsome princes in Australia you mentioned? Does that mean there's no Mr. Right? Or should I be checking over my shoulder for a tall, handsome man coming to defend your honor? Someone with whom your heart is eternally..."

She didn't hear what he said next. Not when all she could think about was the brush circling her left nipple. A brush that seemed to become a tongue. A tongue that flicked and lapped at her nipple until she wanted to whimper.

*Oh God.*

The tongue became teeth. Nibbling at her nipple in a series of soft bites that grew harder with each contact. And then it was a mouth. Sucking on her nipple. Sucking, sucking, drawing on the puckered peak with increasing force and, as she stared at Eamon, as she watched his lips move with words she couldn't hear, she felt the brush find her pussy. Felt the bristles—like oil-dipped sable—slide over her folds, painting each one, stroking them with confident knowledge as the mouth continued to suckle on her breast.

*Oh...oh...oh...*



She ground her teeth, determined to ignore it. Fighting to hear what Eamon was saying, struggling to sit still in her seat.

The brush on her cunt delved between her pussy lips, coating her clit in tiny little strokes of wetness. The mouth on her nipple slid to her right breast, and once again the sensation of someone painting the curve of her flesh filled her.

Her hips rolled forward, her sex seeking the invisible brush between her thighs. Wanting more. Wanting it to become the unseen lips and tongue.

Wanting—

“Cate?”

Eamon’s voice cut through the rising, terrifying pleasure consuming her. She stared at him, sweat trickling into her eyes, her right nipple now the focus of the invisible mouth, the brush on her sex now fingers. Sure, confident fingers. Delving fingers. Fingers seeking her heat. Wriggling past her folds. Stroking her from within.

“Cate?”

She jolted to her feet, her cheeks afire, her breath shallow. “Sorry,” she blurted, stumbling sideways from her seat. “I have to go to the...”

The last word was choked by her own soft cry as the wet brush stroked over her clenching anus. She turned and almost sprinted for the bathroom, knocking over her chair on the way.

She didn’t give a flying fuck. She needed to get to the bathroom. She needed to be alone. She needed to—

*Come.*

Slamming the door to the ladies’ room behind her, she all but fell against the vanity, her chest heaving, her hands gripping the edge of the counter. All over her body the caresses continued; the sensation of a brush painting her flesh giving way to the feel of a mouth, a tongue, only to become the brush again. She squeezed her eyes shut, determined not to surrender to the exquisite, insane pleasure possessing her.

“No,” she ground out, shaking her head, “this is not happening. It’s not happening.”

The brush stroked a line up the back of her left thigh, over the taut curve of her ass cheek, turning into the licking tongue as it passed over her anus. Cate bit back a cry, shaking her head. Holding onto the counter for fear of collapsing to the ground.

The tongue lapped at her hole, pressing against the opening, and then the fingers were pulling her cheeks apart, spreading them with ungentle force and—

A sudden gush of wind, followed instantly by the buzz of the café’s crowd, told Cate someone had opened the door. Shame flooded her.

Shame that turned to stunned shock when the buzz was shattered by the sound of the lock clicking into place—then two hard hands snaked around her belly and jerked her backward. Against a harder body.

Her eyes snapped open and she gasped, staring into Fallen-Black's smoldering black stare reflected in the wall-to-wall mirror.

"Eamon..." His name burst from her lips a second before he drove his hand under the waistband of her jeans and plunged his fingers into her pussy.

## Chapter Five

Raw pleasure erupted in Cate's body. She cried out, her spine bowing, her sex constricting with greedy want on Eamon's fingers. He drove them deeper into her slit, wriggling them until his fingertips stroked the sweetest spot of all, his breath hot on her cheek as he stared at her in the mirror.

"Sweet Melete," he ground out, "you are like the purest of lights."

He turned his head and pressed his lips to her temple, working his fingers within her pussy until she whimpered. "When I touch you, my heart fills with golden heat. It is exquisite."

Before she could respond, before she could find her voice—lost to her in the unadulterated pleasure consuming her—he captured her left breast with his other hand, squeezing its weight with arrogant possession. She cried out again, the caress far from gentle and yet so damn good.

He groaned against her temple, his hand deserting her breast for all of about half a second as he fought with the hem of her shirt, yanking it free of her jeans. His palm smoothed up her rib cage, yanking down the cup of her bra before closing over her breast again, his splayed fingers framing her hard nipple. "You are so soft to touch," he murmured, holding her stare in the mirror as one hand cupped her breast and the other cupped her mound, "so tight to penetrate."

Cate hissed in a breath, her body—already aroused and on the verge of orgasm from its unseen assault—reacting to Eamon's masterful hands. She should be fighting him off, but how could she? When he was doing the very thing she'd ached for him to do since...

*Since you laid eyes on him?*

"Oh, oh...please..." she rasped, arching in his arms. "Eamon...I need...I need..."

"To be fucked," he finished, the proclamation a guttural growl.

Her pussy flooded with liquid tension. "Yes. Yes." Her head fell back, mouth dry, stare locked on his. His blunt words turned her on so much she felt her juices leak from her, past his fingers, until the air hung heavy with the scent of her lust.

"You need to be fucked, Cate Sinclair. By me. Now."

"Please." Her breath left her in shallow, rapid pants. She closed her eyes, her womb contracting with such eager want at his statement, delicious pain spiked through her. She raked her nails over his arms, released her button and zipper quickly then covered his hands with hers, pushing his fingers deeper into her folds. Pressing his palm flatter on her breast. "Please..."

She didn't know what she was begging for, only that the pleasure consuming her now made the unseen caresses of earlier seem chaste.

Eamon plunged his fingers farther into her sex, scissoring them together until she writhed against his body. His cock, long and thick and steely hard, ground against her ass, nudging her cheeks wider apart despite the denim barriers of his jeans and hers. Its massive length was unmistakable. Undeniable.

God, how would she take all of him?

Fresh moisture pooled in her center at the thought, and Eamon groaned at the damp response. "Your cream coats my hand, Cate. So wet. So thick. I want you to suck your own pleasure from my fingers as I sink my dick into your cunt."

Her sex constricted, a powerful throb she knew presaged release. She was going to come soon. She couldn't stop that. Eamon's domination, his force, his hands on her body... She was going to come so very soon and she wanted to do it impaled on his cock.

"Please," she pleaded, knowing this time why she was begging. "I need you inside me. Pl—"

He didn't wait for her to finish. With one hand still buried between her legs, his palm grinding her clit while his fingertip stroked her inner walls, he yanked her jeans down over her hips. The room's chilly air fell over her exposed ass a fraction of a heartbeat before she felt Eamon shift his weight.

She opened her eyes to stare in the mirror. Just in time to see him tear open a condom wrapper with his teeth, his black eyes glowing with molten golden fire. Her pulse quickened, her pussy throbbed—and then he was driving his length into her sodden, gripping sex. Stretching her to capacity.

"God oh God oh *God yes!*"

His balls slapped the backs of her thighs. His cock head pressed again and again on the wall of her sex. She slammed her hands on the mirror, pushing back into his every thrust, tears of something close to rapture leaking from her eyes.

Her orgasm built. Grew closer. Tighter.

And still Eamon didn't stop. He reclaimed her breast with one hand, pinching the nipple in perfect rhythm with his pounding strokes. With his other hand he found her clit, rolling the tiny button of sensitive flesh beneath one fingertip. Ribbons of concentrated sensations unfurled through Cate, knotting and twisting around each other. She caught her bottom lip with her teeth, knowing if she didn't she would cry out. Cry out and scream and beg for more.

"Then I will give you more, Cate Sinclair," Eamon whispered in her ear, a second before he released her breast and pressed one finger to the puckered hole of her anus.

He pushed. Once. A single, steady, shallow pressure. But it was enough.

Cate's orgasm detonated. In her clit, her womb, her ass.

"Oh, oh, oh oh oh!"

She couldn't stem the gasping cries no matter how hard she tried, her release tearing through her with savage force. Her cries grew louder, Eamon's thrusts growing harder, harder, his finger on her anus slipping deeper, his finger on her clit rubbing faster.

"Oh, that feels so good!"

She bucked, all control of her body, her muscles gone. Lost to the sheer pleasure wrought upon her by Eamon's fingers and cock.

"*Real* pleasure, Cate," he ground out, his jaw bunched, his golden-red eyes holding hers. "Real."

And then his strokes suddenly became wild, erratic, and he threw back his head and let out a strangled roar.

The mirror shook beneath Cate's palms, the lights flickered. Behind them, the door knob turned. Rattled.

She let out another gasp, her sex milking Eamon's sheathed cock of his seed even as her heart slammed into her throat.

God, what was she doing? What was she doing?

*Real pleasure, Cate.* Eamon's growl whispered through her head.

Real. Not insane, invisible touches, not surreal, erotic dreams. Real pleasure. With a real man.

"Real."

Her murmur slipped from her on a pant, and as it did Eamon smoothed his hand from between her thighs, up over her belly to her lips. Tracing them with fingers slick from her cream before dipping those fingers into her mouth to lightly touch her tongue.

"Suck," he whispered in her ear.

She did so, tasting her pleasure on his skin. Pleasure he had given her. A man she'd known for all of about forty-eight hours.

*Who cares, Cate? It's real.*

With a groan, Eamon withdrew his fingers from her mouth, cupping her jaw in a firm hold. He turned her head slightly, enough to grant his lips access to hers in a kiss that was almost gentle.

She whimpered. It was madness of course, but she wanted more. So much more.

Eamon's lips dragged from hers, charting a path up to her ear. "So do I." He shifted behind her, a subtle change in his stance, and his spent shaft slid from her sex.

A soft whimper of dismay vibrated in Cate's throat at the absence of his flesh. She slumped a little, letting her head fall forward. At some point she would need to acknowledge the man seemed to know her very thoughts, but not now. She felt too...*alive* to contemplate something so unnerving.

"I'm going to take you back to your home and do that again."

Eamon's low proclamation made her sex clench in wanton greed. She opened her eyes, gazing at his reflection in the bathroom mirror, her hands still braced against its cool surface. "Are you?"

He stood but a step away, his stare holding hers, his clothes immaculately in place. "Yes."

The doorknob twisted again, and this time, her mind not drowning in exquisite pleasure, Cate recognized it for what it was—someone trying to get into the ladies' toilet. She licked her lips, tasting the faintest hint of her own juices, her attention returning to Eamon's reflection. "Okay."

It was the second time she'd agreed to go with him without thought or hesitation, but this was no request for coffee. This was...

An ever-so-soft caress slid up her thigh. The stroke of a paintbrush.

She sucked in a hitching breath.

Eamon's black eyes flickered. "Now. Before I lose what little control I have over myself and fuck you again right here."

Cate jerked her stare from his face, fumbling with her jeans. She yanked them back up over her ass and fastened them before righting her bra. Her cheeks burned with heat and, for a wavering moment, disgusted shame rolled through her. Here she was, on the verge of completely losing her sanity, and she was behaving like a horny teenager. She shouldn't be going anywhere with Eamon, let alone her home. She should be checking herself into a hospital. She should be demanding a cat scan or an MRI or a...or a...

As if sensing her sudden uncertainty—and why not? He knew what she was thinking, didn't he?—Eamon destroyed the minute space between them. He pressed his body to her back, his hands flattening to her belly, holding her to him, his cock once again a long, thick pole in his jeans, nudging at her butt cheeks. "I will fill you with greater pleasure than you've ever experienced, Cate," he said, his lips on her temple. "You have no need to fear what I awaken in you."

The doorknob turned again, followed by a knock and a woman's voice. "Can you hurry up, please? I'm kinda busting out here."

Eamon snared one of Cate's hands and slid it between their bodies, placing it on his massive erection. "I'm kinda busting in here too," he murmured, giving Cate a small grin.

She studied him in the mirror, her pussy constricting with eager anticipation, her heart pounding.

*Do it, Cate. How can you not?*

An invisible, featherlight stroke of something damp traveled up her throat, over her jaw, only to be swiped away by Eamon's lips. "Please, Cate."

It was the word "please" that moved her.

She disengaged herself from his hold, walked to the toilet door and released the lock, pulling the door wide to give the fidgeting woman standing on the other side of

the threshold a wide smile. "Sorry, got a bit," she arched a look at Eamon over her shoulder as he stepped up behind her, nuzzling her neck with a hot kiss, "distracted."

The woman's mouth fell open and Eamon chuckled in Cate's ear, his hand cupping her ass in a gentle squeeze. He walked out of the bathroom, turning his head to give the still-gaping woman a slow wink as he passed her.

A ribbon of wicked excitement curled in the pit of Cate's belly and, with a single lift of her eyebrows, she followed Eamon out of the loo and out of the café.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thirty minutes later she stood at her locked apartment door, her fingers gripping the key already inserted in the keyhole. She closed her eyes, the very presence of the man behind her making her breathless.

They'd said very little on the drive home. He'd commented on her car—"Nice Golf"—she'd commented on the traffic—"Damn it, why is it so busy?"—and he'd chuckled once, the sound so sensually carnal Cate almost came right there and then in the bucket seat of her nice Golf.

They hadn't touched since the ladies' bathroom, something telling Cate if they did they'd never make it back to her house. Whoever Eamon Fallen-Black was—and let's face it, boys and girls, she really didn't know that much about him—he was like catnip to her libido. Just the simple fact that he sat a mere eight inches away from her in the small cabin of her car was like torturous foreplay. From the second she'd exited the toilet back in the café, she could think of nothing but the feel of his hands, his mouth, his body on hers, *in* hers. And the smoldering fire in his eyes whenever she dared look at him told her Eamon thought of very little else as well.

*And since you left the café, you haven't once felt the invisible caresses on your body. Did you realize that?*

"If you don't open that door soon," Eamon whispered, his lips so close to her neck she felt every word on her skin, "I will fuck you against it."

Cate pressed her thighs together, her breath catching in her throat, her clit swelling with hot blood. "Really?"

His lips grazed her flesh. Once. "Really."

She didn't move.

What would it be like to have him bury himself in her drenched sex out here in the walkway? Directly opposite Mr. Butler's door? Have him pound into her as his hands pinned her wrists to the door above her head? As her bare legs wrapped around his hips? Have him suck on her breasts while the busy-body in Fifteen C watched?

A tremble quaked through her. She'd never considered voyeurism or semi-public sex so deliciously exciting. It was as if Eamon brought out the hussy in her. Like a deviant muse.

"Oh Cate," his breath fanned the dip beneath her ear, "you have no idea. Now please, unlock the door."

Catching her bottom lip with her teeth, Cate turned, her ass pressing to the door as she looked up into Eamon's face. "Is this normal for you?" she asked, her heart thumping in her throat, her pulse pounding in her ears. "Starting a new job and seducing your colleague all within two days?"

Eamon's nostrils flared. He placed his hands on either side of her head, lowering until his eyes were level with hers. "Normalcy stopped existing the moment I met you. Nothing is the way I expected it to be. Nothing is the way it *should* be."

His confession made her nipples, already tight with anticipation, pinch tighter. "Who are you, Eamon? *What* are you? Because you can't be real."

For a trembling second she swore he was about to say the words *Twin Heart*. Her pulse quickened and she held her breath.

"I'm real," he said instead, his expression unreadable. "And I'm here to give you that which you need more than anything else."

Cate's throat felt thick. "And what is that?"

"Pleasure." The corners of his mouth curled. A little. "And inspiration."

"That's two things." The correction slipped from her lips in a breathless whisper.

Eamon raised an eyebrow. "You're right." He drew his face closer, his mouth almost—*almost*—brushing hers. "Now open the door, Cate. Please."

Fumbling behind her, Cate turned the key in the lock.

That surreal golden-red fire glowed in Eamon's eyes and without preamble, he opened the door, hauled her off her feet and crushed her mouth with his.

She clung to him, wrapping her thighs around his hips, battling his tongue with her own as he strode into her small apartment. With a swift backward kick, he slammed the door, never breaking their kiss nor slowing his stride. For a rational moment, Cate wondered how he knew where her bedroom was, a tiny lick of fear squirming through her consuming, licentious joy, but then he dropped her onto her old, worn sofa, its cracked leather creaking as she sank into the silk-covered pillows, and fear was forgotten.

Eamon followed her down, his tongue mating with hers in a series of demanding swirls and swipes. His knees planted on either side of her hips, imprisoning her under the bowed arc of his body. His hands roamed her breasts, her shoulders, her throat, worshipping her flesh as his tongue worshipped her mouth.

She moaned, snaking her arms up around his neck. She lifted her hips, wanting the hard pressure of his cock against her pussy. Her blood was like thunder in her ears, searing through her veins and down to her sex. Her labia and clit filled with fresh hunger, swelling with her need. She tangled her fingers in the cool strands of his hair, and even that contact felt more erotic than she knew it should.



"Damn it, Eamon," she rasped against his lips, arching her back in a desperate attempt to be closer to his heat. "How can you make me so fucking horny?"

"I've asked myself the same question about you." He dragged his mouth down her throat, one hand cupping her breast as he did so, scooping it up. "This is not how I expected it..."

He didn't finish. His lips closed over her nipple, sucking it through the thin cotton of her shirt before nipping it with his teeth.

She cried out, unrestrained in the privacy of her home, her hands fisting in his hair.

"I'm going to strip you naked now," he murmured against her breast, his hands smoothing down her rib cage and under the hem of her T-shirt. "And fuck your sweet cunt with my tongue."

A shudder rolled through Cate. She moved her arms straight above her head, an unspoken acknowledgement of his promise, a clear acceptance of her fate.

With a groan that sounded more like a growl, Eamon tore her shirt up her torso, over her head and off her body. He unclasped her bra and tossed it aside. His ink-black eyes flared with that strange golden heat as he gazed at what he'd revealed. "Your breasts are perfect. A master artist couldn't create more perfect, beautiful breasts than yours."

He lowered his head, his breath catching a second before his mouth claimed her exposed nipple.

"Yes!" Cate cried, liquid electricity spearing through her body at the exquisite contact.

This, *this* was real. Real pleasure. Real contact. It shamed the arousal of her dreams. Made her realize what her unhinging, depraved mind had created was nothing compared to the real thing. Or perhaps it was just the mastery of Eamon's touch. He'd referenced a master artist in his adoration of her breasts, but perhaps *he* was the master artist. Surely he was molding her into a creature of sheer sexual pleasure. In the same way a master artist turns a canvas into a work of art or a lump of clay into a sublime sculpture.

He cupped and squeezed her breasts, worshipping one nipple and then the other with his mouth, each time sucking harder and harder. Cate writhed beneath him, her pussy dripping with the juices of her aching need, her breaths growing shorter and shorter. When he scooped her breasts together and nipped one nipple and then the other with his teeth, she threw back her head and moaned, her sex constricting on a cock that wasn't there. Yet.

"Eamon..." She fisted her hands in his hair again, holding his head to her breast. It felt so good. So good. Who would have thought such a simple thing as a mouth sucking her nipples could feel so...so...fucking amazing?

Lifting his head, he gazed at her face. "I can suck these perfect breasts until you come, Cate. Or I can tear your jeans off and fuck your sweet cunt with my mouth." His ink-black eyes blazed. "Which do you want?"

She parted her lips, but no answer came.

Eamon cocked an eyebrow. "What...*inspires* you the most?"

The question sent a tickle of squirming excitement into her belly and her sex contracted again. Demanding attention.

"Fuck my cunt with your mouth," she answered, each word a hoarse breath.

That mysterious light flickered in his dark eyes again and then he was yanking her jeans down over her hip and legs, taking her panties with them.

"Precious Melete," he said, his stare locked on her exposed pussy. "You are divine."

*Melete...*

The name flittered through Cate's mind, familiar and foreign at the same time. It wasn't the first time he'd uttered it and she wanted to know who Melete was, something deep inside her mind *needing* to know. Some part of her – the part not lost to the raw sensations sweeping through her body – convinced it would answer a question that was quickly becoming vital.

How could Eamon Fallen-Black affect her so?

"Who is Melete?" Her voice was a shaky breath.

A smoldering gaze lifted her to face. "The Muse who rules all others."

*Muse.* The word was like a caress. She sucked in a short breath, ready to ask what made him conjure the names of mythical beings.

But the question died on her lips. Destroyed by overwhelming rapture as Eamon dropped to his stomach between her spread legs and stroked his tongue over the sodden folds of her pussy.

"You taste just like I knew you would. Like salted honey and ambrosia." He stroked her slit again, delving the tip of his tongue deeper into her wet center before flicking it over the little nub of her clit. "How could it be I knew the taste of your pleasure before now? It shouldn't be so, yet it is. If I were a foolish poet, I'd believe you were created for me, and I for you. Two hearts forged from one..."

He didn't finish, nor wait for her response. He lapped at her clit once again, this time rolling his tongue over the blood-engorged nub with such attention she couldn't stop her whimpering moans. She bucked her hips upward, pushing her sex closer to his mouth.

A low chuckle rumbled in his chest and he closed his lips around her clit, sucking it past his teeth.

Cate's pussy throbbed with constricting tension, her anus squeezing just as tight. She scrambled for something to cling to, her hands finding the back of the sofa, the edge of the cushioned seat. Lord help her, she was on the verge of drowning in sheer pleasure.

Eamon suckled harder on her clit, nipping it once, twice. She bucked again, and he used her jolting change in position to move his tongue deep into her folds. Stabbing it inside her in slow, penetrating thrusts.

"Oh, oh...!"

Nothing else could form in Cate's mind. No intelligent words. Just that one sound of complete surrender to the bliss consuming her. Repeated over and over again as Eamon's tongue plunged in and out of her pussy.

She rolled her head from side to side, eyes closed, breaths shallow.

And still Eamon worked her cunt. His tongue fucking her with increasing greed, his fingers seeking her clit.

She bucked her hips upward once again, no longer in conscious control of her body. Desire ruled her actions now. Wanton desire for everything Eamon was doing to her. If he asked to fuck her ass, she wouldn't refuse. If he told her he was going to tie her to the bed spread-eagle and use her anyway he wanted, she'd beg for him to hurry. She'd surrendered herself to what he'd created in her very soul.

What he'd formed from her freely giving body.

A being of sex.

"My work of art," he murmured against her spread, drenched pussy. "My masterpiece of light and heart."

Cate's nipples puckered at the statement and she pushed her hips higher, needing his tongue and lips on her sex. "Yours."

He stabbed back into her, wriggling his tongue deeper into her folds, his hands raking over her belly, her thighs and butt. Just when Cate knew she couldn't survive much longer, *knew* she was going to erupt, he jerked her hips higher, pulled her ass cheeks apart and lashed her anus with his wet tongue.

She hissed in a breath, the sound becoming choked as Eamon laved her hole with her own juices and his saliva.

*God, he's going to...he's going to fuck you there...*

But he didn't. Instead he slowly, slowly inched two fingers into the tight entry. Pain speared into Cate's core. Pain threaded with indescribable pleasure. "Oh Eamon, it's unlike..." she panted. "It's unlike...it feels so good. So fucking good."

He pushed his fingers deeper. Deeper, deeper still. And when they were so deep she felt his knuckles press to her perineum, he turned his wrist ever so slightly and slipped his thumb into her pussy.

"Holy fucking God!"

The exclamation burst from Cate in a cry of utter joy. Her eyes flung open, her lips parted. She stared at her living room ceiling, seeing nothing, feeling everything. Every minute bead of perspiration on her skin seemed to thrum, every nerve ending in her body sizzled. She sucked in breath after breath, taking the musk-infused air of the room into her lungs, tasting her pleasure on her tongue.

And all the while Eamon sucked on her clit, fucked her pussy with his thumb and her ass with his fingers.

"Eamon," she moaned, "I'm gonna come!"

"Then come on my face," he growled, never removing his lips from her flushed sex. "I want to drown in your cream when it floods from your cunt."

The coarse words pushed Cate over the edge. Her womb throbbed, the soles of her feet tingled, her breath caught in her throat and then she was coming, powerful contractions seizing her, shuddering through her.

Her cum gushed from her sex and Eamon moaned, plunging his tongue into her folds, lapping at her pleasure until she shook her head and begged him to stop. She couldn't take it anymore. She couldn't. She couldn't...

"Please!" she begged, trying to squirm away from him, the pleasurable pulses gripping her simply too much to endure. If he didn't release her, if he didn't let her ride the wave of her climax, she would surely lose what little sanity she had left. "Please, I can't...I can't..."

"I don't believe you, Cate," he murmured, and before she could cry out with sweet disbelief, he reared up between her legs and buried his cock in her sex.

## Chapter Six

Cate lay curled on her side, her head resting on Eamon's bare chest. His heart beat softly beneath her ear, so softly she could barely hear it let alone feel its thumping rhythm. It seemed to beat in perfect harmony with hers, and yet still sounded so calm. How could that be? Hers felt like it was about to burst from her chest, it was beating so hard.

*Two hours of solid fucking will do that to you, Cate.*

She smiled, tracing her fingers over the sculpted perfection of Eamon's abdominal muscles. Two hours and too many orgasms to count.

For a comical moment, an image of the old English actor Sir Alec Guinness flashed through her head, wearing a rough-hewn brown robe, waving his hand before his face in a serene arc and mumbling, "The force is strong with this one."

She chuckled, the idea of Eamon using some kind of mystical power ludicrous.

"What could you possibly find so humorous, Cate Sinclair," Eamon asked, his voice like thunder rumbling in his chest, "after what we just did?"

She lifted her head, propping herself on an elbow to grin down into his face. "If I say, will you be offended?"

He raised an eyebrow. "I might. Depends on what part of the situation you find funny?"

Cate laughed again. "Men and their egos." She smoothed one hand down his stomach to brush her fingers over the thick nest of curls between his muscled thighs. "It most definitely wasn't *this*, if that's what you were worried about."

Eamon pulled a self-satisfied smirk, moving his arms to thread his fingers behind his head. "Well, then...laugh away."

Cate snorted, snuggling back into the warm crook of his hard body. She stretched one leg out over his, reveling in the corded steel of his thighs. "Tell me, Mr. Fallen-Black," she swirled her fingertips over his abs again, enjoying the way they jerked under her teasing caress, "how do we approach this...situation at work Monday morning?"

"Well, seeing as you're *not* laughing at my dick, I'd say with serious aplomb."

She gave his chest a light smack and he laughed, the sound rich and wonderfully addictive.

"Okay," he went on, the deep timbre of his voice thrumming with his laughter, "how does this sound? We go to work together, I constantly and continually call you to my office where I constantly and continually make love to you on my desk, the floor, the drawing table, the copy machine..."

"And then I stick copies of your very impressive dick all around the studio?" Cate finished, grinning. Her belly flip-flopped. That Eamon had suggested whatever this was would continue made her feel...happy.

Very, very happy.

*Surely you're not falling in –*

She shut the thought down. It was too early for that.

*And yet you've never felt so content, so at ease with anyone before. So completely you.*

That was true. And she wasn't going to explore the notion anymore. It was all too new.

"Hmm," Eamon hummed, "copies of my dick everywhere in the studio may be considered workplace sexual harassment. You Aussies are a little bit more relaxed when it comes to matters of sex, but I'm sure even *my* impressive appendage would be pushing it too far. Besides, I'm a touch shy."

Cate burst out laughing, rolling on top of Eamon and grinning. "This from the man who followed me into the ladies' loo back at the café." She paused, cocking her head to the side. "Why did you follow me, by the way?"

A still tension claimed Eamon. Cate could feel the muscles in the body beneath her becoming rigid. He looked up at her, expression guarded. "You needed me to."

The answer was odd. Odd enough for Cate to pull away from him slightly, a frown pulling at her eyebrows, a knot of unease twisting in her stomach. "I *needed* you to?"

He didn't answer, the rigidity in his body growing. His eyes flickered that weird golden light again, his nostrils flared...

And then he placed his hands on her hips and slid her off his body, rolling to his side and off the sofa. "Just like you need me to do something now," he said, gazing down at her.

She blinked. "And what's that?"

"Make you a cup of tea." He grinned. "Trust me, you've never had a cup of tea like one made by a proper English gentleman."

Cate laughed, the knot in her stomach loosening. "A proper English gentleman? Again, let me point out you followed me into the toilet and screwed me silly against the vanity."

He pulled a face. "Well, we English gentlemen are very talented."

Before she could respond, he turned and walked out of the living room and Cate couldn't help but find herself admiring the way his very proper, naked backside bunched and flexed with every step he took. She smiled, crossing her ankles on the edge of the sofa's backrest as she let her fingertips skim in a light caress over her stomach.

There wasn't a hope in hell she was going to let her mind wander to the "L" word again, but she had to admit, there was something amazing going on here. Something wonderful and, if she stooped to the use of such lame clichés, almost magical. It wasn't

just the sex—the holy-God-could-it-get-any-better? sex—it was the way, when he smiled, she wanted to smile as well. The way she felt something stir deep within her soul when he looked at her. Like she could do anything she set her mind to. The way their hearts beat in perfect rhythm. Twin hearts beating as one.

*Oh Lord, Cate, now you really are stooping to clichés.*

She chuckled, rolled her eyes and let out a sigh. A cup of tea? The funny thing was, a cup of tea sounded absolutely perfect right about—

The brush stroked up the back of her thigh, over the curve of her ass cheek to the base of her spine, leaving a thin smear of cold, thick moisture in its wake.

Cate froze. Her breath caught in her throat, her stare flicking around the room. Oh no, not again. Not now.

The stroke started on her thigh again, slower this time. More deliberate. She tried to hitch in her stolen breath, tried to squirm away from the invisible caress, but she couldn't.

It explored the curves of her ass, the lines of her hips. It brushed over her belly and up her rib cage in a series of short, feathering strokes, each one growing a little longer until they reached her breasts.

Her nipples turned hard, anticipating what she knew was to come and what she couldn't escape. The wet brush slid over her right nipple first. Circled the areola with soft dabs in what Cate swore was a small, number six brush. Her breasts swelled with the contact, grew heavy with a desire she couldn't control. No, this was not right. Not happening anymore. Not...

The brush painted her left breast. And she knew she couldn't deny it. Knew it couldn't just be in her head. This *was* happening to her.

An invisible brush, wet with invisible paint, was painting her.

As soon as the thought formed in her mind, Cate's body began to tremble. She tried to move but the brush lashed at her wrists, binding them above her head. And then it was between her legs, stroking over her still pleasure-engorged folds, slicking cool moisture over her swollen clit.

She sank her teeth into her bottom lip, silencing her depraved moan before it could escape. She couldn't let Eamon see her like this. She couldn't. Writhing on the sofa, she fought to deny the brushwork assaulting her body but it was no use. No matter what she did, each unseen caress, each invisible stroke seemed to drive her closer and closer to a climax she didn't want to have.

Her sex grew heavy, her breath grew ragged. She drove her nails into her palms and bit her lip harder but the pain didn't halt her hideous response. Nor did the sickened fear when the brush moved to her mouth, painting her lips with meticulous care before something else—something thicker, something warm and hard—pushed at her lips.

Cold terror pierced Cate's gut. *Oh fuck, no!*

The invisible dick plunged past her lips and deep into her mouth.

She gagged, bucking on the sofa, her wrists immobile, her legs trapped. The cock shoved deeper, ramming against the back of her throat. She tried to clamp her jaws shut. Tried to bite the repulsive, unseen thing but it was as if her jaw wouldn't bend to her will.

*No no NO! Please stop! Please, God – STOP!*

Heavy balls slapped her chin. Wiry hair mashed against her nose.

She cried out, the sound muffled.

*Eamon! Oh God, Eamon, help, please help me...*

The thick flesh in her mouth pumped harder, faster, faster – and she felt the product of her attacker's pleasure spurt against the back of her throat. Felt his unseen cum coat her throat as she choked and gagged on the thick wads, mind reeling, tears falling fast down her cheeks.

*PLEASE HELP –*

And then it was over. Again.

She lay stretched on the sofa, its cushions cool against her bare flesh, her wrists and legs free to move. Nothing touched her. Not brush nor hands, mouth nor penis.

Cate struggled upright, her heart slamming in her chest as she fought to sit up. Lifting her hands to her mouth, she swiped at her lips, a wild giggle bubbling up her throat when her fingers came away dry.

Nothing. Even as she felt her attacker's semen dribble from the corner of her mouth, like a vile slime too repulsive to consider, there was nothing there. Her skin was clean of anything but her own tears.

She closed her eyes and slumped forward, dropping her face into her hands. What did she do now? What *could* she do?

*Tell the cops? Eamon?*

*No one?*

She choked back a sob. She couldn't tell anyone. Who would believe her?

*"Tea. Black. No sugar. The way all good tea should –"*

She jerked her head up at Eamon's voice, watching the smile on his lips fade away as his gaze fell on her face. "Cate?" He hurried forward, placing the tea on the coffee table before sitting beside her. Steam swirled from the cup in languid patterns, tendrils of mist stretching toward the ceiling. "What's wrong? What happened?"

He slid an arm around her waist but she resisted his effort to pull her to his body. No. She couldn't. Not now. Not until she...

*What? Saw a shrink? An art dealer? For fuck's sake, woman, you've just been orally raped by an invisible assailant. You have to tell someone. Do something!*

"Cate," Eamon pressed a finger under her chin, lifting her head until she looked at him. "Tell me what happened."



She shook her head, dislodging his fingers as she did so. "Nothing. I haven't eaten since breakfast. I just feel —"

"Was it only the brushes on your body, Cate?" Eamon suddenly asked, his eyes no longer black but deep, molten gold, his fingers lifting her chin again, forcing her to look at him. "Or more this time? You need to tell me — did you feel flesh as well?"

## Chapter Seven

Cate scrambled away from Eamon, her heart slamming into her throat. "W-what did you say?"

He rose slowly to his feet, his eyes dark. "Cate, I need to tell you something."

She took a step back, a chill rippling over her body, her stomach rolling. "No *fuck* you need to tell me something! How do you know..." She licked her lips, her mouth suddenly drier than dirt. "Are you...did you..."

Eamon's eyes flickered golden-red and for the first time Cate realized just how unnatural, how goddamn *weird* that was.

Not just weird. Wrong.

Her breath burst from her as if she'd been punched in the chest. "*You* did this to me?" She stumbled another step backward, something close to hysteria worming through her. "*You?*"

His jaw bunched. He took a step toward her, his freaky gaze locked on her. "Cate, please, you need to—"

She screamed at him, fear becoming terrified fury. "*Tell me!*"

"A Daemon Form has given Xander Dupont the power to possess your body through painting," Eamon said, his voice low and steady. "Every caress you feel belongs to *him*."

Whatever answer Cate had expected, that wasn't it. She gaped at him, her gut churning anew. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Eamon took another step forward—a step she scurried quickly away from. "No." She shook her head. "Stay away from me!"

Irritation flashed over Eamon's face, there and gone in a heartbeat. "Cate, I need you to *listen* to me. You've become the target of a Daemon Form's power, a power ruled by the lust of a human. I can help you escape it."

A scoffing snort ripped from her throat, biting and incredulous. This wasn't happening. She wasn't having this conversation. With this man. While naked. She was dreaming again. She had to be.

"No." Eamon's gaze continued to hold hers. "You are *not* dreaming. I fear what will happen when next you do."

"Get the fuck out of my head!" she snarled. "Get the fuck out of my head and out of my home."

"I can't do that, Cate." His eyes burned. "Not now that I've touched you."

It was too much. Too much.

She ran. From her living room into her bedroom, slamming the door behind her.

*Oh, how very brave, Cate. Brave and stupid.*

She ignored the sarcastic jibe, snatching a T-shirt and running shorts from her cupboard. Stupid she may be, locking herself in her room with no easy means of escape, but at least she wouldn't be naked anymore. If she was going to fight the sick bastard off, she was at least going to do it —

"Cate," Eamon said from behind her.

Directly behind her.

She squealed, spinning to face him, her shirt and shorts falling from her hands.

He reached out and grabbed her, his hands curling around her arms, his fingers driving into her flesh. "Cate, you need to *listen* to me," he growled through clenched teeth, his English accent thicker, almost archaic. "I can't help you if you fight me."

"Let go of me," she ground out, writhing in his grip. She twisted to the left, letting her knees collapse beneath her. The abrupt move caught Eamon by surprise and he dropped her arms. He let out a grunt, the sound becoming a hiss of pain, when she slammed the heel of her palm to his groin.

It was only when her flesh mashed against supple black leather that she realized he was dressed. Head to toe. Black trousers, black shirt, black boots. *Not* the clothes he'd worn earlier.

*And let's not forget he appeared in your room, Cate. Your locked room.*

Oh shit, what *was* he?

She scrambled backward across her bedroom floor, her stare locked on Eamon. Pain etched his face and his jaw clenched as he bent at the waist, his hands cupping his balls.

She snatched at her clothes, cognizant of a sharp elation. Whatever the fuck he was, she'd hurt him. Perverted, mindreading *whatever*, his balls were still delicate. Still a weakness.

Balls that had oh so recently slapped against her flesh while she'd begged for more.

Her stomach rolled. "What are you?"

Releasing a slow breath, Eamon straightened, looking at her with eyes once more pitch black. "I am a Muse. Or at least, I was. Now I'm...a watcher. Of sorts."

"A muse?" Cold fear stroked Cate's anger. "A watcher? *Of sorts?*"

Eamon let out a wry snort. "It's hard to explain."

Hugging her clothes to her body, Cate glared at him. "Try."

"Mine is an elemental power, a base magic. All Muses are born of thus, with the power to evoke emotions beyond the cerebral, to stir in one an ethereal desire to express, create. Melete's hand touched us all upon creation, and thus we simply...*were*. For me though, that power has been tempered by darkness, by a malevolence none could explain or describe." He regarded her, silent for a moment before continuing,

each word he spoke chilling her blood more. "I was power beyond design, and it worried Melete and those who were meant to govern me.

"The humans I moved, the people I inspired, all went on to change the world – with bloodshed, pain and torture."

"Oh wonderful," Cate scoffed, incredulous.

"My soul is not black," he went on, muscles bunching, "but the souls of those I have moved *were*, unfortunately."

Cate's stomach didn't just roll. It lurched. "And I slept with you. What am I going to do now? Go out and butcher a busload of children?"

He shook his head and she shivered at the fathomless rage she saw in his eyes. "No. If I could inspire you, Cate, I wouldn't be having this conversation with you now."

"What does that mean?"

"It means I *have* tried to influence your will to surrender to mine, have tried to interfere with Xander's influence over you from afar, but have not succeeded."

Cold fury rippled through her. "You've tried?"

Eamon let out a strangled growl. "Everything you've done with me has been of your own free will. If I could influence your actions and creative urges, we wouldn't be arguing over facts you stubbornly refuse to believe." His eyes flared golden heat – potent and so pure – and he stepped toward her once again. "We would be making love at this very moment. Because I very much want to lose myself in your body again."

Cate's stomach rolled once more, but this time it had nothing to do with fear or anger. The thought of Eamon's body sliding over hers, into hers, filled her with a wanton urgency. She drove her nails into her palms, fighting the need. Ignoring it. "I don't believe you."

Eamon raised an eyebrow. "That I want to make love to you again? It's very true. It has been a long time since I've seen a woman so beautifully formed. Even longer since I've shared the same dimension as her. I have never been so...moved...by a human as I am you. I have never been as aroused by a female as I am by you."

She ground her teeth, refusing to let the licentious tension in her core distract her anger. "I can't believe this. I won't! You told me only a few *hours* ago you worked in an advertising agency in the UK. And that's what McCullum said when he introduced you!"

Unreadable eyes studied her. "I influenced Carter McCullum to believe it was so – his mind is only too susceptible. I haven't existed in corporal form for many, many decades. It simply hasn't been necessary."

Cate stamped her foot, balling her fists and scrunching up her face. "No! I don't believe you," she spat, ignoring his calm claims. "I don't believe you're a...a *Muse*, I don't believe there's a thing called a Daemon Form out to get me, and I sure as *hell* don't believe Xander Dupont is...is...*raping* me through a painting!"

Eamon growled again, his expression not just dark but black. Frightening. "What else would you believe, Cate? How else do you explain the feel of brushes and hands on your body? The wet mouth on your flesh?"

A starkly terrifying ripple traveled up her spine at the memory of the invisible caresses, making her scalp tingle. She shook her head, hugging her clothes closer still to her chest. "I'm going insane. That's how. I've lost my mind and you and the...the...*everything* is just the end result."

Eamon's face softened and he let out a low sigh. "Cate, if only it were that simple." He walked slowly toward her, his gaze holding hers, and she knew, just *knew* she should be running from him. But she couldn't.

He stopped before her, so close his heat radiated into the chill claiming her limbs, his thighs almost kissing hers. He towered over her, studying her upturned face, a taciturn calm stilling his chiseled features.

*God, he is so beautiful.*

The disconnected thought whispered through Cate's whirling mind and she shook her head once more, her teeth catching her bottom lip, her breath hitching in her throat. "I can't believe you," she whispered. "I can't."

"You don't have to believe me, Cate," he said, his voice a low, thrumming rumble. "You just have to trust that I'm telling you the truth."

"Why me?"

Her question quickened her heart, a distant, all-but-smothered rational side of her brain recognizing it for what it was—acceptance. Recognized it and screamed against it.

Eamon's eyes narrowed, as if he too sensed the battle waging in her mind. "The Daemon Form, a vile creature who calls himself Asmodeus, seeks out those ruled by pure lust. Xander Dupont lusts after you with such ferocious hunger, Asmodeus could feed on him for a lifetime."

The answer made little sense. And yet every word inspired bone-deep fear. "I never... Xander never..." She shook again, her gaze never straying from Eamon's dark eyes. "I never let him believe we..."

Eamon's expression grew soft. "One doesn't need permission to give their soul over to lust, Cate. Or to have pure desire take them by surprise."

Her exhausted body betrayed her, moisture pooling in Cate's core at the smoldering heat in his stare. Her pussy constricted, her nipples becoming rock-hard. Fire stole over the numbing cold of only seconds before. She swayed toward him slightly, lifting her chin as she did so. If he kissed her, maybe this dream would stop being a nightmare? If she kissed him, maybe her broken mind would mend...

*CATE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!*

The scream ripped through her mind, high-pitched with incredulous disbelief. She blinked and stumbled back gracelessly, her heart thumping.

What *was* she doing? This man had just told her he wasn't human. He'd just told her she was the victim of some kind of paranormal stalker rapist. He'd just said he'd tried to control her actions and she was going to *kiss* him?

She sucked a harsh breath in through her nose, squaring her shoulders. "You have to go. Now."

Irritation flickered over his face once again. Impatience and exasperation. "I can't. You're vulnerable. Dupont has wrought Asmodeus' power over you too many times."

"What does that mean?"

"Asmodeus has given Dupont a canvas that acts as a conduit. Every time Dupont paints his fantasies on its surface, his body experiences what he has created. Every image of you, every depiction of you submitting to his lust—he physically and mentally experiences them all. *Every. One.* And the lust he feels as he paints in turn feeds Asmodeus."

Eamon's voice had become a low growl as he spoke, but now he sighed. "And with every painting, Dupont draws you further from *this* existence and more into the existence of his work. He draws your essence into the work, and that captured essence also feeds his pleasure. Eventually, when he's mastered the magic of the canvas, he'll be able to capture you completely...and you'll be his sexual slave in this life and beyond. Only *I* can stop that."

Cate just stared at him, wide-eyed, anger and disbelief twisting through her. "How do you know all this?"

"Because the Daemon Form and the Muse are born of the same substance."

Her eyebrows shot up. "Brothers?"

Eamon's gaze turned shuttered. Unreadable. "Something like that."

"Wonderful," she sneered. "And how can you stop this...*brother* of yours? By fucking me in a café toilet? By screwing me in my living room?"

His gaze sparked. "Yes. By giving you real pleasure, in *this* world, the impact of Dupont's lust is weakened."

"Hah!" Cate barked. "Sounds more like a sick attempt to get into my pants again."

One dark eyebrow rose slowly. "The pants you're clutching to your naked breasts? Breasts I so recently held in my hands? Suckled with my mouth?"

Scalding shame washed over Cate. She glared at him. "Get out. Now. If you truly are an all-benevolent being with nothing but altruistic motives, you will get out of my bedroom *now*. Get out of my bedroom, my apartment, my head and *leave me alone*."

Her stomach knotted. Nothing made sense. She was furious. And petrified. As if her gut knew every word Eamon had uttered was true.

Her throat grew thick and she shook her head, staring at him. "I can't deal with this. If you really are what you say you are, you have to give me time. I need...I need to think..."

The muscles in his jaw bunched again. He studied her, eyes shimmering golden light, his body heat sinking into hers. He lowered his head, so close she felt his breath feather her lips. "Do not take too long, Cate," he murmured.

And was gone.

She staggered backward, the strength deserting her legs. Her knees crumpled and she dropped to the floor, her heart a wild hammer in her chest. How she hadn't had a heart attack in the last two days, she didn't know. Pressing her hand to her mouth, she closed her eyes. Tears threatened to burn her cheeks and she fought them. She wouldn't cry again. She wouldn't.

"Then get up, woman," she mumbled. "Get up and stop being so fucking pathetic."

She did so, pushing herself to her feet. Tugging on her clothes, she looked around the room, half convinced she was going to see the door wide open. It wasn't. Nor was the lock released.

*It's all real, Cate. You don't have the luxury of denying it anymore.*

No. She didn't. After everything that had happened to her, there was no other choice but to believe. She was well past denial and was pretty much smack-bam in the middle of fucked-up, can't-do-anything-about-it acceptance. But that didn't mean she had to accept it blindly. She'd be damned if she was going to do *that*.

She crossed her room and yanked open the door, a numb emptiness seeping through her limbs. The living room sat silent before her, devoid of any living soul.

*Or Muse?*

"Funny," she muttered, stalking across the floor to her desk under the far window.

*Look on the bright side. At least you're sane.*

"Shut up," she said, plonking down at her desk and opening her laptop with actions both savage and stilted. Opening her browser, she typed "Eamon Fallen-Black" into Google.

The little colored pinwheel spun on her screen before, point-twenty-two seconds later, the search engine did its thing and delivered five hundred and forty-one thousand results. She scanned the first page. Not one of the results even remotely related to the man claiming to be a Muse. There wasn't even a result with the names Eamon, Fallen and Black together. Cate let out a huff, suspecting it was pointless to open the other pages but looking all the same. By the time she'd scanned the fourteenth page, she knew her suspicions were correct. Eamon Fallen-Black didn't exist on Google.

Dragging her hands through her hair, she cleared the search field and typed in another name.

"Asmodeus."

The numb sensation in Cate's body turned to an uncomfortable prickle. Over three million results in less than point-eight seconds. She clicked on the first, scanning the Wikipedia entry...

According to the cyber encyclopedia, Asmodeus was the Daemon of Lust.

Her mouth was an instant desert. She clicked on a hyperlink, then another, another, reading each site, each description, studying each accompanying image, her pulse growing faster with every click, her chest growing heavier.

No. It couldn't be true. *It couldn't.*

*What? That a guy you worked with, a guy you saw every day who rarely uttered a word to you if he didn't need to, is somehow – thanks to a Daemon of Lust – feeling you up without your consent? Using your body for his sick gratification via some magical canvas? Right. And Eamon didn't disappear into thin air right in front of you. Back to denial, I see. That was fast.*

Cate stared at the page currently open before her. *This* image was of a man painted by an unknown artist somewhere around the early sixteenth century. He stood on a pile of naked women, the sky a boiling mass of bruised purple thunderclouds behind him, an unnatural light highlighting his grotesquely muscled body. He stared out of the image, his eyes burning with red fire, his lips curled in an arrogant smirk. His dick – thick and massive – pointed straight up, milky fluid leaking from its tip, a tip that looked very much like the head of a snake.

The painting was titled succinctly – *Lust Daemon Asmodeus*.

The junction of Cate's thighs clenched, as though her body were fondly remembering what had been done to it. Remembered the orgasms.

She dragged her cursor over the image, needing to remove it from her screen – and froze when a tiny popup appeared directly atop the Daemon's hideous erection.

*temptationdesirelust*

Three words, no spaces. The same three words someone had typed on her monitor.

She squinted at the image, her belly flipping at the sight of those words painted in small but ornate script up the length of Asmodeus' erect penis.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me."

Her voice fell from her in a whispered breath. She slumped back in the seat and closed her eyes. Okay, perhaps blind acceptance was better after all. *Knowing* what was fucking with her life...well, it sure as shit wasn't leaving her feeling empowered, that's for certain.

She let out a slow breath, drew in another and let it out even slower. What should she do now? If there *were* Daemons, if there *were* Muses – and there was little point arguing there wasn't – then why *couldn't* Xander Dupont have sex with her via a painting?

Opening her eyes, she hunched forward, deleted "Asmodeus" in the browser's search field, typed in "Daemon Form" and hit enter.

Instantly her laptop screen filled with results, everything from rock bands to World of Warcraft spells to bizarre – and frankly, worrying – YouTube clips. But nothing related in any way to what Eamon had told Cate.

"Of course there wouldn't be." She pulled a face and dropped back in the chair once more, tired. "That would make it all too easy, wouldn't it?"



She huffed at the few stray strands of hair hanging over her forehead, scrolling down the search result listings.

Punk band. Goth band. Punk-goth band. World of Warcraft geek fan art. World of Warcraft geek fan fiction.

“This isn’t getting me anywh—”

The mutter died on her lips, her gaze falling on the result at the bottom of the fourth page.

*Horatio’s Paranormal Books.*

*Specializing in unusual and rare books on the supernatural.*

*Open twenty-four hours.*

*Catalogued arrivals include Duchatte’s History of the Forms.*

Cate clicked on the link, her heart trying to thump its way out of her throat. Five seconds later she was looking at the very simple website for Horatio’s Paranormal Books, a secondhand bookseller two suburbs away.

There were no contact details, no ability to peruse the bookshelves nor any other hint at what *Duchatte’s History of the Forms* was about. Just a simple logo of a man holding a book with a grinning skeleton on the cover while another skeleton looked over the man’s shoulder, an address in Surry Hills, the single sentence about catalogued arrivals and a flashing, neon-green “Open 24 hrs”.

She narrowed her eyes, opening a new tab and keying in the business name and address in the local telephone directory’s search field.

*No results found.*

“Damn it.” Her grumbled complaint vibrated through her chest.

*Go there. Go there and get the book.*

She flicked the top right-hand corner of her computer a quick look, noting the time.

1:42 a.m.

*So? Open twenty-hour hours, remember?*

## Chapter Eight

In the wee hours of the morning, the streets between Cate's small apartment and Horatio's Paranormal Books were, for the most part, empty. She was pulled over by a police officer for a random breath test halfway to Surry Hills, but apart from that it was smooth sailing. Except for the fact she was still so very tired. Her body felt not just physically drained, but...thin. Like she was insubstantial.

Twice she'd found herself fighting to keep her fingers on the wheel, a worrying situation when she was in control of a motor vehicle, to be sure. By the time she found Horatio's twenty-four-hour store, her fingers were tingling and her vision kept blurring.

Tired. She was so damn tired.

And messed up.

Pulling her Golf into the—surprise, surprise—empty parking space across from Horatio's Paranormal Books, she squinted out the driver-side window, studying the secondhand bookshop even as her head swam with dizzying waves of exhaustion. She looked at the digital clock on her dash.

2:07 a.m.

She frowned, releasing her seat belt and opening the door. Once she found *Duchatte's History of the Forms*—if she found *Duchatte's History of the Forms*—she was heading home and straight to bed. She needed to sleep. She was so tired, she thought Picasso himself could paint her being screwed and she'd sleep through it all.

Trying not to drag her feet, she entered the store, stumbling to a halt one step in.

It smelled. Like damp fabric and mildew. With every shallow breath she pulled, Cate pictured millions of tiny mold spores pouring into her lungs.

She scrunched up her face, cursing her creative mind, and took another step.

The place was dimly lit and packed with so many books, her eyes hurt. The shelves, towering structures that seemed to press down on her, were stocked to overflowing with old books, stacks of them rammed onto the shelves, cramming into any and every space until there wasn't space left to be seen. Pillars of thick tomes leaned against the shelves, frayed edges and worn covers stacked one atop the other until Cate wondered if there could be a single book on the paranormal anywhere else in the world.

She stared at it all, her mouth open.

She'd never seen so many books in the one place. Books that looked so...so...intimidating.

*And somewhere buried within it all is, hopefully, Duchatte's History of the Forms.*

She let out a ragged sigh. This was a stupid idea.

Stepping deeper into the murky shop, she sought out the sales desk, finding what she thought might be it under piles of books that seemed to be covered in various types of animal skin, and a stack of loose-leaf papers that looked as if it were going to fall over at any second. What she didn't find was Horatio himself. Or any sales assistant, for that matter.

"Hello?"

Her call echoed through the labyrinth of books, coming back to her a muffled groan.

She stood by the book-cluttered counter, waiting.

There was no reply, just an oppressive silence that wrapped around her and the musty odor of age and neglect.

"Hello?" she called once more, resting her hand on the counter's edge. Her head was swimming again, making the columns and rows of books seem to sway. Or maybe that was her? "Can someone help me?"

Once again there was no response, just the sound of her voice moving through the shadow-shrouded shelves.

Cate let out a shaky breath. "Damn it."

*Go look yourself.*

A heavy beat thumped in her throat at the idea, her pulse quickening. "Is anybody here?" she asked, almost shouting this time.

Silence.

She pulled a face. "Fuck it." She needed to know if Eamon was telling the truth, and standing around waiting for someone to help wasn't going to achieve that. Besides, she hated waiting, even if her head *did* feel like it was floating.

Pushing herself from the counter, she began walking through the towering shelves, trailing her fingertips over old and worn book spines as she perused their titles. Some made little sense—*Leeching the Beast*—some made no sense at all—*O Pecado do Diabo*. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the catalogue system, books about goblins shoved beside books about spells and Voodoo.

Deeper into the store she moved, her attention fixed on the shelves and stacks. Occasionally a title would make her pause and she'd open its cover, her pulse thumping in her temple as she skimmed the index. One particular book, *Daemons of the Seven Deadly Sins*, didn't just quicken her pulse; it made her breath catch in her throat. Asmodeus' name was mentioned in the introduction, but the author must have assumed the reader knew who Asmodeus was because there was no detailed description. At least, none Cate could find.

"This could take all night," she muttered, slipping the thin book back into its narrow spot on the shelf. She wiped her hands on the ass of her shorts, the book's cover leaving her fingers with an oily sensation she didn't like at all. As if the leather hadn't cured.

A soft rasp tickled Cate's left ear and she jerked around, squinting at the gloominess beside her.

The aisle was empty.

She looked around herself, an unpleasant pressure growing on her chest. Damn, she was a long way from the door. How had she walked so far into the store without noticing?

"Hello?" she called.

Overhead, the bare, entirely insufficient light bulbs flickered.

She stared at them, another wave of dizziness threatening to overwhelm her. If the lights went out, she'd be stuffed. Even the paltry light available through the grimy front windows wouldn't shine this deep into the shop. She'd have no sense of how to get out.

"The lights are not going to go out, Sinclair," she murmured, returning her attention to the shelf on her right. "Don't be such a drama queen."

She read the titles at her immediate eye level.

*Of Specters and Poltergeists.*

*Basic Necromancy.*

*Necrophilia and the Puritans.*

*The Jinn.*

*Daemons of Power...*

She pulled the last one from the shelf, crinkling her nose at the stench of mold seeping into her breath as the book slid against the two it was buried between.

The book was bound in blotchy tan leather, an image of a man with a goat's head embossed in the center. There was no mention of an author, only a subtitle written in red, so dark it was almost black.

*Man's Demise.*

"Wonderful," Cate muttered. She swallowed, an unpleasant dusty taste coating the back of her throat. Opening the book, the cover seeming slick under her fingers, she read down the list of chapters on the index page, her breath catching in her throat when she made it to chapter six. "Fuck a bloody duck."

*Chapter Six. Daemon Forms. Page 169.*

She flipped through the book, doing her best to ignore the few images and diagrams she spied as she searched for page one hundred and sixty-nine. They were all disturbing. Too disturbing.

Stare locked on the bottom right corner, she stopped, her pulse thumping in her neck.

Her breath left her in a choked groan. "You've got to be kidding me."

Page one hundred and sixty-nine was ripped from the book.

As was the entire sixth chapter.

A prickling sensation raced over Cate's flesh, a dull anger smoldering in her chest. The whole chapter. Not a page of it left. As if someone—*something*—knew she would try to find it.

"Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck!"

The whispered and rather childish rant didn't make her feel any better. Replacing the book on the shelf, she continued walking, rubbing her arms as she did so. The itching sensation hadn't gone away, moving over her skin in a slow crawl. Her mind painted a picture of an army of dust mites making themselves at home on her body, and she shuddered. She wanted to get out of here. Not just because of the stale air and smell of deadness in the place, but because the silence was too suffocating.

She looked over her shoulder, wondering why no one had come—

"Cate..."

The word slipped through her head, accompanied by a soft breeze lifting the hair on the back of her neck. She heard a scraping sound, like a hand wiping across taut canvas, a familiar sound from her past, from her art school days—

And then a loud cough shattered the silence behind her and she screamed, spinning around.

A man stood before her, barely reaching her shoulder, his face so weathered and wrinkled with age his eyes seemed lost in the drooping flesh. Thin, scraggy hair the color of steel sprouted from his ears and chin, his bald head covered in liver spots the color of old mushrooms. A cardigan hung from his narrow, stooped shoulders, the overpowering smell of camphor rolling from him in thick waves.

And yet, underneath the unmistakable odor of mothballs and wool, a cloying sweetness tainted the air, a smell Cate remembered from the farm during wet summer storms.

*Rotting meat...*

It was the same smell sheep would get when fly-strike had set in, their living tissue eaten by parasitic larva until the animal died.

Her stomach rolled and, unable to stop herself, she took a step backward, her ass bumping against a stack of books behind her.

The man looked her up and down, squinting pale gray eyes, cloudy with cataracts.

A heavily accented voice slipped from between lips that barely moved, the Asian inflection almost turning the words into a slurring moan. "Been a long time since I seen a Twin Heart."

Cate's heart slammed into her throat. "A what?"

He chuckled, shuffling forward a step, his fingers plucking at his cardigan. The stench of decay thickened and Cate had to stop herself from slapping her hand over her mouth and nose.

His washed-out eyes roamed over her face. "A *very* long time."

"Can you tell me what a Twin Heart is?" she asked, inching as far back as the aisle would allow. "And a Daemon Form? Do you have —"

He shook his head, a knowing glint in his eyes, his mouth pulling into a wide smile filled with graying teeth. "The Forms have long loathed the Twin Hearts."

Cate blinked, her heart beating faster. "I don't understand. What *is* a Twin Heart? Why do I keep —"

"Many have been hunted down and killed before they found their other," he went on, as if she hadn't spoken, nodding sagely. "Others are corrupted by the Forms, their souls lost forever."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Cate burst out. She couldn't take this. This was insanity. Had she fallen into some surreal Hollywood horror film? Just what the *fuck* was going on?

The wizened man cackled. "Two hearts forged from one..." He crooked a finger at her as he turned and hurried deeper into the store, leaving a wall of putrid air in his wake. "This way, this way."

Cate drove her nails into her palms, watching the shadows close around him, fighting to calm her pounding heart. She pulled a steady breath, gagging as the stench of rotting meat flowed over her.

*Jesus, this can't be real, can it?*

"Is any of it?"

Her own answering question spurred her into action. She followed the man, a distant part of her overwrought mind surprised by how quickly he moved for someone so old.

"This way," he threw over his hunched shoulder without looking at her, the words a lilting singsong.

The sound of flesh scraping against material whispered on Cate's left and she snapped around, squinting at the rows and rows of books beside her.

Nothing.

She scowled, the bookstore's dim lighting making the rows of different-sized spines seem like jagged teeth.

*Seriously, Sinclair? God, what is wrong with you?*

*"It's time, Cate."*

Ice ripped through her veins. She froze, every hair on her body prickling. No. She hadn't heard that. She hadn't. Not now. Not here in this —

"This way."

The shopkeeper's faint voice made Cate jump. She looked away from the row of books, searching for the man's diminutive form.

He was gone.

"Crap," she muttered. "Where are you?" she called, hurrying toward the end of the aisle. "Hey, where did you —"

A sudden soft pressure played down her spine and across her hips, over her thighs. She hissed in a swift breath and, unexpectedly, an image of a massive white canvas hanging in a black void filled her mind. Her nipples tightened into painful peaks of hunger.

*"It's time."*

The whisper came again. Softer. Closer. A cool breath kissed her neck. Or was it the store's air conditioner?

*What air conditioner?*

Her eyelids fluttered closed and she clenched her fists, forcing calm into her body. This couldn't happen. Not now.

An insubstantial caress slid to her pussy and she sucked in another breath.

"This way!" The man's accented voice sang through the store from somewhere behind a bookshelf, not just faint this time but almost inaudible.

The caress delved between her legs, pushing at her folds. Insistent.

Tight heat speared into Cate's center. She staggered backward, her hands reaching for something to hold on to, her fingers gripping the edges of a bookshelf. The hard wood dug into her back but it meant little compared to the driving pressure sinking into her sex.

"No!" She shook her head, squirming under the attack. "Please don't!"

Something small and wet plunged into her pussy, burying deep into her slit as unseen hands scraped at her breasts. She cried out, the sound choked in her throat. Her nipples were pinched, twisted so hard that hot tears filled her eyes. This wasn't like the other attacks. This felt different. Brutal. This was...

*Rape.*

The tongue in her sex stabbed deeper, the hands on her breasts raking up to her throat. Long fingers circled her neck, squeezing as the tongue fucked her. Squeezing, squeezing, squeezing...

She bucked, an insidious heat blooming between her thighs. She shook her head, scrunching her face against the horrific, sickening pleasure building in the pit of her belly. "Don't," she moaned, trying to press her legs together. "Don't!"

The tongue wriggled deeper still, burying inside her, laving at her inner walls. One hand left her throat, snaking back down to her breast to gouge at her flesh. Fingers mauled her nipple, pulled it harshly before replacing the tongue in her sex with terrific speed. Spearing into her wet folds as a mouth dragged up her body, closing over the nipple the fingers had just tortured.

"No," she whimpered, writhing against the bookshelf. Steady pressure mounted in her core. Disgusting tension she recognized all too well. The mouth sucked on her nipple, bit it, the fingers in her cunt stabbing.

Her clit was pinched, a ferocious tweak that sent white-hot pain straight to her core. She cried out, bucking her hips forward, her eyes rolling in her head.

The mouth on her breast slid to her neck, teeth sharp and sinking into her flesh. Savagely biting her. There was nothing sensual about the bite but her body reacted, her rising pleasure like sour vomit in her soul.

"No, no, stop," she sobbed frantically as a finger between her legs rolled over and over her clit. The friction burned and she tried to push her assailant away, her hands encountering empty air.

*"Going to make you come, Cate."*

She heard the groaned statement in her head, reality bleeding into wild swirls of vivid colors as the finger kept rubbing her clit. The bite on her neck throbbed, something warm and wet dribbling down her throat. Blood? Saliva? She didn't know.

The fingers worked her sex, the mouth returning to her breasts, first one then the other, sucking and biting until her breath burst from her in shallow pants, each one growing thick with a moan she despised. A moan of hateful pleasure.

*"Come for me, Cate."*

The mouth moved back to her cunt, tongue ramming into her pussy with frightening speed. Fingers forced themselves into her mouth. She tasted her own juices, the salty musk sending a shard of constricting heat through her body. The fingers were drenched with her pleasure.

*Her pleasure.*

"No," she begged, pushing back into the bookshelf. "Oh God, I don't want to come! I don't want to come!"

But her assailant wasn't listening. And her body didn't care.

The mouth and hands tortured her, pushing her closer and closer to a precipice she didn't want to tumble over. Teeth bit at her folds, her clit; fingers cupped and squeezed her breasts. Too many sensation to keep track of, all bending her to someone else's will. Breaking her.

She writhed against the shelf, lips parted, heart wild, hating everything. Loving it all.

And when the tongue plunged into her pussy once more then stroked over her clit...when the fingers pulled her ass cheeks apart and sank into her virgin anus...she screamed and screamed and screamed...

And came. Her orgasm ripped from her body as books fell from the shelves and slammed into her head and shoulders.

She crumpled to the floor, her legs robbed of strength, her gasps scalding her lungs. Her body aching, her flesh crawling with disgust and vile rapture.

Jesus Christ, how could she climax?

*How could you, Cate?*



A thin, wet dribble trickled down her shoulder and she lifted her fingers to her throat, not wanting to feel what scored her skin but needing to.

Spittle glistened on her fingertips. *His spittle.*

*Xander's? No. It can't be.*

The bookstore's dank interior swayed around her, the silence a roaring tidal wave in her ears. "What is *wrong* with me?" she whispered, sobbing, gasping as she stared at the impossible evidence on her fingers. She dropped her arm to her side, too exhausted to hold it up any longer. As she tried to stand, her other hand slipped off the edge of one of the books that had struck her, her nail tearing nearly to the quick. She snatched her hand to her chest, staring at the cover.

*Duchatte's History of the Forms.*

Hysterical laughter bubbled up Cate's tight throat, a humorless giggle that sounded more like a wail. She picked the book up, staring at it for a long moment before opening it to the index. She knew what she would find, as if she'd written the damn thing herself.

*Chapter Six. Twin Hearts. Page 182.*

Even in her semi-catatonic state, she couldn't miss the coincidence of chapter number.

Opening the book to page one hundred and eighty-two, she let out a resigned sigh. The chapter was gone of course, ripped from the book just like the chapter on Daemon Forms.

Except for the last page.

Cate swallowed, her hands trembling as she stared at the one small paragraph left of Chapter Six, the remaining words seeming to vibrate with angry energy on the page.

*"and as such, known Twin Hearts become targets of the Forms. The Forms cannot help but be drawn to their monumental source of loving light, and at the same time are repulsed by its blinding brilliance. If a Twin Heart's light is consumed before its other met, the Form will feast for eternity."*

And below the paragraph, depicted in detailed perfection, was an image of a woman draped in the arms of a hideous being she'd seen before, its vile erection pointing straight up, jabbing into the small of the lifeless woman's back.

Asmodeus. The Lust Daemon. Smiling out at her from the pages of an old book.

Asmodeus holding a lifeless, naked woman.

Holding Cate.

"Hey, lady? Are you okay?"

The shocked voice jerked Cate's head up and she stared, unblinking, at the young man standing over her, dressed in jeans and a black shirt with the words "Horatio's Paranormal Books" printed on the top left pocket.

"What..." she began, her throat scratchy. "Where's the old man?" She licked her dry lips, her head swimming. "The old man in the cardigan?"

The young guy, barely an adult judging by the volcanic acne covering his cheeks, frowned. "What old guy? Did someone—"

"The man who works here," Cate interjected, pushing herself to her feet. "He was...getting something...taking me to..." She pressed her hand to her eyes, biting on her bottom lip. She felt so lightheaded. Lightheaded and dazed. Why was she here again?

"There's no old guy, lady," the young man said. He shook his head, studying her with an expression close to trepidation. "I'm working tonight and there hasn't been anyone in here since I started my shift."

Cate looked around, her gaze skimming over the books scattered on the floor. Why were there books at her feet? Why was she in a bookshop holding a book called—she looked at the cover—*Witches in the Thirteenth Century*?

"What time is it, please?" she asked, returning her attention to the sale assistant.

He flicked a harried glance to the cheap digital watch on his wrist. "It's 2:07 a.m."

2:07 a.m.

The kid gave her a worried frown, half-turning away from her. "Are you okay? 'Cause if you're not buying anything or don't need my help, I really need to get back to my essay."

Cate cast a look around, supporting herself with one hand on the closest bookshelf, a pounding headache starting behind her eyes. She should know why she was here, but all that came to her was a vague feeling. Like she'd come to get answers.

*About what?*

"Do you know what a Twin Heart is?" she asked, the question passing her lips before she knew she was even forming words.

*Why are you asking about something you typed on your computer, Cate? Wasn't that just a keyboard glitch?*

The sales assistant shrugged, an impatient look in his eyes. "Nope." He waited a beat. "Can I help you with anything else?"

Cate let out a sigh, shaking her head. "No, thank you."

She returned *Witches in the Thirteenth Century* to the shelf beside her and left the store, pausing to hold her flushed face up to the cool breeze wafting along the empty sidewalk.

"Okay, that was really odd," she muttered, crossing to her car and unlocking the door. She dropped into the driver's seat, the solid thud as she closed the door making her grimace. Damn, she was tired.

Tired and drained.

Firing up the Golf's engine, she pulled away from the curb, gripping the wheel like a drowning person clings to a buoy.

She needed to sleep. For the whole weekend.

If she turned up for work exhausted on Monday morning, Xander would give her one of his patented cool glares that made her feel worthless and guilty.

*No. Xander doesn't work at Enigma anymore, remember?*

She did. Yet she didn't. If Xander didn't work there, who did?

*Eamon.*

Who was Eamon? Wasn't Xander her supervisor?

Her head swam, a gray fog rolling over her vision.

*No, it's Eamon. The Muse...*

Muse? She shook her head, trying to clear it. What was she on about?

\* \* \* \* \*

Xander woke with a start, covered in sweat and shaking—deep, shuddering shakes that made his bones ache and his breath hitch. Jesus, what was wrong with him?

He curled his fingers—still sticky with white, semi-wet acrylic paint--around the armrests of the old chair he kept in his studio and lurched to his feet, staggering sideways a step before his natural sense of balance steadied him. Christ, he felt on fire.

He'd been painting No. Sleeping. But he remembered seeing Cate. Making her come...come so hard with his hands and mouth. Remembered jerking himself off on her image as it still writhed on the canvas. He glanced at the wet paint on his fingers... Had he passed out?

He swiped at his forehead, the rough contact of the back of his hand against his skin making him gasp. He had a fever. He was burning up. Why? How could he be sick? He hadn't left his home, his studio, since the day McCullum fired him.

The day Asmodeus appeared in the middle of his studio and presented him with the gift.

Flicking a dry tongue over even drier lips, Xander swung around, studied the eight-foot-by-six-foot canvas waiting for him on his easel.

Its surface was pristine, primed to perfection with virginal white paint, ready for his next masterpiece. His next portrait of Cate.

He walked slowly to the canvas, ran a finger lightly over one corner. Wet. Wet, white acrylic over still-tacky oils. He'd barely waited for the image to begin drying before coating it with thick primer.

He *couldn't* wait. Not a second longer.

His body shook harder, his skin drenched from the perspiration rolling off him. His cock jerked, the loose cotton of his track pants doing nothing to contain its eager reaction at the thought of Cate Sinclair.

The next portrait was it. The next portrait would make her his forever. This last one—the one now suffocated beneath the white acrylic primer—had moved before him on the canvas and he'd nearly erupted with pleasure at the sight. But he'd controlled

himself, just, waiting until the strokes of his brush brought her to climax. Then he'd stumbled back from the painting and pumped his dick, splattering Cate's beauty with his seed.

Seed he would soon see dribbling down her creamy, smooth thighs.

Seed he would soon see glistening on the folds of her cunt.

He would suck his seed from Cate's sodden, bruised pussy and feed it to her with his tongue. His cock jerked again and he stared hard at the empty canvas before him. He saw the image there, his mind creating its intoxicating perfection stroke by stroke, line by line.

Asmodeus told him he had to wait longer, but he was done with waiting. As soon as the primer dried completely, he would begin. His next work.

His *final* work. The glorious depiction of Cate's surrender to her desire. To *his* desire.

He even knew what he was going to title it.

*Cate's Capture.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Fifteen minutes later, the gray fog thicker, her head not just swimming but spinning with disorientating speed, Cate stumbled through her doorway, dropping the keys as she collapsed sideways into her armchair where it sat waiting for her in the middle of her living room floor. She closed her eyes, letting bone-deep fatigue roll over her.

A soft caress slid up her belly, an even softer one skimming over her throat.

It felt good, and she drew in a deep breath, longing to be touched again.

*By whom?*

*"Xander."*

The man's name whispered through her spinning head and she whimpered. She didn't want to think of Xander. She'd always been a little uncertain of him. He was undoubtedly talented, and yet there was something about him that made her feel...unsettled. Uncomfortable. He was too intense. Too brooding.

Too...

*"Handsome?"*

She nodded at the deeply spoken word, a low hum of appreciation in her chest. Yes. Handsome. She'd wondered often what it would be like to be kissed by him.

*No, you didn't –*

To feel his hands smooth over her body, cup her breasts.

*No –*

To whimper with pleasure as his lips closed around her nipple.

She arched her back, pressing her breasts higher, humming again at the smooth hands journeying her torso, her belly.

"Yes," she murmured, sliding her legs until her thighs pressed together. She felt so good. "Oh yes."

A wicked ribbon of tension unfurled through her core, making her womb throb with heavy want, and she opened her eyes – gazing up at Xander.

He smiled down at her, his sky-blue stare as piercing as ever, his pale skin almost ghostly in the room's ethereal light. His blond hair fell over his face in a fine curtain of artfully messy strands, brushing the angles of his high cheekbones and playing with long blond lashes.

Cate stared at him with rapt desire, aching for him to not just look at her, but touch her. Take her. Possess her.

*No, this is not –*

He moved slightly, enough for her to feel the mattress shift beneath her.

*You're not on a bed, Cate! Wake –*

And then his knees were between hers, his hands smoothing up her legs, over the dip and peak of her hips, the flat plane of her hitching belly, the rise of her rib cage.

She gazed up at him, the silk rope stretching her arms above her head feeling like a kiss from a cloud, the eager throb in her pussy echoing the rapid beat of her heart. She licked her lips, caught the bottom with her teeth and made an impatient whimpering sound. She wanted –

*Eamon!*

Xander to fuck her. She did. She wanted him to use her any and every way he wanted. She wanted –

*No!*

To be his.

*You need to – !*

"Fuck me, Xander," she moaned, lifting her ass from the soft bed and its cool, silken sheets.

Exactly a heartbeat before Xander lowered his lips to her throat and whispered, "Finally. It's time to complete my masterpiece. And I'm going to come *inside* you this time."

## Chapter Nine

His mouth journeyed up her neck to her ear, back down to her chin. His hands roamed her body, hungry and feverish. They felt so good. So good she wanted to...

*Wake*

...die.

He cupped her breasts, his fingers scraping at her bare flesh as he captured her nipple between his knuckles. She thrust her hips...

*Up!*

...harder to his, writhing on the bed. His hands were like heated mist on her body. Her heartbeat quickened, her lips parting with a cry as he squeezed her breasts, her sex constricting with reflexive pleasure.

"Xander," she groaned, fighting the ropes stretching her arms above her head. They slid over her wrists like cool snakes, tightening their binding pressure. "Xander, please..."

"Say my name again," he ordered, his lips dragging down her throat. "I want to hear you beg me."

She shook her head, her nipples pinched tight by...

*Disgust*

...his fingers. "I...I..."

*Won't!*

"...can't."

He bit at her throat, a hard bite of punishment. "I *said* say my name again."

She shifted underneath his weight, her hips mashed to the mattress, his rigid dick rammed against the curve of her sex. "Stop."

The word fell from her, sounding nothing like her voice. When had she ever sounded so husky? So submissive?

Sharp teeth nipped at her throat again, lower this time. At the point where her neck became her shoulder. "Say it, Cate. Tell me who owns you."

"Xander," she whimpered, her hands balling into fists. Liquid tension poured through her center. She squirmed, wishing she could...

*Wake up! For the love of God, Cate, wake –*

...wrap her legs around his hips. But her legs wouldn't move, her ankles bound as they were to the corners of the bed, leaving her spread wide. Exposed.

"Yes," Xander purred, biting once more on her flesh. Not on her shoulder this time but on her breast, his teeth sinking into the soft curve beside her nipple. She cried out, loud, bucking her hips in an attempt to...

*Get him off!*

...grind her pussy closer to his massive cock.

"I knew you would be like this," he said against her breast, his breath hot and wet. "I wanted you like this."

His lips closed over her nipple. Her sex constricted, a brutal reaction to the sucking pressure wrought on her imprisoned flesh. She fought against the ropes, against Xander's mouth, her breath hitching in her chest. Oh, why did this feel...how did she get...

"Stop," she panted, her pussy lips prickling, her pulse pounding. Blood roared through her veins. "Please stop."

"I'm never going to stop, Cate." Xander moved his mouth to her other breast, suckling on her nipple with hungry force. His hands tore down her torso to her hips, worming between their bodies until his fingers stabbed at her folds.

She bucked against him, a cry bursting from her lips. Around her, the colors of the light swirled, reds to purples, purples to indigo, indigo to red again. Wild strokes of colors that danced and mated in the air. She stared at them with blank...

*Terror*

...amazement, wondering how the very essence of her pleasure could flow in color around her. How did the paint seem to echo...

*Wake up, Cate! Oh God, Eamon! Help –*

...the raw sensations consuming her at Xander's forceful touch?

As if to answer the unspoken question, Xander tore his mouth from her nipple with a savage bite. "I've worked this canvas so many times, I can't believe..." He didn't finish, a ragged breath shaking his body, his eyes wild as he returned his lips to her breast. He sucked on its distended point, pulling it deeper into his mouth as his fingers drove farther into her folds. She felt his palm grind against her clit. Sharp, primitive pleasure stabbed into her and she whimpered, the base of her spine beginning to tingle. She was going to come soon.

It made no sense. How could she come so easily when Xander had done so little to propel her to the edge? But she was. The squirming excitement in her core was...

*Hideous! Oh God, don't you fucking come!*

...mounting. Growing fiercer.

She shook her head, tossing it side to side; closed her eyes as Xander feasted on her breast and wriggled his fingers deeper into her sex. "Fuck me, Xander. Oh...

*Christ, Cate, please wake up. Wake up! Don't you dare –*

...fuck me, please!"

Her blood sizzled in her veins, her skin seared. Her orgasm rushed at her, breath ripping from her lungs. The air tasted of...

*Linseed oil, turpentine –*

...her musk, the sounds of her keening moans almost lost to the wet, liquid sounds of –

*Paint*

...Xander's fingers pumping in and out of her cunt. Invading her.

She remembered this feeling. He'd done this to her before. Only a little while ago. In the bookstore. He had...

Reds and purples and blues washed over her, bled through her closed eyelids, covered the wisp of memory. She could feel the silken texture of the ropes oozing into her flesh. Xander's fingers seeping into her sex. His breath permeating her form. With every suck on her nipple, with each stroke inside her body, the colors of her orgasm became more vivid. Inescapable. Undeniable.

She opened her eyes and watched as the colors fucked around her, writhing strokes of gaudy vermillion and magenta raping virginal whiteness that seemed to stretch forever. Covering her. Devouring her. Just as Xander devoured her.

Just as the man looming over her slammed his fingers deeper into her cunt and hissed in her ear, "I'm going to fuck you now, Cate."

"No," a deep voice growled, just as Cate's orgasm pushed at the walls of her womb, her sanity. "You're not."

A warm sensation crushed her lips, an even warmer pressure smoothed over her body, her heart.

A terrifying scream ripped through the fabric of existence, slicing at Cate's soul. The colors boiled around her, furious, frenetic. And then they began to fade.

Until there was nothing but Xander looming above her, screaming, screaming...

And as the climax in her body floundered, he too began to fade. His face bleaching to white, stripped of color, of texture and substance, a last enraged roar tearing from his dissolving countenance as the whiteness cracked, blistered and peeled away to reveal a potent, golden light...

To reveal Cate's living room.

Cate's living room dancing with the shadows of predawn. Eamon Fallen-Black wrapped in their embrace, his lips but a breath from hers. His eyes glowing golden fire.

"Cate." His voice played over her lips like a cool shower, one hand reaching up to cup her jaw in a gentle caress. "Cate, you need..."

"To wake up," she murmured, gazing at him.

Another scream ripped at the deepest reaches of her mind, so faint she barely registered it and yet, at its furious call, her sex fluttered. Pulsed with a need beyond her comprehension. She blinked, the solid feel of a chair and the delicate smell of the vase of



summer jasmine on her coffee table jerking her fully awake. There wasn't a hint of paint or turpentine on the still air.

*Why would there be?*

She blinked again, her breath catching as the question destroyed her fugue.

And everything came back to her, what Xander had done to her in her dreams, what he'd done to her in the bookstore...everything.

"Christ, Eamon, what am I going to—"

Eamon kissed her before the question finished passing her lips. A gentle kiss, unlike any he'd given her before.

Her pussy blossomed with raw need, a ravenous ache, and she snaked her arms around his neck, pulling him into the kiss. Fuck, she wanted to come. The denied orgasm of her dream throbbed anew in her core, her womb constricting, wanting that which had been promised. She whimpered, seeking his tongue with her own.

Eamon brought his other hand to her jaw, framing her face with long, warm fingers as he pulled away from the kiss. "Asmodeus' power is still working on you, Cate," he whispered. "The need in your body is not *your* need, but Xander's."

A cold finger of fear wriggled through Cate. She gazed up into Eamon's golden-red eyes, the pulse in her sex growing stronger. "How do you...how did you..."

Eamon's lips curled in a small, wry smile. "You are the light that makes my heart beat, Cate. Since the moment I touched you in Enigma, my ability to feel what you feel has steadily increased."

Cate dipped her eyebrows, studying his face even as the throb between her thighs grew more urgent. She felt as if she were riding rapids of insane rapture. Or drowning in them. Or both. "Why?"

He shook his head. "I don't know. If I believed it possible, I would say your heart is mine and mine is yours. And as much as I wished it were so, a Muse has never known thus. Never been what we call a Twin Heart...but right at this moment, what can and can't be isn't important. If experiencing your feelings means I can save you from Xander's lust, I'll take it..." He brushed the pad of his thumb over her bottom lip, his gaze dropping to watch its path. "If it means I get to do this..."

He kissed her again. Just as tender as before.

She moaned, parting her lips under the featherlight caress. She touched her tongue to his, the clean sweetness of his breath mingling with hers. Eamon's mention of Twin Hearts had startled her—and heightened her need for him. She had no idea why, it just did. And she welcomed it.

With a shuddering groan, Eamon pulled away from her again and she couldn't stop her own whimper—part dismay, part anger. Her head swam, the beat between her thighs growing ever stronger. Insistent.

"Cate," he tilted her chin up with a finger under her chin, "you need to understand this."

"Tell me later," she said, the words lost in her ragged breaths. She wanted to come. So fucking badly. "Please, I need —"

"Cate, you need to be sure you realize it's *me* giving you pleasure." He touched his thumb to her lip once again, his eyes flickering that strange golden heat. "Me, not Xander."

"I don't want to think about Xander," she answered.

But at the very second his name formed on her tongue, her pussy contracted, squeezing a nonexistent cock. Her pulse quickened and she sucked in a hitching breath.

Eamon's eyes narrowed, his expression turbulent. "You see the power being wrought on you?"

Cate shifted on her seat, her heart hammering. The need to orgasm was becoming tantamount. Even as she stared at Eamon, her mind conjured image after image of Xander...

Xander looming over her.

Xander tying silk ropes around her wrists.

Xander stroking the bulbous head of his cock over the seam of her lips.

Xander shoving her thighs wide as he sank his dick into her cunt.

Xander fucking her. Claiming her. Possessing her...

Capturing her.

Her sex constricted again. Eager. Desperate.

*Help me. Oh my Twin Heart, help me.*

She gazed up into Eamon's face, the surreal thought confusing her already exhausted mind. Her stomach knotted. "What will happen to me if I climax with..." She couldn't finish the question, its possible repercussions too unsettling.

Eamon studied her, his expression guarded. "If you orgasm with even the ghost of Xander's touch in your mind, you'll be drawn further into his possession. With every orgasm you give him, your life energy is being drawn from you and given to Xander's painting."

Cate shook her head. Eamon's words made her sick. "But I didn't...I never..."

"You did, Cate," Eamon said with gentle force. "Your mind, your soul didn't want to, but control was taken from you and given over to your body's most primitive function—sexual response. Just as your existence is being taken from you and given to someone else. One, maybe two more climaxes brought about by the Lust Daemon's power and you'll be drained from this life, this *world*."

A wave of nausea rolled through her. "And then what?"

"And then you become trapped in Xander's painting forever. His to use whenever he wishes, with just the stroke of a brush."

Cate's pussy fluttered, a traitorous beat she wished to hell would go away. "How?"

Eamon's jaw bunched. "Whatever he paints, he experiences." He paused. "You experience. His slave. Unable to fight or escape him. No longer existing in this world."

Cate stared at Eamon, her heart feeling as if it was stalled in her chest. "I don't want that to happen."

Her whispered statement sounded like a scream in the thick silence of the room. Her throat felt stripped, her mouth coated with dirt, every fiber in her body aching—from rising terror and unquenched need.

Eamon caressed her lips again. "By Melete, neither do I."

He lowered his head and claimed her lips, but this time there was nothing gentle about his kiss. His tongue plunged into her mouth, demanding and forceful. She parted her lips and met his hunger with her own, her mind awash with his image. Every chiseled plane of his face, every sculpted muscle in his body. She leaned into the kiss, a little groan of delight vibrating in her throat when his hands cupped her jaw. He nipped at her bottom lip, sucking it gently before exploring her mouth again with his tongue. He tasted like sweet nectar and she groaned, smoothing her arms around his neck.

A low chuckle rumbled in his chest. He snared her wrists with his hands, removing them from behind his head and returning them to the armrests of her chair as he broke from their kiss. His eyes flared that pure golden fire she now recognized as the latent force of his power stirring. "I want you to watch *me* bring you to climax with my mouth, Cate."

His voice played over her senses like buttered wine. She sucked in a ragged breath and nodded, unable to find the words to form a response.

One side of his mouth curled and he skimmed his hands along her arms, over her belly to the waistline of her shorts. "Watch me make you come, and think of no one else."

She nodded again, lifting her ass from the seat with little encouragement from Eamon's guiding hands.

He hooked his fingers under the elastic band of her shorts and, with a slow, steady tug, removed them from her body.

"I fear I have become addicted to your taste," he murmured, his fingers dancing up the inner length of her thighs, splayed before him. "The thought of someone else..." The golden light in his dark eyes flickered black and he lowered his head, the rest of his sentence left unspoken as he stroked his tongue up the seam of Cate's pussy lips.

*Oh yes!*

Raw pleasure rippled through her, twisting fingers of exquisite tension burrowing through her womb. Instantly the orgasm denied her only moments earlier mounted in her core. She hissed, a shaking intake of air that did nothing to ease the almost agonizing want consuming her. Her nipples pinched tight, her clit throbbed. The walls of her sex constricted.

"Eamon!"

"I love the way you say my name," he growled against her sodden folds, his teeth nipping in teasing bites. "It gives me life."

Her breasts grew heavy at his confession. She closed her eyes and let her head loll backward, her strength draining as waves of pleasure crashed over her.

She arched in her seat, Eamon's palms pressed flat to the inside of her knees, keeping her legs spread. Her pussy gushed fresh cream, flooding over her folds. Eamon drank it all, his tongue swiping faster, deeper into her sex, his action a synergetic echo of her release.

Cate gripped the armrests, bucking her hips higher. Eyes squeezed shut, she pictured Eamon's face between her thighs, drew on the power of that deliriously wonderful image. Every time he dragged his tongue over her swollen clit, the image grew stronger. And every time it did, her impending climax grew more forceful.

"Oh Eamon," she moaned, her nails driving into the cushioned armrests. This was unreal, explosive. How could she possibly think of anyone else while Eamon was filling her with such pleasure? How could she think of—

She squirmed, smothering the unfinished thought. The light behind her closed lids flared in blinding swirls of energy and she whimpered, driving her pussy harder to the mouth feasting on it. "Oh yes," she gasped, "yes, don't stop! Please don't stop!"

"I won't, Cate," Xander whispered, each syllable sliding through her mind like liquid fire. "Ever."

Cate's eyes snapped open.

She jerked her stare down her body, hot relief scalding through her at the sight of Eamon's head buried between her thighs, his tongue in her sex sinking deeper into her body.

And a laugh passed her lips in a soft, low moan.

He made her come twice in the chair as she watched, never again taking her eyes from him. With his tongue first and then with his fingers, building in her body one orgasm after the other, so intense she'd barely recovered before he tugged her from the chair and laid her on her back on the floor.

Her second climax was still shuddering through her, pulsing through her body with ebbing rhythm. She hadn't heard Xander's voice again, nor had she thought of him during Eamon's worship of her pussy. Now, lying stretched on one of the colorful shag rugs in her living room, its soft, thick strands tickling her bare skin even as Eamon's lips journeyed up and down her body, she wondered if she had heard it in the first place.

*No. How could you? When it's Eamon you want? Body, heart, soul...*

The thought should have scared her. He wasn't human. In fact, she didn't know what exactly he was—a Muse? Did that make him a Daemon? Monster? Alien?—but it mattered little. All she knew was she'd never felt so safe, so content and at the same time, so turned-on and sexy, so like a desirable woman as she did with the mysterious man. What that meant she had no bloody clue, but she didn't care. Not now. Later.

Later she would address the whole nonhuman thing as well as the soul-searing-connection thing. For now she just wanted to drown in the sheer and utter pleasure Eamon gave her. Drown in it and...

She moaned, arching her back and pressing her palms to the rug as Eamon's tongue returned to her pussy. She felt him blow a fine stream of cool air over her swollen folds and she moaned again. He was teasing her. Taunting her with his mastery of her body. A slow smile curled at the corners of her mouth and she caught her bottom lip with her teeth. She couldn't argue with him. Whatever he was, he knew exactly how to give her pleasure.

"Real pleasure," he murmured against her pussy before flicking the tip of his tongue over her clit. "Not that of daemonic magic."

Another shudder claimed her as her core remembered the intense orgasms he'd already given her. "Please," she whispered, closing her eyes.

He stroked her sodden sex again, his tongue warm and wet on her flesh. "I've done what is needed to save you tonight, Cate. I've milked your body of the Daemon Form's influence. There is no need for me to continue." He lifted his head from between her legs and slid his body up hers. The head of his cock nudged her cunt and his eyes glowed. "But there isn't a force in this realm or any other powerful enough to stop me from making love to you now."

With a single, fluid thrust, he drove his thick erection inside her.

Cate arched into the sudden penetration, taking his length deeper into her sex. Her pussy lips stretched taut around his width, a burning pain more pleasurable than she could fathom. With every stroke he pushed her closer to another release, just as carnal, just as powerful as the last, and yet there was something very different about the way he moved inside her now. Something different about the way he touched her, looked at her.

His elbows rested on the floor on either side of her head, supporting the weight of his upper body as his hips rolled against hers. His stomach and chest pressed to hers, his heart beating a steady rhythm that echoed her own. He gazed down at her, his arms framing her face, his lips so close they shared the same breath. There was an intensity to his expression she hadn't seen before. His black eyes glowed with the same ethereal power and magic she'd witnessed many times before, but this time it seemed tempered by something else. Something far more...real.

He stroked into her. Each sliding penetration grew faster and fiercer and yet, at the same time, seemed governed not by the wild, dominating arrogance of their previous coupling but a need more complex. He'd never possessed her body like this before. This was...

*Lovemaking.*

A soft, hitching gasp caught in her throat at the single word and she stared into his face. When he'd fucked her previously it had been to save her from Asmodeus' magic. Despite the pleasure he'd also found, the sex had been purposeful. A mission.

His body had a different mission now. She could feel it in every fluid thrust; hear it in his panting breaths; see it in his soft, wondrous expression.

There were no unseen caresses driving her to horrific arousal. No threat of invisible hands or lips raping her mind and existence. There was only Eamon. He wasn't fighting anyone for the pleasure of her flesh, wasn't trying to save her soul. He was just –

“Making love to you,” he whispered, gazing into her eyes. “Because you are so beautiful, and I want to.”

The awed truth in his voice rolled through her in a wave of constricting pleasure and liquid electricity. She laughed, the joyous sound lost in a shaking moan as her climax began its claim on her body. She wrapped her arms around his neck and her legs around his hips, pulling herself into his quickening thrusts, impaling herself harder onto his stabbing cock.

And when she came, her nerve endings sparking with rapture, her blood singing in her ears, she closed her eyes and saw nothing but glorious white light. White light infused with pure, golden heat. Like the heat of her lover's eyes. Powerful, potent...and surrounding her with his loving force.

## Chapter Ten

Something bright and yellow bathed Cate's closed eyelids in warm light. She squeezed them shut tighter, rolling onto her side in an attempt to escape the flickering light, the arm draped over her rib cage like a solid weight of resistance.

Light.

The abstract concept behind the noun flittered through her subconscious—a mere heartbeat before myriad sensations crashed over her. A hard surface digging into her hip, cool air playing over her naked body, an equally naked body curled around her from behind, a thick, slow, steady breath fanning her neck.

Arm.

Breath.

She snapped her eyes open, staring around her sunlit living room. Well, what she could see of her sunlit living room from her position on the floor. Which—after the last few hours—consisted of cushions and throw-rugs scattered over the floorboards, her overturned office chair, several items of clothing carelessly flung any which way, a silk scarf and three large seat cushions from her sofa stacked on top of each other to form a waist-high tower.

Her sex contracted at the memory of what Eamon had done to her over that stack of arranged cushions. Who would have thought such innocent slabs of foam could contribute to such mind-blowing—

Her gaze fell on the room's far window and she frowned, studying the tiny dust motes dancing in the bright sunlight.

Holy hell, how long had they been asleep?

She twisted in Eamon's loose embrace, shooting him a quick look as she disengaged herself from his arms and silently rose to her feet. Taking a step away from him, she let her stare roam over his sleeping form. There was no denying it—Eamon Fallen-Black was the most gorgeous, sexy man she'd ever known.

*Man, Cate?*

She bit back a frustrated sigh, catching her bottom lip with her teeth as she turned away from him.

Her pussy fluttered, an insistent response she hoped was just her body telling her to go back to Eamon, wake him up and let him take her to sexual heaven and back again. The trouble was, she couldn't trust herself to know *where* the response was coming from. The need, the hungry ache in her sex, could have just as easily been created by the strokes of a paintbrush on a canvas owned by a Lust Daemon—a Daemon Form. Or it could be the result of her complete mental instability. Truth to told, she hadn't entirely

ruled out the possibility she'd gone completely bonkers and was currently locked away in a padded cell somewhere, having altogether too realistic wet dreams.

Which was why she had to leave her apartment and the man sleeping buck-naked on its living room floor...and go see Xander Dupont.

She needed to know—once and for all—if what Eamon said was true. As deliciously intoxicating as the idea of being made love to every minute of every day by the Muse was, ignoring all else, it was kind of impractical. If she was the target of Xander's perverted desire, she needed to stop it. If nothing else, she had a job to go to.

*Oh you are being so very practical now, Cate Sinclair.*

She pulled a face at her own sarcastic jibe, hurrying over to the cushionless sofa to snatch up her running shorts and T-shirt. Practical maybe, but she wasn't the type to play the damsel in distress no matter how delicious her savior was—and Eamon was pretty damn delicious. If Xander *was* fucking with her body and her mind, she was going to demand he stop.

A soft snort behind her forced a rush of adrenaline through her body and she stood motionless, waiting.

Another snuffling snort followed, an even softer snore following that, and Cate let out a silent breath. Eamon would stop her if he knew what she was doing. Whether he would stop her by throwing her against the wall and pinning her there with his body or throwing her against the wall and fucking her until she could barely stand, she didn't know. As appealing as the second option was though, she had to go. Now.

The drive to Xander's residence in the very trendy harbor suburb of Woolloomooloo took far less time than she'd expected. Fate seemed to be playing a hand and she encountered not one red traffic light—a rarity for Sydney traffic, especially late on a Saturday morning. Whereas when she was late for work every man and his dog was out on the road, this morning seemed to be left for the sun, the seagulls, the sparrows and an occasional car or early-morning jogger. A dog-less jogger at that.

*You're rambling, Cate. Even your thoughts are borderline manic.*

"What do you expect," she growled, her knuckles white on her steering wheel and her mouth parched as she turned her car onto Xander's narrow street. "You're about to confront your ex-supervisor, a man who may or may not have sold his soul to a Lust Daemon just so he can fuck you whenever he wants through the medium of painting. Yeah, I think you have solid grounds for being manic."

The one-sided conversation did little to calm her nerves. Her stomach twisted, her pulse pounded in her throat. If she let herself believe it, she could hear heavy breathing in her ear, shallow, rapid pants that made her flesh prickle with unwanted heat.

One minute later, she killed the ignition of her car and stared through the passenger window at the large building she'd parked beside.

A converted warehouse, Xander's home sat silent in the morning sun's glaring light. Its brushed-steel door was etched with acid in jarring streaks, the only relief from



a wall of flat, gray concrete blocks. No one looking at it would think one of the most artistically gifted people in the country lived inside. But Cate knew.

What she *didn't* know was if he was also one of the country's most deranged.

Her pulse kicked up a notch, not just beating in her throat but thumping with the force of a mallet.

Pulling in a slow breath, she released her seat belt and alighted from the car, keeping her stare locked on Xander's door. She didn't know what she would do if he suddenly burst through it, wildly waving paintbrushes and a dripping pallet, but she didn't want to take her eyes off that door. That one place of exit.

Twenty-two steps later, she stood directly before it.

She rubbed her fingers on her palms, a distant part of her mind trying to point out how foolish the situation was. *What are you going to say, Sinclair? Hi, Xander. Are you raping me on canvas?*

Her heart was beating furiously, every instinct telling her to get back in her car. For a wrenching second she wished to God and all things holy she'd never left Eamon's side. She could be wrapped in the comfort of his embrace even now if she'd listened to her —

She knocked on the door. Just like that. Two sharp knocks before she changed her mind and fled. She'd done enough fleeing these last few days. She was over it.

The solid *thunk* of her knuckles on steel seemed to echo in the silence. Behind her a lone seagull screeched, its cry suffocated by a surreal void of sound.

Cate straightened her spine, her stare fixed on the door. A ripple raced up her spine and her nipples tightened, pushing against the cotton of her shirt.

*What the fuck are you doing, Cate? Run away. Now! N —*

The acid-etched door swung inward and Cate sucked in a sharp breath, her gaze locking with Xander's immediately. He wore only a pair of faded Levi's splattered with dry paint of various colors. His lean frame was far more muscular than Cate ever suspected, his sculpted muscles defined by the sun's harsh light. She stumbled back a step, an unnerving sensation squirming in her gut. She hadn't expected —

"Cate?"

Surprise turned her name to a question, his gaze flicking over her from head to toe and back. He looked at her, clearly confused by her appearance on his doorstep. And then the confusion vanished, replaced by obvious contempt. He scowled, his sharp blue eyes flashing. "So, you come to laugh at me?" His voice sounded rough and for the first time Cate noticed his hair looked greasy and unkempt, as if he'd not washed it for days. "Or perhaps to tell me you don't want to have coffee with me again, just to make sure I get the point?"

Cate blinked. God, was she here under completely false information? Had Eamon lied to her?

Xander rolled his eyes, his lip curling as his grip on the doorjamb tightened. "Or are you here to tell me you're Enigma's new art director?" he went on, knuckles white, jaw bunched. "Congratulations. I'm sure you'll do the job well."

He began to swing the door shut and Cate took a step forward, placing her hand on its cold surface. "I'm sorry, Xander," she said hurriedly, gazing up at him. He was tall. Taller than she remembered. "I'm...I'm not really sure why I'm here." She grabbed her bottom lip with her teeth. He wasn't behaving like a man so in lust he'd resorted to daemonic power just to fuck her. In fact, he was acting like he couldn't stand the sight of her. "I thought...I was told..."

Her stomach rolled. She'd been tricked. By Eamon or her unhinged mind, she didn't know. But she'd been tricked. And now she looked like a bloody fool.

She retreated a step, her fingertips brushing over the metal door. She turned her face away from Xander's scorning glare...

And saw the canvas.

It was propped on an easel in the shadows of the room behind him, a paint-stained bed sheet hanging over half of its expanse, as if someone had thrown the thing there in haste.

The canvas was huge, large enough to hold a life-sized image of an adult, the otherwise bone-white surface covered with strokes and lines of what appeared to be charcoal. But even the obviously unfinished work was enough to capture the subject with sheer mastery – and why wouldn't it? Xander was, after all, an amazing artist.

She stared at the sketched image, knowing exactly who it was.

Her. Naked. Draped over the end of what looked like a rumpled bed, her eyes closed, her legs spread open, exposing her sex to the man standing between her bent knees, his cock long and thick and erect.

Xander.

"Jesus," Cate whispered. Her heart smashed against her breastbone and as she stared at the canvas, her peripheral vision seemed to go black and she felt as if she were tilting. A trippy, surreal tunnel vision. She jerked her stare to Xander's face and gasped for breath, her cheeks flooding with fire. "It's true!"

His eyes narrowed. "I don't know what –"

She didn't let him finish. She flattened her palm on the door and shoved it wide, pushing past him as she stormed toward the canvas and its offending image.

"It's true," she whispered, her throat choked with shock. She stumbled a step, half turning back to Xander, her lips numb, her mouth dry. For the first time she noticed how black the ends of his fingers were. Noticed the barest black smudges under his right eye, over his jaw. "You...you..."

Incapable of finishing the sentence, she swung her stare to the charcoal drawing, bile coating her tongue. She reached for the canvas, ready to pull it from its perch on the easel. To throw it on the ground and demand Xander destroy it.

The tip of her middle finger skimmed its edge.

"Stop!"

Xander's growl reached her ear half a second before his fingers curled around her arm and he yanked her around to face him.

"Get your hands off—"

He hit her. Eyes ablaze, he lashed out, the back of his fist smashing against her cheek.

Splintering pain exploded in her face. Her vision flashed red, her head filled with the blast of a detonating nuke. The force of his strike flung her into a tumble and she slammed to the floor, the cold concrete as hard as his fist. She slid for a split second over its paint- and dust-coated surface, stunned, before self-preservation kicked in and she scrambled to her feet.

Or tried to. Xander crashed down onto her back, his fingers gouging into her shoulders as he flipped her to her back between his legs. He straddled her, his ass pinning her to the floor, his hands snatching for her flailing fists.

She thrashed beneath him, desperate to buck him off. This wasn't good. This wasn't good. Damn it, this wasn't good!

"I'm going to fuck you now, Cate." The words burst from him, punctuated by pants and grunts as he rode her writhing, fighting body, his hands still trying to snare her wrists. "No need to bother with the canvas when I have the real—"

She landed a punch—an ineffectual blow that glanced off his jaw. "Get off me, you fuck!"

He laughed, and in a sickening blur, finally grabbed her wrists and slammed her hands to the floor beside her head. "I want you so badly." He stared down at her, his eyes wide, unblinking. Sweat dripped from the tip of his nose, a hot bead of exertion that fell to her lips. "From the second you started at Enigma, I wanted you."

"Get off me," she ground out, teeth clenched.

He jerked her arms straight, snaring her wrists with one hand as his other found the hem of her shirt. "And then you said *no*," he went on, the words now nothing but spittle-filled breaths of effort. His hand drove beneath her shirt, fingers scraping at her breast through her bra.

She squirmed wildly, her mind screaming. God, she was such a fool! "Get the fuck off me, you sick—"

He smashed the back of his hand against her mouth, snapping her head to the side. His fingers locked back around her wrists before she could comprehend he'd released them. The side of her face, her lips felt on fire. The copper taste of her blood trickled into her mouth, down her throat.

"I took it slow, Cate," he grunted, his free hand circling her throat. He dropped his face to her neck and closed his lips over the flesh beneath her ear, sucking hard. A love bite she knew all too well. She cried out but he ignored her pain. "Just like Asmodeus

told me to," he mumbled, teeth scraping her skin. He dragged his mouth up to her ear and lashed its shallow inner shell with his tongue. "An image of you bound naked to a whipping post, your legs splayed, granting my brushes...and then my tongue...uninterrupted access to your thighs, your cunt."

He caught her earlobe with his teeth and bit down, moaning when she cried out again. "The next painting captured you stretched on my bed, your breasts flattened under my palms as I kissed your very, very fuckable mouth. Then a close-up of *my* mouth on your perfect throat, sucking on your perfect flesh. After that, a painting of you begging for more..."

She bucked against his imprisoning weight. Ice-cold fear whipped through her. Her heart thumped. What should she do? *What could she do?*

"Yesterday I painted myself fucking you with my tongue and I *heard* you come," he panted, his fingers around her throat squeezing tighter, tighter, before jerking down to her breast and mauling her through her shirt. "I heard your moans and saw your body reacting to the pleasure *I* gave it. It was so good, wasn't it?"

"It wasn't good, you fuck," she spat, thrashing beneath him. "It was rape!"

He laughed, his breath hot and wet on her jaw. "No. It was a masterpiece. My favorite work so far. My most detailed. And once it was finished, once I'd lived the pleasure of my creation and watched my cum spurt onto your likeness, I should have walked away. Should have waited. But oh Cate, it wasn't enough. I wanted more. Right then. I primed the canvas before my masterpiece was dry and painted you bound on a bed, as I fucked you with my fingers."

For a moment he paused, then his fingers twisted her nipple until spikes of pain made her scream. "And then I saw *him*. With *my* woman...in *my* masterpiece! His image just appeared in the wet paint and I sure as fuck didn't paint it there." His hand left her breast, his fingers wrapping around her throat again. "Who is he, Cate? Who fucked you? Who put his dick where only *mine* should go? *Who?*"

Black flashes of nothingness swirled through Cate's vision. She couldn't breathe. Xander was choking her, his hand squeezing tighter, tighter. She writhed and bucked but it made little difference. She couldn't breathe. She was going to —

Abruptly he released her throat, his hand back on her breast, his mouth on her cheek.

"You want *my* dick buried inside you, don't you? You want *me* to fuck you now, not him." He shoved his hips forward and Cate whimpered, the iron rod of his dick bruising her groin. "Me. Not that fuck you were with last night. That's why you're here, isn't it?"

"No." She shook her head, her lungs on fire. "No, I'm not —"

"I let *that* painting dry before priming the canvas, Cate. See? I learned my lesson. No poaching bastards in my next painting. Which I'd just begun when you'd arrived." He chuckled, nipping her bottom lip in a stinging bite. "But now you're here, and I can fuck you for real. I don't need the magic of the canvas anymore, do I?"

"Get off me!" She thrashed her legs. Trying to dislodge him. Kick him. Anything. Anything.

"Going to fuck you now..." Xander pressed his mouth to her throat once more, his hand now clawing at her breast like an animal. He rolled his hips, his erection grinding into her mound with brutal force. "Just like I have over and over again. But this time in the flesh. This time..." With a guttural moan, he ripped her shirt up, tore at her bra and latched onto her nipple with his mouth. Hard.

Cate screamed again, writhing beneath him, blood-red pain momentarily blinding her, consuming her body. Pain and shame and terror.

"Please, Xander!" she sobbed, fighting to move, his weight crushing her. "Please don't do this!"

He didn't stop. His hard dick pounded rhythmically at her groin, his mouth mauled her breast.

She closed her eyes, willing her body to feel nothing. Willing her mind to shut him out, to go someplace safe where Xander couldn't touch her. But she couldn't—her body remembered his touch too well, had been wrought with sick, surreal pleasure too often at his hands. Her nipples pinched tight, her sex contracted. Tears streamed from her eyes, moans of denial escaped her throat. "No, no," she whimpered. "Stop. Please, please, Xander, stop..."

He raised his head and she chanced a glance at him, his stare like hot acid pouring on her face. "You're mine, Cate. *Mine.*"

"Fuck you!" she snapped.

He hit her again. Harder this time. Hard enough to flood her head with excruciating agony. White-hot pain and black emptiness exploded in her skull. She cried out, incapable of little else. She shouldn't have come here. She shouldn't have left—

He ground himself against her, fingernails scraping at her body as he dragged his hand down to the waistline of her shorts. She knew what was going to happen next. But didn't know how to stop him.

*Think of Eamon, Cate. Like you did before. Remember the pleasure Eamon gave as Xander takes. Protect your mind, your soul...*

Her heart hammered, her mind drawing on the memory of Eamon—the way he looked, the way he smiled. The infectious way he laughed. The gentle way he held her.

Xander's weight shifted off her hips and for one short moment Cate hoped, *prayed* he'd come to his senses. But the brief reprieve didn't last, shattered by the sound of a zipper releasing. He grunted, his fingers driving into her wrists, and suddenly something thick and hot poked at her belly.

"See what you do to me, Cate?" he whispered, his hand snatching at her jaw. "See how much I want you?"

"Too bad," she snarled, thrashing beneath him. "I'm not yours!"

In a flash she swung her right leg up and around his hip then threw herself sideways, propelling them both into a lurching roll. Xander's hands were wrenched from her and she scrambled to her feet, turning to swing a hard kick straight to his jaw.

He fell backward, a furious wail ripping from his throat.

Cate didn't hesitate. She's seen too many movie villains lunge after a heroine who'd mistakenly thought she was safe. This wasn't a movie and she sure as shit wasn't a too-stupid-to-live horror heroine either. She threw her weight into another kick, her instep smashing against his ribs.

"Fucking bitch!" he spat, scrambling to grab her leg. His nails tore at her ankle, gouging into her flesh as she stumbled out of his reach.

"Get back here!" The command was vicious, high-pitched, hysterical. He flung himself at her and she squealed, adrenaline-fueled terror turning her blood cold. She spun around, looking for the door, a weapon, anything.

A heavy vase filled with paintbrushes sat beside the canvas and she ran for it. If she could smash it against Xander's head —

He snared a fistful of her hair before she could reach it, yanking her backward. Her body slapped against his chest, his arms clamping around her, his nails digging into her flesh. She thrashed in his hold but he hauled her off her feet, spinning around to drive her, face and chest first, onto a wide futon sitting against the wall.

He threw himself on top of her, his hands ripping at the waistline of her shorts, her shirt, frenzied hands trying to strip her bare as his still-erect cock ground against her ass.

*No! No no no...*

"Fuck, I can't wait to sink my dick into your cunt," he panted, his fingers yanking her shorts down over her butt even as he rammed his hips and cock harder against it. "I can't wait to fucking fuck you until you're screaming my name."

"I think *you'll* be the one screaming," a deep voice stated above their heads, the accented words like growled thunder—a second before Xander's weight disappeared off Cate's body.

She twisted on the futon, looking over her shoulder just in time to see Eamon—still materializing—throwing Xander across the room.

He crashed against a table covered in paints and jars of murky liquid, shattering glass accompanying the sound of wood splintering. The air suddenly reeked of linseed and turpentine, the smell suffocating Cate. Or maybe it was her fear.

She scrambled away on all fours, her stare—unfocused and clouded with pain—first fixed on Eamon before jerking to Xander. Her heart continued to beat out of control, her body and mind too terrorized to process any form of relief.

"I am going to fill you with such *pain*," Eamon said, stalking toward Xander, each word a growl of menacing control. "Such agonizing, excruciating pain."

"*You!*" Xander roared.

Cate had time to think, *My Muse*, before Xander squealed again.

*"She's mine – MINE!"*

"Not because you submitted to Asmodeus' magic," Eamon uttered, ignoring Xander's wail. He continued forward, the sound of paint erupting from flattened tubes marking each step, the crunch of shattered glass jars making Cate's stomach turn. Blackness blossomed before her eyes and she pressed a hand to her temple.

It was too much. All too much. She wanted to go home. She wanted to be away from here.

"Not because you took what was never yours to take," Eamon continued, his hands curling into fists at his side, his steps measured, his shoulders bunched.

"Gonna kill you!" Xander screeched, and for a brief second Cate's pain-fogged vision cleared enough to see him trying to stand amongst an abstract mess of broken glass, spilled paint and splinters of wood that were once a table. His face was white, his eyes filled with confused rage, bright red blood oozing from his nose and the side of his mouth, as if he'd been gorging on tubes of vermillion. His grimace turning him into a terrifying caricature of the once-handsome man. He seemed to be missing a tooth. *"Going to kill you for touching my Cate!"*

"But because," Eamon said, drawing to a halt before him, each word like ice cracking, *"you hurt her. For that, I will make you beg for death's release."*

"Hurt her?" Xander scurried back as far as the broken furniture would allow, glass shards scraping against exposed skin and blood dripping onto his bare chest. *"I've never hurt her. I love her! She wants this! She's mine!"*

"She's not yours," Eamon growled. He reached for Xander, his fingers fisting in the man's white-blond hair, now tangled and matted with sweat and dirty linseed oil. *"And you have no concept of real love."*

Xander opened his mouth, his stare locked on Eamon. An expression of sheer wonder shimmered over his face, as if an elusive notion had suddenly dawned. *"Oh, I see it now,"* he murmured on a breathless sigh, his eyes glazed. *"I need to be dead. Kill me and everything will be –"*

*"Now now, Xander,"* a new voice uttered, smoother than melting ice – and just as cold. *"Surely you're not so weak you'll let a mere Muse influence you?"*

Eamon stiffened, his head swiveling toward the speaker. A silent curse fell from his lips, his eyes flaring golden heat, and he let Xander fall to a heap on the floor. *"The Daemon Form of Lust decides to make an appearance, does he?"*

Cate's gaze was riveted on the new arrival and her stomach knotted. The man stood beside Xander's easel, his hand playing on the canvas, long, talon-tipped fingers stroking its edge with slow caresses. A lover's touch, intimately gentle and knowing.

Even through the gray fog of her pain, she couldn't miss the similarity. The Lust Daemon was almost a carbon copy of Eamon.

*Asmodeus.*

The name whispered through the deep reaches of her mind and with each syllable, her sex constricted. Consuming her with a horrific hunger unlike anything she'd ever experienced.

Asmodeus. The creature who'd given Xander power over her body.

Hate filled her. Hate and (*God save me*) desperate carnal need. She was going to kill him. She was going to—

She threw herself at the Lust Daemon, a raw cry erupting from her throat.

"Cate, no!" Eamon yelled, his voice like cracking thunder.

It was too late. Her body slammed into Asmodeus, her shoulder driving into his hard gut.

And the second her body touched his, a ravenous lust surged through her, mind, body and soul. She screamed, her sex constricting with such force her whole body shuddered.

God, she wanted to fuck. And be fucked.

Sharp claws raked at her back, her shoulder. Long fingers knotted in her hair, yanking her head backward until she was staring up at Eamon's smirking double. His lips curled, his eyes flashing every shade of red. "Oh she's a responsive one, isn't she?"

"Let her go." Eamon's growl stroked all of Cate's senses, the menace in his voice making her heart thump harder and the dark lust possessing her vanish.

Asmodeus laughed, a smug, confident chortle. "Don't think so, Muse. Her pleasure does belong to me, after all." And with that, Cate's body was once more on the edge of orgasm. Instantly. Painfully.

From the floor Xander moaned and writhed, as if feeling Cate's desire.

"Let her go," Eamon repeated.

Without warning, Asmodeus released his grip on her hair and Cate dropped to the concrete. She bit back a cry, scurrying away from the Lust Daemon, pain pounding through her head and her lust ebbing slowly. She felt as if her entire body had been beaten to a bloody pulp. Her vision blurred in and out of focus. *Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.*

"I must admit," Asmodeus purred, running an unhurried gaze over her before turning back to Eamon, "I've been feeding on her pleasure for some time now, thanks to our boy Xander, and never fully realized just how exquisite she is. Once I've removed *you* from this picture I shall enjoy taking my fill of her."

Xander moaned again, the guttural noise becoming a sob. "No. She's mine!"

Asmodeus ignored him and stepped back to the canvas, his fingers returning to its edges to stroke once more with slow attention, as if he couldn't bear not maintaining contact. He smiled as Eamon, sharply defined lips curling at the corners. "It's been a while, Muse. How have you been? Inspire anyone to massacre a convent lately?"

Eamon's lip curled and he glared at the Daemon. "No. What about you? Sank your prick in a pig ass of late?"



Asmodeus laughed, the unhinged sound making Cate's nipples pinch with terror. "Ah, that pig gave me quite a week of enjoyment, I must say. Almost as much as the pig farmer."

Cate stared at the two men, her gut churning. The air sizzled and crackled between them, growing hotter with each word passing their lips. What was happening?

"And now you're loaning out your parlor tricks to humans who can't get laid the normal way?" Eamon continued, more calm than before. Almost indifferent. "How the mighty have fallen."

Asmodeus' eyes glowed blood-red, his fingers on the canvas turning into a white-knuckled grip. "Careful, Muse. You go too far."

"No, *Daemon*," Eamon snarled back, "*you* go too far. When you gave Dupont the power to rape a defenseless woman, you went way too far."

Asmodeus snorted, his gaze roaming Cate's body anew. She shivered under its weight, her skin crawling, her sex constricting. "Ah, so that's how she's managed to hold off Xander's full lust. You've been fucking her in the flesh."

"No!" A weak squeal came from the floor and Cate blanched, jerking her attention to Xander. He cowered in a ball amongst the broken jars and spilled paint, his face ashen, his eyes bulging. "No no no..." He shook his head. "Cate's mine. Mine..."

"What is it with this female?" Asmodeus asked. "She's catnip to anything with a dick?" He drew a slow breath, his chest swelling.

Cate felt the air around her stream over her limbs, her body. She squirmed, the sensation somehow vile.

"Hmmm, very delicious," he murmured, taking a step away from the canvas to study her with unblinking intensity. His lips stretched into a wide leer, white, sharp teeth winking at her. "Sweet and innocent, yet dirty at the same time. I look forward to drawing directly from her."

"Touch her, *Daemon*," Eamon's voice cut the air like sharpened steel, "and I will make you suffer more than you could possibly imagine! You may be immortal, but you still feel pain."

Asmodeus turned back to Eamon, scoffing. "Your magic can't best mine."

Eamon chuckled, the sound cold and menacing. "I've inspired some of this world's most brutal, sadistic killers. All you do is make people horny."

Asmodeus narrowed his eyes. "Do you really think *you* can defeat *me*, brother?"

Eamon's eyes flared with golden heat. "Let's see, shall we?"

Both men moved as one—twin blurs of darkness flashing toward each other. They slammed together, a silent shockwave rocking the room, propelling Cate backward in a wild roll. She landed on her backside, her hand striking the nearby easel on which the horrific canvas sat. The thing quaked, its balance affected by the force of Eamon and Asmodeus' collision.

She threw it a harried look before a shrieking shout snapped her attention back to the fight. Both Eamon and the Daemon moved at impossible speeds, sometime so fast she could see nothing but a shadow of a blur, other times moving close to the natural speed of humans. But no matter how fast they moved, Cate could see their battle was terrifying.

Asmodeus no longer appeared like Eamon's brother. Every time she caught sight of him, his visage grew more and more terrifying, his face distorted. More like the Daemon she'd first seen depicted on the website. He hissed at Eamon, swinging grotesquely muscled arms, his clawed hands slashing at Eamon's face and chest and throat.

Eamon attacked back, one moment smashing a balled fist into Asmodeus' vile face, the next sending the Daemon flying across the room with an untraceable blur of movement.

With every blow, more shockwaves detonated, as if reality and unreality repeatedly collided, making the room quake.

An explosive pressure thumped through Cate's head, her stomach lurching with nauseous fear. Her brain, hobbled by naive human knowledge, couldn't comprehend what she witnessed. She stared at the dreadful spectacle, at the two men fighting to destroy the other.

One terrifying. One...

Hers.

*Stop this, Cate. Stop it now!*

She shoved herself to her feet, nauseous blossoms of pain erupting in her head. She reached for the small stool beside the canvas, her fingers trembling, knocking over a glass jar full of paintbrushes and palette knives. Big ones. Sharp ones.

She could think of only one thing to do.

Before she could grasp the biggest palette knife, another shockwave rocked the room, this one so forceful Cate was thrown sideways. She hit the side of the canvas, careening off its heavy weight, her ears ringing.

Asmodeus' cold laugh filled the air, followed immediately by the sound of something hard and solid striking the concrete wall.

"Once I'm done with you, Muse, I shall capture the cunt in the canvas and let any daemonic creature with a cock have his way with her," Asmodeus sneered.

Cate threw him a hurried look, her gut sinking as she saw him slowly stalking toward Eamon.

Eamon – who lay bent and gasping on the floor, bright red blood pouring from his nose.

Asmodeus tossed her a leering smirk, his eyes glowing, blood as black as crude oil seeping from his snouted nose and lipless mouth. He turned back to Eamon, reaching

one clawed hand toward him. "The pleasure they rip from her defenseless body will feed me for the rest of eternity. She will –"

"God, I am so *sick* of your voice!" Cate shouted, her fingers closing around the hilt of Xander's largest palette knife.

Both Eamon and Asmodeus spun to face her, Eamon's face etched in worried shock, Asmodeus' in contemptuous surprise.

She grinned, her cheek exploding in agony as she did so. "So shut the *fuck* up and leave us alone, will you?"

She swung her arm wide, aiming the knife's point at the canvas.

"NO!" The cry punched into her first, a mere heartbeat before Xander smacked into her shoulder and drove her to the ground.

"Cate!" Eamon yelled, his voice cracking.

She thrashed beneath Xander, her fingers holding his palette knife with desperate strength, Asmodeus' rising laughter a maniacal soundtrack scraping at her sanity.

"You're mine! My whore!" Xander screamed in her ear. His hands scratched at her wrists, her fingers, trying to steal the knife from her grip. "I gave my *soul* to have you and I will fuck –"

"Get *off* me!" she snapped, every muscle and fiber in her body surging with disgusted fury. She swung her arm, the knife plunging into Xander's side.

His mouth gaped wide, his bulging eyes locked on her face. "You..."

Cate didn't let him finish. She shoved him off her, dislodging the knife and lurching to her feet just as Eamon stumbled to his.

"Cate..."

For a split second their eyes met, and at the sight of that strange golden light glowing brighter than ever before in his black pupils, at the sight of his power manifesting, Cate knew – knew – her heart was his forever.

She tightened her grip on Xander's palette knife, his blood warm and slippery on her fingers.

"*Cunt!*" Asmodeus roared, and as Cate turned toward the canvas, her arm raised, she saw Eamon lunge at the Daemon Form in a dark blur, smashing him back into the wall.

Another shockwave crashed through the room, shattering every glass jar and window and coffee mug, showering Cate in shards of glass and porcelain as she threw herself forward and buried the sharp point of the blade into the center of the stretched canvas.

Right between her own breasts, captured there by Xander's phenomenal talent.

The sound of fabric ripping asunder echoed through the warehouse. As did the sound of Xander's desperate wail. "NOOOO!"

Scalding heat flayed Cate's body when the knife hit its mark. She cried out, the pain more pleasurable than she could comprehend, burning through her with the might of a volcanic blast...

And then it was gone, leaving her gasping. And holding the palette knife with locked fingers.

"*You bitch!*" Xander screamed, his voice cracking into a choked sob, his wide eyes fixed on the slashed canvas. "No, no, you fucking bitch..."

Behind her, Asmodeus began to laugh, a low, gurgling chuckle that caused her stomach to lurch. Bile rose in her throat, thick and hot, and she shuddered, turning on her heel to stare at him.

He lay slumped against the wall, black ichor leeching from his eyes, his nose, his mouth. He'd returned to his human form, his countenance even more like Eamon's than before.

"Well..." He shook his head, a weak cough bubbling up his throat as he struggled to breathe. Black blood frothed on his lips and he cringed, licking at it slowly, his tongue long, thin and pointed. "It seems...the Muse of...the malevolent has found...his light."

A shiver rippled up Cate's spine at the word "light". Her pussy constricted, her pulse quickening as the word tickled at her memory.

*Twin Heart.*

The mysterious title whispered through her mind, followed immediately by other words that stole her breath.

*Monumental source of light and love...*

*Its blinding brilliance...*

*Twin Heart's light...*

"Twin Heart," she murmured aloud.

Asmodeus' eyes grew wide. "No." His swung his stare to Eamon, head shaking in denial, the color bleaching from his face. "No. She can't be."

Eamon small smile held a glimmer of triumph. "It seems she is. I couldn't believe it myself until this very moment. I didn't dream such a thing was possible." He flicked Cate a quick look, eyes glowing, his smile softening. "But she *is* my Twin Heart. I know it—I know *her*—in my very soul."

Asmodeus roared his denial, the sound echoed by a choked sob from Xander. "A Muse cannot be a Twin Heart! A Muse can only inspire, not *be* inspired."

"As we both know," Eamon stepped forward, slowly swiping the back of his hand over his bloody mouth, "I have never been a typical Muse. For the first time in my existence, I've discovered someone who doesn't require my influence to achieve greatness—just my love." He gave Cate another look, this one longer. "It is the soul that gives birth to the vision of the heart. And this woman's soul is greater than any vision a Muse could imagine."

His voice was low and calm, its sheer confidence and unwavering acceptance sending a shiver throughout Cate's body. She gazed at him, her heart beating harder, as if it recognized its other.

No, not "as if". It *did*. Her heart, her soul *knew* who Eamon was, just as she'd known minutes ago. Just as she'd suspected hours ago.

Her Twin Heart. The man she loved without condition. The man who held her soul, as she held his.

A low throb fluttered in her sex and she smiled.

"And trust me when I say this, Daemon," Eamon said, smiling back at her, "it is wonderful. Powerful. More powerful than you can comprehend, more powerful than your magic can handle." He swung his gaze back to the Asmodeus and took a step forward, hands balling into fists. "Now *fuck off*. You can't use her anymore. The very fact you have is already beginning to poison the blood in your veins. It will be a long time before you can feed from anyone with a soul."

Asmodeus coughed again, rolling his blood-weeping eyes to Cate. He gave her a long stare, his tongue scraping over his split bottom lip. "Unfortunately...so very true." He pushed himself to his feet, the lurching move causing Eamon's muscles to tense as he stepped between Asmodeus and Cate.

Another cough gurgled up the Daemon Form's throat, thicker. He slid his attention to the sobbing Xander, the Daemon's beaten and bruised face so like Eamon's, it made Cate's chest squeeze. "You owe me an eternity of lust, Dupont," he rasped, wiping at the blood oozing from the corner of his mouth. "And fortunately, your soul is long gone. I shall be back to collect."

Asmodeus returned his gaze to Cate, both fury and undisguised interest burning in his black eyes. "Enjoy her, brother," he spat, the words a husky croak. "May she...*inspire* you...to fucking greatness."

He laughed, a wet chuckle that made Cate's stomach churn, before turning his gaze to Xander and flipping him a slow wink.

And then, a shudder rippling over his flesh, Asmodeus threw himself at the gaping wound in the canvas, transforming to his grotesque daemoniac form mid-arc.

And was gone.

"No," Xander sobbed, shaking his head. Tears poured from his bulging eyes. Snot ran from his nose. The puncture wound in his side leaked thick blood, a slow flow that already seemed to be congealing, its glistening viscosity staining his flesh and the waistline of his jeans. He scurried forward a few inches, his stare glued to the rip in the painted fabric. "No...please no!"

For a moment no one moved. Xander's sobs hiccupped over the silence, pathetic. Pitiful. Cate swallowed, her mouth dry, her throat thick.

"I can end it if you want."

A low, deep voice caressed her and she jerked her gaze away from the man who was once her supervisor.

Eamon stood beside her, not a flicker of golden light to be seen in his eyes. They were human eyes again. Dark and intense, but human all the same. He placed his hand on her arm, his palm warm, his fingers gentle. "I can take his life from him and make him beg you for forgiveness with his last breath."

She shook her head, her chest tight, her pulse pounding. "No." The word felt like sandpaper in her throat. She smiled up at Eamon, a small smile, but a smile all the same. "Let him live with what he's done. Asmodeus will take care of him."

Eamon raised his hand to cup her face, his thumb tracing her bottom lip with infinite care. "If that is your wish." He lowered his head, brushing his lips over hers. "I love you, Cate Sinclair. Not because you're my Twin Heart, but because you are beautiful. In heart and soul, as well as body."

A warm heat rolled through her at his words, pooling in her center. Her smile widened. "Y'know, I still haven't got a definite idea of what Twin Heart means but I have to admit, I don't give a rat's bum. I love you too."

He laughed, that same infectious rumble she'd first heard in the café a lifetime ago. "It means the fates created you for me, and me for you, something I must admit isn't common for a Muse, especially a fallen one. It means our hearts were born of the same love an eternity ago and finally found each other. It explains why I couldn't influence your actions and why I could feel your thoughts. It explains why, when I first touched you, *really* touched you, the light of the heavens seemed to well through me. It also means Asmodeus' magic—and any other Daemon Form's magic, for that matter—will not work on you anymore."

Cate grinned, her pulse beating with increasing speed at his explanation. "You're kinda handy to have around then, aren't you?"

He laughed. "And just to let you know, there's not a force in all the realms that could take me away from you now."

She smiled again, the aches in her body from Xander's attacks already becoming distant memories. "In that case, is there any chance you could take me home and make love to me, Mr. *Fallen-Black*?" she asked. "Muse influence or no, there's something about what you just said that makes me feel...inspired."

For a split second, golden light shimmered in his eyes and then they were black again. Black and molten with desire. For her.

"I think I can do that," he murmured with a lopsided grin. He slid his arms around her waist, placed a soft kiss on her lips—a teasing caress that made her moan a little—and scooped her off the floor.

Without a backward glance, he carried her from Xander's house. Leaving the mewling, sobbing man on the floor and the torn canvas on the easel.

## Epilogue

The tongue laved up his inner thigh, passed over the sensitive strip of flesh between his sac and his ass in a slow stroke before painting his balls with studied attention. He sucked in breath after breath, the pleasure in his groin arcing through him like scorching electricity. Or blistering fire.

He writhed against the wet caress, unable to move under its onslaught, his heart hammering so hard in his chest he wondered how he was still alive.

The tongue lapped its way up his cock, hungry strokes that filled him with hot pain. "Oh," he groaned, rolling his hips in an attempt to escape the increasing pressure. "Fuck..."

The tongue stopped its greedy swipes, only to start again on his anus.

"Fuck!" He bucked at the sensation of steel sinking into his ass. Sharp steel in the form of a wriggling, penetrating tongue. "No, no, stop!"

The tongue didn't stop, delving deeper into his virgin hole. Stretching him. Tearing him.

Perverse pleasure sank into his core and he shook his head, lips parted as he sucked in ragged lungfuls of air.

The tongue withdrew, lapping at his balls again before a mouth closed over them both. Sucking hard.

He cried out, thrashing against the mouth, a surge of arousal flooding his cock with blood. The mouth sucked harder, drawing his sac deeper into its hot, wet well. Unseen hands raked up his quivering legs, sharp nails gouging at his flesh. He squirmed, trying to escape. There was something wrong. Something so wrong...

Hard fingers curled around his dick, choking it. Pumping up and down its length with brutal insistence. The pressure on his balls grew stronger, as if his lover was trying to suck his scrotum from his body. He cried out again, sick pleasure turning his prick to a stiff rod. He didn't want this, but his body wasn't listening.

*Fuck, what's going on? What is –*

A finger sank into his clenching anus, a rude, dry intrusion that sent arrows of pain straight into his groin. Hot pain. Real pain.

He came, fat wads of come spurting from his cock, splashing on his hitching stomach.

The laugh sounded in his head first, a low chuckle that vibrated through his aching body. A laugh he'd heard before.

*No.*

Xander Dupont jerked himself awake, his stare flinging around the shadow-painted room. His breath tore from his chest in burning gasps, stripping his lungs, destroying the early-morning silence.

Sweet relief crashed over him and he slumped back to his sweat-damp, tangled sheets, eyes closing, pulse pounding. A dream. A fucking dream. *Thank Christ, it was just a dream.*

Guilt had made his nights a living nightmare, his days a loathsome chore. Since what he'd done...since Cate...he couldn't paint, he couldn't think. He couldn't eat. He was going insane. But at least he was still alive. And alone. Thank God he was –

Warm fingers trailed down the center of his stomach and he froze, his eyes snapping open.

The room was as empty as it had been before. Just him, his neglected, dust-coated supplies and a torn canvas he couldn't bear to look at. Or touch.

*No one here, Xander. No one but you and your –*

*"Told you I'd be back to collect,"* a familiar voice purred in his mind. Asmodeus' unseen fingers wrapped around Xander's flaccid penis in a choking caress. *"Ready?"*

And to the steady soundtrack of Xander's hollow screams, the pain began anew...

*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 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 (<http://lexxiēcouper.wordpress.com/>).

Lex welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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