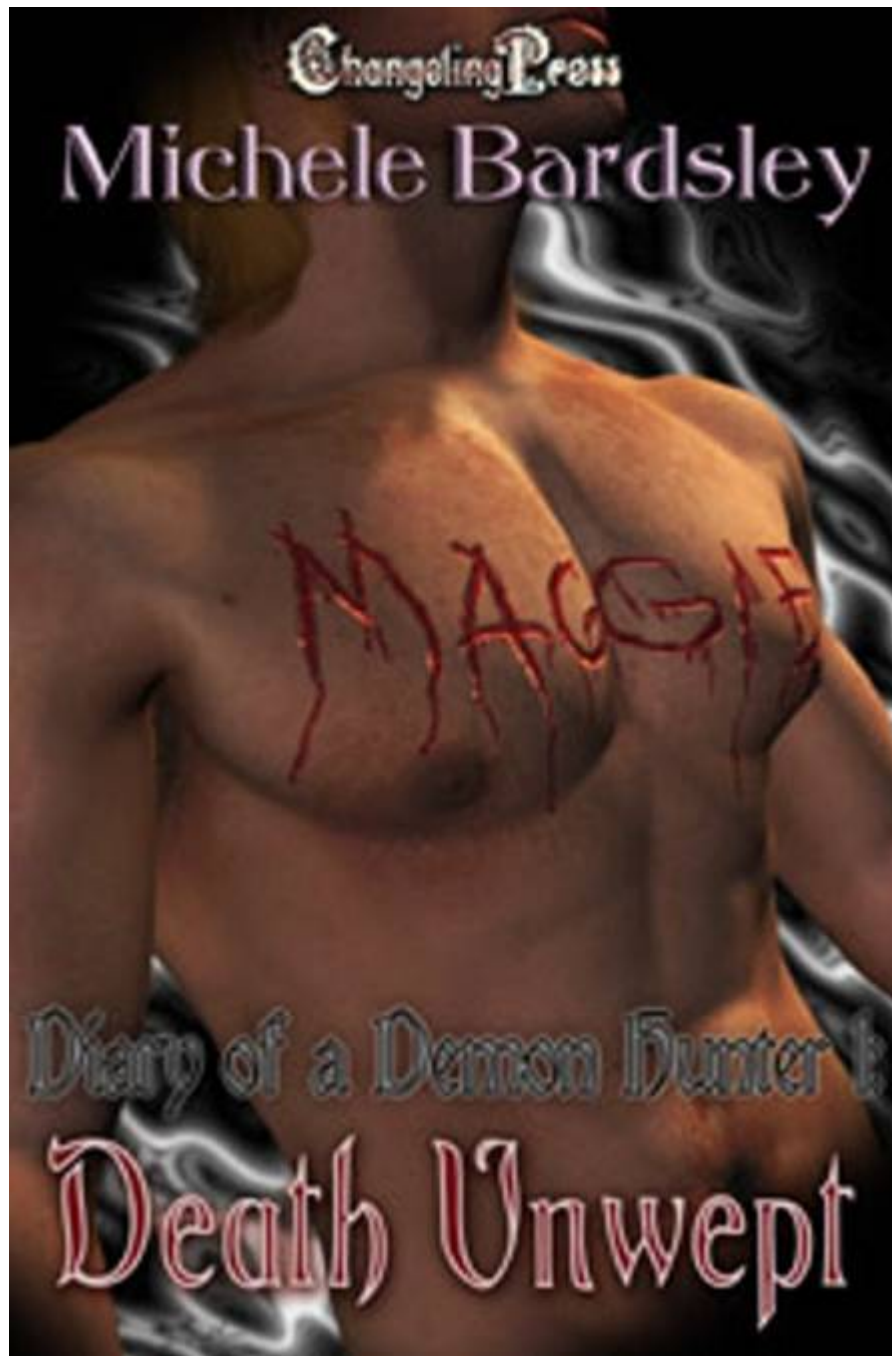




Diary of a Demon Hunter:

Death Unwept

By MicheleBardsley

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

Demons don't die.

When they're not manifesting in some monstrous corporeal form or body-napping humans and animals, they're just balls of energy. Dark energy. Demons have seriously badmojo.

Most people get bummed out when faced with the knowledge that demons are eternal. What's the point of battling those evil assholes if they can't be killed?

Immortality doesn't mean they're immune from pain or imprisonment. And that's what I specialize in.

When I take out a demon, it doesn't puff into sulfurous smoke or melt into a puddle of brimstone goo. It goes into a special prison made with material from Hell. Yeah, that's right, HELL.

My dad figured out how to confine demons. He figured out a lot of things. Abraham Mortis taught me every trick in the book and then some.

One day, I'll find the soul-sucking bastard that killed him. Until then... demons beware.

Chapter 1

"C'mon, Mags," said Damian in his silkiest tone. That dark-as-sin voice accented the wicked look in his jade-green eyes. "You know you want it."

"Fuck off, Damian."

"Such language!" Hetsked in mock horror. "And in your own bedroom too." "Bet you've heard worse than that in your bedroom."

"And I bet you want to come over to find out, don't you? You want to hear me say naughty things."

Maggie grinned at him, twirling her moon scythes before sticking 'em in the hip holsters. Damian's eyes -- and his lips, jaw, ears, and Goddess, everything else from his neck up -- were freaking

perfection, but his body, especially showcased in black leather vest, breeches and biker boots, was drool-inducing spectacular. He stood a couple feet away, near her bed, watching her dress.

Her gaze drifted to the object in his left hand. "Stop trying to tempt me, you heartless bastard."

His grin widened and he shook the little rectangular box in her direction. "No." Maggie pushed the jeweled knife into her thigh sheath and smoothed the

sleekline of her form-fitting pants. She was dressed head-to-toe in the cobalt material that her father had conceived and created. Regular clothes never held up under fire balls, sharp talons, and sulfur blasts. Before she'd discovered the experimental clothing in her father's lab, she'd walk away from demon fights practically naked.

"I like the new look, Mags, but I do miss your glorious locks." "Thanks, sweets." Maggie wore her jet-black hair short and spiked. She'd learned

the hard way that her glorious locks were just a weapon for her enemies. She didn't wear jewelry for the same reason. Anything that could be torn off or turned around to be used against her in hand-to-hand didn't belong on her person.

The weapons were another matter. None of them could be used against her. Forged from white-light metal crafted by the Goddess herself, the daggers, swords, throwing knives, and energy shields could only be wielded by Maggie. Any demon or human who tried to hurt her with her own blades got a nasty surprise.

Finally outfitted for another night of demon-hunting, Maggie looked around her sparse bedroom. She liked neutral colors, the soothing tones of beiges and browns and creams. She liked clean lines, not clutter. The only object she allowed on top of her oak dresser was a framed photograph of her father.

"You really should think about adding a little color to your life, Mags. A few red pillows or an orange throw, maybe."

"Says the man who only dresses in black." She rolled her eyes. "D, if you try to redecorate my bedroom, I'll gut you."

"If you do such a terrible thing, darling, I won't give you this." Maggie sashayed to him and didn't stop until they were hip-to-hip. She trailed

her fingers across the bit of his chest that wasn't covered by his vest. His skin felt like warm silk. She

shuddered as desire prickled through her. Lust bombs always exploded anytime Damian was near her. She leaned forward and kissed the base of his throat, felt the steady, unaffected pulse that beat there.

“Oh, Damian,” she breathed, lonely and sad and aching.

“Oh, Mags.” He tugged on her earlobe, the tip of his finger tickling the sensitive spot under her ear.

“I know, I know,” she said. “We are who we are.” Maggie breathed in his scent, the familiar sandalwood cologne, that delicious male essence. Then she backed up and smiled up at him. “Are you sure you’re gay?”

He laughed. “You’re the only female who could make me switch teams.” “I’m willing to give it a try if you are.”

“Shut up and take your present.”

Maggie plucked the box out of his hand and opened it. Four champagne truffles from Godiva. The rich smell of expensive chocolate threaded through Damian’s cologne. She licked her lips as she stared at her one true weakness. Plucking a round treat from the box, she glared at Damian. “You really are a heartless bastard.”

Six miserable hours later, just a few minutes before dawn, Maggie stomped up the huge staircase of Damian’s big-ass mansion. She was in a raw fucking mood. Demon-hunting had been a goddamned bust. Not a single tip had panned out, and none of her psychics had sensed any paranormal disturbances. It was too quiet. And that worried her. Sometimes the dark forces pulled back before unleashing some big, bad ugly into the world.

Shit, shit, shit.

Just as she reached Damian’s bedroom door, Elise, who never seemed to age past a very lovely forty and served as Damian’s assistant, secretary, housekeeper, and Goddess knew what else, glided into the hallway to touch Maggie on the shoulder. “Hello, warrior. How was hunting?”

“Sucked.”

“Ah.” Elise’s gaze went to the door. “Damian is entertaining.” Maggie’s shoulders slumped. “I need to vent and cry and take a nap. And, damn it, I need a hug.”

Elise’s lips twitched, but the smile never quite formed. “Damian said that if you arrived in time I should invite you to watch him play. He likes this one.”

“Second invitation, eh? That’s rare.”

“Yes.” The older woman cupped Maggie’s cheek, her eyes soft with sympathy. “It will never be possible for the two of you. His heart was lost long ago to another.”

“And I’m not the right gender,” said Maggie. “I get it already.”

“Refreshment has been prepared. You know how to get to the room. Good night, dearest.”

“G’night, Elise.”

Maggie slipped down the hall to the room she used when she hung out with Damian. She crossed to the far wall and pushed a camouflaged button; a door slid open and she ducked inside. The short passage led to a secret room. Though small in size, it was luxurious -- from the twin-sized bed dressed in red silk to the table filled with desserts, sandwiches, and bottles of chilled champagne. The bed faced the floor-to-ceiling window, which was a mere two feet from the footboard. The other side, the wall that faced Damian’s bedroom, looked like a mirror. But on her side, it was glass. Unbreakable, even by her weapons. Damian knew a few immortals too.

She and Damian would never be lovers. But he shared with her an intimacy he’d given to no other woman.

He let her watch him make love.

Damian was skillful and oh-so-tender. Watching him bring another man to orgasm again and again... Goddess, it was mesmerizing and beautiful. She would touch herself while she watched him touch his lover. She pretended her hands were his hands because it was as close as she would ever get to having Damian.

And it wasn't fucking enough.

A glance at the two men lounging on the bed told her they'd already been a few rounds. She pressed a red button that made the bedroom lights flicker. It was a signal, letting him know she was watching.

And waiting.

Chapter 2

Maggie undressed, arranging her weapons on the hooks Damian had installed on the back wall. She grabbed a champagne bottle, rolling her eyes at the stack of sissy flutes Damian liked so much, and propped up the pillows. Then she settled onto the bed and slugged champagne, watching the two men.

No. Watching Damian. She didn't give a rat's ass about the fuck-boydu jour. While D echoed her position on the bed, lying back on propped pillows, his

newesttoy crawled between his muscled thighs and sucked his yummy cock. He watched the mirror, his secret smile for her.

"And he's getting a great view of his boyfriend's ass," she muttered, tipping the bottle to her lips. Mmmm. Champagne tasted good. Bubbly and dry and a hint of sweet. She put it between her legs, laughed at the way its chill made her pussy flinch, and kept her gaze on Damian.

The guy working D's cock must've been really good. She'd never seen Damian get aroused so fast. His eyes rolled back and his fingers fisted in his lover's long blond hair.

“Yes,” cried Damian, his hips pistoning. “Yes, baby. Yes!”

No wonder fuck-boy got a second invitation to Damian’s bedroom. If there was one thing Damian liked, one thing any man liked, it was a blow job done right.

Her own body tingled with arousal. She put the champagne bottle on the floor and let her hands wander over her body. Stroking her own flesh while pretending, wishing, Damian caressed her thighs, stomach, breasts.

Damian.

She heard D’s guttural moans. His breathless gasps. And while she pushed fingers into her pussy... while she fondled her own clitoris... she watched Damian’s face tighten, his body still, his cock shove deeply into his lover’s mouth...

“I’m coming,” he cried. “Oh God!”

Her orgasm trembled, and she moaned, “Damian...”

The wave hit her hard. Harder than it should have given how little she’d pleased herself. Yet she lay panting, watching sweat roll down her stomach, felt come stain her thighs, the sheets.

Damian and his boy toy got up. D walked to the two-way and splayed himself against it.

“What the hell?” Maggie stared at the gorgeous chest of her best friend. She scooted off the bed and went to stand in front of Damian. “What are you doing, D? You never get this close to the mirror. You never let anyone take you this way.”

Her gaze dragged down his muscled form. He was gorgeous. Perfect. His cock, though only half-hard, was still a delectable sight, even squished against the glass. She traced the veins, wishing like hell she was doing it on the real thing. Day-um. She bet his lovers enjoyed getting that rod rammed up their ass. The same way she wanted to feel it ram into her pussy. Or hell, even her ass.

Desire rioted through her, clawed at her with urgent fingers. She shuddered and tried to rein it in. Yet the dull throb claimed her pussy, snaked upward to make her breasts ache, her nipples tingle...

made her want, made her need. She felt like a kid with her face pressed against the candy-store window, gazing at the treats she could never have.

Damian looked into the mirror and winked, then turned his face so that his cheek pressed the two-way. He closed his eyes, his lips moving as if in prayer... then his body jerked violently.

Holy crap! The sudden movement startled the hell out of her. Heart pounding, she realized Maggie Mortis, big bad demon hunter, had nearly jumped out of her skin witnessing a guy get a cock plunged into his ass.

You are so pathetic! She sucked in a breath and moved away, but her gaze was irresistibly snared by the action just a few inches from her.

The mystery lover hadn't wasted any time plowing Damian. She watched D's body smack the glass as whoever-it-was went hard and heavy. Damian liked it though. He liked it a lot because his cock went to full hard-on fast.

Foreboding sat low in her belly. Argued with the thick lust slugging through her. Something was off. Wrong. This wasn't the usual wish-it-were-mess she suffered from when she watched Damian play either.

She couldn't see the face of the guy banging him. D was bigger, broader. Other than the bony, pale fingers digging into D's hips, the dude was a ghost. She watched those pallid digits wrap around D's cock and stroke. Damian's palms were flat against the glass -- the most submissive she'd ever seen him.

Foreboding fluttered anew. She heard a deep, growling moan. The lover getting off? She thought about the way it felt to have a cock tremble in her ass canal, the jerking of it as come spurted. Her eyes closed. She hadn't had a lover in a long time. In months. Because of Damian. She couldn't remember the name of the last guy she'd fucked.

All because I want a man who doesn't want me.

Damian was her Guardian. Had been for the last five years, since her previous Otherworld contact had been eaten by a demon. Well, half-devoured. She'd gotten there too late to save the Guardian, but she'd put his killer into a white-light pain prism and never let it out.

She wasn't one to let her guard down. Not since her father died when she was twenty and still learning the tricks and moves of a hunter. When Damian came into her life, she was enthralled. There was something so enigmatic, so magnificent about him. Somehow, she'd come to trust him. Rely on him. He was her best friend. He was damned near her only friend.

D's body smacked the two-way really hard.

Goddamn it! He'd done it again. Made her jump like a scared little girl. Annoyance flickered. She wasgonnawhomp him for making her fritz.

Damian groaned loudly. Her gaze dropped and she watched him come. His seed spurted onto the glass and fell like little white raindrops onto the hand that had pleased him.

Two comes in a half an hour? Not bad. Damian had serious staying power. D's face turned toward hers, his expression one of glazed joy, and he grinned. She grinned back, getting close to the glass again, spreading her fingers across the face she couldn't touch.

This time, when his body crashed against the two-way, she didn't freak. Only after she saw Damian's eyes go wide, his face drain of color, his mouth

opensoundlessly, did she realize something was wrong.

Damian lurched, screamed, tried to throw off whatever held him. Too late. Too goddamned late. He remained against the mirror, his struggles weak and useless.

"Damian!" she yelled, punching the enchanted glass with her fists. "Baby, are you okay?"

The skin split sickeningly inches below his collarbone. Fleshy red chunks pushed out, fell wetly on the glass, on the floor. D's blood spurted everywhere. Fucking everywhere. She'd seen it before. A million times before. But she couldn't move. Couldn't breathe. Couldn't comprehend.

Then slowly, two scaly snow-white hands wormed through D's pectorals. Goddess, no! No!

She stared, horrified, as the yellowed claws sticking out from Damian's mutilated chest tapped the glass. "Maggie Mortis," crowed a melodic voice, "are you in there?"

The cruel laughter was like a slap, forcing her to wake up from her shocked stupor. Damian!

No time to dress. She'd kicked demon ass in the nude before. She scraped her moon scythes off the wall, grabbed her jeweled knife and the bag that held her crystal prisms.

He's not dead. He's not dead. He's not dead.

It took forever to get through the dusty little passage. An eternity to cross the bedroom and run down the hallway. An eon to throw open D's bedroom door.

The demon was gone.

It fucking killed her to do it, but training crowded out her panic. She spent two minutes checking the bedroom, making sure the demon wasn't hiding in a nook or cranny. But she knew by the empty feel of the air and the faint smell of sulfur that it had left.

Maggie dropped her weapons and fell to her knees by Damian's ravished body. His eyes were open, but his gaze was past seeing anything. Those jade-green eyes would never see again. The copper smell of blood overpowered the lingering scents of Egyptian incense and vanilla spice candles. The warm sticky red coated his chest, his face, his hair. It filled her hands and splashed her thighs.

Grief slammed into her like a thousand-pound fist.

She gathered Damian into her arms, crooning and weeping and brushing his hair. She begged him to live. Begged the Goddess for mercy.

But the demon had already accomplished its mission. It killed the only other man she had ever loved.

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

Demons are beautiful liars. Some of them will kill in such a way that the dying don't even know that their lives are at an end.

When they steal human bodies, they keep their powers. They have an unerring ability to find your weakness, to cater to your most fervent desire until the time is right for them to strike.

I don't know what's worse, a demon who tries to rip off your head or one who tries to woo you.

Hard to believe it's been six months since Damian was murdered by Magnus. And Magnus was sent by Drak. Drak who likes to think himself king of the demons. Chickenshit. Sent one of his minions to do away with my D. I will capture them all. Every single one of them.

And make them suffer. Make them scream in agony. Make them wish they had never fucked with me and mine.

D left me all his shit. The mansion, money, his sweet Jaguar XLS, and even Elise. I have everything except him. But what the hell else is new?

I moved my crap into the mansion, and all the rest of Dad's lab equipment and unfinished experiments. There's a lot of room here. Room for all kinds of stuff. Including secrets. Including sorrow.

Goddess, I miss Damian. His wicked grin. The way he teased me until I wanted to smack him. Elise and I talk about him a lot. Neither one of us can get over losing him.

But I don't want to. Not really.

Otherworld keeps trying to send me new Guardians and I keep telling them to fuck off. I don't give a damn about procedure. I don't want another death on my conscience. I don't want another person

to worry about, to protect. It's hard enough keeping my own ass alive.

Chapter 3

Maggie followed the shadow that was following the mother and her toddler. It wasn't late yet, just past dusk, but this part of town was filled with empty buildings and empty people. Not a safe place any time of day for a mom and her kid. But Maggie wasn't worried about human crime.

The toddler was whining, obviously tired from walking and probably hungry too. The mom shushed and made saccharine promises, but it did no good. Calming the little boy was probably the reason she stopped too close to the shadow-filled alley.

The demon manifested in the blink of an eye, reaching thorny red hands toward the thin, doe-eyed woman.

"Down!" yelled Maggie.

Usually such a command didn't get much of a response, forcing Maggie to shove aside gaping idiots, but the woman grabbed her toddler and flattened to the sidewalk. Maggie leapt over them, her moon scythes already unsheathed.

She jabbed the monster in one meaty red shoulder, then the other. Its skin sizzled from the cuts inflicted by the blessed weapons.

"Hungry!" it screamed. "Food!"

"Humans are not on the menu." She sheathed one scythe and took out a plastic container of salt from her weapons belt. The demon lunged and got a chest full of scythe for its effort. It reared back, shrieking in pain. Maggie scattered the salt on the grimy trash-infested ground and shouted, "Steti!"

The demon whined way worse than the toddler.

It was red-skinned, multi-horned, and had four yellowslitted eyes.Lower level demon.Real low. Didn't do the speech thing well and usually just destroyed and killed without much of a goal.

"You are bound, demon, until I release you. Where is Magnus?" "Food. Then tell."

"I don't negotiate, you piece of shit." Maggie withdrew a blue prism from the bag that hung at her waist. "You know what this is?"

The monster hissed and tried to lurch away. Its legs strained against the salt's power; its arms covered the ugly, leathery face.

"Electric shock.Not just any electricity, mind you. The lightning in this prism was created by Wiccans . It will be like acid on your flesh. It will keep you in agony forever." She bared her teeth in a malicious grin. "What do you say? Want to be tortured by light and love for all eternity?"

"Magnus gone.Drakangry."

"Like I care that asshole is upset. Where did Magnus go?" "Another king.Big king.Drakangry."

Well, shit. That was probably as much as she'd get out of this one. Maggie switched out the blue prism for a white one. The demon's four yellow eyes stared at the crystal, its snarling mouth opened to reveal several rows of jagged, black teeth. "No!Told you.Told you! Food! Hungry!"

"This prism holds no pain," said Maggie as she set the object at its feet. "You'll just hang out in a great big white space. Um... do you happen to have a book?Because you might get a tad bored. Liberatio!"

The demon sprang free and being stupid as well as inarticulate, stepped on the crystal. Maggie shouted, "Carcer!" The demon turned into red smoke and was sucked into the pyramid.

“You have a visitor,” said Elise.

Maggie let Elise help her off with the leather jacket, but doing so chafed at her. Not that she didn't like Elise. She did. And she knew the woman needed something today, someone to care for, so Maggie sucked it up and let Elise be, well, Elise. She handed

her three prisms. “Slim pickings tonight,” she said, “and none of them knew Magnus's whereabouts. Or where I could find Abatu. Or what happened to my father.”

“You'll find what you seek, Maggie. I'll put these in storage,” said Elise. The prisms went into a containment unit that had been designed by her father.

He hadn't lived long enough to see it built, but she and Damian had taken the blueprints and created it in the basement. They'd already been in the process of transferring her dad's lab equipment and notes to the secure location. There would never be enough prisms to capture all Hell's creatures. But she'd get all the ones moronic enough to venture into her territory.

“So where is today's Otherworld messenger?” asked Maggie, one booted foot on the staircase. “I guess I got enough left in me to kick one more ass.”

Elise's almost smile curved her lips. “He is not the usual Otherworld messenger. I put him in the main living room, but he's not there anymore.”

“What?”

“I suspect he's been wandering the house for some time.” Her gray eyes took in Maggie's pissed-off expression. “I'm afraid I lack the talent for kicking ass and taking names.”

Maggie heaved out a tortured sigh. “So you didn't get his name?” “He wasn't the talkative sort.” Elise turned and floated away, toward the

kitchen. There, behind the titanium, triple-coded door, was the staircase to the basement, which held the containment unit and her father's experiments and notes.

“Great,” she muttered as she stomped up the stairs. “I gotta chase some asshole in my own house. Just let uninvited guests wander around at whim. That's dandy. Real fucking dandy.”

As she hurried down the hall, she passed Damian's bedroom door. The day after he died, she and Elise had cleaned the room themselves, using old-fashioned soap-and-water for the blood and a few

purchased spells for the lingering negative energy. She'd also had a local priestess come in and charm the door. The secret room had been emptied and sealed.

No one had been in D's bedroom for six months. Until now.

The door was opened wide, the lights on. Sonofafuckingbitch! Maggie rushed inside, her fury at full boil, and almost pitched forward when she skidded to a sudden stop.

A man with long, raven-black hair kneeled on the very spot where Damian had breathed his last. He was dressed in a white T-shirt, faded jeans, and black Converse high tops. He wore his hair loose, flowing. She'd only seen that kind of black, silky hair once before, worn that way by one man. He looked like... it couldn't be... her heart soared. He'd come back. Somehow, some way... Damian had returned! "Damian!" she cried and hurried across the few feet that separated them. The man stood, whipped around, and glared at her with glacier-blue eyes. He's not D. Her soul howled in despair, but instinct kicked in and she grabbed her jeweled knife, pounced on him. In an instant, she'd brought him to the floor. She lay on top of him, her knee lodged on his family jewels and the knife at his neck. Goddess Almighty. He looked like Damian. The same slope of the eyes, the same

strong jaw, the same nose with a tiny crook in the middle. His eyes were an intense

blue, the color of the summer sky, and they swirled with amused resentment. The knife hovered against his throat, not quite touching.

"Who the fuck are you?"

"I'm not my brother, so you can stop wishing that I am."

His words stung. Then what he'd said filtered through. "D didn't have a brother. He didn't have anyone."

"That's not what I heard. Damian had more than his share of men." She hissed and pressed the blade against his throat. Rage throbbed through her,

clouding her mind until she couldn't think straight.

“What’s the matter? Still pining for a man who didn’t want you?” One quick slice across the carotid artery and he’d bleed out. She’d watch him die.

Laugh. Weep. Goddamn it. “Tell me who you are or I’ll kill you.”

“I’m Damian’s younger brother. My name is Raphael.”

“Yeah, right. My Guardian has been dead for six months. Why are you just now showing up?”

His gaze flickered with what she thought was grief, but the emotion disappeared too quickly for her to be sure. “I was... on an assignment. I didn’t know what happened until yesterday.”

“Bullshit.” The blade dug in and a thin red line creased his skin. Satisfaction was thick in her belly as she watched the blood well. Then she noticed the cut blackened, as if invisible flames licked the flesh.

Holy fucking shit.

“You can’t be Damian’s brother,” she said, triumphant. “Because you’re a demon.”

Chapter 4

The demon’s human face looked carved from stone. He didn’t flinch, didn’t show an ounce of pain as Maggie pressed the blade deeper into his neck. “Do you mind? That hurts.”

“Good.”

“All right, sweetheart. I’ve had enough.” Raphael wrapped his arms around Maggie and jumped to his feet. She was startled at the strength and power it took to execute such a move, but she wasn’t rattled enough to drop the dagger.

He reared back his head and smacked it into her skull. Pain ricocheted in her head like a crazed

metal sphere in a pinball machine. Then the unmerciful motherfucker dropped her on her ass. The knife sailed through the air, spinning out of reach. Dazed, she glared up at him. "As soon as I stop seeing three of you, I'm going to fucking kill you."

"I look forward to it." He crossed his arms and stared at her with those cold blue eyes. "My name is Raphael. I am Damian's younger brother. The Otherworld sent me because you're such a stubborn bitch."

He withdrew a gold stone from his jeans pocket and dropped it into her lap. It bore the mark of Meelena, the High Council Priestess in the Otherworld. No way in hell he'd gotten that token from anyone other than the Priestess. It melted in the grip of any evil creature. That it hadn't reacted to Raphael's touch meant, demon or not, he was one of the good guys. Sure. If he's so damned good, why did my dagger burn him?

"Meelena called me a stubborn bitch? That's a new one." She rubbed her temples. "She wouldn't send a demon."

"I'm only half-demon. And Meelena didn't use that particular description." He grinned. "It's my interpretation of what she said. Bad shit is going down, Maggie. And you're gonna need help. You're gonna need me."

She rolled to her feet, retrieved her dagger, and sheathed it. "I don't want another Guardian. So good-bye and fuck you."

"Sorry. You're stuck with me, Mags," said Raphael. "Don't call me Mags, you son-of-a-bitch."

"Why? Does it remind you of Damian? He was such a tease, wasn't he? How many times did you masturbate while you fantasized about him screwing you?"

Maggie slapped him. The blow snapped his head back. Before he controlled his expression, she saw the shock, the anger. Well, fuck him. How dare he talk about Damian, about her, with that ugliness in his voice?

Silence stretched between them. She realized that waiting for an apology was like waiting for it to snow in Tahiti. Raphael didn't seem to be the kind who was sorry for anything he did. Goddamn him. He looked so much like Damian. Same broad shoulders, same loose-hipped walk, same muscled form. But

there were differences. He wasn't quite as tall. He was leaner too, and the hair she'd thought raven-black was really dark brown.

He crossed the room, looked into the two-way, and tapped it. The mirror pinged. "I know what it's like to want something you can't have."

"What was between me and Damian is none of your business. Not ever. And if you say anything that shitty to me again, I'll stick you in a prism and pitch you out into the Atlantic Ocean."

He turned and leaned against the mirror. "Fair enough." His gaze flicked down and though the blood was gone, it was as if he saw it anyway. "Damian and I didn't see eye-to-eye on a lot of things, but I loved him."

Uncertainty shimmied through her. She and Damian had been close. Best friends. He'd been everything to her. But had she been everything to him? "Damian would've mentioned a brother. Especially a half-demon brother."

"There were a lot of things he didn't tell you, Maggie." He sighed, pushed away from the mirror, and returned to stand in front of her. "He loved you... as much as it was possible for him to love anyone."

What the hell did that mean? "Of course he loved me," she snapped, resentful that Raphael tried to comfort her with those petty words. "Quit talking in circles, for Goddess' sake! Give me the lowdown, then scamper off to Meelena and tell her that I refused you."

Some dark emotion flashed in his eyes. "I offer a bargain. I will stay for a month. What do you want in exchange?"

"Bartering? You really are a demon." She pursed her lips. "Tell me why you're half-demon and how you're related to Damian."

"Are my answers what you wish to trade for my thirty days?" "Hell no."

“Fine. I will give you the information you want and grant another request, but I get to stay three months.”

“Two months. That’s probably all I can tolerate you,” said Maggie. If she let him hang around a while, it would satisfy Meelena and stop her from sending other Guardians. And it would mean finding out more about Damian. Whether or not it galled her, and it sure-as-shit did, if Raphael was D’s brother, it was a way to be close to him again.

“Agreed,” said Raphael. He looked at the bed, nodded toward it. “Let’s sit down and I’ll give you the short version.”

Maggie hesitated. It was difficult enough being in D’s room, knowing that he’d never step foot in it again. But sitting on the bed, soaking in his essence, remembering the last time she’d seen him on it... no.

“It’s just a piece of furniture,” the demon offered in a tone that must’ve been his version of soothing. Hah. Sounded like he was chewing rocks. He took her hand and led her to the four-poster monstrosity. He sat down and patted the place next to him.

She sat, but damned if her heart didn’t try to climb up her throat. “All right. Give.” And hurry. I can’t fucking stand this.

“Damian’s father died when he was two years old. Brain embolism. When he was four, our mother was seduced by a demon. From that union, I was born. She raised the two of us the best she could, but I was... different. Mom never realized that her one-night lover had been from Hell. And if she didn’t know, how could she tell me? Or help me? Didn’t matter though. She died when I was ten and Damian was fifteen.”

“How?”

“Car accident.” A muscle in his jaw twitched. It took him a second to gather his composure.

Watching him, Maggie felt the first crack in her anger. Painful memories. Everyone had them. Even demons. “I’m sorry,” she said. “Damian never talked about his family.” Not once. It hurt to know that he

hadn't confided in her. Why? She'd shared her burdens. She'd bitched until her voice went hoarse. She'd cried on his shoulder so many times he'd gotten stain-resistant shirts.

"After Mom died, a man came to us. He was a Guardian assigned to watch our family. They'd traced the demon energy to our house. Figured out what had happened. Knew what I was. So they took us to the Otherworld. Trained Damian to be a Guardian."

"And you?"

He looked at her, his icy gaze fathomless. "They trained me to be something else." He released her hand and until he did, she'd forgotten that he still held it. "Satisfied?"

"For now."

"What is your second request?"

"Bring Damian back." She said it plaintively, knowing full well that interrupting a soul's death cycle was beyond the skill of any creature, demon or Goddess. It had been tried many times, but the results were unsatisfactory -- in the worst way imaginable.

"You know what happens when such a thing is attempted. But that's not what you really want, is it?" His voice changed. It no longer sounded like smoke and whiskey; it was smoother, darker, like Godiva chocolate.

"Don't," she said, but the denial trembled on her lips.

"Don't what, Mags?" He tipped her chin with one finger and she watched, spellbound, as his eyes shifted color. His face realigned. His body filled out, stretched up.

And when he was done, she was looking at Damian.

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

You know that weird-assed movie... what was it called? Adaptation. Yeah. With Nicolas Cage. There's a line in it that Damian liked to go around quoting.

"You are what you love, not what loves you."

I never got it. I never understood that he said it to me all the time because that's what he could give me.

All he could give me.

Chapter 5

"It's the only way I can bring him back," said Raphael. "It's the only way I can give him to you."

"If you think I'm above fucking you so I can pretend you're Damian," said Maggie, "then you're wrong. I'll come on your cock and scream his name. I have no pride, demon. I have no honor."

"I've always wanted you, Mags," lied the creature with Damian's face. "I will take you any way you'll have me. I don't have any pride or honor either."

"Well, damn. Aren't we a pair?" Maggie stood and stripped off her clothes and weapons. Damian watched her, his jade-green eyes filled with desire. For years she'd yearned for him to look at her that way, and now that he was, lust burbled through her. He wants me. I don't care if it isn't true. "Let me undress you," she murmured.

He lay down while she tugged off his shoes and socks. Her fingers wandered around his toes, up his feet, tickling the ankles. She heard the snick of the buttons being released on his jeans. Smiling, she rose and helped him pull off the denims.

"I never figured you for boxers," she said, "much less the kind with tiny hearts on 'em."

“They glow in the dark,” he said, and made her laugh.

After the underwear and T-shirt came off, Maggie took her time looking at him. Goddess, he was gorgeous. She trailed her fingers over the muscles on his stomach, over the toned ridges, up, up, up to his pectorals. His flat brown nipples were hard and she flicked each one with a fingernail.

She touched him everywhere, memorizing the contours, the shape, the lines. Then she slid between his legs and cupped his balls. He tensed. Moaned. And grinning, she leaned down to kiss his cock.

His penis was warm, silky, and hard. Hard for her. Because of her. As the length of it slid between her lips, pleasure warbled in her belly. She closed her eyes and groaned. The sound vibrated on his cock, made him gasp. She wanted to tease him, bring him to peak without letting him go over. But she was too ravenous. This was a feast too long denied to a starving woman.

She sucked his big cock eagerly, quickly... took him all the way down her throat and back again, over and over, until his hands fisted into her hair and he begged her for more. So yeah, oh yeah, she fucked him like crazy with her mouth, laved him with her tongue, squeezed his balls, and the whole time, she got hotter, wetter, hungrier.

“Maggie,” he said, his voice quivering. “I’m going to come in your mouth, baby.” His hips thrust and she took the rough shove, swallowed that luscious cock as

his seed spurted, hot and sticky, into her mouth. She drank from him, a cat licking cream, until his body went limp and his hands fell away from her tingling scalp.

“How long do you need to recover?” she asked, knowing she sounded desperate. “I’m half-demon,” he reminded her. “I don’t need recovery time. Especially

when I’m as horny for a woman as I am for you.”

“That’s damned fine news,” she said. “Wait here.” She rolled over and opened the nightstand’s top drawer. She withdrew a tube of lubricant and a sparkly purple six-inch dildo with a wide base.

“What’s that for?”

“I want it all,” she said. “I want you in my pussy and in my ass. Since we don’t have a third party and you don’t have two cocks, this will have to do.”

“Who says I don’t have two cocks?”

He reached between his legs, grabbing his manhood. As she watched, his penis split in two, the new one the exact size and shape as the original one behind it. Both were deliciously hard. Goddess Almighty! She tossed away the dildo and crawled toward him. “There sure are some perks to fucking you.”

“Anything to please.”

That was so demon of him to say. He was kinda ruining the fantasy of her doing Damian. But just a little.

She handed him the tube, turning her buttocks to him. He didn’t need a map. He pushed the tip into her anus and squeezed until the gel filled her ass. Then she turned, slid onto his stomach, and wiggled backwards. “I need your help,” she said.

“In a minute.” His hands filled with her breasts. His thumbs flicked the peaks. They hardened, aching. He rose up and suckled the sensitive nubs until she moaned, sensual delight cascading from breasts to pussy.

“I’m good to go,” she muttered. “You don’t have to do that.”

His teeth scraped her nipple, licked it, sucked it; he tortured the other one the same way.

“Goddess!” She reared up, panting. “I want you inside me. I want you to fuck me.”

Her whole body quivered. Heat and light and need so intense it burned her from inside out. Damian sat up and cradled her on his lap. “You turn me on, Mags,” said Damian’s lips. “Nothing has ever turned me on like you.”

What a horrible, wonderful lie. “Just fuck me. Please!”

As she guided the top penis into her wet cunt, he pushed the back one into her anus. Gasping, she clutched at Damian’s shoulders, and nearly came just from the sensations of two cocks penetrating her.

It had been a long time since she’d had a man in her arms. She nearly wept at the joy of it. “I don’t think I can move.” She knew he heard the tears in her voice.

“Kiss me.” Without waiting for a response, he took her lips, plunged his tongue inside, and made the tears fall. She wept and kissed him back, attacking his mouth, sucking his tongue, biting his lips.

As their mouths mated, Damian slowly pumped his hips, pushing his cocks into her cunt, into her ass. Oh Goddess. She felt completely infiltrated; the sensations of hard flesh piercing soft flesh felt bawdy, strange, amazing.

He found a rhythm that both tormented and thrilled. The sound of their sweaty skin slapping, the ripe smell of sex, and yes, oh yes, those plunging cocks drove her wild.

“It’s damned near unbearable getting fucked this way,” she managed to say. “But you love it, don’t you?” he asked wickedly.

“Damned right I do. Ooooooh!”

“That’s right, baby. Let go.”

His soft plea thrummed like the beat of an ancient drum. Hot pleasure welled in her core; the warning before the quake. “Damian,” she moaned. “Oh, Damian.”

She looked at him, at the jade-green eyes, at the desire that filled them, and felt the orgasm rise like an ocean wave.

“Come for me, Mags,” said the chocolate-smooth voice. “Because I’m going to come for you. You make me so hot, so hard.”

He growled, the echoing black of a beast's roar, and slammed into her, filling her so well and so deep she screamed at the delight of it. Then she felt the duel shudder of his cocks and the blast of come in her cunt and in her ass.

It was too much.

It wasn't enough.

"Damian!" she shouted as bliss exploded, swept her away on an erotic tide, and she floated... floated in water and sun and bittersweet joy. "I love you," she whispered as she returned to the arms of her fake Damian. "I'll always love you."

Chapter 6

Maggie yelped when Raphael pushed her off. She bounced onto the bed, looking up at him with shocked eyes. "Hey! What the fuck!"

"Our bargain is complete," he said.

"I'm not done with you."

"With me? Or with Damian?"

"Why the hell do you care? You're getting off. What more do you want?" "You."

The possession he infused into that single word made her heart turn over. Why would someone she didn't know say something like that? It didn't make sense. One fuck and the guy already felt jealous of his brother? Sheesh.

In the blink of an eye, he morphed into himself. Into the lean, blue-eyed, and pissed-off Raphael. He reached for the jeans and she leaned over, grabbed his wrist. "I said I'm not done with you."

"Listen to me, Maggie. I will not ever touch you again pretending to be my brother. You will never again call me Damian. And you will never, ever say you love me unless you Goddamn mean it."

His words left her wide-eyed and breathless. No one had ever spoken to her like that. She tried to find purchase, but there was nothing to hold on to, so she fell, scared witless, into emotions she dared not name. "You want me to love you?" Damn it! He'd sucker-punched her and she couldn't get air into her lungs. "I don't even know you." "But I know you." His jaw clenched. "And I know what it's like to want someone

sobadly you can almost taste them, almost touch them. You know how that feels, don't you, Maggie?"

"Yes," she admitted softly. The look in his eyes right now, she'd seen that desperate craving in her own gaze when she stared into the mirror for too long. "So who do you want, Rafe? Who do you want me to pretend to be?"

"That's just it. I want you. Margaret Eleanor Mortis."

She rolled her eyes, blew off his desperation-tinged words because she couldn't deal with the drama, and swung her legs off the bed. "I can't believe D told you my full name. He knows I hate it."

"I thought you weren't done with me." His tone was stiff and his body seemed braced for rejection. The jeans he'd retrieved from the floor dangled from two fingers.

She stared at him. He wasn't the slick kind of handsome that had defined Damian. Raphael was raw, sharp-edged, real. He didn't hide in sardonic wit or wry smiles. His body wasn't the glossy good looks orchestrated by gyms and surgeons. He was muscled from action, not just movement, and he trembled under her fingers because he wanted her touch. Not just some willing female. She didn't know why or how, but she knew it was the truth.

Shame burned across her face and she turned away from his accusing gaze. I turned his gift into a joke because I wanted to believe that Damian had returned and given up his lust for other men. I thought I was only pathetic. But I'm worse than that. I'm heartless.

“Can’t do it, huh?” His voice held bitterness. “I’ll never be Damian. And I won’t fucking settle for second place in your heart.”

He shook out the jeans and stuck a foot inside.

“Wait. Just wait.” She reached for the pants and pried them out of his grasp. “I don’t know what’s going on. I don’t know how I feel. You can’t come in here, pretend to be Damian so I’ll fuck you, then get all pissy because I took you up on the offer.”

“You have a point.”

“Gee, thanks.”

His gaze pinned hers. “I didn’t realize how much I needed you to need me. I wanted you, Maggie. Didn’t care what it took.” He blew out a breath, relaxed. “Only I guess I did care.”

“At some point, you’re going to have to tell me why you know so much about me.” She grabbed his arm and hoisted herself off the bed. “And you’re going to have to give me the details about what’s going on with the High Council and why I’m going to need your help.”

“I will tell you everything when the time is right.”

“How vague and mysterious of you.” She led him across the room and into the master bathroom. She flipped on the lights and heard Raphael’s low whistle.

“Yeah, it’s huge and filled with every indulgence. Oversized tub with jets. Separate stand-up shower. Two private toilets.” Maggie walked to the three-sided glass stall and opened the door. She turned on the water. “C’mon, Raphael.”

He joined her under the hot spray and she washed him slowly, thoroughly from head to toe. With every stroke of the soapy loofa, she offered silent apologies, even though she wasn’t quite sorry that he’d given her Damian.

“I think it’s gonna be difficult sticking both of those into your pants,” she said as she washed the two penises.

He looked down and smiled. He pushed them together and they morphed into one cock.

“Goddess, that’s sexy,” said Maggie. She soaped it again, rubbing vigorously until it hardened. Raphael watched her, his gaze both wary and lustful, and Maggie dropped the loofa. “Let’s try this again,” she said. “Just you and me.”

Raphael backed her against the wall and pushed his cock into the wet crease of her thighs. “Do you want me, Maggie? Because I don’t need a pityfuck. I made the bargain with you. I shouldn’t have reprimanded you for asking for what you really wanted.”

“That was so five minutes ago.” She cupped his face in her palms. “I’m not easy to like, much less love. I’m mean and selfish, and I whine when things don’t go my way. But I’ll never break a promise and I’ll never lie. It’s all I’ve got, Rafe. It’s all I am.”

“You are so much more than what you believe.” His hands slid under her buttocks and he lifted her. Then he impaled her pussy with one swift stroke of his cock.

Maggie wrapped her legs around his waist and clutched his shoulders, her gaze held hostage by his. He thrust inside her pussy, grunting and groaning, his teeth clenched as he took his pleasure, as he gave her pleasure.

He made her shiver... moan... beg.

He took her all the way to the brink and, goddamn it, he wouldn’t let her look away. His eyes glittered like sapphires -- sharp and blue and unrelenting in their beauty. They cut at her, those eyes, like broken glass, like rusty blades.

And she trembled like a virgin in his arms, afraid of what he wanted and what he offered. Afraid she wasn’t worthy of love. Of him.

You are what you love, not what loves you.

The meaning of Damian’s oft-quoted line crystallized in the tender moment before the orgasm ripped through her.

He didn't want me. I wanted him. He didn't need me. I needed him. He didn't love me. I loved him.

She shattered... her body and her soul. Even as the bliss undulated from her core, sorrow carved through it. Oh, Damian. Goddamn you. Sobbing, nails digging into Raphael's shoulders, she held on tight as he fucked her.

"Maggie!" He plunged deeply, his fingers jabbing into her thighs, his eyes on hers as he pumped hot seed into her cunt.

They held each other, breathing hard, shuddering under the hot water. She'd been splintered. Destroyed. Crushed by the truth. By her own desperate lie. And Raphael, that beautiful demon, tucked her into his arms and held her close as she wept one last time for Damian.

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

My mother used to say that when life handed you lemons, you should make lemonade. But what do you do when life hands you demons? Makedemonade?

She died when I was eight. Dad never told me what happened, even when I was old enough to understand. I had to read about it in his journals.

A demon killed her... killed her in the worst way. It possessed her. Used her like a puppet, made her flay her own skin until she bled to death. Mom was smart and tough though, and she wrote the demon's name in blood as she lay dying on the bathroom floor. Abatu.

That's how Dad got into demon-hunting. He was the only one who followed his wife's lead. The only one who loved her enough to know she'd never commit suicide. The Otherworld found him, helped him, and when the time was right, trained me.

I wonder what my father would think about me sleeping with Raphael, the man with one foot in Hell. I don't think Dad would like it at all.

But I do. I like Raphael a lot, even if he is half-demon. Guess I'll just make demonade.

Chapter 7

Maggie entered her bedroom feeling tired and cranky. She'd bagged five demons tonight, but her usual queries got her nothing fresh. Magnus worked for some new demon king, Drak was pissed off, and no one knew the whereabouts of Abatu or what had happened to her dad five years ago.

She plopped onto the bed and pulled off her boots.

"Bad day?" Raphael sauntered through the balcony doors, dressed in a pair of unbuttoned Levi's. His long brown hair was loose, brushing the tops of his bare shoulders. Lust stirred in Maggie, batting away the exhaustion.

"It's always a bad day. But as we speak Elise is taking more occupied prisms to the containment unit. Woo-hoo for the good guys." She stood and took off her weapons, aligning them on the wall hooks above her bed. Then she turned and found Rafe behind

her, grinning.

"What were you doing outside?" she asked. "Howling at the moonlight?" "I'm not a werewolf. And it's a new moon, not a full one." He smiled. "It's the

demon in me that likes the black sky. The demon that gets frisky during this kind of lunar phase."

"Lucky me." She let him take off her clothes. Let him stroke the fatigue from her body. Let him bring her desire to a slow boil. "Did you talk to Meelena?"

"Still no word," he said as he leaned down to nibble her neck. "She'll be in touch soon. Don't worry."

"It's been a week since you got here. Do you think I'm ready to hear about the impending doom yet?"

“Yes.”

He cupped her breasts and licked the nipples. She arched like a purring kitten and threaded her fingers into his hair. He encircled the taut buds, suckling lightly, before setting her away.

“Hey!” she protested. “You aresoooo not finished!”

He pushed her onto the bed and she laughed, delightfully stunned by the suddenness of it. Raphael bent down and opened the nightstand drawer. He drew out a pair of black leather panties that had a six-inch dildo thrusting out of the middle. “Youwanna tell me whatthisis?” he asked.

“You sneaky bastard! Just because you’re fucking me doesn’t mean you get to snoop through my stuff.”

“Sureit does .” He reached into the open drawer and pulled out a small rectangular silver box. “The funny thing is,” he said, “when you push this button, the panties vibrate right about where your clitoris would be... if you were wearing them.”

“I’ve never used ’em,” she said. “It was just a desperate attempt to...” She mashed her lips together. Why admit she had bought the damned panties hoping to one day fuck Damian in the only way hemightallow her?

It had been good between her and Raphael. The sex was beyond fantastic. And as the days passed, she felt her heart opening up to him, accepting him. He hadn’t told her how he knew her. Why he thought he loved her. She wasn’t all that sure it wasn’t just a stupid demon trick.

“I think Damian might always be a ghost between us,” said Raphael. “He’s hovering just out of reach. We might not ever banish him. We can’t pretend that you don’t love him. That he wasn’t here.”

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

“That can’t be helped,” said Rafe . He tossed the panties and the remote onto the bed then

shucked off his jeans and smiley face boxers. For such a bad-ass, his choice of underwear never failed to crack her up.

Raphael reached into the drawer one more time before closing it. "We're going to hurt each other. We're human. Well, mostly human. We'll just make sure that love heals the wounds inflicted. As long as love is stronger, we'll be okay."

"You're so romantic," she teased, "that my heart is going pitty-pat just listening to you."

"Shut up."

He threw the object at her and she caught it. "Lubricant? Why should we use the dildo when you can just morph another cock? I like the real thing a lot better."

"Because you're going to use it on me."

"What?"

"That's what you bought it for, right? Somebody's getting fucked with it. I'd like it to be me."

"Rafe, I never got the impression that you... uh, liked it that way." "I'm not turned on by men," said Rafe. "It doesn't mean I haven't been with them."

Her jaw went slack. "Why would you sleep with men if you don't like it?" "I'll tell you sometime."

Maggie rolled her eyes. "Yeah, I know. When the time is right. Whatever." She tossed the lube onto the covers. "I'm not fucking you in the ass. You're not going to enjoy it."

"You turn me on," he said. "The way you look. The way you smell. The way you move. I may not

like the idea of another guy's dick plowing me, Maggie, but you... Goddess, yes. I'll happily let you do it. And I have prepped accordingly," he added with a smug grin.

"There you go with the nice words again," she murmured. "Kiss me, Rafe. Then we'll see."

He crawled onto the bed and gathered her into his arms. His lips brushed hers, seducing her mouth until she conceded to his tongue. He dipped inside, tasting her, and she sighed as need clawed through her, tightening her nipples, slicking her pussy.

He kissed her into compliance, damn it. Helped her slip on the odd underwear. Gave her the lube. Then pointed the remote and clicked it.

The vibrator sewn into the undies whirred on, stimulating her clitoris immediately. Orgasmic spikes pierced her. "Wow. Whoa. Hey, medium setting or I'll come too soon."

"Really? What a shame." He leaned forward and sucked on her nipples. The pleasure spikes turned into quivering arrows of heat. And the arrows into bliss-driven spears... and... "Raphael!" She came, unable to stop her hips from bucking as her juice spurted, soaking the leather. Hercunt pulsed for endless seconds as she tried to regain lung capacity.

Rafe grinned. "Medium setting, you said?"

"Yeah. Thanks for listening." But she grinned back. Then she tugged the remote out of his grip and put it on the right setting. The vibrations slowed, but already she felt renewed sensations tingling in her clit.

"Stand up," she said. "I want to take you against the wall."

Silently, he did as she asked. He scooted off the bed, walked to the nearest wall, and spread himself against it. She walked to him, looking at him from head to toe. He was so handsome. Muscled and sinewy and drool-inducing.

Maggie's heart pounded erratically. She hadn't used this kind of toy before. Hadn't really done much but buy it and fantasize about using it on Damian. Tucking the lube into the top of the undies, she dragged her nails down both of Raphael's buttocks.

"I want you to play with your cock," she said. "And if you don't like what I'm doing then tell me to stop."

"It isn't my first time." He chuckled. "I'm a big boy. I can handle it." "Why don't you get a handle on your penis?"

Maggie watched as Raphael braced one arm against the wall and put the other between his legs. As soon as he got a good rhythm, she kneeled and peppered kisses on his ass. She parted that gorgeous butt and dragged her tongue along the revealed flesh.

When she got to his anus, she circled it, darting her tongue against it. Then she plunged inside the tightness.

"Maggie!" he cried. "Damn. Oh, damn!" He was sucking in breaths like a man about to run out of air.

She licked the wrinkled slit one last time, then lightly bit his left cheek. His ass twitched but he said nothing.

"Keep stroking that big, beautiful cock," she said as she stood up. She took the lube and squirted it onto one finger. Slowly, she inserted the gelled digit into his ass. His anus clenched so she waited until it relaxed. Then she pushed further and further -sheathing the entire forefinger. She drew it out. And in again... in and out... in and out...

Goddess Almighty! It made her hot to penetrate him this way. The vibrations on her clit were working some good mojo. Heat spread from her core, anticipation tickling her. She increased the rhythm of her finger and heard him groan in raw pleasure.

“How’re you doing, Rafe?”

“Give me more,” he demanded.

She switched out her finger for the lubricant, squeezing in more than half the tube. Then she parted his buttocks and pressed the plastic cock against the puckered star. Gradually, she inserted the dildo.

As soon as he adjusted around the first half, she pushed deeper and deeper, until it was all the way inside. Pressing against his ass flattened the vibrator to her clit. Pleasure sparked -- the lighting of fireworks she didn’t want to detonate just yet. Damn. She panted, tightened, tried to stall the orgasmic quivers. “I’m going to come,” she confessed. “Fucking you this way makes me really horny.”

“Take my ass,” he commanded harshly. “Because I’m getting ready to explode.” Maggie spread his cheeks and partially withdrew the dildo. After a few seconds, she got a rhythm going. Watching the cock penetrate Raphael’s ass was too fucking beautiful. Every time she slid inside, the vibrator banged her clit. She gritted her teeth. No! Not yet!

Her body had other ideas. “Raphael... oh, baby. I’m coming!” She didn’t stop moving as the orgasm shook her. She was breathless and blind and quaking, but she plowed his ass until he screamed with stunned joy.

Maggie lodged the dildo fully into him then reached around and grabbed his cock with both hands. She wanted to feel those last thrusts, wanted to know that he was coming because of her. Because of what she did to him.

Her hands wrapped around his, stroking as one. Seconds later, he tensed, his penis jerking violently. Come erupted, a white geyser spurting onto the wall like an artist’s effort at abstract painting.

“Maggie,” he groaned. “Sweet Maggie.”

Later, after they recovered sufficiently to clean the wall and the toy, they took a hot shower. It wasn’t long before they had washed themselves into another sexual frenzy. Rafe took her against the shower wall, something he seemed to like to do, and with thrusting cock and whispered words, made her

come again.

“I’m gonna sleep until next Tuesday,” Maggie said drowsily as she stumbled from the bathroom toward her bed. She dropped the towel and crawled under the covers. “Rafe?”

He stood in the middle of the room, naked, his wet hair slicked down his back. He was so quiet and still, he might’ve been carved from stone. And what a statue he would make. Women would worship him. Call him God or Master or anything he wanted just for a touch, a look, a smile.

And he’s mine. Maggie smiled dreamily. “Come to bed, baby. I need a hug.” “Stay here,” he said.

The warning in his voice made her bolt upright. “What is it? Those demon senses tingling?”

“Promise me, Maggie, that you will stay here.” He ran to the door, flung it open. “I’m not promising you shit.” She jumped to her feet, grabbed the moon scythes, and followed Raphael.

Chapter 8

Maggie couldn’t catch up. No doubt Raphael’s demon powers gave him speed as well as strength and morphing capabilities. She heard muffled crashes and screeching as soon as her feet hit the foyer.

She ran across the marble floor, through the double doors that led to the large formal dining room. At the back, where the huge cherry wood buffet took up most of paneled wall, she entered a hallway. It seemed to take forever to clear the passage and push through the swinging doors into the chrome-and-white kitchen.

Her gaze panned the area. Raphael wasn’t in here. The titanium steel gate that protected the lab and the containment unit was wide open. Shit. Elise had gone down there to deposit the prisms. Had she come back out?

Growls emitted from the basement. She heard glass breaking, metal scraping across floor, and more crashes. Maggie felt her heart dive to her toes. What the hell had gotten loose down there?

Taking the stairs two at a time, she entered what looked like a family hang-out. Pool table, dart boards, bean bags, shelves with board games and books along with a big-screen TV, a DVD player and a Gamecube made it look like the ultimate play place.

But it was really just a false room she and Damian had created. If someone accidentally wandered downstairs, they wouldn't find anything out of the ordinary.

Unless they knew where to look.

Maggie crossed the room until she reached the far wall then she ducked through the already open entrance. Usually lights went on when the door was engaged, but it was as black as a cave's interior. And just as creepy.

Ten steps got her to the lab; its door was made of titanium too. It was not only triple-coded, but it was also spelled by Meelena herself. The only people who knew how to get in were Maggie and Elise.

The quiet that had reigned for the last few minutes was destroyed by a wild scream and another crash. Heart pounding, moon scythes at the ready, Maggie entered the laboratory.

And stopped cold.

Most of the fluorescent lights were out, though several still flickered, giving a ghostly glow to an otherwise dark room. The concrete floor sparkled and Maggie realized she was looking at glass. Someone had purposely broken the bulbs. Demons

hate light.

No way. How had a demon gotten free in the lab?

She hurried through, heedless of the jagged glass that painfully stabbed her feet. Tables had been overturned. File cabinets had been ravaged. Objects, mundane and paranormal, littered the floor. Paperclips and staplers. Charms and prisms. Shredded paper from research tomes and torn pages from spell books.

The containment unit was in the back. It was so large, two Cadillacs could park inside it, side-by-side. The door was open and, with fear a weight on her chest, Maggie crept inside.

The ceiling lights were out; glass poked at her feet. Damn it. More broken bulbs. "Rafe?" she called out softly. "You in here?"

A triumphant growl warned her. She dropped to the floor and rolled out of the unit. She was in a crouch, moon scythes at the ready, when Elise bolted through the door. Her skin was the color of stone, her eyes gleaming solid black in the glow of the single light. Possessed. Fuck, fuck, fuck. Elise grinned, her mouth bloody, her nails elongated and yellow.

Maggie straightened. What do I do? That's Elise. "Get the fuck out of my friend." "Make me," it said, stretching Elise's mouth into a terrible smile. Her lips split, and blood leaked down her chin.

"Stop messing with her!"

Elise lunged, sharp nails slashing.

Maggie bounced away. She couldn't kill Elise to get rid of the demon. While the worry for her friend beat an unhappy tattoo in her heart, her fear for Raphael sliced through her guts like rusty razors. Where was he? "Raphael!"

"Here," he said, limping through the containment entrance as he clutched his right side.

"Are you okay?" She glanced at the demon who seemed content to slowly stalk her.

"Got swiped, that's all. Whatever it is, it has the power to open the prisms. I don't know how many it destroyed before I arrived."

“No!” screamed Maggie. “That’s impossible.”

“Is it?” asked the demon. “Come to me, Margaret. Come to me the way thy mother did. The way thy father did. I love the Mortis family. I am the Mortis family.”

Fear pierced her with cold spikes. Demons were liars. Beautiful liars. And what this one said scared the piss out of her.

“Demon blood,” it hissed, inching closer. “Demon born.”

“You are so full of shit. And you’re a coward too. Hiding in a helpless woman so I can’t kick your ass.”

“Expel me, demon hunter,” cackled the voice. “Use thy wondrous powers to save thy friend.”

It lurched toward her again and as she turned to run, the claws scraped her shoulder. Still, she managed to slip away. Then she heard Rafe’s shout and another crash. Over her shoulder, she saw that Rafe had taken Elise to the floor and they scrabbled against each other.

“Expel you?” she muttered. “You bet your ugly demon ass I’ll expel you.” As Rafe fought with Elise, Maggie flipped the scythes and pushed them together.

The handles clicked together; and the blades locked at each end. Now the scythes shaped a sun circle and in its middle, the handles formed a pentagram. Four holes were drilled into the blades. She slipped her forefingers into the two on top and her thumbs into the two on bottom.

She spun around. “Rafe! Move!”

Raphael leapt up and skittered backward. The moment he was out of the way, she yelled, “Goddess arises; Her enemies are scattered and those who hate Her flee before Her. As smoke is driven away, so are they driven; as wax melts before the fire, so the wicked perish at the presence of the Goddess. ”

A bolt of light emitted from the sun circle, blasting Elise. The demon howled, not with pain but with laughter. Maggie hurried forward, keeping the Goddess light on the demon. Something was wrong. No demon could withstand light, prayers, and getting rebuked.

She tried again. "We drive you from us, whoever you may be, unclean spirits, all satanic powers, all infernal invaders, all wicked legions, assemblies and sects. In the Name and by the power of our God and Goddess, may you be snatched away and driven from the Earth and from the souls made to the image and likeness of our God and Goddess."

Elise rose to her feet as if a pulley had been attached to her waist and suddenly yanked forward. She turned toward Maggie, dusting off the stained and torn sleeves of the white-silk shirt, and laughed again. Her face looked cracked. Flesh hung off her cheeks in strips, black with blood, and her hair had been ripped out in large clumps. Maggie's soul keened for her friend. He's killing her, damn it!

"Is that the best you can do?" taunted the demon.

Maggie bit the inside of her cheek. Son-of-a-bitch. He was gonna make her recite Catholic rites. Using the sun circle, she made the sign of the cross and shouted, "Exorcizote, omnis spiritus immunde, in nomine Dei Patris omnipotentis, et in nomine Jesu Christi Filii ejus, Domini et Judicis nostri, et in virtute Spiritus Sancti, ut descedas ab hoc plasmate Dei, Elise, quod Dominus noster ad templum sanctum suum vocare dignatus est, ut fiat templum Dei vivi, et Spiritus Sanctus habitet in eo. Pereumdem Christum Dominum nostrum, qui venturus est judicare vivos et mortuos, et saeculum per ignem."

"What was that? Didn't quite get what you were saying," said Elise in a bored tone. "Haven't you heard that Latin is dead? Y'know, like your family and your friends."

Maggie was sweating now, trying to keep the fear at bay. She'd never seen a demon resist so much good spirit mojo. Her arms strained to point the sun circle at Elise's chest; the muscles quivered so much that the scythes shook.

Again, she made the sign of the cross. "I exorcise thee, every unclean spirit, in the name of God, the Father Almighty, and in the name of Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord and Judge, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, that thou depart from this creature of God, Elise, which our Lord hath designed to call unto His holy temple, that it may be made the temple of the living God, and that the Holy Spirit may dwell therein. Through the same Christ our Lord, who shall come to judge the living and the dead, and the world by fire."

Elise rolled her eyes. "English translation isn't working for me either. What ever will you do, Maggie Mortis?"

"You have to kill her," shouted Rafe. "No demon can inhabit a dead body." "No demon can resist rebuking either, but he's doing it."

"Maggie, you have no choice," said Rafe, his voice sounding reedy and thin. "I'm not going to kill Elise. The bastard has taken everything and everyone from

me." She gritted her teeth, steadied herself. "Isn't that right, Abatu?"

From the diary of Maggie Mortis...

Love is a strength and a weakness. It makes you strong, makes you vulnerable, makes you sacrifice. My father loved my mother. He loved us both. And he always felt guilty about what had happened to her. Like it was his fault she'd been possessed. I never thought to wonder how he was so adept at demon hunting. I always believed that the Otherworld had rescued us. Helped us. But there are times... well, I just don't know. Dad didn't put everything in his journals. And so I am left with my love for him, and my sorrow, and questions that will never be answered...

Chapter 9

Elise clapped her hands. "Score one for the Magster." Hands on hips, she did a little jig. "I am Abatu. King of the demons. Murderer of the Mortis family. You've been wondering which one of us got your daddykins, haven't you? It was me. Came back for a little visit. Wanted to catch up on how things were going since I made your mother kill herself."

Anger and grief burned through Maggie. The demon that had killed her mother was the same asshole that had carved out her father's heart and left it next to his body. Dad had been in the old lab, protected by prayers, spells, and charms... and yet Abatu had managed to get inside and murder him.

"Maggie!" cried Rafe. "I'm sorry, baby. I'm so sorry. But you have to kill her!" Tears fell as

Maggie unhooked the sun circle and flipped the scythes. Elise was

her last human connection. She had lost every person she'd ever loved to the demon Abatu. And he had counted on that, the slimy bastard. He'd fucking counted on the human weakness of love. He would use Elise to kill her. And then he'd kill Elise.

"What's the rush?" she asked, twirling her scythes as she crouched into an attack position. "Why are you so keen on making sure the Mortis family is dead?"

"When you go about trying to rule Earth and the Otherworld, it's not wise to keep heirs around. Even an immortal can be deposed from his throne." Elise put her hands together. A red light swirled between the palms.

The hellfire zinged toward her, but Maggie batted it away with a scythe. It dissolved into ash, leaving the rank smell of sulfur. "There is no fucking way I'm related to you."

"Yeah." Elise rolled her eyes. "Like there's no fucking way you'd sleep with a demon. But you're banging Rafe, aren't you?"

Okay, that was low. And the insult pissed her off. When Elise blasted her with another ball of hellfire, she punched it back. It stopped an inch from Elise's face, and Abatu left it there just long enough to melt the skin. The nauseating smell of burning flesh made Maggie's stomach roil.

"You're hurting her," said the demon. "You're killing her inch by inch." "Get out of her! Fight me in your true form."

"Tsk. Tsk. You know a demon can't manifest after a possession. We're too weak."

"Good to know that some of the rules apply to you."

"What's wrong, Mags? Sickened by the idea of having demon blood? It's okay for you to screw a demon, but it's not okay to be one? That's so hypocritical."

Abatu goaded her into the mistake. She knew it even as she went to mark a cross on Elise's chest and try to force the bastard out. The blades cut, burned, but failed. And Abatu wanted her close.

Maggie was on the floor in the beat of a heart, her back gouged by broken glass as Elise lay on top of her. She brought the scythes to Elise's neck and the too-black eyes watched her gleefully. Go on, whispered a dulcet voice inside her head. End her misery. End your misery.

"No." It would be foolish to toss away the scythes. She kept them clenched in her fists as she lowered them. "Get thee out, oh father of evil. I rebuke thee!"

The eyes flickered, the mouth twitched. What the--? Why would such simple words affect Abatu when other invocations did not? Because I said father. Because it was an acknowledgement that I am his blood. Was it true? Was the Mortis family somehow born from the demon Abatu?

"If you're wondering why your boyfriend hasn't come to your rescue," snarled Elise, "it's because I ripped off the right side of his torso. He's been bleeding to death. So... that means I get Elise, who you love, and Raphael, who you almost love, and you, dearest Maggie, whom no one loves."

"Get off her!" yelled Rafe. Elise was lifted as if she weighed the same as a feather and tossed into a shelf filled with books. The tomes tumbled onto the dazed woman.

"Goddess Almighty," said Maggie as Rafe hoisted her to her feet. "You're..." "Ugly? Despicable? Unclean?"

"Kindacute," she finished. "We'll have to explore this side of you if we, you know, live."

His black eyes swirled with surprise. Hell, she was surprised too. But he was kinda, well, hot. And she'd never really been with a demon before.

Rafe was at least seven feet tall and the same gray color of ancient castle walls. He was hairless and muscled -- oh Goddess was he muscled. His demon face was nearly the same as his human visage, but he had no hair and his eyes were black as brimstone. He also had thick dark talons and huge wings. He looked more like a gargoyle than a demon. And she'd never seen anything like him.

"I can't believe you're thinking about sex at a time like this," he said. "Who says I'm thinking about sex?"

One talon touched her hard nipple. Then the other hand snaked between her legs, one finger swiping her labia. He showed her a wet, gray finger and grinned. Wow. That's a scary smile.

“So I’m thinking about sex. Get over it. Why aren’t you bleeding to death?” “I heal fast.”

“Nokiddin’.” Maggie glanced at Elise. She was still slumped on the floor and covered with books. “What are we going to do about her? About Abatu?”

“Sex helps me think better.”

“Raphael...”

He shrugged his massive shoulders. “What would Elise want you to do?” Before she could answer the question, Elise sprang upward. Books flew

everywhere and the acrid scent of sulfur filled the room. She floated a couple feet above the floor. Her black eyes glowed red.

“Good-bye, daughter,” she screeched. A wave of red flame undulated from Elise’s body and rolled over Maggie and Raphael.

Maggie felt the heat of hellfire blast through her body and the evil in it blast through her soul. She collapsed to the floor, trying to mutter prayers of protection, but her ability to think burned away. Her lungs filled with smoke and her skin felt on fire. “I... rebuke... thee, father!”

“Shut up!” screamed the demon. The air crackled as another wave of hellfire was drawn into Elise’s body. She shimmered with the red flames, then the inferno shifted forward...

“We drive you from us, Abatu, my father, my ancestor,” Maggie said in a hoarse voice. “In the Name and by the power of our God and Goddess, I rebuke you of my own blood, my own body. I rebuke you, creator of the family Mortis!”

“Nooooooooo!”

A red mist issued from Elise’s eyes and mouth. Boom! The hellfire roared through the room, but

its supernatural qualities didn't just affect Maggie this time. The wall of flame whooshed through the laboratory, setting everything ablaze. And under the crackle and flicker of the fire were the fading shrieks of Abatu .

Maggie and Raphael rushed to Elise. Her eyes opened. Maggie swallowed the knot of her grief in her throat. She'd seen that look before. The look of the dying. She leaned down, cupped Elise's battered and bruised hand to her cheek. "We'll get you out of here. We'll get you to the Otherworld. Meelena can --"

Elise shook her head slightly. "No. Need to tell you." She looked at Maggie with those empathetic eyes and whispered, "You are loved."

Her body went limp, her gaze staring at the ceiling. Sobbing, Maggie closed the eyes of her friend.

"C'mon, baby," crooned Raphael. He picked her up the way a father might an injured child. His wings wrapped around her, protecting her from the fire, and took her away from Elise, away from the lab, away from life as she'd known it.

Chapter 10

One week later...

"Are you sure?" asked Meelena . The tall, thin blonde was dressed in a white gown, a circlet of laurel crowning her waist-length, curly locks. As always, she was barefoot. Meelena loved to feel the earth under feet; she loved to keep a direct connection to Nature.

"Yeah," said Maggie. "We got everything we could out of the house. I kept Dad's original journals and back-ups of all his research in another location in case something shitty happened. Abatu opened almost half of the prisms -- we can't figure out how he managed it. The ones he didn't get to, we hid. But we'll have to build another containment unit." Maggie's gaze wandered over the ruined mansion. She watched Raphael stand at the edge of the burnt carnage. He had to be thinking of Damian. D was not only dead, but also all that had been his, even his beloved Elise, was destroyed as well. "Nothing else should be built here."

“Very well. The High Council will remove all trace of the house, fill in the basement, and bespell this place. Humans will ignore it and Otherworlders will avoid it. It is the least we can do for our Guardian.”

“Thanks, Mel.”

“Do not call me Mel,” said Meelena in an annoyed tone that suggested she said the same thing often. “What of Raphael? He is not a Guardian.”

“What is he?”

“That is for him to say.”

Maggie rolled her eyes. “I guess I’ll keep him around for a while.” “Until the bargain is met?”

Surprise had her turning toward the Priestess. “How did you know about that?”

Meelena shrugged. “Perhaps it is best that he stay with you. He has done what no other Guardian, including your father, has managed to do.”

“Not die?”

“Protect you.”

Maggie remembered how Raphael had spirited her out of the burning house and into the Otherworld so that her cuts and bruises could be tended. “Yeah. He did. This time.”

“So cynical. You are worried about Abatu. We will find him and capture him. Not only for you, dear one, but for every good soul.”

“He’s preparing for war. And he’s strengthening his powers in ways that shouldn’t be possible. If

we don't catch that asshole soon, he's going to do a lot of damage to both our worlds."

"What you say is true, but for today you should not worry about it." Meelena cupped Maggie's cheek and brushed a kiss on her forehead. Feelings of peace drifted through her. A blessing from a powerful and wise woman --wow. "You are worthy of

so much, daughter. Accept the gifts given to you."

"What the hell does that mean?"

In typical Priestess style, Meelena sparkled away, her smile enigmatic as she left Maggie's question unanswered.

"Fine," huffed Maggie, supremely irritated. That irritation faded as she walked across the blackened ground to join Rafe. She threaded her fingers through his. It was a gesture of affection that she had never taken with another lover.

The idea of falling in love was both thrilling and terrifying. What she felt for Raphael was like nothing she'd felt for anyone else -- not even Damian. It had been a fantasy. She understood that now. It was easier to yearn for what she couldn't have than to risk what, or rather who, she could have.

"So you're not a Guardian."

He turned toward her. "No." "And that makes you..."

He kissed her and desire sizzled through her. She broke the spell woven by his lips and stepped back. "You're not going to tell me, are you?"

"Not yet."

"Will you tell me how you know me? Why you think you love me?" "I don't think... I know." His gaze flicked toward the mansion, then to her.

“Damian was genuinely fond of you, Maggie. And he was a good Guardian. But he...”Rafe sighed.
“When did he start letting you watch him have sex with his lovers?”

Maggie felt her cheeks heat. It still bothered her that Rafe knew about her voyeurism. It shouldn't. She was not a liar -- not to others and not to herself. She liked watching people give each other pleasure.
“About a year ago.”

“That's when he started sending me the DVDs.” “He sent you recordings of his lovemaking sessions?”
“No. Of you... in the secret room.”

The color drained from her face. “Here recorded me?”

“He said I would like you.” Raphael smiled, but his eyes remained wary. “He was right. I did like you. He wanted me to meet you. To see what we could have together.”

She was still trying to process the idea that Damian had videotaped her. He'd never told her about his brother. Never said a fucking word in five years. But he'd been secretly taping her masturbating, screaming his name, listening and watching... and sending the evidence of her shameful passion to his brother.

“Heartless bastard.” Tears pooled in her eyes, but she blinked them away. She was through crying for Damian. “Why didn't you take his advice? Meet me?”

“You were in love with him.” He brushed her cheek with his knuckles. “You're so beautiful, Maggie. Watching you touch yourself, seeing that look of longing and love in your gaze... I wouldn't take that from you.” He shook his head. “No. That's not true. I didn't want to face your rejection. To know how badly I wanted you to look at me the way you looked at Damian.”

“And when he died...”

“I had no choice. Meelena sent me. And I wanted you so much that I morphed into Damian just so I could have you.”

Sorrow weaved through her. She'd hurt him. Hurt him bad. And yet here he stood, taking whatever she could give him, because he believed that he loved her. “This is pathetic. I wanted Damian,

you wanted me, and here we are... a vicious circle of --”

He kissed her again. Kissed her madly. Until she melted into his embrace. Until she burned for his touch. Until she was breathless and needy. “Raphael,” she said against his mouth. “What am I going to do with you?”

He grinned. “I’ll think of something.”

MicheleBardsley

MicheleBardsley put pen to paper in junior high in the form of angst-filled poetry, angst-filled journals, and angst-filled short stories. She wanted to be a journalist, but after getting an associate degree in liberal arts -- otherwise known as the degree of the perpetual student -- she ended up majoring in marriage and motherhood whereupon she failed housework, plant care, and staying calm in the face of bigowies .

Multi-published in several genres, Michele is a bestselling author in electronic and print. She is also an admitted contest slut. Her works have won the Grand Prize in the 72nd Annual Writer’s Digest Writing Competition, Best Published Romance Novel in the Royal Palm Literary Awards, Best Fiction Book from the Oklahoma Writer’s Federation, Inc., an EPPIE for Best Romantic Suspense, and numerous other honors from publications and organizations.

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