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WITCHES
ΑΠΟΨΥΜΟΥΣ
MISTY EVANS

— Tickle My Fantasy —

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Witches Anonymous

Misty Evans

Dedication

As always, this story is for Mark...my dear husband and best friend who never fails to tempt me with laughter and an occasional Dove chocolate.

Special hugs go to my sister of the heart, Chiron. Without her encouragement, this story would still be in the drawer.

And more hugs to my brainstorming partner, Nana, who brought Liddy and her crazy hair to life for this story.

Many thanks to my chocolate-loving editor, Laurie Rauch, for her expert eye for details.

Chapter One: The Thirteen Steps

In a room full of witches, you'd think I wouldn't stand out. You'd be wrong.

My name is Amy Atwood and I'm a witch. Not one of those goodie-two-shoes Wiccans. No, I'm a Satan-worshipping, Devil-made-me-do-it witch.

However, after catching Lucifer performing a particularly wicked hex act with Emilia, my sister—a tried and true Wiccan—I turned my back on the Devil. I didn't exactly expect him to be faithful, but bewitching it with my sister? High ick factor. So, no more casting spells to entertain him. No more curses to carry out his desires. No more witchery of any kind.

That's why I was attending my first Witches Anonymous meeting. Glancing around at the faces staring back at me, with their raised eyebrows and thinned lips, I suddenly realized the last part of my introduction, about the Wiccans, I said out loud. In a room full of the goodie-two-shoes sisters.

Way to go, Amy. Stepping on broomsticks in less than thirty seconds. A new record, even for me.

Too bad I couldn't cast a spell and enchant them all, but I'd sworn an oath to stay clean. Because magic is a slippery slope. Even

one small curse or spell could put me on the downhill slide back to Lucifer. So far, I was sticking to my oath. I was good now. Normal.

Human.

Yeesh. The thought made me shudder.

Anxiously caressing the square of Dove chocolate stowed in the pocket of my jacket, I gave the witches in the room my most charming smile, full of ear-to-ear goodness. I'd promised myself if I got through the meeting, I could have the chocolate.

And there wasn't much I wouldn't do for a Dove.

The door behind me opened, saving me from making a false apology. A tall, good-looking guy with a determined look on his face pulled up short as he took in the circle of women. His T-shirt was a bit too tight and his jeans a bit too loose, but his boots were high-quality leather with snappy silver toes peeking out from beneath the frayed hems of his pant legs.

That's what I call *goodness*.

His intense brown eyes looked intelligent when his gaze locked with mine. "Uh, hi," he stammered, his focus dropping to my mouth. It stayed there a second too long before returning to meet my eyes. Thank the devil I'd worn my plum lip gloss. "Is this room 12A? I was looking for the Harley Brothers meeting."

Men and Harleys? Now that was my kind of group. "I'm Amy." I stepped forward to extend my hand. "I was looking for that meeting, too. It must be down the hall."

The grin that passed over his face showed me one perfect dimple. He took my hand with confidence, his warm skin kissing

mine like a lover as he pulled me toward him. I noticed an apple with an arrow piercing the core tattooed on his right arm.

“Let’s get out of here, then,” he said, “and let these fine women get back to their...whatever meeting.”

Out in the hall, I put my hand over my mouth and giggled. “Your timing is perfect. You just saved me from being burned at the stake.”

Up close, his brown eyes looked like the color of the Dove in my pocket. The dimple reappeared. “Rescuing damsels in distress is one of my specialties.”

I’d never considered myself a damsel in distress. However, the dimple won me over, saving him from a sharp rebuke. I found myself wondering if his eyes got darker, like melted chocolate, when he got mad.

Or horny.

He took my hand again. Soft warmth enveloped it. “I’m Adam Foster.”

Instantly, I thought of Bananas Foster. Yummy. My mind was already casting a circle of lust around us when I caught myself.

No spells. No charms.

No fun.

“Nice to meet you, Adam Foster.” I took my hand back, wishing I could curse Lucifer and Emilia for forcing me to embrace goodness and normalcy. “I better let you get to your meeting.”

“You’re not coming?”

“No.” I glanced at the door to Room 13C and shuffled my feet. “I swore an oath to be good. I have to go back to this one.”

“Back to the stake, huh?”

“You could say that.”

He gave me a nod. “Maybe after our meetings, we could grab an ice cream?”

A Harley-riding, tattooed man who wanted to go for ice cream? Normalcy wasn't all that bad.

And revenge on Lucifer, whether by stake or by mortal torment, was extremely satisfying. “I'd love to.”

“Meet you outside later?”

“I'll be there.”

As he walked away, I watched the back of his dark brown hair brush his neck and thought about touching that same spot with my fingers. When Lucifer discovered I'd taken a new boyfriend—a human one, no less—he'd be mad as hell.

Who says being a good witch isn't fun?

Inside the room, the good witches chatted in pairs. One lonely woman, with glasses covering most of her face, sat alone, staring at the others with a look of distracted interest. Weaving my way through the small groups to get to her, I felt the other witches' annoyance and fear pinging off me like little balls of hail. Instinct had me forming a protective bubble around my body until I pulled up short. Was protecting myself from negative energy too witchy? Deciding not to take chances, I ignored the energy hail balls and continued on toward the woman sitting by herself. As I stopped next to her, I plastered a smile on my face and pointed at the empty chair on her left. “This seat taken?”

Her eyes widened behind the thick lenses. Straightening, she glanced around at the witches nearest her who were watching the exchange. Was it my imagination, or did tiny bolts of lightning crackle in her hair? She pointed one short finger at the chair as if it were a boa constrictor and eyed me with suspicion. She seemed genuinely surprised. “You want to sit here?”

I nodded, doing my best to look harmless. “Yeah, if you don’t, you know, have a partner.”

“Oh.” Again she stole a glance at the group around us and I saw her discomfort shift to something more determined. Something friendly. The frizzy curls in her hair seemed to relax a bit. “Actually, I was saving this seat for you. I’m Liddy.”

She motioned me into the chair and I dropped like a rock, full of relief. “Nice to meet you, Liddy.” Once the majority had returned to their conversations-in-progress, I leaned closer to her and said under my breath. “Thanks for the save.”

“The save?”

“Yeah, you know, saving me from embarrassment in front of everyone. Me not knowing what the heck is going on and all.”

She gave me a covert nod and cracked her knuckles one-by-one self-consciously. Again, I could have sworn I saw microscopic lightning bolts, this time emerging from the ends of her fingertips. “This is your first meeting, huh?”

“Yep.” I settled back and crossed my legs, curious about the energy she was fighting to hold in. “So, what are we doing, pairing up like this?”

“Step Five.”

I waited for her to explain. When she didn't, I prompted her. "Step Five?"

She shifted her chair to face me like the other pairs of witches were doing. "Admit to another witch the wrongs we've committed against humans."

Wrongs we've committed against humans. Dirty demons, this could get ugly. "Like a confession?"

She nodded at my quick study. "Right. The first step is to admit you have a problem. Then you take a moral inventory and then you unburden yourself to another. It's redeeming."

Making a quick mental list of the wrongs I'd committed that fell in that category, I knew it could be a long evening. "Wiccans only perform white magic, Liddy. All that *harm none* stuff. How many wrongs could you have committed?"

She dropped her gaze and started worrying the cuticles on her fingers. She'd bitten her nails to the quicks. Or maybe they were chewed up from the white light zigging and zagging between the tips. "You'd be surprised at the defects in my character."

Defects? Using my natural-born empathic skills, I opened a small fissure and probed her. Lots of angst, but I couldn't find any black energy. I leaned in, patted her leg and gave her a wink. "You can always claim the Devil made you do it."

My stab at humor garnered me her serious wide eyes and a shake of her head. "It wasn't the Devil. My family made me do it."

Another display of crackles stood her curls on end. Yep, families could do that to you. Considering my only living relatives were Emilia and our neurotic grandmother who'd holed herself up

in a nunnery in Romania, I felt an instant kinship with Liddy. “Mine’s less than stellar too. Don’t sweat it.”

“Your family, are they...you know...in the occult like you?”

“I have a sister who just went to the dark side.” I did my best Darth Vader breathing-through-a-mask imitation, but Liddy looked confused. I waved it off. “Emilia’s the reason I’m here, trying to go good again.”

“Why would you want to worship Satan in the first place?”

The question of the ages. I thought about Lucifer—his dark, brooding eyes, his skillful lips, his talented fingers. A shudder ran down my spine. The bad boy in him called to me, even here, sitting with Liddy and her poor battered fingernails and fried hair. “It’s hard to explain. Luc—that’s what he likes to be called—is sort of the, uh, ultimate seducer. Pretty damn hard to resist.”

Liddy’s eyebrows drew together as if she didn’t get it. Again, I wondered how many defects she could have. I tried an example. “You know in high school how all the girls moon over the hunky quarterback, but, in the heart of the night, yearn for the bad-ass biker boy?”

She tilted her head to one side and stared at me, thinking hard. “You mean like Dean Winchester in *Supernatural*?”

Holey jeans and cocky attitude. “Exactly. You watch that show?”

Her eyebrows drew tighter. “Once. It was too scary for me, but I liked Sam the best.”

“Ah, the wounded-soul, reluctant-hero type.” I placed my hand over my heart and sighed deeply. “Hard to resist those, too.” Especially when seducing them was *so* entertaining.

A heavy energy settled over us. The witches on either side of our chairs had picked up on the thread of our conversation and were openly staring.

Liddy didn't seem to notice. “But Satan hurts people. You don't seem very mean.”

Again, the image of Lucifer rose in my mind, his lips curving up in a dangerous, seductive smile. Remembering the dark magic we'd performed together sent a tiny tingling through my veins. Like a trained dog, my thighs tightened in response. I coughed, tried to clear the image of Lucifer's head between my legs, and squirmed. “The magic I did was for personal gain.” Deeply, *deeply* personal. I fanned myself with my hand. “I never hurt anyone but myself.” And, come to Momma, bad-ass biker boy, I wanted to do it all over again.

Except, probably at that very moment, Luc was making Emilia's thighs squeeze the same way. My heart jerked inside my chest.

Liddy bit at a non-existent fingernail. “I hate my sister,” she said. Every body part I could see crackled. “I want to do her harm.”

The out-of-the-blue confession mirrored mine so perfectly, I sat back hard in my chair. It squeaked backwards on the linoleum floor. “Really. That's...um...interesting.”

She slapped her hand over her mouth, her eyes bugging out behind the lenses. Her curls did the hula on top of her head. “Oh, my, God, I can’t believe I said that out loud.”

Me either, but, hey, a girl’s gotta confess what a girl’s gotta confess, and Liddy obviously needed to get some of that crappy energy out of her system. “Your secret’s safe with me.” At her continued look of abject horror, I reached over and patted her knee again. “It’s okay, Liddy. We’ve all been there, wrestling with that blood-is-thicker-than-water stuff. It’s good to get it off your chest. The redemption thing, you know?”

“You.” The Witches Anonymous president, Marcia Something-Or-Other, rose from her chair to my left. She pointed a finger at me. “You made her say that.”

What? “What?”

Another woman stood and glared at me. “Liddy would never say something like that. She wouldn’t hurt a fly.”

“It’s you,” Marcia said, hands on hips. “You brought out the evil in her.”

“I...uh...” I looked at Liddy’s scared expression and the crazy lightning bolts flashing around her. “...did not.”

Did I?

Had I somehow inadvertently transferred my feelings toward Emilia on Liddy? I pushed back my chair and stood as Marcia and several of the others gathered around my new friend in a protective, human shield. Marcia shook her finger at me again. “If this is your idea of a joke, it’s not funny.”

The rest of the women moved forward and joined the protective ranks. Once again I was staring down a dozen angry Wiccans. Their energy glowed red. Strike two. One more and I was out. *Harm none*, I chanted in my head in case any of them were mind readers. “Look...” I raised my hands and turned them face out to reinforce my innocence, “...I didn’t do anything to Liddy. We were just following your Step Five and she sort of had a personal epiphany about her family. That’s all.”

Liddy’s head popped up over Marcia’s shoulder. Her eyes were still bugged out, but lit with something new. Something happy. “She’s *right*. I had an *epiphany*.” Her voice was almost giddy. Her head bobbed up and down, her now-relaxed curls jiggling with wild abandon.

Marcia glowered at me, but spoke to her. “Shut up, Liddy. You did not have an epiphany.”

“Yes, I did. I did,” she insisted. “I know what’s wrong with me now and how I can make amends.” She turned a glassy-eyed smile on me. “And I owe it all to my new friend, Amy.”

Marcia’s mulish face continued to stare me down as Liddy tried to convince the rest of the witches that she’d just had some kind of spiritual awakening.

After a minute, the women moved off in small groups to gather around a table set up with punch and cookies. Several threw me curious looks over their shoulders. Others still regarded me with disdain. The energy level was now a burnt orange.

Marcia crossed her arms over her chest and narrowed her eyes at me. “Watch your step, Atwood.”

Her tone thoroughly pissed me off. Or maybe it was just her pompous attitude. I clenched my hand around the Dove in order to keep from reaching for her neck. Giving her the sweetest smile I could generate, I channeled mock innocence. “Would that be Step Nine or Step Thirteen, Marcia?”

Chapter Two: Did I Scare You?

As the nice witches filed by me on the sidewalk, some of them sending me more looks of open curiosity, I slunk into the shadows and pulled the Dove from my pocket. Satisfaction was sweet. My first Witches Anonymous meeting was over and I'd survived. More than survived, I'd actually made a new friend. It was like running on a treadmill. Getting on was the hard part, but once finished, I felt renewed. Invigorated, even. Ready for anything the universe could throw at me. Or at least Marcia.

Setting the dark chocolate square on my tongue, I sighed and closed my eyes. Heaven. Pure heaven. I leaned my back against the old brick building and savored the chocolate, fantasizing about the dimpled guy who would soon be taking me for ice cream. *I could get used to this kind of life...*

A hot wind blew across my chest and a deep, seductive voice whispered in my ear, "Amy?"

Goosebumps ran over my skin. I jumped and choked on my chocolate, my eyes flying open to find the Devil standing in front of me. Tall, dark and sexy as hell, he was nevertheless too handsome for his own good. No visible horns or claws, but an insatiable hunger for all things denied him.

Placing one hand on the wall behind me, he leaned in closer and pinned me to the spot with his body. The streetlight's glow did nothing to soften the blue glints in his raven-black hair. As he smiled down at me, his white teeth gleamed in the shadows of his face. "Did I scare you?"

Straightening my jacket, I swallowed the last of the chocolate and itched to throw a curse at him. It wouldn't do any good, but it would make me feel better. "Of course not," I lied. "What are you doing here?"

"Precisely what I was going to ask you. Witches Anonymous, my dear?" His gaze traveled over my body and certain parts tingled in response. "You must be joking."

I cleared my throat and told my parts to knock it off. "It's no joke. You and I are done. I never want anything to do with you again."

He laughed under his breath and one long finger reached out to stroke my cheek. I flinched at the feel of the scorching heat of his touch. "You've gone too far to walk away from me, Amy."

"Get off me and you'll see me walk away with no trouble at all."

Luc parted his lips to say something or possibly laugh at my threat, but a man's voice interrupted him. "Hey, there you are."

Luc drew back and dropped his arm, taking his luscious heat with him.

My knight in shining leather once again came to my rescue. Adam, the streetlight illuminating his face, hooked his thumbs in his belt loops and narrowed his eyes at Lucifer. "Is there a problem?"

Waving a hand in the air in dismissal, I smiled so hard my cheeks hurt. “No problem.” I skirted around the demon who owned my soul, and hooked my arm through Foster’s. “Let’s go.”

Lucifer spoke a low warning. “*Amy.*”

The tone of his voice was hard to ignore. I pulled Adam away from the building, heading toward the parking lot where a bunch of other men were talking alongside their Harleys.

I felt the shadow of Lucifer’s hand on the back of my neck, ready to snatch me back. Shrugging it off, I kept walking. He wouldn’t do anything in front of all these humans. “See this?” I called to him over my shoulder without meeting his eyes. “This is me walking away. We’re done. Finished. The End.”

A bullet of heat shot through my heart—Luc’s nonverbal answer.

Heart pounding, I scanned the motorcycles and gripped Adam’s arm tighter. “Where’s your bike?”

“Over here.” He pointed to a big, black Dodge truck.

“That’s not a bike.”

He shrugged, pulling out a key fob and hitting the automatic door locks. “Bike’s in the shop.” Motioning with his head, he asked, “What’s his deal?”

“Ex-boyfriend. Thinks he still owns me.”

“Ah.”

The truck sat high on oversized tires. Adam gave me a hand up. I bounced in, wondering if I was really going through with this. I didn’t know this guy from Adam, even if he *was* Adam. He could be

a jerk, a serial killer, a Britney fan. And me, Miss Reformed Witch, without my powers.

But as I slid across the seat, I saw Lucifer still standing in the shadows of the building, a faint but distinctive red glow illuminating his body. He was pissed.

Feeling the first flush of revenge, I smiled to myself. *Point to the witch.*

We pulled out of the parking lot, and a sudden weight tugged at the pocket of my jacket. Sticking my hand inside, I found not one, but a dozen Dove chocolate squares.

All of them glowing red.

Chapter Three: Sin City

My first instinct was to throw the glowing candy out the window. Knowing Lucifer the way I did, I figured the chocolates were hexed and some innocent kid or unsuspecting mutt would end up with the Devil in them. So, I kept them in my jacket, silently begging them to disappear, since I couldn't vanish them myself.

"Your pocket's glowing." The dashboard light showed a hint of curious amusement on Adam's face.

"Uh," I stuttered, searching my brain for an explanation. "Hand warmer. One of those little packs you break and it gives you heat. These cold nights, you know..." I bobbed my head, "...a girl's got to keep her hands warm."

He turned his gaze back to the road, smirking. "It's fifty degrees outside."

The chocolate continued to glow. If I didn't do something soon, it would melt in my pocket and ruin the leather. "I'm very sensitive to cool air."

A two-way radio on the seat between us buzzed, and a woman's voice spoke in an urgent manner. "Unit Seven, this is dispatch. House fire reported at 66 Wingate Drive..."

"Hang on." Before the dispatcher finished with the details, Adam did a U-turn in the street and reached behind his seat to grab a

strobe light. Shoving it through the open window, he set the flasher on top of the truck. Then he picked up the radio, confirmed he was en route, and put the gas pedal to the floor. “Sorry,” he said. “Davy’s out sick with a virus and I’m on call.”

“You’re a fireman?”

“Captain. Tonight was supposed to be my night off.”

There was no time for more questions. He wove in and out of traffic, ran stop signs and answered a continuing stream of information coming over his radio. I admired his ability to multitask so effectively.

I also admired the fact he knew how to put out fires. A skill like that could come in handy for someone who messed around with Satan.

Arriving on the scene, I shifted my eyes between the orange and red flames bursting from the downstairs window to Adam, who was pulling up his fire-retardant pants. “Rain check on the ice cream?” he said, setting a hat on his head and grabbing his turnout coat from behind the seat of the extended cab. His crew was just beginning to shower the house with water.

“Sure.” Watching the fire eat the water, I wondered how I’d get home to my apartment. I’d walked to the meeting and there was no cab service in Eden, unless you counted Denny’s Bar, which ran a van for the town drunks to keep them off the streets and encourage the average drinkers to indulge, guilt and designated driver free.

A family of four stood outside, shook up but unharmed. The little girl cried against her mother’s leg. Her fear and pain rippled through the air as the flames rose and fell in the house. Mesmerized by the

fire, I continued to watch the scene with a group of other gawkers as the firefighters moved in sync with Foster's directions. He seemed to think one step ahead of the fire, and within minutes, he had it contained. The little girl's crying had stopped in the arms of her mother.

I could still feel the heat coming from the house on my face when the air behind me spiked in temperature as well. The candy in my pocket glowed brighter. "You always did love fire," Lucifer said, running his fingers down my back.

Even in the midst of the oven-like air around me, I shivered under my coat, arching away from him. Keeping my eyes on the house, I hissed, "What are you doing here?"

His breath, hot as acid, touched the back of my neck. "Thought you might need a ride home."

I turned to look him in the eyes, a thought dawning on me. "You did this. You started the fire, didn't you?"

A casual shrug confirmed my suspicions. "Job security for your new boyfriend."

"He's not my..." I stopped, remembering that I was using Adam to make Lucifer jealous. I wanted to give the Devil a taste of his own medicine. "Are you going to burn down a house every time I go out with him?"

Luc grinned, dark and wicked. "I'll do whatever it takes, Amy. You should know that."

Boy, did I. "I took an oath not to use my powers anymore. I'm of no use to you. You want to fool around with Emilia? Be my

guest. Lure her in. Turn her evil. I'm not your playmate anymore. Do you understand?"

The grin fell off his face. "Oath or no oath, you'll do my bidding, witch."

If I could have vanquished him, I would have. But even in my days of evil witchery, my powers weren't strong enough to vanquish the Devil. We stared at each other as the crowd around us began dispersing. A tingling heat flared between my legs.

A voice came from far away, snapping me out of the trance. "Amy? You still here?"

I whirled around to see Adam standing behind me. The fire was out and the firefighters were rolling up hoses and patting each other on the back.

Relieved once again to find Adam rescuing me from Luc, I smiled up at him. "I wanted to watch you in action. That was amazing how you guys put the fire out so fast. You're a talented guy."

He grinned, a small, embarrassed grin. Then he fixed his gaze on a spot over my shoulder. The wall of heat at my back flared higher. "Funny how we keep running into each other." He held out a hand to Lucifer. It was still grimy with ash and soot. "Adam Foster."

The corner of Luc's mouth curved up with malicious intent. "Luc." He gripped Adam's hand. "Smith."

The handshake lasted a few seconds too long. Even through the soot on Adam's hand, I saw his knuckles turn white.

“Well.” I grabbed Adam’s coat sleeve and tugged him away from Lucifer. “You must need to get back to the station and do...um...captain things.”

Adam pulled his gaze from Luc’s and looked down at me. “I’ll take you home first. That is...” He shifted his feet and took off his hat. “If you want me to.”

“I’d love you to,” I gushed with a touch too much enthusiasm. As Adam turned to head back to his truck, I looked Lucifer in the eye. “Stop following me, and stop setting fires.” I emptied my pocket of chocolates and shoved them at him. “We’re done. Finished. Over.”

The curve of his mouth sharpened, and for one brief heartbeat, a flame sparked in his eyes. “We’re not over until I say we’re over.” He let the chocolates fall to the ground. “Witch.”

“You live above Evie’s Ice Cream?” Adam pulled into a vacant parking spot in front of my building.

He smelled like smoke and had soot smeared on his cheek. “Yes,” I said, breathing deeply and fighting to keep my hand from wiping off the soot. “I actually own the ice cream parlor.”

The look on his face would have lit up Manhattan for a week. “No way.”

My night manager, Keisha, eyed us through the window as she locked up the front doors. I willed her to be on her way and saw her raise one eyebrow in challenge as she felt my mental hands shooing her toward the back room. Her fists went to her hips and she returned her own mental hand slap before turning to go. She was

more of a sister to me than my flesh-and-blood one. “It’s been in my family for generations. The first Evie was my great-great-grandmother’s grandmother.”

“I love your ice cream. It’s the best I’ve ever had.” He held up three fingers. “Honest.”

The boy-scout gesture tugged at my heart. I laughed at his kidlike exuberance. “What’s your favorite flavor?”

“Sin City Chocolate. I like those little pieces of dark chocolate mixed in with the vanilla ice cream.”

A man after my own heart. “Would you like to come in and have a dip?”

I could see it in his face, he was tempted. Really tempted. For more than just ice cream. “I would, but I have to get back to the station and fill out the paperwork on tonight’s fire.” He sniffed at his shirt. “Besides, I stink.”

I was more than a little disappointed. I’d obviously misread the look in his eyes; the heat coming off him was from the fire, nothing more. What was that guy always saying on TV about guys being into you? If they made an excuse, even a legitimate one, not to come inside your place, they *weren’t that into you*. “I understand. Another time, maybe?”

“How ’bout breakfast tomorrow?”

Not that into me, huh? My confidence rebounded. “I’d love to.”

“I’ll pick you up at eight.”

I opened the truck door. “Excellent.”

Avoiding Keisha, I went up the outside stairs to my apartment. Smelling like smoke myself, I showered, fed my cats, Cain and

Abel, and snuggled down in bed to dream about my new firefighting friend.

This thing with Adam was going to work out perfectly.

I woke from dreaming about Adam in his fire suit to the feel of a hot body next to mine. A body too big to be one of my cats, and much too hard. And then there was the hand cupping my breast through my Snoopy sleep shirt.

Frantically, I tried to clear the cobwebs out of my brain and get my bearings. Had Adam accepted my offer last night? Had we enjoyed more than a scoop of ice cream?

An image of him waving goodbye to me from his truck surfaced, and with it, a chill spread down my spine. With sudden clarity I knew who was sleeping in my bed. I jerked away from Lucifer, tumbling to the floor in my haste.

I have only one vice in life—lust. I lust for sinful men, dark chocolate and designer shoes. For ten years, Lucifer satisfied all my desires and then satisfied them some more.

The embodiment of lust, he made me choose bad over good, dark over light, hell over heaven. I simply couldn't resist his wicked ways. Until he slept with Emilia, that is. Just thinking about him touching her, kissing her, the same way he'd touched and kissed me made me shake with disgust. Betrayal was one thing. Betrayal with my sister...well, that was more hell than I bargained for.

He rose up and peered at me over the side of the bed, his hair mussed and his eyes full of enchanting lust. "Good morning, Amy. Dream of me?"

Chapter Four: Bed Buddies

Since I no longer had protection spells keeping my apartment off limits to demons and other magical creatures, it was no surprise Luc had wandered in.

“What the hell are you doing?” I shouted at him, even though I knew exactly what the hell he was doing. He’d been seducing me for years. I was familiar with his guerilla sex tactics.

He ran a hand through his shoulder-length, blue-black hair, mussing it into an even sexier look. “Thought you might be lonely since your boyfriend left you high and dry.”

“He did not...” I broke off, knowing it was useless to explain anything to him. Pushing myself off the floor, I grabbed my robe and shoved my arms into the sleeves, pulling the belt tight. “Get out.”

Luc threw the covers back and walked buck naked across the floor toward me. “I made your favorite breakfast.”

On cue, the tantalizing smell of French toast wafted by me. Breakfast. Adam was picking me up for breakfast.

I glanced at the clock. The blue numbers read seven-forty. Crap. I had twenty minutes to shower, make up my face and do my hair, not to mention kick a naked man out of my apartment. A naked, *supernatural* demon-man.

Who was not so surprisingly well endowed.

Taking a deep breath, I racked my brain for a non-supernatural way to take care of him *and* me. “I’m getting in the shower. When I get out, in like two minutes, you’d better be gone. Understand?”

He scratched the stubble on his chin. His eyes glowed with lust. “I could scrub your back. Massage your scalp while I wash it with that new herbal shampoo you just bought.”

How did he know about my new shampoo? Obviously he’d been snooping while I wasn’t home. “You have to leave. Now.”

“How about a pedicure? Or a bubble bath instead of a shower? Remember the bubbles I produced for you last time?” He advanced on me with each suggestion and I shook my head as I stepped backwards. The heat pouring off him made me want to shed my robe and the thought of those crazy, pheromone-laced bubbles made sweat trickle between my breasts.

Sticking my hand out to stop his advances, I hit his sculpted chest. Energy zigzagged through my fingers and up my arm. “Stop it.”

But he didn’t stop. He pried my hand off his chest and kissed the tips of my fingers. Panicking, I jerked my hand away and ran for the bathroom. Throwing the door shut and twisting the lock, I leaned against the solid wood door and prayed. *Uh, God? Are you there? Your old arch enemy is at it again. I could some help here, your Godship. A little strength to resist the Devil?*

“Amy,” Luc murmured to me through the door. “Come back to bed. Your breakfast is getting cold.”

I shook my head adamantly, even though he couldn't see me. "No."

The door warmed under my hands. "I brought your favorite boysenberry syrup."

Oh, curses. Every cell in my body tingled. Boysenberry syrup and the Devil. What woman could resist such temptation? *Come on, God. Cut me some slack here.*

"There's fresh whipped cream." His sexy smooth voice singsonged through the door. "You know what I want to do with that."

In the mirror over the sink I could see my flushed face. My robe had fallen open and my nipples were rock hard. *Mercy*, my brain screamed. *Can you hear me, God? I'm crying, mercy.*

Lucifer chuckled low in his throat, as if he were listening to my pleading cries for help. His heat rushed over me like the wind and it was all I could do to form a coherent thought. I was almost ready to untwist the lock when I heard Emilia's voice in my head.

"You're pathetic."

It wasn't in my head, though. Emilia was on the other side of the door with Luc. Apparently my lack of a protection charm left me open to her as well. Wonderful.

The door's warmth faded and the fire burning my skin evaporated.

"Em." Luc's voice held a hint of embarrassment. "What are you doing here?"

Casting a glance up at the ceiling, I rolled my eyes. *You sent my sister? That's the best you could do?*

Turning on the cold water tap, I shed my clothes and jumped into the shower. As the last of Lucifer's heat evaporated from my skin, I forced myself to ignore the yelling outside the door and the sound of crashing breakfast plates in the other room.

Chapter Five: Welcome to Temptation

Adam took me to Eden's arboretum for breakfast. Breathing in the fresh air and soaking up the beautiful scenery, I imagined the landscape was, in many ways, like the original Garden. Leaves on the trees were edged with red and yellow. Birds sang and dipped under the soft blue sky.

The morning's earlier fiasco with Luc and Em seemed like a distant memory as the sun soaked into my clothes, warming them.

From a white bakery bag, Adam handed me a cherry turnover and a foam cup filled with espresso. His own bag contained a chocolate-covered donut and a carton of white milk.

As we sat on a bench, mainlining sugar and watching a pair of swans glide around the edge of the arboretum's small, man-made pond, Adam's leg leaned against mine with easy familiarity. "I figured you for a steak-and-eggs-breakfast kind of guy," I said, licking cherry filling off my finger.

A mischievous look passed over his face. "And I figured you for something lighter, but no less satisfying. Hence, a sweet pastry and strong coffee for a most interesting woman."

Heat rose in my cheeks and I enjoyed it, sipping my espresso to hide my smile. "How did you know I love cherry turnovers?"

He swung his gaze around to look at me. It bounced off my hair, down to my eyes, and came to rest on my mouth. “You just seemed like a cherry-turnover kind of gal. Pretty and delicate on the outside, and full of rich, delicious filling on the inside.”

Certain parts of my body tingled in response to his obvious flirting. When was the last time a guy used a food metaphor to describe me? When was the last time a guy actually stopped to think about what I might like, for that matter? I couldn’t keep the grin off my face. Breaking off a corner of the turnover, I held it out to him. “Wanna bite?”

My heart galloped at the sudden heat in his eyes. His answer was to lean forward and take the piece of turnover out of my fingers with his mouth. Warm lips closed over the tips of my fingers and my breath caught at the cool electricity sliding up my arm and into my chest.

His gaze stayed locked on mine as he chewed and swallowed. “Yum.”

Exactly what *I* was thinking.

I was suddenly hungry for more than breakfast. Maybe my libido was still in overdrive from Luc’s unexpected and unwelcome visit. Or maybe the new, improved Amy was also horny. Dropping my shaking fingers to the turnover, I jerked my eyes away from Adam’s so I wouldn’t jump him right there in the arboretum.

“How about we catch a movie tonight?” he asked around a bite of his own breakfast.

I nodded without thinking and then remembered my WA meeting. “Darn, I can’t. I have another meeting tonight.” And the

way things were going with both Lucifer and Adam, I needed the reinforcement of Witches Anonymous to keep me on the straight and spell-free path I'd chosen.

“What kind of meetings are they?”

“Um,” I stammered, searching my brain for a plausible, non-magic type of meeting. I couldn't claim AA or any other substance-abuse group without throwing water on the fire we were building between us. I needed to shine a nice light on myself, keep Adam's interest piqued. He needed to think I was a good person. “It's for Halloween. A bunch of downtown business owners are working with the Chamber of Commerce to sponsor a trick-or-treat festival this year.”

“Cool.” He finished off his donut. “I hadn't heard about that.”

“Oh, it's top secret. We haven't actually decided on anything yet, so we're keeping it under wraps. A few of the women in the group are...” Marcia's hard-set face popped into my mind and I had to temper the word that popped into my mouth, “...challenging.”

Nodding his understanding, he sipped his coffee. “Know-it-alls, huh? Bossy?”

“You can say that again.” I wiped my mouth with a napkin. “It's their way or the highway. I'll probably just end up doing something on my own at the ice cream shop, but I should still go to the meeting tonight and see what they're going to do.”

He shifted, making a small production out of cleaning up our wrappers and napkins and crumpling the paper bag. Before I knew it, his full leg was up against mine. He stretched his arms over his

head and one came down on the back of the bench around my shoulders. “Maybe I could help you out.”

Of course he could. He had no idea how many ways he could help me. “That would be nice of you. I could show you how to make ice cream witches and spiders and such.”

His head bobbed once. “I love Halloween.”

“Me, too.”

We sat in silence for a few minutes, watching the swans. A light fall breeze played with the tree leaves hanging over our heads. Discreetly, I snuggled closer to him, enjoying the warmth his body generated.

“Tonight, after your meeting...” his thumb rubbed the side of my shoulder, “...I’d like to turn in my rain check on the Sin City.”

My body hummed with sugar, caffeine and Adam. I was nearly purring with contentment. If things continued at this pace, I’d be spoon-feeding him decadent ice cream before midnight. “We’re open until ten,” I said, giddy with the prospect. “I’ll be home from my meeting by nine-thirty.”

The swans eyed us as they swept by. I could almost feel Adam’s heartbeat against my other arm. He turned his face so his lips were next to my ear. “I’ll be there at nine-thirty-one.”

Goose bumps rose all over my skin. “Oh...ah...” I stammered. “Good.”

His lips dropped to my earlobe and then made their way south, their touch so soft and gentle I squeezed my thighs together and clenched the tops of them with my fingers. “Very...very good.”

Adam sunk his hand into my hair at the back of my neck. He tipped my head a fraction to the side and lightly ran his lips back up to my ear. Nibbling my earlobe, he massaged the back of my neck with his strong hands. “Yum,” he whispered in my ear. “I just discovered my new favorite breakfast.”

Yum, my mind echoed. *Me, too.*

Chapter Six: The Devil Wears Armani

Just so you know...the Devil does not wear Prada.

For business, he wears an Armani suit The Donald would kill for. Otherwise, he's like any other mortal guy...comfort above all else.

When he entered the ice cream shop at six-thirty that night, he wore his usual casual attire—faded Levi's, a rich, chocolate-colored leather jacket, and calfskin cowboy boots.

At the sound of the bell tinkling above the door, Keisha looked up from scooping a double dip of Bubble Gum ice cream for a four-year-old. At the sight of Lucifer standing there in all his raw maleness, her mouth dropped open like a nutcracker's.

Handing my customer—the child's father—his banana-split mixer, I snapped my dishtowel at Keisha to bring her back from fantasyland before I went to deal with Marlboro Man.

“What do you want?” I pulled him toward a corner booth, away from my customers.

His voice dripped innuendo. “What do I always want from you, Amy?”

Sex in a public place. An ego stroke. Free ice cream. The same thing all men, mortal or supernatural, seemed to want from me. “One chocolate shake, coming up.”

Marching back to the counter, I bit the inside of my cheek to keep from mumbling curses. Mechanically, I went through the motions of preparing a shake for him, reminding myself I'd feel more in control after my Witches Anonymous meeting and an ice cream treat with Adam.

Keisha shut the cash register and sidled up to me. She worked at drying her already dry hands on her apron. Her multiple silver bangles jingled softly against each other. "What's he doing here? I thought you gave him his walking papers."

Digging deep in the bucket for a scoop of ice cream, I released it into the cup in my hand. "He was in the mood for a chocolate shake."

Keisha made a sound in the back of her throat that suggested she knew I was lying. "I know what he's in the mood for and it ain't chocolate. He's bad news," she conceded, eyeballing him. "But, damn, he is a fine-looking man."

"He's a demon."

"Aren't they all?"

Adam's face flashed in front of my eyes. "No, they're not." I pointed the ice cream scoop in Luc's direction. "But he is. King of the demons, right there."

Keisha twirled her stack of bangles and waggled her eyebrows at me. "Fun to play with, though. You have to admit."

Rolling my eyes, I stuffed the cup under the mixer and tuned out any further comments. After the shake was finished, I set it on the table in front of Luc and held out my hand. "Five dollars and fifty cents."

He shifted to pull a stack of bills from his back pocket. “Prices have gone up, I see.”

“You get what you pay for.” I took the dollar bills and used them to point at the shake. “I made it with premium ingredients.”

His eyes narrowed with a hint of suspicion. Using the plastic spoon, he scooped up a bite. Then another. “Not bad. How come you’re being nice to me?”

“Yelling at you to go away doesn’t work. I’m trying nice instead. You hate nice. Is it working?”

His lips pulled down in one corner. “Oddly enough, nice is a turn-on coming from you.”

I gritted my teeth to hold in the retort pushing against my lips. “You. Are. Un-believable.”

The corner of his lips turned up. He continued to spoon ice cream into his mouth. “You’re going out with Adam tonight, aren’t you?”

Again, I bit the inside of my cheek. He was keeping tabs on me. Being the Devil, he knew a lot of things I didn’t want him to. Rotten, dirty demon.

Ignoring the set of my closed lips, he sunk his spoon back into the shake. “He’s going to invite you to a Halloween party Saturday night at the fire station. Say no. You can’t go. You’re busy.”

I worked at unclenching my teeth so I could speak. “I am *not* busy.”

A wicked expression I knew only too well lit up his entire face. “I’ve got something for you to do, my dear witch. A whole lot of somethings. Keep you busy the whole night.”

“No. Way. You can’t stop me from going to a party with Adam if I want to go, and, newsflash, I want to go.”

“You don’t want to go. Trust me, Amy.”

Trust the Devil. Sure. That had gotten me far. Still, I was curious to find out what he knew that I didn’t. “And why don’t I want to go?”

Luc licked his spoon and I heard Keisha moan under her breath behind the counter. I shot her a look of pure disgust and she shrugged her shoulders in an *I-can’t-help-it* gesture.

He tipped his spoon at her before returning his gaze to mine. “The explanation is beyond what you can comprehend. Let’s just say, if you attend that party with Adam, you could change the history of the world.”

I slid into the booth opposite him, unable to ignore such an opening. “The history of the world? That’s overdoing it a bit, isn’t it? Even for you?”

He coughed as if something were caught in his throat. “Overdoing what?”

“This is obviously another of your ploys to keep me from seeing Adam. Admit it, you’re jealous.”

Setting the spoon down, Luc cleared his throat. “I need some water.”

Knowing what was about to happen, I gladly went to the sink and filled a plastic, disposable cup with water.

“Put ice in it,” he croaked from across the room.

My customers and Keisha stared at him, gawking. Returning to the seat across from him, I smugly noted his red face. He gulped the

water, but I knew it would do nothing to soothe his throat. Another coughing fit followed, just as I expected.

“What did you put in that shake?” he choked out when he finally got his breath back.

“Organic ice cream,” I said, smiling. “Natural, pure, and good for you. Well, maybe not *you* per se, since you hate anything pure and good.”

His face hardened. He raised a finger and pointed it at me. “You’ll regret this.”

“Why? Is it going to *change the history of the world*?” I mimicked his finger-pointing. “Personally, Luc, I think that might be a good thing. I’m not too impressed with this version, since you’re in it bothering me.”

He grabbed my wrist and pulled me out of my seat and toward him so we were nose to nose over the table. “You’ll never get away from me, Amy. Deal with it. You belong in my world, not Adam’s.”

The bell above the door tinkled and in walked my sister. “Well, well,” she said to Lucifer, planting her hands on her white, Versace-clad, Wiccan hips. “I should have known I’d find you here. Running back to the Wicked Witch of the West yet again. What is it with you and her?”

Like she was Glinda. My customers switched their gawking to her, their eyes dilated, their ice creams melting. Pulling my wrist from Luc’s grip, I rose from my seat and faced Emilia. “I’m not wicked anymore, sis. That’s your department, now, remember? You wanted to play with fire, and now you’ve got it. He’s all yours. Please, take him home and keep him there.”

Emilia's pale lips curved in a rueful smile. "He *is* mine, Amy, and don't you forget it."

Lucifer stood up, eyes blazing. "I'm not some dog that you own," he yelled, or tried to yell. His voice came out squeaky, like a pubescent boy's. Emilia frowned at him. Rubbing his throat, he shot daggers at me again. "I want you to stay away from that freak Adam, do you hear me?"

He grabbed Emilia's arm above the elbow and ushered her out the door. As the bell's tinkle faded away, I smiled to myself. "And people in hell want ice water."

Chapter Seven: Orlando and Marshmallows

Streetlamps flickered on as I walked to my WA meeting. A sickle moon was barely visible overhead. The buzz of cricket song rose and fell around me and I kicked at the leaves blowing past my feet in a kid's game to keep my mind off my ex and my sister. I kept one eye out for Luc, my nerves jumping at every moving shadow, but no demon emerged from the dry leaves swirling in the alleys or the darkened doorways. Having readied myself for what seemed like his inevitable appearance, I was almost disappointed when he didn't show up.

I was even more disappointed when Emilia did.

"Amy," she said, materializing from behind an oak tree. I flinched, my hand flying to my heart. She didn't seem to notice. "Stop seducing Lucifer."

Dropping my hand, I let out the breath stuck in my throat and started walking again. "Come off it, Emilia. You know I'm not the one doing the seducing. Like I told you earlier today, you wanted to play with fire. Now you're playing with fire."

She fell into step with me, her high-heeled Gucci boots clacking on the sidewalk. The Dark Side was obviously working for her in the fashion arena. She'd never cared about designer labels

before. “If you really want to be free of him, let me bind your powers.”

I stopped in mid-step. “You think I’d let you—a witch who blows up her kitchen making a simple love potion—bind my powers?”

Annoyance flashed across her features before she shut it down. Then she turned on her charm. What charm she had, anyway. “Why put yourself through these stupid Witches Anonymous meetings? Let me help you. Once I bind your powers, Lucifer won’t want anything to do with you. Solves both our problems.”

Fudge sauce could have dripped from her smile. Shaking my head in disbelief, I continued on my way. “In your dreams.”

She stayed put, but her eyes bore into my back. Her normal voice trembled with a guttural sound. “You always were a spoiled-rotten, holy terror of a bitch.”

So much for charm. And what was with the eerie octave of her voice?

Ignoring the shiver that went through my bones, I stopped. We’d had this fight one too many times growing up...I knew exactly where to sprinkle a dose of salt. The sisterhood of the magic witches. “And you always were an overachieving, first-born, bossy prude.”

As if unseen hands were attacking me, the leaves at my feet sprang up and whirled around my legs like a cyclone. Her anger slammed against me as if she were physically pushing me. I tripped, but caught myself before totally losing my balance. Good thing I’d worn my Pumas instead of my Choos.

Straightening upright, I saw Liddy across the street by the building's entrance. A small calico cat wove its body through her legs in a figure eight. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she waved a little-girl-type wave. I waved back, keeping my hand lowered so Emilia didn't see it. No way did I want Em to set her sights on my new friend. She, too, knew where to sprinkle the devastating sisterly salt.

"Look." I turned to face her, trying to block Liddy from her view. Under the streetlamp, her skin appeared ashen and pale, but her eyes were clear and intense. Feverish-looking. Unblinking. Demonic.

I hesitated just a second, letting that sink in. Emilia had been acting out of character ever since Luc seduced her. Like she was possessed. Sleeping with the Devil could do funny things to a person, especially when the person had once been all goodness and light. Maybe Emilia had gotten more from her demon lover than a bonus orgasm.

That idea would have to be explored later. "Why don't you pop over to my apartment and clean up the mess you made this morning, Emilia, and we'll talk about binding my powers when I get home from the meeting?"

The demon in her flashed like heat lightning and I took a step back as another shiver ran through me. Yep, she was definitely possessed. By what, I wasn't sure.

She saw my fear, or maybe smelled it. Her nostrils flared. "What, you didn't clean it up yet? Oh, that's right." She snapped her

fingers. “You aren’t acting like a witch anymore. No housekeeping charms. Poor Amy. She has to clean the toilet just like a human.”

She was right. I’d cleaned up the broken plates and the cats ate the French toast scattered on the floor, but there was so much damage, I’d been overwhelmed with the amount of cleaning, which was why I was trying to bribe my sister into doing it for me. One wave of her perfectly manicured hand and all would be repaired. “You can bind my powers if you clean up the apartment. And while you’re at it, scrub the toilet as long as you’re there,” I added. “Deal?”

Emilia hesitated for a minute, tapping her booted toes on the sidewalk. The demon receded a bit and my sister returned. “You trust me alone in your apartment?”

I did a mental inventory of potentially embarrassing items my snoopy sister might uncover. There was the erotica between the mattresses of my bed and the poster of a half-naked Orlando Bloom hanging on the inside of my bathroom medicine cabinet. An assortment of Luc’s S&M products tucked into the closet in the spare bedroom and my *Partridge Family* DVD collection stuffed behind my *Buffy* one.

The only thing that truly worried me was my spell book. Full of intensely potent black magic, if that fell into Emilia’s hands, she could hurt herself. Plus, she’d know all the hexes I’d developed to please Luc. Why should she get the credit, and pleasure, for my work?

“He-llooo.” Liddy was crossing the street, grinning at me and doing that wave thing at Emilia. I didn’t have time to worry about

protecting my sister from herself, nor was I sure I really wanted to. Not at the expense of Liddy's good nature. "Sure, Em. Go for it." I waved my hands in a shooing motion. "I mean it. Go. We'll bind my powers later."

"Bind your powers?" Liddy skipped up beside me. "You don't have to do that, Amy. We renounce our powers once we've completed all Thirteen Steps."

"Is that so?" Emilia's lips stretched wide across her professionally whitened teeth. "Are you in Witches Anonymous too?"

Liddy nodded. "Amy and I are partners."

Emilia's gaze left Liddy's face and flashed on mine before returning to my friend. "Really? You and Amy? Partners?" Again, her gaze cruised to my face with smug attention. "Something in your closet you want to tell me about, Amy?"

The cat had followed Liddy across the street and now slid against my leg, purring. I took Liddy's elbow and pulled her a step back from Emilia. "My closet is full of interesting things you'll never know about." Spinning Liddy back toward the street, I gave her a little push. "Nice seeing you, sis, but we gotta go. Meeting's about to start. We'll talk later, 'kay?"

Dragging my friend away from Emilia, cool tendrils of magic, like Emilia's fingernails, raked my back. "Oh, Amy?"

Caught in the spider's web, I stopped and looked over my shoulder at my sister in her misleading, white haute couture.

The grin was still wide. “Why don’t you bring your *partner* home with you after the meeting? I’ll make a fire in the fire pit on your roof, and the two of you can fill me in on your relationship.”

“Ooo,” Liddy said, her head bobbing up and down at Emilia. “That would be great! We could roast marshmallows and give each other manicures. I just got this new nail polish, TinkerBell Tan, that dries in like five seconds.”

“Marshmallows.” Emilia’s eyes blazed feverishly again. “Of course. What else would we roast?”

The cat’s back arched and it hissed at her. Mentally, I did the same. “Later, Emilia.”

As Liddy and I crossed the street, I heard the spider laugh under her breath. “Oh, yes, Amy. Later.”

My apartment was still a disaster when I got home from the meeting. “Hello?” I called out, praying earnestly that Emilia had found something better to entertain herself with.

I needn’t have worried. Sensing something was off even though I couldn’t feel her anywhere inside my home, I stumbled into my bedroom. The closet door was open and all my shoes were scattered helter-skelter on the floor like a hobgoblin had gone Taz on them. The bitch went through my shoe collection. Why would she do that? What was she looking for?

The clicking of her high heels echoed in my mind. Her feet were at least two sizes bigger than mine. Surely she wouldn’t steal my shoes.

Eyeing the pile of discarded pairs, I searched for my favorite Dolce and Gabbanas. The black ones with the studs and ribbons. The ones Emilia had repeatedly asked to borrow back in the summer. Back when she was planning to seduce Lucifer away from me. She was such a copycat.

“I don’t believe it.” Cain and Abel had crawled out from under my bed and were now sitting on top of it. “She stole my favorite pair of shoes.”

The cats lowered their eyelids to half-mast in what I took to be sympathy. “Curse you, Emilia,” I said, looking up at the ceiling. “I hope you get bunions the size of Simon Cowell’s ego.”

Curses. I slapped my hand over my mouth. *I had just cursed.* Leave it to my sister to push my buttons and get me to fail at my oath. Rubbing my forehead to stave off a headache, I chastised myself and re-swore my oath. No magic of any kind!

Curses...curses...

Oh, hell in a handbag. Kicking shoes out of the way, I shuffled purses, shoe boxes and jewelry aside to reach the secret hiding place in the back of my closet. Sure enough, my sister, the bloodhound, had discovered the very thing I didn’t want her to get her hands on. Besides the D&Gs.

She’d stolen my spell book.

I could easily envision Emilia sitting in her favorite recliner with a glass of wine and a pad of sticky notes, marking all the spells she wanted to try, giggling like a possessed woman.

How long before she found the best spell of all?

I flopped on my bed between the cats, and pulled my pillow over my face.

The Atomic Sister Slave spell was one of my favorites, even though I'd never used it. Keisha had added the touch of voodoo to up the potency. That's why we'd named it Atomic. Just having the wicked incantation gave me the feeling of superiority to Emilia. No matter how she taunted me, no matter how many of my boyfriends she stole, I always knew that one verse of the wicked spell and she'd be my slave. Power, my friends. Deep, satisfying power.

But now that power was in her hands. The moment she found that spell, my freedom would be over. I'd be begging her to let me be her slave. I'd offer to handwash her delicates, polish her pentacles and tell her how beautiful she was.

Yeesh. So not going there.

Fear is an energizing emotion. I bolted off the bed, rummaged through my closet again and finally found what I was looking for—my power crystals, karma circle necklace, and several gremlin statues I'd used as domain guardians years before. In the deep recesses of the far corner, I came across a Do Not Disturb sign that read Go Away instead. *What the hell.* I pulled that out too.

When my doorbell rang ten minutes later, I had the crystals washed and set in the four points around my apartment and one in my pocket, the necklace dangling from my neck and the gremlins in place over every entrance. Busybodies, unwanted visitors and evil sisters beware. It wasn't magic; magic was a slippery slope, which was why I had sworn it off lock, stock, and devil. The warding of my apartment and myself was preventative self-care.

Throwing the door open, I found Adam leaning against the frame with a sly smile on his face. His arms bulged under the sleeves of his gray T-shirt and his jeans sported a silver belt buckle with the Chinese ideogram *Fu*.

Good Fortune. Yes-sir-ree. Good fortune was exactly what I needed.

As I shut the door behind me, I hung the Go Away sign on the doorknob as a finishing touch.

Chapter Eight: Fake Snakes

Since my apartment was such a disaster, I'd decided to entertain Adam on the roof of my building. I avoided lighting a fire in the fire pit, lest it act as a beacon to any supernatural sources out and about. Instead, Adam and I laid low, staring at the stars and eating spoonfuls of Sin City Chocolate from a bucket he had toted up to the roof in a classic fireman's hold.

"The guys at the station are throwing a Halloween party Saturday night," he said, twirling the spoon between his fingers and kicking back on the lounge chair next to mine. "A costume party. I thought maybe, if you wanted to, we could go together." He snuck a look at me. "As a couple."

Pausing my spoon halfway to my mouth, I thought of Lucifer and his warning. There was no way I was letting him scare me off my growing relationship with Adam. Besides, I needed something to take my mind off Emilia and Lucifer and my rotten track record with men. Having grown up in Eden, most of the male population knew about my love life—a lot of them had helped me earn my ribbons before I got desperate enough to hook up with Lucifer. I had finally run out of available, worthwhile men. Next stop was online dating. Yeesh.

But then there was Adam. “I *love* costume parties.” I finished licking the ice cream off my spoon. “Especially Halloween ones. What famous couple should we go as?”

“I was thinking...” He checked out the stars before glancing back at me. “Adam and Eve. You know, since I’m Adam and your great-great-however many greats-grandmother was Evie, and we do live in Eden...”

I let him trail off, watching his sudden shyness as he searched my face in earnest for a response. He was so darn cute, I could have kissed him.

Having never done cute before, I found it charming. And sexy as hell. “And what, dear Adam, will we wear?” I teased. “Fig leaves?”

He chuckled. “We never wore fig leaves.” Pulling up short, the smile fell from his face. “I mean, um, never mind. Fig-leaf costumes will work, or we can pretend it’s after The Fall and wear animal skins. Fakes, of course,” he added.

“Of course,” I said, conjuring up images of the two of us. Mostly naked images. Heat rose in my face and I glanced at the moon to make sure it hadn’t suddenly grown full. Nope, it was still the quarter moon I’d noticed earlier. After clearing my throat a touch too loudly, I swallowed another spoonful of ice cream. “And we need a serpent—fake, of course—and an apple.”

Tossing his spoon into the bucket, Adam pulled me beside him on the lounge chair and wrapped an arm around my shoulders. His earlier hesitation evaporated and he brought his lips to mine in a

slow, soft, brush of skin to skin. There was nothing demanding, just inviting.

Welcoming the feel of him, I returned his kiss. His lips were cool from the ice cream and he smelled like chocolate. As we did a slow perusal of each other's lips, the initial coolness of his turned hot. Taking my cue from him, I chased his tongue with mine, advancing and retreating. One of his hands gripped the back of my neck and the game of cat and mouse ended.

My stomach fluttered like a manic butterfly and my thighs tensed with lust. I held him by the shoulders and pushed the length of my body against his. He broke the kiss, out of breath and staring at my lips. "You are going to make one hell of an Eve, Amy."

If he only knew. I teased his lips again with mine, enjoying their soft, inviting pressure. "And change the history of the world while I'm at it."

Pulling his head back an inch, he peered into my eyes. "Huh?"

I waved the spoon, still in my hand, in dismissal. "Never mind." Cuddling into his chest, I let myself once again enjoy the mental image of him in nothing but a fig leaf. "You are going to make one heck of an Adam, Adam."

We giggled together, coconspirators.

Chapter Nine: Sin in the City

Adam's hand stroked my back, sending feathery shivers up and down my spine. His heart drummed a soft rhythm against my chest as I lay my head on his shoulder. Breathing deeply, I inhaled the masculine smell of his neck and knew he wanted more than a lip-melting kiss, but was too much of a gentleman to go for it. Our first date and all.

I, however, had no reservations about plunging in hook, line and firefighter. Forget revenge on Lucifer. I wanted Adam, and I wanted him on the rooftop with the whole town of Eden spread out below us.

Just as I puckered my lips to kiss his neck, he sighed. "I know what you're thinking."

I froze. What, now he could read my mind too? "You know what I'm thinking?"

"Yeah. We just met and here I am all over you. Moving kind of fast, huh?"

His hand was actually moving with exquisite slowness. I wanted to arch my back into it. "No, not at all," I purred into his neck.

"It's been a while for me." He tipped his head to look at the sky again and brought my hand with the spoon to his mouth. Peeling the

spoon out of my curled fingers, he tossed it in the ice cream bucket and kissed my palm. “Maybe too long.” His tongue danced on my palm and I sucked in my breath. “I can’t stop thinking about you. Wanting to touch you.”

Damn. I kissed his neck, felt the texture of his skin, and scooted my body so I lay completely on top of him. “Sounds good to me.”

His eyes reflected the baby moon as he gazed up at me, heat and lust burning in them. Gentleman or not, he was still a man, and in my experience, men would believe anything you told them if it meant they’d get laid. “Really?”

Lucky for me, I didn’t need to lie. I nodded, licking my lips and pressing my hips down, just a little. Just to tease him again. I wanted to know how much it took for Adam to lock his cute, shy hero self in the closet and let the bad boy come out to play.

The lust in his eyes flared brighter and his hands went to my hips. “I like you, Ames. I like you a lot, but if you’re looking for a rebound boyfriend, that’s not what I’m into.”

My heart squeezed at his sincerity and his new nickname for me, and I realized how tired I was of pushy, demanding men. I liked nice. I liked charming. I liked Adam. A lot.

If I were a decent woman, I would have crawled off him and sent him on his way. He deserved someone nice and normal like him. A woman who was stable and had morals.

But even though I’d given up my witchy lifestyle, I wasn’t a masochist. I’d dumped that gig along with Lucifer. Caressing the side of his face with my palm, I smiled into Adam’s eyes and once

again told the truth. “I’m not on the rebound or looking for a short-term fling. I’d like a meaningful relationship, and I’d like it to be with you.”

He scanned my face. “You’re sure?”

For the first time since I’d sworn that stupid oath to be good, I really *was* sure about something. He felt solid underneath me and I liked solid. I placed my hand over his heart. “Yes.”

His eyes darkened in response with a look I knew to be very, very sinful.

Before I could dip my head for another kiss, he wound his hand in my hair and pulled my face down. There was nothing shy about Adam’s lips as he took mine this time and I laughed softly into his mouth.

Bye bye, charming hero. Hello, bad boy.

Chapter Ten: The Fall

Saturday night, Adam rode up on his Harley, took one look at me standing on the sidewalk in my Eve costume, and nearly crashed the bike into a parked car. “Damn,” he said, staring at my fig leaves. Or possibly lack thereof. “You look...”

“Stunning?” I flipped my long hair, decorated with baby’s breath, over one shoulder. “Even better than the original?”

“Oh, yeah. Much better than the original.” His eyes roamed downward. “You’re all but naked, Ames.”

Unfolding the trench coat I carried, I slipped it on and tied the belt around my waist. I was certainly less naked than I could have been had Keisha not raided the neighborhood florist for artificial ivy branches and daisies. We’d sewn pieces of each, along with the baby’s breath, to the bodysuit in creative ways, and Keisha had braided sections of my hair with the leftovers. I now looked more like a kinky version of Mother Nature than the Mother of Humankind, but at least my butt was covered. The single fig leaf the suit had come with in that area wasn’t big enough to cover an ant’s butt, much less mine.

“Where’s your costume?” I said, carefully fitting a helmet over my tresses.

“Hard to look manly on the Harley in a fig leaf, not to mention, it’s uncomfortable. I’ll change when we get back to the station.”

I eased onto the bike behind him and relished running my hands around to his stomach. Hard and compact, every muscle moved in unison under my fingers as he gunned the bike and we took off for the party.

The Eden firehouse was hopping when we arrived. Romeo and Juliet stood on the sidewalk talking to Marilyn and Joe. Butch and Sundance practiced their gun-drawing skills out front while balancing cups of punch. Music from inside thumped and vibrated into the parking lot.

One side of the station had been converted into a dance floor. Cobwebs and tombstones decorated every corner. The punch on the far table was blood red. As Adam led me through the partygoers, he stopped several times to introduce me to his fellow firefighters. They were so distracted by my natural assets wrapped in ivy and dotted with daisies, most had trouble following a real conversation. Normally, I would have flirted with every man there, but for some reason, I blushed and hung on Adam’s arm instead.

Upstairs, while he changed into his matching costume in his office, I roamed the floor. I wandered through the sleeping area and toyed with the idea of sliding down the fire pole. Being a total klutz and wearing a bodysuit covered with flora seemed like enough reason to nix that idea. No sense in embarrassing myself in front of Bill and Hillary. One never knew when a Cabinet position might open up for a reformed witch.

Leaving the sleeping area behind, I walked down a short, dark hall, past Adam's office. There were restrooms on one side, and a storage room and water fountain on the other. At the end, flashes of light danced and flickered in bursts from another glass-fronted office. Since the light couldn't be coming from the party below, I figured the intermittent bursts were from a light bulb about to burn out.

As I came to a stop outside the office, I did a double take. On the other side of the glass, Lucifer fought with another man—a winged, luminescent creature who traded blows with my ex like a prize fighter. Every punch, every kick set off an explosion of light.

My breath stuck in my throat, I watched, mesmerized, as the two of them ducked, swiveled and flew into the air in an ongoing attempt to pulverize the other. Neither seemed to be winning or losing.

As though he felt my gaze on him, the angel stopped in mid-swing and pivoted his head. Our eyes met and a chill ran like water down my spine. The skin over his angled cheekbones bunched as he smiled, but there was no kindness in the gesture. The blood in my veins froze.

Lucifer followed the angel's gaze and his eyes went wide with alarm when he saw me. Even my formfitting bodysuit did not distract him. He moved as if to leave the office and the angel's hand shot out, gripping him by the neck. Lucifer's mouth formed a word. "Run!"

Instinct swept through me, making me stumble backwards. As I turned to run, my foot caught on a chair sitting against the wall. I

tripped and, falling, cracked the side of my head against the water cooler.

Pain, sharp and brutal, ripped across the back of my eyes and everything went black.

A voice cut through the fog in my head. “Amy Evelyn Atwell, I command you to open your eyes.”

I blinked a couple of times, trying to obey the voice, even though I didn’t want to. A dull throb beat above my right ear and it intensified when I looked at the incandescent glow coming from the angel’s face. Another blink and, narrowing my eyes, I could take him in. Long waves of blond hair hung from his head, his features matched the hair, more feminine than masculine in their design. Deep blue eyes that held complete neutrality.

“Where’s Adam?” I croaked. “What did you do to Lucifer? If you’ve hurt either of them, I swear...”

He stroked my forehead with a single, long finger. “They are at the firehouse. Unharmmed.”

Knocking his hand away, I eased myself into a sitting position, my gaze drawn to the sight before me—mountains in the distance dressed in clouds, a valley cradling a clear stream, trees full of birds, their songs echoing softly in the clear air. There were animals everywhere, roaming and grazing in complete harmony. My pulse jumped and I rubbed my head. “And where are *we*?”

The angel surveyed the beautiful garden before him. “Do you not recognize this place?”

Oh, God.

Literally.

“I’m *dead?*” I started to shake uncontrollably. “This is heaven?”

The angel scoffed and reached down to take my hand. “I’m Gabriel, and this—” he motioned at our surroundings, “—is Eden.”

I expected his touch to be warm, but it was neither warm nor cold. The sensation was more like spiders crawling under my skin. Jerking my hand away, I struggled to stand and keep my balance. “This doesn’t look like Eden,” I said, hugging my body and crushing baby’s breath in the process. “Where are the houses? The arboretum? My ice cream shop?”

“You, Amy, are at the crossroads of good and evil. This is Genesis.”

“Oh,” I said, sure I had totally lost my mind. “*That* Eden.” My laugh sounded tight, incredulous. No surprise since I was freaking out inside. “Sure it is. I knew that.”

Gabriel’s gaze lingered on a giraffe stripping leaves from a tree. “Adam has been sent back to Earth for a second chance at resisting temptation. He’s picked you from the entire human race to face the test with him.” His eyes dropped to my face, challenge in the blue orbs. “You must be wiser and stronger than the original Eve and resist Satan, or humanity will once again be lost to sin and death in the fires of hell.”

Right. *Someone knock me on the head again so I can get back to reality.* Scanning the area for anything that might look like reality, I freaked out an ounce more when absolutely nothing resembled my Eden. This had to be a trick. “That’s a good one.”

Nervousness made my laugh sound like Alvin the Chipmunk's. "You and Adam's friends are punking me, right?"

Gabriel cut his eyes to me. "Punking you?"

"Yeah, you know, pulling a fast one on me." I pivoted around. "Where's the camera?"

"There is no camera. Nothing high-tech, in fact, at all."

"Of course there is." My voice sounded shrill. "This is just an illusion. A good one, too, but I'd like to get back to the party now."

Gabriel stood silently, sizing me up. His wings fluttered a micron and a wave of impatient energy washed over me.

I met his challenging stare and pushed it back at him. "Tell me this is an illusion."

"This is not an illusion, Amy. This is Eden."

I scanned the beautiful landscape again. I was standing in the original Eden with God's right-hand angel. I bit the inside of my cheek. Apparently, I should have listened to Luc and his prophecy.

Hell and damnation, I hate it when he's right.

"Just in case this is real," I said, deciding to reason with the angel. "I have to tell you, I'm not the best candidate for the job. Lucifer—Satan—and I have a history, in case you didn't know."

Gabriel's sigh was whisper-soft. "Satan claims you're quite good at resisting him."

Okay, there *was* that. "Here's the thing, see. Even though I took an oath to stop the witchcraft stuff, I'm still under contract with him. I sold my soul a long time ago. There's no way I qualify for this job."

Gabriel's wings fluttered again and I realized that was where he held his emotions. Wisps of irritation mixed with his impatient energy, but he also liked to reason. "Perhaps you should view this as redemption for you, too."

Redemption. At that moment, I wasn't sure I wanted redemption if I had to spend eternity with good ol' Gabe staring me down with his cold blue eyes and fluttering his wings at me. "I would really like to go back to the fire station now."

Another ripple of his wings. If possible, his eyes grew even harder. "Help Adam, Amy. Whatever Satan offers you, remember it is a trick. God's depending on you to save humanity. I'm depending on you." He spread his wings and took my hand in a strong grip. "Oh, and by the way, you have three days."

I opened my eyes to see Adam's furrowed brow and concerned eyes hanging over me. "Amy, what happened? Are you all right?"

He helped me to sit up, and though the pounding in my head intensified, so did my relief. I was back in the dark hallway of the fire station. Chuckling with giddiness, I grabbed his arm as a new stab of pain split my skull. I careened to the side.

Adam's grasp tightened on my arm. "Whoa, there."

I rubbed the sore spot on the side of my head. "I fell and knocked myself out."

Adam's gentle fingers probed the spot and images of Eden—the original Eden—flashed through my mind. My stomach tensed. "And then I dreamed I was in The Garden of Eden."

His fingers stopped moving, and he blinked at me. “Let’s get an ice bag on that bump.”

Twenty minutes later, an EMT at the party declared me healthy, but suggested I go to the hospital. I refused and Adam took me home, offering to stay with me in case I did have a concussion. Totally tired out and needing the feel of his solidness beside me, I agreed.

Inside my apartment, he babied me, bringing me a cup of chamomile tea and helping me remove the flowers from my hair before easing me into bed. He was still wearing his fig-leaf costume and I took a moment to admire it before I closed my eyes. “You look good enough to sin for,” I teased. “Sorry I ruined our night together.”

His hand caressed my cheek. “Nothing’s ruined. We have plenty of time.”

Gabriel’s voice echoed in my head. *You have three days.*

A tremor of dread ran through me. “What’s three days from now?”

“Three days?” He thought for a second. “Halloween.”

Of course. The test would come on All Hallow’s Eve. My weak spot. I’d been dreading it, along with my fellow Witches Anonymous compatriots, all week. We’d already made a pact to spend the night watching Drew Barrymore films at Marcia’s place just to keep our minds occupied and our wands unused.

A tiny noise sounded from the kitchen table. “My beeper,” Adam said, hurrying out of the bedroom. He came back with a sheepish look on his face. “It’s a code-red fire in the industrial strip

outside of town. I have to go, but I can't leave you. You might have a concussion."

"Go," I said, waving him off. "I'll call Keisha to come stay with me. She's only two blocks away."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure."

He brushed my forehead with his lips and handed me my cell phone. "Don't do anything but rest. I'll be back as soon as I can."

The moment I heard the rumble of his motorcycle outside, hot air rushed over me on the bed like an invisible blanket. Lucifer stood in the shadowed corner.

"Please tell me you didn't start that fire," I said on a moan.

His face was grim. More grim than usual. "I didn't start any fires. Now, tell me what happened."

I was too tired to pretend I didn't know what he was talking about. "Your angel buddy took me to Eden. The original version. He told me I could help Adam with a do-over. Save humanity from sin and all that."

I waited for Luc to laugh. To tell me I hallucinated the whole thing. "Gabriel is a skilled liar."

Closing my eyes, I wished the whole night would go away. Except, maybe, for Adam and his fig leaf. "Gabriel's an angel. A messenger of God. He can't lie."

"He's an angel with free will. Like me. Lying comes quite easy for the right reasons."

I slanted my eyes open a micron to look at him. "You're not an angel anymore. God kicked you out, remember?"

“Because I wanted to be a god. Gabriel’s not so different.”

Something small and petty burst in my chest. “Right, he wants to be a god, too, since it turned out so well for you.”

Lucifer moved toward the bed, his arms crossed over his chest, one finger stroking his goatee. “Did he tell you what would happen if you succeeded in rescuing Adam from temptation this time around?”

“I told you. He said I could save humanity. Wipe out sin.”

“Did you agree to do it?”

“It’s a no-brainer. Why wouldn’t I do it?”

“Everyone on the earth at this moment was born in sin.” Luc paced to my closet and back. “What do you think happens to them when you restore Paradise, where sin no longer exists?”

My brain spun in foggy circles as I tried to follow his train of thought. “I don’t know. What happens to them?”

“They cease to exist. Poof.” He snapped his fingers. “You, little Amy Atwood, will be responsible for eliminating the entire human population. Except Adam, of course.”

Everyone? Poof? I swallowed hard. “God wouldn’t do that.”

Luc held up a finger to make a point. “Did you speak to God?”

“No.” I sighed. “Only Gabriel.”

“Don’t you think God would speak to you directly about something so...damnable?”

Narrowing my eyes at him, I tried to unwind the tangled ball of thoughts making my head hurt again. “I think you’re the one trying to trick me.” I rubbed my forehead, hoping to ease the pain. “If sin ceases to exist, then so do you.”

Lucifer walked into my kitchen and I heard the rustle of a bag. I knew that sound. My mouth watered. He returned and sat on the edge of the bed, holding out three squares of Dove chocolates. “I may be a fallen angel, but I’m still an angel, Amy. If Gabriel succeeds in creating a new Eden using you and Adam, he becomes the god of it, but I will never cease to exist.” He unwrapped one of the chocolates and held it in front of my nose. “And I will never stop tempting you to come back to me.”

I wanted to ignore the chocolate as much as the Devil’s words, but I found myself leaning forward to take both.

“Why?” I said around the smooth chocolate melting in my mouth a moment later. “Why am I so important to you?”

He smiled, but it was full of sadness. “Because, Amy...” One finger touched the bump on the side of my head. The pain vanished as if it had never been. “I love you.”

Chapter Eleven: Confession

Sunday morning, I sat at in my office and stared at the gremlin on my desktop. He smiled at me with jagged teeth and a lolling tongue and I was sure if I looked at myself in the mirror, I'd see his twin. My head seemed to weigh a hundred pounds and my mouth was dry as sin. Every noise, from trucks on the street outside rumbling by to the freezer motors in the ice cream parlor kicking on, made my stomach clench. I'd slept fitfully and woke to the worst non-alcohol-induced hangover of my life.

Keisha bustled into the office around nine, her hair wrapped in a psychedelic-colored cloth that doubled as a sarong. To save my eyesight, I focused on the gremlin instead. Keisha clucked at me. "What's the matter with you? Too much *par-tay* last night? You look like you saw a ghost."

"Close. I saw an angel."

She snorted under her breath. "Oh, sweetie, I know Adam must seem like an angel compared to Lucifer, but he's still just a man."

Or not. I dropped my head into my hands. I wasn't sure Emilia was just a witch either, but was she being possessed by one of Lucifer's minions or Gabriel's? Why would Gabriel want to possess Emilia? Was that even possible? "What do you know about demon possession?"

Keisha's eyebrows had this way of pulling down in the center and rising at the tips when she was aggravated or confused. "Demon? You just said Adam was an angel."

"I think Emilia's possessed."

"She is sleeping with the Devil, in case you've forgotten."

"She stole my favorite pair of Dolce and Gabbanas."

Keisha leaned on the back of the chair across from my desk. "Amy, even I would do anything to get my hands on your D&Gs. That's *obsession*, not *possession*."

"The shoe thing is definitely Emilia being Emilia, but she shows classic symptoms of possession. Her voice, her eyes." Goosebumps rose on my skin. "She wanted to roast my new friend Liddy in my fire pit Thursday night."

Keisha shrugged. "Not to be rude, but blood sacrifices are not out of character for Emilia, even when she's a good witch. She's threatened to disembowel you more than a few times." She winked at me. "Now tell me all about the costume party and Adam the Angel."

"Keisha, Emilia stole my spell book."

Sliding around the chair, she dropped down in it, her eyebrows now up under her bangs. "You let her have the Atomic Sister Slave hex?"

"I didn't let her *have* it. She stole it."

"I thought you kept your spell book in a safe..." Her eyebrows crashed back down. "Wait a minute. Since when is Emilia and her antics more important to you than your sex life? You did spend last night with Adam, right?"

I laid my head down on my desk. “Sort of. Our evening got interrupted.”

“Let me guess, Lucifer.”

“Try Gabriel.”

Her hesitation lasted only a second. “As in *the* Gabriel, Angel of God?”

I made a small nod with my head.

“OMG. You met Gabriel? I can’t believe it! Is he fine?”

Lifting my head, I squinted at her and her rainbow head. “*Is he fine?* What kind of question is that? Do you think about anything besides *your* sex life?”

She ignored my jab. “Well, is he?”

I laid my head back down and closed my eyes. “He’s...different.”

“Different? What’s that supposed to mean? Different how?”

Finding the right adjective to describe the angel was hard. “Weird. Icky. Repulsive.”

She gasped. “No!”

“Yes.”

Silence fell as Keisha digested my news. “So why was he at the costume party?”

“For me.”

“Seriously?” She snorted softly again. “Man, you get all the good ones, you know that?”

“That’s the thing,” I said, lifting my head. “I’m not sure Gabriel is good.”

“Come again?”

I massaged my temples and closed my eyes. “Long story.”

Pushing herself out of the chair, Keisha left the office, shaking her head and muttering under her breath. Five minutes later, she returned with two cappuccino milkshakes. She plunked one down in front of me and dropped back into her chair. “Okay, spill it. All of it.”

Sitting back in my chair, I sipped the cold milkshake and told her about my visit to Eden and Gabriel’s missive. When I was done, she was staring, openmouthed, at my gremlin. “Your life is never dull.”

“Tell me about it. I can’t decide what’s worse—a demon-possessed sister with a slave hex hanging over my head or an angel of God dumping the future of good and evil in my lap.”

“This is bad. Really bad.” Keisha shook her head in a slow arc. “What are you going to do?”

Taking a long pull on my straw, I swallowed the cool, coffee-flavored ice cream and met her eyes. “It gets worse.”

All the muscles in her face tightened in fear. “Worse?”

“Lucifer told me he loves me.”

Her eyes lit up, her face muscles relaxed and she smiled. “I knew it. That man is fine, no matter what you say.”

“He is not *fine*. He’s the Devil.”

Chuckling under her breath, she stood and shuffled to the door. “Don’t you just love a happily-ever-after ending?”

“Happily ever after?” I slammed my milkshake down on the desk. “Do you understand what I’m dealing with here? I could snap my fingers and you could die. I could wake up tomorrow and have

to clean dog poo off my sister's shoes—*my* shoes—and tell her she's prettier than Gwyneth Paltrow. Come on! My life *sucks*."

Keisha and her psychedelic hair shook with laughter in the doorway. "Love conquers all." She raised her milkshake cup to me and winked again before disappearing.

"That's it?" I yelled at her. "That's the best advice you've got? Love conquers all?" Growling in frustration, I kicked the side of the desk. "Just so you know, I'm hiding your romance novels!"

In the parlor, I heard her humming some silly love song. Gripping the arms of my chair, I spoke to the gremlin, still grinning widemouthedly at me. "Love conquers all. Bet you didn't know that." I gave a derisive grunt under my breath and rocked the chair back and forth with manic speed, staring at the ugly, unlovable talisman. "If that's true, Gremmie, you and I both are in big, big trouble."

Chapter Twelve: Redemption

Eight p.m. All Hallow's Eve... Desperate, I stood in front of the Witches Anonymous group asking for their advice since Keisha's had been so lacking. The tick of the clock on the wall made my pulse race—I didn't know in what form temptation would appear or what I would do when it did. All I knew was I was running out of time.

"If I don't keep Adam from giving into temptation, he loses his chance to redeem himself," I told the witches. "If I do keep him from sinning, everyone ceases to exist. Poof." I used Lucifer's finger snap to emphasize my point. "Gone. Except Adam. And me."

"That is so coool," Liddy said from the front row. Her eyes were twice their normal size, framed by her long curls.

"On top of that, I think my sister is possessed by something. Not Lucifer, but something evil nevertheless. I looked up demon possession on the Internet and she definitely shows symptoms. Anyone know a good exorcist?"

Liddy raised her hand in the air like a student trying to get the teacher's attention. "There's a priest at Immaculate Conception who does them."

"They say he's really good," a gal in the back piped up. "And he's cute too."

Behind Liddy, Marcia exchanged an eye roll with the woman next to her. “That’s quite a dilemma, Amy. Good luck with that.” She stood, rubbing her hands in anticipation as she beamed at the group. “Who’s ready for our Drew marathon? Everybody to my house!”

A handful of women rose from their chairs, grabbed their coats and started for the door.

“But, what should I do about Adam?” I raised my voice above the noise of scraping chairs. “Don’t you have any suggestions for that?”

Liddy, still seated, raised her hand again, but before I could call on her, commotion erupted in the back.

The door swung open with a bang and Emilia blocked the exit. “I have a suggestion,” my Sister Dearest said. She was dressed in a black velvet gown, cape, and matching hat. Her eyes were solid black. *Supernatural*, here we come. “Redeem yourself and go to heaven so I can be rid of you.”

Silence bloomed in the room as every head turned to look at me. Liddy dropped her hand and her jaw. At the same time, her hair tensed.

Emilia was scary on normal day. Throw in demon possession and she was downright terrifying. Her angry energy poured and crashed in waves through the room, making the chairs spin.

“Good to see you, too, sis,” I said, masking the groan in my head. “What brings you here tonight? Don’t you have a house to haunt or a zombie to raise from the dead?”

“He kicked me out,” she snarled from between red-stained lips. I prayed the color came from Lancôme.

The women closest to Emilia took several steps back, their gazes now ping-ponging between us. “He kicked everybody out. Said he doesn’t want any witch but you.”

I didn’t have to ask who *he* was. While I’d been sincerely trying to ditch Luc for a couple of weeks now, the idea that he was pining for me to such a degree made me smile inside. “I made it very clear to Lucifer that I wasn’t going back to my old ways, Emilia. You know that.”

She took a step forward, her cape flowing around her, and the women moved backward in unison. “The only way he’ll get over you is if you’re gone.” Her voice rang with that eerie baritone echo. “Either redeem the world with Adam, or I’ll resort to desperate measures.”

It was obvious she hadn’t found the Atomic Sister Slave spell yet, or desperate measures wouldn’t be necessary. A spark of hope bloomed in my chest. There was still time to steal my spell book back. Unless, of course, she killed me in the next few minutes.

“If she redeems the world from sin,” Liddy said, her face a mirror of complex thought. “You’ll cease to exist, too. You do understand that, right?”

Emilia’s black eyes narrowed at the ex-Wiccan. “I’m a servant to the Devil. My soul is guaranteed to survive.”

Liddy chewed a cuticle and looked at me. A tiny bolt of energy shot from her finger and ricocheted into her hair. “Is that true? What about *our* souls? Will they cease to exist like our bodies?”

The technicalities were beyond my comprehension. “I don’t know for sure, but my guess is, if everyone born in sin ceases to exist, it doesn’t mean they die, it means they cease to exist, souls and all.”

Marcia pushed her way through the group of women, coming to a stop in front of me. “You are really something.” She shook her head in disbelief. “You have to be the center of attention at every meeting, don’t you, Amy?”

In the middle of my demonic-sister showdown and the clock tick-tocking away on the wall behind me, our lovely WA president wanted to pick a fight. “I’m dealing with your future here, Marcia, as well as everyone else’s. If I screw this up, you all pay the price.”

“There’d be no pain,” Liddy said in a dreamy voice. Her hand dropped back into her lap, but her hair still stood at attention. “No accidents, no sadness, no lonely nights waiting for the phone to ring. Sounds wonderful.”

Having given it a lot of thought, I had to add, “But all of the things people have created in this world will also disappear, Liddy. There’ll be no Beethoven’s 5th or Springsteen’s “Born to Run”. No Emily Dickinson or Edgar Allen Poe. No Egyptian pyramids or Taj Mahal. No Orlando Bloom.” I paused to emphasize my next sentence. “No chocolate.”

Several of the women sucked in their breath. “No chocolate?” one of them echoed.

I nodded, my taste buds crying too.

Marcia turned on her and the others. “Are you listening to her? She’s Satan’s ex-girlfriend? Her sister’s possessed? She’s dating

Adam, the original man? You can't possibly believe this insane story."

"Oh, it's not insane," Emilia said. Her red lips tilted in a ruthless smile. "It's absolutely true. While Amy has always believed the world revolves around her, this time, it actually does."

"Look," I said to all of them. "I'm not making this up. Everything I've told you is true and if I don't figure out what to do, we're all in trouble."

Emilia reached out and slammed the door shut. A new and powerful wave of energy zoomed around the room. "Too late. You and your group of freaky friends are already in trouble."

A creepy, crawly feeling raced up the back of my neck. "What are you doing, Em?"

She snapped her fingers. "Poof, Amy."

With a wave of her hand, she raised a protective bubble around herself. I saw her lips move in a silent chant through her wicked smile. The next moment, I smelled smoke.

"Emilia." The voice in my head was screaming to get everyone out. "Stop it. Whatever you're doing, don't take it out on the others. It's me you're mad at."

Outside the room, a fire alarm came to life. "So fight me, Amy," she taunted. "And save them."

Brushing by her bubble of protection, I grasped the doorknob and twisted it. Locked. Conveying calm I didn't feel, I herded the women to the far corner. "She's just trying to scare us," I told them, trying to sound believable. "Stick together, and stay down on the floor. I'll take care of her."

Liddy grabbed my arm. White-hot electricity zinged over my skin. “She’s possessed, Amy. How are you going to handle her without using any spells or enchantments?”

Good question. Gray smoke seeped under the door. Taking off my jacket, I ran to the door and jammed it in the crack at the bottom. Then I looked around for a fire extinguisher. Nada. No extinguisher.

Break a window, I thought, and jump.

Nope, no windows either.

She could have wiped us out with one flick of her hand. Torturing us—me—was more fun. As smoke began seeping right through the walls, I returned to my WA compatriots and demonstrated what I wanted them to do. “Cover your mouths with your shirts. Breathe through the fabric.”

A few exchanged worried looks. Taking out my cell phone, I called Adam. He answered, out of breath. Sirens blared in the background. “Can’t talk now, Amy. There’s a fire downtown in the Golden Building.”

“I know,” I shouted over the background noise. “I’m in the building with my group. We were having our meeting and all of sudden a fire broke out.”

His concern touched me through the night air. “Damn. How bad is it?”

“Bad.” My eyes watered from the smoke and I used my shirt to wipe the tears off my cheeks. “We can’t get out of the room. We’re locked in.”

“Locked in? How did that happen?”

“Uh, I don’t know.” I shot a look at Emilia. Her red lips moved in her ghost-white face. “I guess the doorknob got jammed somehow.”

“Stay as close to the floor as you can. I’m only two blocks away. I’ll be right there.”

Something in me refused to lie on the floor with the others and wait. This time, I had to do the rescuing. After all, Emilia was *my* sister, possessed or not.

Handing my phone to Liddy, I gathered up momentum and charged Em’s bubble. Upon impact, I bounced back like a rubber ball, landing hard on my butt. “Ouch,” I yelped, rolling ass-over-broomstick backwards.

She clapped her hands in mock applause. “Oh, that was funny. Do it again!”

Like Liddy said, without my powers, I couldn’t hope to stop her. The fear in my stomach turned to self-righteous conviction. In my mind, the words of a spell formed. I didn’t try to stop them.

Before the first line of the spell could leave my lips, however, Gabriel appeared in the bubble behind Emilia. She didn’t seem to notice, she was so focused on doing me in.

Satan appears in many forms, his cool, firm voice chided me.

Emilia was Satan, I’d give him that, but she wasn’t *the* Satan. Still, if this was the test, using my witchcraft would kill Adam’s chance at redemption. I racked my brain for another way.

My eyes continued to pour tears and my throat felt like it was stuffed with Brillo pads. “You set the other fires, didn’t you?” I yelled at her. Distraction had worked on her before.

She pointed her pale, well-manicured index finger at me. “You slept with Lucifer even after you told me it was over between the two of you.”

The wail of fire engine sirens outside overrode the smoke detector’s blaring ring. Another minute and I’d have help. “Technically, he showed up in my bed, but nothing happened. I was sleeping.” I coughed and croaked out the rest. “I just woke up and he was there.”

Reasoning with Emilia was like reasoning with Paris Hilton. “You lured him there,” she yelled at me. “I know it’s your fault.”

Coughing hard again, I pulled my shirt over my mouth to filter some of the smoke before I continued. “Emilia, if you kill my body, my soul will still spend eternity with Lucifer. Neither one of us wants that.”

Gabriel, watching the exchange, nodded his head, an almost-smile on his lips. Suddenly, I was sure he was behind my sister’s over-the-top craziness.

Emilia’s forehead creased as if my logic rang true to her. “I never thought of that.”

At that moment, an axe hit the door from the outside, wood splintering in every direction. Emilia screamed, Gabriel rippled his wings and I dropped to my knees in relief. Adam to the rescue. My hero.

The moment he came through the door in full protective gear, Emilia waved her hands and I heard the sharp crack of wood splintering. A ceiling beam overhead wobbled. “No,” I yelled, powerless to stop it from falling.

Adam's gaze locked on mine a second before the beam hit him, knocking him to the ground. His ax slammed into the floor, and his helmet skidded behind a chair. The oxygen mask on his face slipped sideways.

Scrambling on hands and knees, I reached for him. "Adam." He was out cold. I shook him hard. "Adam!"

Flames licked the now-open doorway. Pushing at the heavy beam, I tried to free him. I yelled at the women behind me to help. Liddy and several others broke from the group.

Dodging the flames and coughing our lungs up, we heaved the heavy beam off Adam and pulled him away from the door.

Unfortunately, that was our only way out. A wall of fire leapt from floor to ceiling, blocking our escape as completely as the locked door had done. No other firefighter appeared.

I had no choice. I could not let Adam and the WA women die because of my jealous sister, redemption or no redemption.

Time running out, I cradled Adam's head in my lap, restoring the ring of the oxygen mask over his mouth and nose. The floor, ceiling and walls were cracking and popping in the blistering heat.

"I'm sorry," I said in his ear over the roar of noise. "I can't save humanity or change the balance of good and evil. The only thing I can do, at this moment, is save you."

Laying his head back down on the floor, I rose, coughing, and faced Emilia in her bubble. Calling all my particles into the center of my body, I raised a hand and spoke. "Flames extinguish, stop this game..."

Emilia's frown deepened. Gabriel extended his wings, his face turned to stone.

Ignoring both of them, I raised my voice. "Free Adam from all blame, and return the deceptive angel of God..."

Before I could complete the spell, Gabriel flew at me. The sight of him, wings fully extended and a look of utter hate on his face, made me jump back. I tried to duck, but he was too fast. He picked me up by the neck with one hand and slammed me against the wall. Heat seared through my jacket and into to my skin. I smelled my hair burning.

His grip was so tight on my neck, I couldn't swallow. His eyes, a golden brown a moment before, now burned a deep red. There was no air in my lungs, but I forced the words to my lips, whispering, "...back to the realm from whence he came."

Gabriel disappeared in a flash of white light. I fell to the floor in a heap and lay there, every bone in my body mush. The room was deathly quiet.

No smoke. No flames. Just blessed peace.

And then, out of nowhere, a lone person began to clap.

I sucked fresh air into my lungs. Raising my head an inch, I saw Lucifer sitting on the refreshment table. He smiled at me, his hands continuing to clap at my performance. Emilia had disappeared. With Gabriel? I wasn't sure. The fire was out. The members of Witches Anonymous sat on the floor hugging each other, still stunned by their recent brush with death, a demented angel, and my ruthless, possessed sister.

"Is it over?" I asked Luc, my voice raw.

He slid off the table and helped me into a sitting position. “It’s over.”

Using his fingers, he touched my neck at the base of my throat. A sensation like ice cream running over my vocal chords repaired the damage done by the smoke. “For now,” he added.

For now? Forcing the implications of that statement to the back of my mind, I pulled away from him and crawled over to Adam. He wasn’t breathing and I couldn’t find his pulse. His heart had stopped. “Liddy,” I yelled, waving her over. “Come here.”

Positioning her hands over Adam’s heart, I said to her, “Think of your family, Liddy, and the rotten things they’ve done to you. They’re just like my sister. They push all your buttons and turn you into a bad person, no matter how hard you try to be good.”

Liddy’s brows drew together and electricity crackled in the air. Sparks jumped in her hair and ran down both arms to her fingers. Adam’s body jerked. When I touched his neck to feel for a pulse, he blinked his eyes open.

“What happened?” he asked through the oxygen mask.

Removing it from his face, I sighed, feeling like a total loser, but happy that Adam was okay. “I blew it. I used my powers to stop the fire instead of resisting temptation.”

He blinked again and frowned. “Your powers?”

“I’m a witch, Adam. And not a good one. I work for Lucifer. Luc.” I pointed with my thumb over my shoulder at the Devil. “I wanted to be a good person, a normal person, really I did. That’s why I came to these meetings, Witches Anonymous. I even swore

an oath not to use my powers, but I blew it tonight. I broke my oath. I cast a spell.”

“You’re a Devil-worshipping witch and you swore an oath to God?”

“To myself.”

“Oh.”

“She saved your life and ours,” Liddy said, smoothing back her hair. She stood and brushed dirt off her pants, examined her calm fingers. “If that’s not good, I don’t know what is.”

Lucifer moved beside me and stared down at Adam. “She also saved your chance at redemption.”

Adam glared up at him. “You again?”

“The proper response would be, ‘thank you, Amy’.” Lucifer crouched over Adam. “You see, my dear boy, in her spell, Amy protected you. You still have your chance at redemption. She sent Gabriel back to heaven, so you’re on your own now, though. The future is up to you.”

“It is?” Adam and I said in unison.

A cacophony of noise erupted behind us as several firefighters came busting in through the charred door. “Captain? Are you all right?”

Adam sat up, rubbed a hand over his face and through his soot-filled hair. “What took you guys so long?”

“It was weird, Cap,” a beefy guy answered. “There was like Plexiglas or something across the threshold out there. After you went in, none of us could get through it. We kept bouncing off.”

I exchanged a knowing look with Adam and realized Lucifer had disappeared. The pockets of my jean jacket suddenly felt like I had a couple of watermelons in them. A pleasant yellow glow radiated from both sides. Reaching inside, one hand found foil-wrapped squares, the other touched the edges of a small book. I pulled the book out enough to see the worn black cover. My spell book.

Adam rose to his feet and motioned at the others. “Get these ladies out of here.”

“Right away, Cap.”

As my fellow WA members filed out, I shoved the spell book back in my pocket and stood with Adam, helping support him. Some of the gals, like Liddy, embraced me in a hug. A few patted my arm. Marcia stopped beside me, looked down at the floor, and sighed. “I guess I owe you an apology. I thought you were—” she hesitated, looking for the right word, “—in serious need of a psychiatrist.”

We were even then, since I thought she was in serious need of Valium. “No hard feelings.”

She lifted her gaze to mine. “That other guy who was here?”

“Yeah?”

“Was that...” She blushed. “Was that really Satan?”

“Yes, Marcia, that was him. He prefers to be called Luc.”

“Luc, right. Do you think he might, you know, speak to our group sometime?”

Another woman seduced by a wicked man in faded Levi’s. “I’ll ask next time I run into him.”

She giggled all the way out of the room.

“Amy.” Adam took his arm from around my shoulders. “I’m not sure I understand what happened here.”

“The short version?” Slipping my hand into his, I pulled him toward the door, wanting to get the heck out of there and go home. I needed a shower, ice cream and a full night of sleep. “I stopped my evil sister from killing innocent people. I vanquished an angel, who wanted to be a god, back to heaven. And I improved my status in the Witches Anonymous group significantly. After tonight, I’ll be able to unseat Marcia as president next month when we have elections.”

“You’re sticking with Witches Anonymous even though you broke your oath?”

I shrugged one shoulder. “Everyone falls off the wagon once in awhile. Besides, even though I did use my supernatural powers tonight, I did it for good. I think I’m getting the hang of being human.”

“What about, you know, Lucifer?”

I felt the weight of Dove chocolates and my spell book in my jacket pockets. “I’m sure he’ll be around, but I think I can handle him. Right now, he very much wants to stay on my good side.”

Adam’s lips quirked. “And the long version about tonight?”

“Oh, that.” Squeezing his arm, I hoped he’d understand my philosophical rant. “You see, free will begets self-responsibility. You can’t force someone else to be responsible for your decisions, even if the destiny of humanity rests on your shoulders.” I sensed he understood what I was getting at, so I took a breath and plunged on.

“You take the credit and the blame, one-hundred percent, for your choices. No passing the buck. Or the forbidden fruit, for that matter. Eve sinned and so did you. You can’t blame her for tempting you to eat the apple or ask me to save you from eating it again.”

A chuckle resounded low and soft and sexy in his throat. “Sounds like you have a lot of ideas on the subject. I think I’d like to hear more.”

Lust crackled in the air between us. I raised one eyebrow. “How much time do you have?”

He pulled me close and brushed his lips over mine. My heart did a little dip and soft warmth spread through my chest. “Possibly eternity, but at least all night.”

Tendrils of anticipation ran up my spine. “Ice cream on the rooftop?”

His fingers touched the back of my neck. “Sin City Chocolate?”

My legs went weak. “Of course.”

What else would a wicked witch serve an innocent man?

About the Author

To learn more about Misty Evans, please visit www.readmistyevans.com. Send an email to Misty at misty@readmistyevans.com or join her Yahoo! group to join in the fun with other readers as well as Misty! groups.yahoo.com/group/MistyEvansSuspense.

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A Tickle My Fantasy story

Dating in today's world is tough enough. Pair it with a paranomalady, and Lucille Wainwright is living the recipe for loneliness. Born a talentless witch in a family of legendary spellcasters, she's managed to carve a niche for herself with ParaMatch.com, a matchmaking service for paranormal beings.

What she lacks in the magic department, she more than makes up for with her uncanny ability to conjure committed relationships out of any combination of traits and backgrounds. Until now.

Enter Jager Cronus, deposed king of the Titans and successful paratrader. As a client, he's a nightmare. As a man, he's irresistible. When he demands a date with her to the annual Legion Halloween Dance, she's hard pressed to refuse. With her professional ethics warring with a deep need to prove herself, she gives him two more chances to find love.

That's all the opening Jager needs. After all, he didn't survive his downfall without learning a few things about prevailing in the face of the stiffest negotiations.

Now he's about to negotiate the deal of a lifetime—a future with Lucilla.

Warning: Contains inter-species romance, love potions, fallen Greek Gods, super-morphing wizards, and a male strip-tease.

Enjoy the following excerpt from *ParaMatch.com*:

She pulled slowly into her drive, looking in the rearview mirror at the car as the driver's door opened. A tall, well-proportioned man stood. The light from the street lamp rendered his face half in shadow, but even from where Lucilla sat, she knew the identity of her mystery visitor.

Jager gazed over the top of his car and gave a hesitant wave.

Flutters like leaves stuck in a whirlwind flew around inside her stomach. She smoothed her hand over her abdomen in an attempt to calm the flying furies. What was it about Jager that made her body misbehave?

She motioned for him to come up to the house. It took him no time to get to her with his long strides.

He looked good. The dark suit jacket hung perfectly on his wide shoulders. He moved with elegant grace for such a big man. When he reached her, she looked up into his face, afraid he could hear her heart pound.

A rich, spicy scent filled her head. *Oh, Goddess weeping, he even smells good!* How was she supposed to resist him when he showed up at her door looking like the best fantasy she'd ever had? He gazed at her as if he didn't know how he'd come to be standing on her doorstep. And for the life of her, Lucilla couldn't think of a word to say.

Then he was there, kissing her mouth like a starving man. Lucilla put her hands on his shoulders, intending to push away from his unprovoked admiration, but only managed to sink her hands into his thick hair, holding onto him, afraid he'd let her go.

Her entire body melted against the wall of his heat. His tongue brushed against hers. A faint tang of cloves clung to his mouth. Why did he have to taste good, too? Now she'd never want to stop kissing him. But she had to. He was a client. His fees helped keep a roof over her head and food on her table. Kissing him was definitely unethical.

Lucilla managed to pull her mouth away from his. The maneuver didn't have the desired effect of stopping the kiss. It only served to give him an opportunity to run his mouth into her hairline, to kiss her temple and breathe hot breath into her ear.

Her nipples were so hard they ached behind the confines of silk and lace. Without conscious thought, she arched her back, rubbing them against him for relief.

"Lucilla," Jager moaned. "Please, don't send me out on another bad date when I already know who I want."

For a second she tensed, until she realized what he meant. She wanted to hear it. Needed to hear it. "Who do you want?"

He laid his forehead against hers. "I'm holding her right now."

"If that's true, why did you sign up for my services?"

"I didn't know it was you." He put his finger under her chin, tilting her face up to his. "I'm not used to begging. It's not in my nature. But if you make me go out with the djinn, I'll be reduced to it."

A fallen god begging? It made for an intriguing picture, but Lucilla had never been that cruel. She slid her hand in his then turned to the door. “Why don’t you come inside and we can discuss what we’re going to do with you.”

She led him through the living room and into the den. The room was filled with earthy colors, rich and warm. It was her favorite room in the house. Large, overstuffed furniture was grouped in the middle of the space to make for an intimate setting.

Lucilla indicated the sectional with a turn of her hand. “Have a seat and I’ll bring us some drinks.”

He released the button on his jacket and sat on the sofa. “You have a beautiful home.”

“Thank you. I like it.” She poured them both some brandy and carried it over to him.

She took a seat across from him, balancing her drink on her crossed legs. “Did something happen tonight to make you come over here and wait at the curb for me?” The words, *and kiss me*, echoed in her head, but she refrained from saying them.

He swirled the brandy around in the snifter. “I had a date with Maribon Seacrest.”

A hand clamped around Lucilla’s heart to squeeze. Wasn’t that what she was being paid for? She’d only done her job in setting them up.

“I see.” Her throat tried to close around the words. Even though it was obvious he hadn’t had a good time on the date, it was like a knife going through her gut.

“The night will not be repeated.”

“Oh, Jager.” She hid her smile behind her hand. “You really know how to charm the ladies, don’t you?”

He frowned. “What makes you think the failure of the date was my fault?”

“Your track record. You’ve found fault with them all.” Warming to the conversation, she shifted in her seat. “How do I know, if I go with you to the Legion Halloween Dance, you won’t say the same thing about me?”

“You *are* going with me to the dance. You’ve already agreed.”

“I *agreed* to it on the stipulation you went out with *both* of my clients. Now you’re here wanting to go back on your word.” Lucilla shook her head in mock pity. “I don’t know, sounds to me as if I may need to apologize to my other clients for sending them on dates with you.”

She watched his jaw tighten. He turned his head to avoid looking at her. “I’ve never gone back on my word.” When his gaze connected with hers again, his eyes were hot, intense. “I want you. I don’t want to wait.”

It's not smart to piss off a poltergeist

The Ghost Shrink, the Accidental Gigolo & the Poltergeist Accountant

©2008 Vivi Andrews

A Tickle My Fantasy story

It's bad enough to be sexually frustrated. But as a medium, it means until Lucy Cartwright gets some, she's doomed. Oh no, not to death. Worse. To nightly visitations by recently deceased, wanna-be Cassanovas without the bodies to back it up. Then a living, breathing fantasy arrives on her doorstep, and Lucy thinks her dry spell is at an end.

Much as he would like to be Lucy's personal gigolo, PI Jake Cox has a job to do. He's been sent to prevent her from getting laid until a particular horny phantom—and key witness in his mob investigation—pays her a visit. The real challenge? Keeping his own hands off Lucy long enough to get the job done.

Or the lonely, geeky ghost of a murdered mob accountant could rip a hole in the fabric of the universe...

Warning: This book contains cheesy pick-up lines, amateur stripteases, and voyeuristic intentions—all by dead men. And the living behave just as badly...

Enjoy the following excerpt from *The Ghost Shrink, the Accidental Gigolo & the Poltergeist Accountant*:

Lucy slipped past the eye-candy in her kitchen, set the timer and shoved the muffin tray into the oven. Then she heard him breathing. *He's allowed to breathe, dammit*, she told her hormones, but they weren't listening. They were already summoning up fantasies involving breathing. And panting. And gasping.

So Lucy gasped, and swore, as her hand brushed the hot oven rack. She snatched her hand out of the oven, mentally cursing her stupidity, and slammed the door closed.

"Did you burn yourself?" Jake demanded, stepping forward and immediately taking control.

He caught her wrist and held it up for inspection. Seeing the vivid red welt rising on the back her hand, he tugged her over to the sink and turned on the faucet with a single-minded economy of movement that was somehow indescribably hot.

Dear God, I'm doomed. Even his first aid is sexy.

He temperature-tested the tap with his own hand before thrusting her burn beneath the cool, running water. "Keep it there," he ordered, already on his way to the freezer. He was back a moment later, a clean dishtowel wrapped around a bundle of ice. "Here, let me see."

He gently took her wrist and drew her hand out of the water, cautiously inspecting the burn. His attention was so focused, so intent, as he brushed the soft skin around the burn with his fingertips, careful not to touch the wound itself. He bent and blew cool air on her hand before gently pressing the ice pack over it, his

concentration complete. Lucy couldn't help but wonder if he would bring that focus and intensity to everything he did. A delicious shiver ran down her spine.

"I know it's cold," he said, and Lucy was relieved he didn't suspect the real reason for her shivering—she was embarrassed enough already. "You need to keep it on there for twenty minutes or so."

"Thank you," she said quietly.

Jake shook his head abruptly, rejecting her gratitude. "My fault. I shouldn't have been distracting you while you were cooking."

"You weren't distracting me," Lucy lied, knowing she was blushing. Again.

"No?" He arched his eyebrows skeptically then reached up to brush the back of one finger against her cheek. "You have flour all over your face."

Lucy winced internally. Great. Now, not only was she as red as a turnip, she had the distinction of being a blotchy, flour-coated turnip with a propensity for burning herself. Oh yeah, he wasn't going to be able to keep his hands off her now.

She waited for him to laugh at her. She waited for him to turn away, writing her off as ridiculous. She waited...until he tipped her chin up, forcing her to meet his eyes. Eyes that didn't look mocking or superior, but rather curiously intent.

Oh my.

He brushed at the clinging flour on her cheeks, his calloused hands tentatively caressing. Lucy gazed up at him, trying to

remember how to breathe, or think, or do anything other than stare at him with her heart in her throat and her stomach down around her toes. They were standing near the oven, but Lucy had a feeling the burning sensation rippling along her skin had more to do with the mountain of solid muscle in front of her than the oven behind. He smiled gently, his hands still cradling her face. “Even without the flour, you look pretty damn edible,” he murmured, his voice low and intimate.

The world slowed and tightened until they were the only two people in it, and time was frozen in that thick moment when she *knew* he was about to kiss her. She stood paralyzed, hopeful, but not allowing herself to hope.

He bent toward her slowly, his gorgeous black eyes shuttered by thick black lashes. Lucy’s eyes fell closed and she held herself perfectly still, desperate, waiting. When his lips finally touched hers, it was like putting a spark to a fast-burning fuse. A fuse attached to a stick of dynamite.

Lucy dove recklessly into the kiss, arching against him shamelessly. The first tentative brush of his mouth instantly became an urgent, open-mouthed exchange. She wound her arms around his shoulders and he gripped her butt in both hands, lifting her to get a better angle on her mouth, a better angle of her body pressed against his.

As soon as her feet left the floor, Lucy looped her legs around his waist, locking her ankles at the small of his back. Jake took two steps across the kitchen and pinned her against the refrigerator, the cool, smooth surface teasing her exposed shoulder blades where the

spaghetti straps of her sundress left them bare. Lucy gave a little groan of pure, unadulterated lust, her hormones throwing an orgiastic party when Jake immediately echoed it. *Now, this is how a gigolo behaves.*

Jake grabbed the knees squeezing his waist with both hands and shifted her slightly for better access. The combination of his fingers teasing the sensitive skin at the backs of her knees and the sudden, grinding friction of his jeans where she wanted it the most was nearly enough to send her off right there. Lucy let her head fall back against the refrigerator, her eyes closing in anticipation of bliss as she sent a little prayer of thanks to the gods of nookie.

All it takes is a spark of Grrrrrl power to set the swamp on fire!

Carolina Wolf

©2008 Sela Carsen

A Tickle My Fantasy story

Librarian Debra Henry is boring. And she's okay with that. Really. It's not as if the teensy amount of witchcraft that flows in her veins is worth getting excited about. Yet someone—or something—thinks it's worth crawling out of the swamps to attack her. Those *somethings* are werewolves.

When one of them is hurt saving her, the least she can do is take him home and patch him up. Healing him stirs more than her senses. Maddox Moreau awakens the magic that sleeps in her blood. And suddenly, life's not quite so boring.

A wildlife manager at Congaree National Park by day, Maddox likes being the BWIS—Big Wolf In the Swamp. By night, he lets his wild side out to play lone wolf. At least until he meets the one woman who can share his soul. Perhaps it's best, though, if he holds off on sharing his preference for raw meat.

Rescuing her seals his fate—but only if he can protect her from a rogue of his kind. A werewolf with a nasty stalker streak...

Warning: This story contains hunky werewolves, librarian fetishes, Southern humor, smart-ass women and men who think that's sexy, magic, medieval legends, disco music and flatulent Boxers. (The dogs, not the underwear.)

Enjoy the following excerpt from *Carolina Wolf*:

Maddox hid a shudder of lust as he watched her eat. The woman was sex on a stick and she had no idea how she affected him.

Too bad she didn't trust him.

An acrid tinge of deception colored the air sometimes when they spoke. Mostly when they spoke about magic. Debra had power, but he couldn't quite figure out what kind. Tonight, he needed answers almost as much as he needed her in his arms.

She finished her last bite, her last sip of wine, and delicately dabbed her mouth with a napkin. Close enough. He took her hand and helped her slide off the stool.

"Before we get to the part where you have to lie to me about what you are and what you're protecting, I need to kiss you."

Her eyes widened and she tried to pull away, but he wrapped his arms around her. "I've been dying to do this all day long, Debra. I can't wait anymore."

Every dominant instinct he possessed, both as a wolf and as a man, surged forward and he bent her over his arm, his hand cradling the back of her head as he kissed her. Devoured her. Consumed her.

Her lips melted under his, the tang of the dry red wine lingering in her mouth. Maddox dipped his tongue inside to savor more and tasted the overwhelming flavor of passion. Debra came alive in his arms. Not content to be swept under him, she fought his lead, vying for control, and he relished the battle.

She hooked one leg around him. Her skirt was long and slim, preventing her from moving higher, so he slid his hand down and yanked up the fabric, bunching it around her hips so he could grab her thigh and pull her in tighter to his body.

Thigh-highs. She was wearing thigh-high stockings. With garters. His knees went weak. His erection turned into a painful throb and he groaned, pulling away from her mouth to nuzzle her neck.

“You’re killing me, pretty little Debra Henry.”

“Likewise, Mr. Moreau.” Her soft, sweet drawl ripped his heart right out of his chest, but her scent changed from the spice of lust to sharp regret. She hugged him, tucking her face into his shoulder. “I’m so sorry.” Her arms sagged and the weight of her remorse pulled at him like a millstone.

He slid her thigh back down his leg and adjusted her skirt. “Please tell me what it is. I can’t help you if you don’t tell me.”

“I can’t. I’m so sorry, but I just can’t. Telling you may put us in even more danger than we’re in now. It’s...complicated.”

“You’re a witch. I know. I smell magic on you, Debra. Sweet and sparkling. It’s like champagne. I know you’re protecting something and I figure it’s got to be pretty big if you’re not telling me, am I right?”

The hitch in her breath and the way she caught her lower lip in her teeth gave him the answer he’d already guessed.

“There are rules that have to be followed. It’s not my secret to tell.”

“I understand that, but we’ll have to deal with it sooner or later.” He nuzzled her cheek. “Maybe later.”

Despite the lie that stood between them, he knew her down in his bones. It was bad enough when he’d only wanted her, when his plan was to woo her gently, but in the face of the danger and the power that surrounded them, they were well past a slow courtship. Something bigger than both of them was moving them together and he didn’t want to fight it.

“I have this fantasy,” he said, letting his hand wander down over her hips.

“Do we have time for fantasies?” Her eyes glazed, her lips parted, and she reached up to kiss him again. He licked at her mouth.

“We’ll make time. This one should be easy for you. You’re perfect for it, in fact.” Her glasses had slid down to their customary spot and she looked at him over the rims. While getting her naked and spread was high on his priority list, Maddox still wanted to give her something she needed—a loving that was fun and lighthearted.

He spun her out on the tips of his fingers. “You’re the sexiest librarian I’ve ever seen. Sharp haircut, hot glasses. Pretty blouse.” He trailed a finger down the modest V-neck. “Tight skirt.” His other hand palmed her ass. “Your shoes are a little on the sensible side. Got any hooker heels?”

She chuckled, a husky sound that fired his blood. “You have a librarian fantasy?”

“Only if you’re the librarian.” He reached into her open tote bag and pulled out a paperback. A romance novel, its cover a subtle,

sensual twining of male and female limbs. He tossed it onto the floor behind her. Her head cocked in confusion.

“Oh, Miss Librarian. I dropped a book. Would you please bend over and pick it up for me?”

Debra eyed the book, then her lips quirked up in a sexy smile. Her hips rolled as she turned her back on him. Oh yeah. She was getting into it now. Rather than just leaning down for it, however, she bent at the knees and, spine straight, elegantly lowered herself to reach the book. Not quite what he had in mind, but he'd work with it.

Then she nailed him. Smooth and slow, her legs straightened. Her arm still touching the floor, her ass rose in front of him like a mirage out of the desert. Teasing. Taunting. Right about the time she began to lift her body, he stepped behind her, hugging her hips into his, savoring the slide of heat on heat. His cock was cushioned against those luscious cheeks as she stood fully into his hold, reaching back with her arm to pull his head down to hers.

His hands shook when he took the book from her and tossed it onto the couch. His arms wrapped around her waist as he nuzzled her neck.

“Why, sir, didn't you want that book?”

“I don't need to read love scenes, babe. Let's go write one.”

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