
Chapter 1

The sun was still in bed when Isobel stopped in front of Alizon's, the shop she and two members of her coven had built over the last fifteen years. She unlocked the door and went inside. Her immediate destination was her haven, where she could be alone and think. After putting her purse on her desk, she lit candles around the room; she unfurled her mat and lay down in the middle of the floor. She closed her eyes and settled on the image that always helped her to relax, a deserted beach. The waves crashed against the sands, and Isobel relaxed, as she always did.

The ocean was her peaceful place. Isobel's mind raced, despite the fact this was her quiet time. She took several deep breaths, in through the nose, out through the mouth, over and over. Calm replaced her nerves, and she sat up, crossed her legs and put her hands, palms up, on her knees.

"Goddess," she whispered. "Once again I pray for your guidance."

Once again she was on the beach, the calming sounds of the ocean surrounding her. Isobel opened her eyes and smiled. The sun crested over the horizon. It was the most stunning part of the

day, and she always went to this place to help when her nerves got the best of her, as they were doing right now.

But then something appeared that had never been there before. A man with the body of a Greek god, his dark hair reflected in the rising sun, appeared in the ocean and started to walk toward her. The waves rippled around his legs as he moved, and when he was on the beach, and making his way toward her, she saw he was naked, and had a hard-on that made her mouth water. It had been years since she'd seen a penis, much less an uncut one. He stroked himself, pulling the skin back enough for her to see the head of his shaft.

The sight made Isobel's mouth water. She wanted to get on her hands and knees, cross to him and take him in her mouth. The urge almost made her do it, for she was at the beach, as she was every morning at this time. But before she did something she knew she would regret she pointed at him and yelled, "Get out!"

The beach shook, and she was immediately back in her office, sitting on the mat. Jenson lay in front of her, utter shock making his features crinkle. But the look changed immediately, so fast that Isobel wondered if she had imagined it.

He stroked himself once more and said, "Hungry?"

"Get out," she repeated, her voice lower and more controlled.

"You wondered why we hadn't spoken." He stroked his hardness once more. "I just wanted to answer your call. It would be rude of me not to."

He tightened his grip on his cock, and Isobel looked away. Then she waved her fingers. When she looked back a blanket covered the lower portion of his body. The moment she saw his smooth, muscular chest she knew she was slipping. She could have made it so his entire body was covered. Or maybe she should wrap him in a shroud and toss him into the ocean.

Either way, she had to take charge or all would be lost where

Jenson was concerned. "I would like you to leave and call first before you make another appearance."

"Where is the fun in that?"

Isobel looked up in time to see him stand. Now he wore a pair of low-slung linen pants that made her think he was in a harem and she should be performing a belly dance. As if he'd read her mind a mound of pillows appeared on the floor and he fell into them.

"Are you going to ignore my request?"

"Don't we need to talk about our mission?" He locked his hands behind his head and stretched out on the pillows. Isobel couldn't help the fact that her gaze locked on his crotch.

"Would you like to ride me, princess? That way we could just get the tension out of the way and concentrate on finding either the rose, or the cup."

"I wouldn't ride you if wild horses were involved."

"Kinky," he said with a smirk. "Such a fun thing to learn about you." His cock was hard again, and Isobel looked away. She would not rise to his taunting, because she knew she would get nowhere by allowing herself to be pulled in.

"I'm asking you nicely to leave." Isobel pointed at him. "I'm not a simpering sub to do your every bidding. If you don't want to concentrate on our assignment, I will ask Dante to find me another partner."

"We were meant to be together." Jenson's hand slid under the waistband of his pants. She watched as he grasped himself and pumped ever so slowly. The tip of his cock appeared, and when he pulled back the skin she saw the head glistening with pre-cum. "You were the one who said you would do anything to fight evil."

"Does that mean you're leveraging sex for fighting Tycroft?"

He stepped so close to her that Isobel could feel his hot breath on her cheek. "Princess, I don't leverage anything. I was offering for us to, shall we say, break the ice. But if you prefer to have the tension build until the first orgasm I give you blasts you to the

moon, that is your choice. But when you can't move for days after I fuck you the first time, know that it could have been avoided."

"I don't have a desire for your type of sex."

"Are you a lesbian?"

"That's not what I meant." She put her hand against his chest in an effort to push him away, but touching him burned her skin, in a way that made her tingle down to her toes.

His chuckle only made her swoon, something that had never happened to her before. Jenson clutched her around the waist and pulled her into a tight hug.

"Princess—"

"Stop calling me that," she whispered.

"Princess, you will soon find out my type of sex, as you say, is what has been missing from your life."

His lips were right in front of hers, and she waited for him to claim hers, to kiss her and get it over with, because she knew the actual kiss could not match the fantasy running through her mind.

But he didn't kiss her, despite the fact she knew he wanted it as much as she did. A pounding from the front of the store broke them apart.

He laughed, the sound almost evil as he took a step back. "There's Daddy. He's not happy I'm here, and he's not."

"The building is warded against magical entry," she said as a thought occurred to her. "Speaking of which, how did you get in here?"

"Princess, there are no wards that will keep me away from you." He disappeared, and Isobel ran her fingers through her hair.

This was going to be much harder than she thought. The pounding increased, and she sighed. So much for quiet time. She needed to talk with her father and let him know she was in charge of her life, and not him.

At least she hoped that was the truth, and the *him* she meant was her father, and not the demon who had just made her body quake with need.

ALIZON'S, the place where she felt most comfortable in the world, had been invaded by a demon. She and her partners, Beatrice Tormi and Katia Seaver, obviously needed to work on the wards. Or would it help? Demons had powers she didn't really know much about, because she hadn't had contact with one before. She needed to do some research.

She wouldn't let him come and go as he pleased. Alizon's had a steady clientele and attracted quite a few tourists who wanted to see the darker side of Rome, the occult side.

Their reputation was why her business partners Bea and Katia had argued with her about changing her name on the glass panel to the left of the door. It gave the name of the shop, the hours, and the names of the proprietresses. A week ago, it had read Isobel—with no last name. But that was before Isobel found out her mother, Chetna, was a murderer and practiced black magic, and her father, Raphael Sutter, whom she thought was dead, was alive and well.

Now the store sign named Beatrice Tormi, Katia Seaver and Isobel *Sutter*.

"It's too soon," Beatrice had said. "You don't know him."

"He's my father," Isobel had responded. "I trust him."

"You trusted your mother," Beatrice had spat out. Isobel knew from the look on her face that Bea immediately regretted her outburst. "I can't imagine what this is like. But don't replace one problem parent with another."

Isobel had turned from her friend, so she couldn't see the look on her face. Isobel hadn't backed down, and the next day

her father's surname was added to hers on the storefront. Her father had been thrilled. Her friends, not so much.

Now she was reminded it wasn't just her parents that were causing problems. It was the fight to stop a demon from being reborn.

Tycroft. There was a large part of her that wished she'd never heard the name. But he was a higher-level demon that was known to all. He was dead, killed by his daughter months ago. But the demon had foreseen his death, and he had concocted a ritual years ago that would bring him back to life on Samhain the year after his death.

But her father's coven had discovered the information and they had also set up a ritual. Unfortunately, they didn't keep hold of the items they would need to banish Tycroft forever.

That's where Isobel came into the picture. Three couples would find what they needed. One, Lucinda and Matteo, had already found the painting that would guide them. Now, according to a dream by the priest Dante, Isobel and Jenson, the incubus, would have to find a cup or a rose. Another couple would find the third item. Isobel wasn't sure she wanted to know what would happen after all three objects had been located.

"One down, two to go," she whispered as she unlocked the door, went inside and clicked the lock back into place. This was her quiet time, where she meditated and prepared herself for the day. She would stock shelves, unpack boxes that had come in the day before, and make orders of items that had been sold. Now the demon had ruined it.

Isobel loved her shop. She loved what it represented, and although she'd told Dante she would do her part to make sure Tycroft did not rise again she was having second thoughts. Well, maybe doubts was a better way to express what she was feeling.

Raphael, for she had problems sometimes thinking of him as father despite the fact she was using his name, was livid when it

had been revealed she would pair with Jenson to search for either the cup, or the rose, the two remaining objects.

“Over my dead body,” he’d screamed in a voice that made the rafters rattle.

“Please, Father, calm yourself,” she said.

Jenson had only laughed. Working with the incubus would not be easy. He was too damn sexy for words, and Isobel knew she would end up in his bed. She had only just met him, but his reputation—well, he was an incubus. He ran a BDSM club that attracted quite a crowd, from those who liked to practice, and those who liked to watch. Isobel had never been there, but she’d heard all about it the other evening when Raphael had ranted about her being in contact with “a demon that made his living off other’s pain.”

Said demon had snorted and responded, “You mean those who have to spend too much time in your company? I assure you, they have a standing reservation at *La Presentazione* so they can have your memory beaten from their memories.”

Raphael had pointed at the incubus. “You will never touch my daughter.”

“Mere touching is not what interests me,” Jenson had said. It was at that point that Isobel had shivered and the priest Dante had interrupted and told the two men to stop their bickering.

She’d expected the demon to show up the night Dante had paired the two of them together to hunt for the ritual items. But he hadn’t.

Nor had he shown up the next night.

Or the next.

Or the next.

As the days had progressed she knew it was the Dom thing to do, or at least she thought it was. In her hundreds of years she’d never thought about practicing the darker side of sex. Not that she’d had that many partners. In fact, if you considered the

number of years she'd been alive – more than three hundred years – the number of lovers she'd had was an embarrassment.

Isobel figured she could blame her mother for that. Chetna never had a nice word to say about the male of the species. She'd warned Isobel that no man could be trusted because they brought nothing but trouble. Of course she'd also said Isobel's father was dead, had been for years. That had turned out to be a lie, and her mother had turned out to be a murderer.

Now she faced a quest, one that she knew nothing about. She didn't even know what they were supposed to be looking for, just that the cup and rose were the last two items needed for the ritual. She once again prayed for guidance from the goddess. When nothing happened she thought about the other couple Dante had mentioned, a Jinn named Casimir, and a human he called Char who lived in New Orleans. Why would a human be involved in this? They had nothing they could add to the solution, nothing they could do in the supernatural world. Or did they?

Maybe she should contact them to see if Dante had spoken with either of them. Or was he waiting to talk to them until after he saw how Isobel and Jenson fared in their search. Truthfully, the priest had given them very little information on what they were supposed to do. When she'd asked that night he'd told her he would let her know when he'd learned more information.

That had been the last she'd heard from him. Dante had left Rome for New Orleans, and she hadn't received any sort of message. In fact, he hadn't taken her phone number, or email address; and he hadn't given her any contact information for him, either. Other than the fact that her father trusted him, she knew nothing about Dante, except for the fact he was a priest, and was an Egyptian.

The former religious building where his group lived in New Orleans, called The Abbey, shouldn't be that hard to find on the internet. Isobel made a mental note to do a search that afternoon

in between customers, or during the break from two to four. Unlike many businesses, Alizon's kept their doors open. Beatrice worked those hours. It was when her children took naps, and she enjoyed getting out of the house at that time.

A loud noise from the front caught her attention. Her father was here, as the demon had said. She felt Raphael's anger as he pounded on the front door.

So much for starting the day in a peaceful way. She got up, put away her mat and started toward the front door, praying once again for guidance, this time to face whatever came her way.