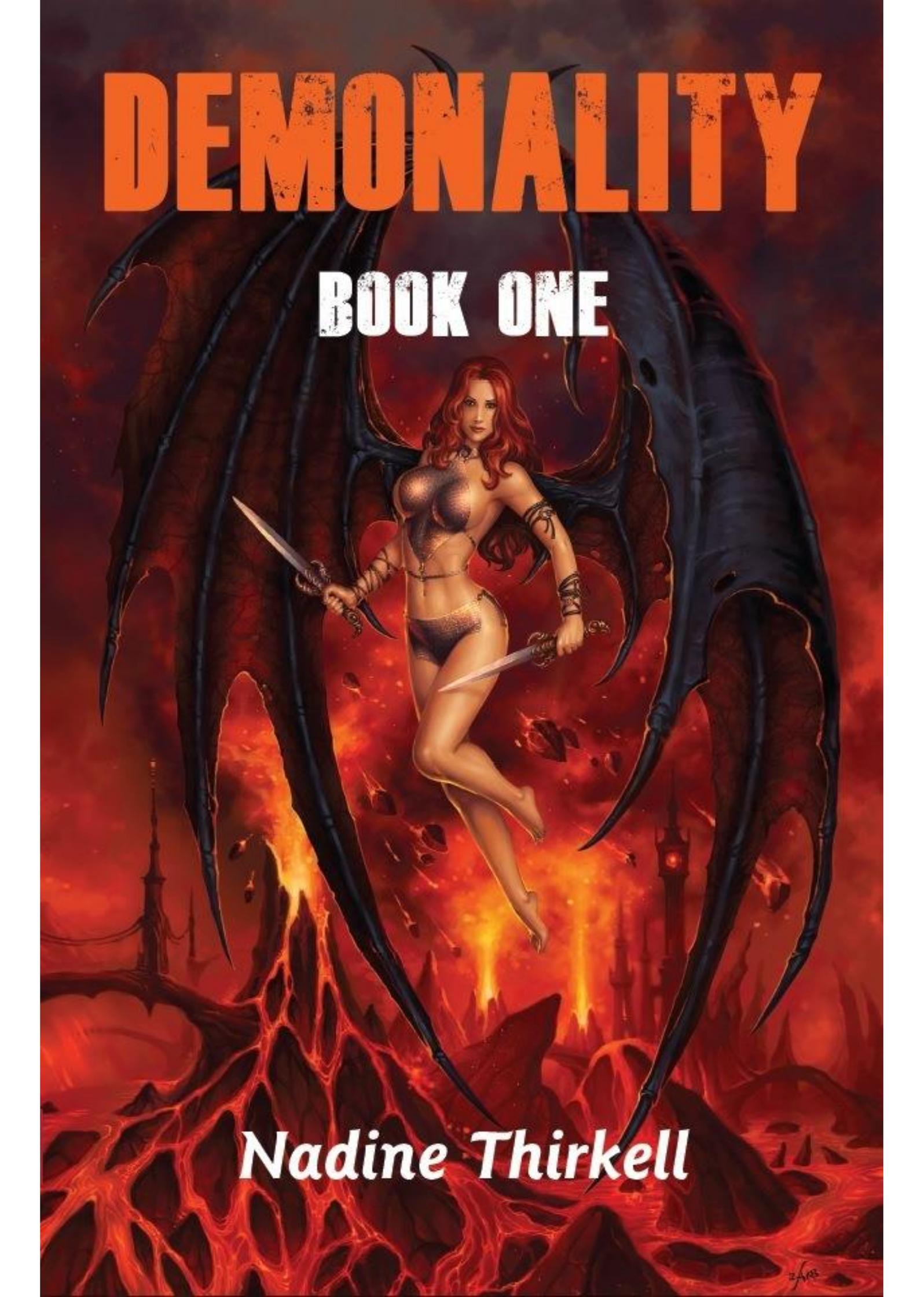


DEMONALITY



BOOK ONE

Nadine Thirkell

Demonality

Book One

By

Nadine Thirkell



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Story tellers will always need an audience.

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Before You Go

A Secret in the Dark

(Earthsideside)

It was the hour of the wolf, the darkest time of night.

They had agreed that it was the best time to meet as no one would be about. The three figures checked to see they were alone, a single male and a couple that included a petite but shapely female. Even in the darkness, they kept to the shadows to stay out of sight and spoke in hushed tones to avoid attention. They wore dark robes, their faces covered by hoods.

The single male looked about before whispering.

“You understand the risks? There is no way to guarantee your safety. There must be complete understanding...”

“I know the risks.”

The lone male spoke again.

“Are you sure the location is not too far?”

She clutched her companion’s hand.

“We have checked, he will find me, and I am sure the attraction will be immediate. I am exactly what he is looking for.”

“So much to chance...”

She patted the cheek of the single male affectionately.

“We shall be fine. Once we are through, we understand we will only have each other and no other support. Please keep Jon out of trouble and check in on Fenris from time to time.”

“Of course, but for all our sakes I hope you are successful, good luck.”

He could almost hear her confident smile as she spoke.

“Dragons do not need luck, we follow our destinies.”

Chapter 1 - Hell

Incendya Domus had always been the seat of power of the rulers of Hell. No one could remember a time before the construction of the edifice. Built on top of Mount Pyrosis, the largest of the Hellfire volcanos, it commanded an impressive view of the valley below where the common and serving demons lived. The only entrance to the compound was a highly guarded series of tunnels carved into the rock that twisted up the side of the mountain.

There were several classes of demons. The strong but non-magical demons —trolls, ogres, and giants— were used for hard labour due to their muscle and size. The weakest demons —gargoyles, gremlins, and imps— made up the serving class. They carried out the most menial and often unsavoury tasks.

The ruling class was made up of elementals, who like their name suggested, had magic based on an element: fire, water, and wind but no rock —the reason lost to time. Some believed they'd abandoned their taste for power and wandered off into the wastes and whose spines could now be seen in the shapes of mountains. Of all the elemental demon classes, fire demons were the strongest. Incendya Domus stood as a stark reminder of that fact.

Shadow Lord, often referred to by underlings as simply the dark lord, was the most powerful of all the fire demons. Herculean in size as well as build, he stood well over the average height of most humans and Faye, towering over other demons. His physical presence enforced his dominance. His skin was an unnatural shade of crimson, his fiery blood affecting his appearance as well as his temperament. He had black eyes that shone with malice set in an angular face with a pronounced chin and full lips that when he did smile, often held a hint of cruelty.

He stood looking out over his domain. The rivers of Hellfire that criss-crossed the land gave off a low glow, like veins of fire. Set against the harsh landscape of jagged rocks and resilient vegetation that thrived in the hot and arid land. This realm crushed weakness. Only the heartiest and most adaptable could survive.

Shadow Lord had fought and gained his place like his predecessor and those before him. All rulers of Hell gained their seat by destroying the one who ruled before them, but the dark lord was already seeking a mate capable of providing him with an heir so strong that his line would rule Hell for eternity.

Shadow Lord sent for his mage, Cendre; he did not like to use her often as her presence left him uneasy. Theirs was an uncomfortable alliance, but her unique gifts had their uses. The dark lord had been given an exceptional opportunity that required him to acquire a rare demon curse —something to bind a Dragon to a single specific form. He knew that Dragons possessed a kind of sympathetic magic. A strange empathy that manifested as the ability to mirror any being it dealt with. Plainly put, Dragons could take the form of any creature.

His spies had brought him word that an obsidian Dragon had been observed making its way towards the compound. Shadow Lord kept a small but dedicated group of spies, hand chosen by him for their ability to ferret out the most useful information, no matter how well it was buried. Their report was puzzling though. A female obsidian travelling alone made him apprehensive, and yet such a prize must be his.

Dragons had not been seen in millennia, and obsidians were prized over all Dragon types due to their dual elemental aspects. And this was a rock-water obsidian no less. If he could capture this Dragon and mate with her, the offspring could conceivably be a dual elemental.

"So my spies were correct, a female obsidian Dragon in Hell. They neglected to report you were so ...well-formed."

It was common knowledge that male demons favoured human females for their carnal pleasures. The female Dragon, Dark Haven, smiled. In this form she was not as statuesque as most humans, but all their reports had indicated that the dark lord was drawn to a curvaceous body type, designed for breeding with wide hips and ample breasts. Unlike the other creatures who kept their eyes lowered in his presence, her bright blue eyes stared directly into Shadow Lord's, her gaze never wavering.

He admired the graceful features of her face. She had high cheek bones and an exquisitely shaped nose. Her eyes were such a luminous blue as to almost shine from within, framed with long, dark lashes. But as beautiful as her eyes were he was mesmerized by her mouth with its full sensual lips, his mind already imagining how he would use them. Her waist length jet black hair fell in soft waves down her back. It swayed seductively when she moved.

"Your spies are fools. I was never concealed. I was told about you, and I journeyed here to see for myself if the stories were true."

Dark Haven lowered her eyes glancing quickly at Shadow Lord through her lashes.

"Send your guards away. I would speak to you privately."

She moved closer still to the dark lord and gently placed her hand on his chest. She felt a sudden jolt of wantonness at his firm physique.

Licking her lips and keeping her eyes downcast.

"What I have to say would be best shared in your private chambers."

Shadow Lord smiled down at Dark Haven.

"No doubt."

"I understand virgins are in short supply in Hell."

She added as an afterthought, flicking her eyes upward to again meet his stare directly.

The dark lord's smile became wider still.

Dark Haven awoke with her thighs bloody and scratches all over her body. Demonic mating was fierce, but she had been prepared for it. What she had not been ready for was the mental haze. Her mind was fuzzy and something felt very wrong. Her Dragon memories were not as sharp as before. She could recall them, but it was like a sheer veil had settled over them. They had shared wine. Reaching for the glass next to her, she raised it to her nose and inhaled. There, just under the bouquet, a faint but unfamiliar scent. Was it Dracaena or maybe some hellish corruption of the root? The wine had been tainted. A moment's panic before she composed herself.

She was still alive, and the blood confirmed her maidenhood had been taken. She reached for her stomach. Had his seed planted? She would have to lay with him until it could be confirmed.

"Come forward, gargoyle."

Gath shuffled toward the dark lord, terrified but unwilling to show any fear. To show fear in Hell was to sign your own death warrant. Better to hide well below anyone's notice, which is how he, a lowly gargoyle, had survived for as long as he had, but now he had no choice.

"Yes, my lord."

Gath kept his eyes level with Shadow Lord's chest, and waited.

"I have taken a mate, an obsidian Dragon and she is now with child. You shall watch her and report to me on her condition. Is this understood?"

Gath's eyes didn't waver.

"Yes my lord."

Shadow Lord waved him away, dismissing him. As he left the chamber he let out a breath.

Gath shuffled down the corridor, avoiding all the other demons. When one of the dark lord's sons strode passed him, he moved to the wall and crouched down. He was just a gargoyle, the lowest of the low in the compound. He'd survived to the ripe old age of six hundred cycles by staying inconspicuous. It helped that to most he looked almost part of the stonework. He did as he was bid and never questioned anyone. His newest orders were simple compared to his usual duties: waiting on the other elementals and occasionally acting as a target for the dark lord's sons. He was strong, if a bit slow owing to his age and the fact that gargoyles were not creatures of speed. Slow, strong and dependable —that was Gath in a nutshell.

He made his way towards the rooms the dark lord had assigned to this new mate. He would see to all her needs while she was with child. He reached her rooms and announced himself to Dark Haven.

"I have been sent by the dark lord to wait on you and to do as you bid."

Gath kept his eyes lowered, unsure of how this newest mate would receive him. The last one had found pleasure in humiliating him in front of the other demons. When she spoke her voice was soft and almost musical.

"What is your name?"

Gath was still bowed.

"Gath if it pleases you."

She laughed at his response but it wasn't the scathing laugh of a new tormenter; it sounded like something altogether more benign. He was still nervous.

"And why would I need to be pleased by your name, you were named by your mother. I had no bearing on the matter."

She stood and walked towards him, and Gath readied himself for what he assumed would be the first of many beatings. He was a gargoyle, he was used to it.

“Why do you cower so? I wish us to be friends; I will have need of a friend in this place, I think. Please, I really do not wish you any harm.”

Gath looked up and into Dark Haven’s eyes and she smiled at him.

“Good, that is much better. I think both of us will get along fine. I am Dark Haven, and I think you need a friend as much as I.”

Chapter 2 – Gath

Gath eventually accepted Dark Haven's offer of friendship was genuine. She did not appear overly friendly with him outside her private quarters, but she did not abuse him publicly either.

"Because you serve me at the dark lord's behest none would dare harm you in my presence, but away from me is another matter. For that reason, do not draw unwanted attention to yourself when you are about the compound. In private I welcome your opinions and thoughts, but in public we shall have to play our parts. I do not wish for you to place yourself in any danger."

Gath nodded his understanding but was still puzzled.

"My lady, though I welcome your kindness, I do not understand it. This is not the way in Hell. How is it that you are so different?"

Dark Haven laughed, the sound so sweet and musical to the poor weary gargoyle's ears. She beckoned Gath closer so there was less chance they would be overheard.

"Because I was not born in Hell. I was born Earthside, and I was never one to grind those beneath me for my own pleasure or gains. I remember the old tenets of my kind: we do not rule, we do not serve, we remember. We have no use for power because my kind exists to bring balance."

Gath's eyes went wide.

"But why? How, my lady? Why would such a gentle lady as yourself wish to be bound to one as brutal as Shadow Lord?"

Dark Haven smiled and placed her finger to her lips. They would talk again, but Gath was afraid for her and vowed that he would keep her confidences.

Gath could often be seen trailing after Dark Haven as she moved about the compound. It was known that he alone served her. Gath took his duties very seriously and made sure his mistress was well taken care of. He was responsible for serving her meals and clearing them away when she ate with the dark lord, or when she preferred solitude, bringing them to her in her rooms. He alone was allowed within her chambers without a guard present.

Demon quarters had little in the way of comforts, but Shadow Lord was generous with his current mate. Beyond the privacy of her own space with a door, he provided a polished looking glass for Dark Haven with a brush for her hair. But the most notable luxury was where she slept. Most demons slept on the ground with whatever scraps they could find, while the dark lord had a raised imposing sleeping area. Dark Haven was given a raised but far simpler pallet.

She once offered to share it with Gath, but his eyes had gone wide and he shook his head while stuttering his words in embarrassment.

"N, n, no mistress, I...I...I have my own corner in the...in the cooking hall. If I left it, even for...for one night, I...I...would lose it. Th...th... thank you."

Dark Haven smiled at the gargoyle.

"If you are sure it is no hardship for you. I only meant to offer you some comfort. I had hoped, as a gargoyle of your age, to help ease your sleep. But you are correct. We need to maintain a public appearance and perhaps your sleeping in my chambers would arouse suspicion. Well done, my friend, for once again showing me the error of my ways. I keep forgetting I am not Earthside."

Gath was curious about the other realm.

"Mistress, what is Earthside like?"

Dark Haven smiled to herself. She gestured for Gath to move closer so they could speak privately.

"Earthside, we have different... traditions. There are no servants. We take care of ourselves. Our homes are what we build, and our food is what we grow. We do not believe in raising ourselves above other creatures. We exist to bring balance. My favourite recollection is of these small flowers called daisies that would grow outside my window."

Dark Haven smiled at the memory, while Gath was awed at her description of Earthside.

"It sounds so peaceful. I wish I could see this place with my own eyes. It is incredible that such majestic creatures as Dragons live so simply."

Dark Haven's face darkened slightly.

"Yes, it is. But in exchange for that humble life Dragons must hide. The Faye and the humans force us to conceal ourselves or be slaughtered. You will know that the portals, which once stood open between the realms, were sealed with Dragon blood. So much loss and yet..."

Dark Haven wiped away a tear and Gath was surprised to find it bothered him to see her upset.

"Mistress, are you well?"

She waved it off and smiled at him.

"We must look forward. I am with child and they will be a very important part of all our futures, even you, my friend."

Gath was taken aback.

"Me, mistress?"

Dark Haven nodded at him.

“Yes, my little friend. She or he will be the first of its kind born for some time. When all forgot, we Dragons remember; once the two were one.”

Gath’s confused expression made Dark Haven laugh, her sweet musical cheer once again lifting the gargoyle’s spirit.

“I am sorry my friend. I do not mean to be unclear. I tend to forget that other creatures do not possess Dragon memories.”

That statement made Dark Haven giggle even more and this time Gath laughed along with her. They stopped when she heard a sound at the door.

“Shh, quickly, Gath.”

She placed a finger to her lips, and Gath prostrated himself just as the dark lord’s messenger came into the room. He sneered down towards the gargoyle before speaking.

“The dark lord wishes to speak to the gargoyle, as well as invite his mate to dine with him.”

His tone revealed his disdain for Gath. He briefly glanced at Dark Haven; it galled him that his lord master’s mate required such careful observance.

Dark Haven made herself ready to go to Shadow Lord.

“I will join him as requested. Lead the way, herald. Let us not keep your lord waiting. Gath, I will not need you any further this night. Go, speak to your master, and then find your place in the cooking hall.”

Gath nodded and left but not before he caught a wink from Dark Haven.

Today Dark Haven wished to walk outside amongst the demons. She took Gath as her companion. She looked down at the gargoyle as he seemed nervous accompanying her in public. He kept his voice lowered.

“Mistress, surely you should be seen in the company of the master?”

Dark Haven nodded discreetly, also keeping her voice low.

“I also thought this and requested his company but he denied my invitation. I will not hide away in my room like a mouse; I am the consort of the dark lord. If I am to walk outside of the living quarters, should I not be seen in the company of a trusted guardian? He selected you to observe me, and so when I am about, you must follow.”

She gave him another conspiratorial wink.

“I may be a diminutive female Dragon, but I am not without some defences. You see those mages over to our right? They have been following us for some time, but something, or more likely someone, stops them from approaching me. You report to the dark lord, and should you or I go missing he will question them first.”

Gath’s eyes went wide and he swivelled his gaze side to side looking for the mages.

“Mistress, it’s not safe to test that assumption. The mages are not to be trifled with. They have great power at their disposal; even the dark lord mistrusts them. He keeps only one in his court. That they congregate like this is no small thing.”

Dark Haven smiled as she stopped to look down at something in her path, her eyes lowered to conceal she was speaking to Gath.

“Yes, I of all creatures know the darkness that shrouds those who practice dark magic.”

Gath apologized.

“Mistress, of course I meant no offence...”

Dark Haven straightened up and waved it off.

“No, I know what you meant, gargoyle. I take no offence, but perhaps, as my guardian, you should report what you’ve seen to the dark lord. He may like to know of their interest.”

Gath nodded, finally understanding her proposal. She was providing him with the means to ingratiate himself with his lord master.

“Mistress, it will be done.”

They shared a secret smile.

Chapter 3 – Birthing Dragons

As Dark Haven's pregnancy progressed the dark lord's mood was increasingly agreeable, but he was now aware of several new mages that had infiltrated the court. Cendre called them her apprentices, but he did not like how the group stalked his mate. Gath had recently reported to him of their interest in her. Shadow Lord did not trust mages, but they were a necessary evil. He could tolerate Cendre but this number required serious consideration. He called for twenty of his most trustworthy fire guards.

"You will follow her and keep her safe. If she is harmed you will forfeit your lives. Is this understood?"

The group of them snapped their heels together and saluted their dark lord answering as one.

"It shall be done."

As an afterthought Shadow Lord called for Gath.

"You have shown your worth gargoyle. You will be rewarded."

He considered a moment before continuing.

"You will no longer sleep in the common area with the others. I wish you to now stay with Dark Haven in her chambers. She tells me, you amuse her. It will allow you to better watch her and keep her happy. Go now."

Dark Haven was getting used to her guard detail, but poor Gath was not. So much of his life had been lived and survived by being invisible, but now, for the first time, he was thrust into the thick of it. Dark Haven had several times offered him the chance to stay behind in her quarters under the pretence of caring for her chambers, but his honour forbade him hiding away when his mistress was out and about.

"It would be unseemingly for you to not have your servant with you."

Dark Haven gave her usual musical laugh.

"I am not without company; your lord has given me several companions on my daily outings."

She referred to the armed guard that followed her anytime she was outside her private chambers. Gath did not see the humour.

"My lady, please, do not make light of the threat that shadows you and your unborn child."

Dark Haven addressed Gath in a soothing voice.

"Be brave, my gargoyle companion. I am aware of all that is around me, even if I do not act it."

She gave him one of her covert winks, and he sighed.

"Besides, the guards are provided to watch, but they will not assist me now that I am in the late stage of my condition. I require a steady hand to support me, and there is none steadier than yours."

Dark Haven gave him a meaningful nod, and Gath could only sigh and follow his mistress.

Gath stood off in a corner as the demon midwife stood over Dark Haven, watching her grunt with each spasm. He'd never witnessed a birth particularly one as mysterious as a Dragon birth and from her appearance neither had the midwife. Thankfully Dark Haven knew what was expected of her.

The midwife spoke trying to hide her ignorance.

"You must push if the child is to be born."

Dark Haven's eyes briefly flashed with anger before another contraction overcame her. When the worst of it subsided, she turned on her.

"Dragons have been birthing long before other creatures came into being. This child, my child, will come when it is time and no sooner."

As the pain of the spasm receded, she brought her anger under control and addressed the midwife more calmly.

"You are called Magra, yes? I need patience, not hounding. Magic is interfering with the birth, and I have no control over that."

She would not say anything more specific, but it was obvious that the curse placed on her was affecting the birthing. Even with her diminished Dragon memories she remembered enough to know that giving birth in this form was the hardest.

Another wave of pain made Dark Haven see dark spots before her eyes, and she called out.

"Celestials, give me strength for I am in short supply. I implore you, show me the same mercy you gave the first of my kind. This child is not for you. This child must live."

Gath watched in fascination as Dark Haven's abdomen moved as the small life within worked to free itself. The scene was unlike anything he'd ever witnessed. Dark Haven's grunts became more pronounced with each wave of contractions. Her strength began to waver and Gath could see his mistress needed help but was too afraid to speak.

Finally Dark Haven breathlessly uttered to the midwife.

"Magra, I was told you were the only midwife capable of delivering the dark lord's sons. He holds you in high regard..."

She paused as another wave of pain overcame her.

"I dare not ask for more magic to bring this child into this realm, but I will not have the strength to push soon. Tell me, do you have some method to help a stubborn child be born?"

Dark Haven gave Magra a tired smile and sighed.

"Is it not a sign that only a true child of Shadow Lord would make us wait so?"

Dark Haven's head fell back as the last of her strength left her and made sitting up too much. Her back ached with the repeated contractions. Gath had no skills to offer.

He felt helpless but wanted to do something, So he bent his knee and offered prayers to his mistress's celestials so that they might offer her some comfort.

Gath's prayers had little effect and Dark Haven laboured for several more hours; each one leaving his mistress ever more exhausted until with an almighty scream the child finally came forth in a flood of gestational fluid and blood. Gath stepped out of the shadows —a look of dread on his weathered face at Dark Haven's sallow complexion. She turned to give him a weary smile, and then the child let loose its own cry as the midwife gave it a loud smack. Gath sighed in relief.

Dark Haven stared down at her new daughter as tears pricked the back of her eyes. She marvelled that such a small thing could cause her heart to burst with such love. She took a shaky breath before again addressing Magra.

"Send for the dark lord and inform him he has a daughter. "

It was some time before Shadow Lord came to see his new daughter. His whole countenance displayed his disappointment. A daughter was useless to him.

"It's a female, my lord..."

Dark Haven's words died on her lips at Shadow Lord's look of utter dissatisfaction. The child blinked and then reached out to grasp a lock of Dark Haven's hair, gurgling to herself. Worse yet it was a girl born in human form, the curse on her mother affecting the child in the womb. As she reached up Shadow Lord noticed her wings for the first time. The child had delicate black wings, almost fairy-like in appearance.

"I have no use for Faye children, dispose of it."

Dark Haven clutched her child so tight it squealed.

"My lord, all Dragons are born with wings such as these, they will mature and grow."

He was surprised by her answer.

"You were born with these pathetic flaps of skin?"

Dark Haven pushed the point.

"Yes, my lord. I was hatched with wings as fine as a spider's web, but they do not stay so long after birth."

Shadow Lord, already walking towards the door, gave an impersonal gesture in the child's general direction.

"Fine! The child has three cycles to grow. If it shows promise in this time, it will live. If not, I will have it destroyed. Is this understood?"

Dark Haven spoke just above a whisper.

"Yes, my lord. I understand."

As soon Shadow Lord left she let the tears fall. She knew that Dragons took much longer to grow and mature. She was so close, but if the dark lord executed the child everything would have been for naught. She wiped away her tears before she called for the only demon she trusted.

"Bring Gath to me."

Magra curled her lip and huffed.

"As you wish. I'll have no more to do with that abomination."

Dark Haven bristled at the slight but kept silent. This child was special, as one like it had not been born for several millennia. The truth had all but been forgotten by every creature but Dragons. Pulling her daughter closer to her, she spoke barely above a whisper.

"Once the two were one. He will no doubt give you a demon name, but I already have another chosen for you."

Gath appeared.

"Good, you've arrived in time to bear witness to her naming."

The gargoyle looked around nervously.

"Should not the master be present?"

Dark Haven shook her head.

"He has made his indifference known. Come closer so we may speak privately."

Gath stepped forward solemnly, as Dark Haven whispered to him.

"There is no one but you I trust. She will be far more powerful than any before her, but she will need us to fend for her until she comes into her own. The truth has been forgotten; once the two were one."

The gargoyle nodded not quite understanding.

"She is a Dragon and I will name her...Aurynthea."

He looked into the face of the master's newest child, and she looked at him. Her expression became thoughtful and he swore she was attempting to see into him; then finding him worthy she smiled. He let out the breath he didn't realize he was holding. For so long he'd lived with such despair, but for the first time in his long life he had hope. Something in that brief exchange renewed his faith. He placed his hand over the child's brow and spoke.

"For as long as it is within my power to do so, I will protect you, little one."

End of Sample

Aurrynthea Shadow's Fire (her friends call her Thea) is not a typical young female demon. Born to a Dragon mother and a demon father in Hell, she is trying to resolve both halves of her nature and survive despite being smaller than her six demon brothers. She is also the only female fire demon in Hell.

Jon is a "young" hundred-year-old half Faye-half demon mage living Earthside. His only assets are his car, his sword and his boyish face. Other than his older Faye brother, he's lived on his own for most of his life as an overqualified errand boy/mercenary for the Olde Ones. He spends most of his energy keeping his inner incubus under control to avoid another incident.

Together they begin to learn that being half demon is not as bad as they first thought. Sometimes you just have to go with the flow.

However, they have a problem. The seals placed over the portals between Hell and Earthside are failing. Can they learn to use their demonic gifts in time to avoid a war that would destroy both realms?

