

THE DEMON GABRIELLA

RACHEL CALISH



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BY

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CHAPTER ONE

The eyes glaring at Ana through the upstairs window were varicolored red with slit pupils, like a snake's. A passing car's headlights outlined the dark, misshapen head. Fear and adrenaline spiked through her, pushed on a rising wave of anger. She jumped up from her meditation cushion and threw the window open. A semitransparent black body scuttled up the side of the house like a crab.

Call Lily, the familiar voice of the demon Abraxas spoke into her mind.

"You call Lily, I'm going after it," she snapped back.

Sure, she let a demon live inside her body, but that didn't make it okay for snake-eyed creepers to look in on her at all hours of the night. Plus she wanted to test the enhanced strength Abraxas gave her.

Ana leaned out the window and grabbed a bracket of drainpipe and a bar of the decorative wood siding. Hauling herself up, she kicked out a leg and pulled herself onto a narrow ledge. From there she ran two steps, gripped the edge of the

roof, and swung around and up onto the deeply slanted, shingled surface.

The little demon crouched at the far end of the roof, eyes widening with surprise. It fled up over the peak and she followed.

She spoke to Abraxas internally, in case one of the neighbors had an open window. *How can I be strong enough to pull myself up onto the roof and still have a belly?* she asked him as they ran.

Your body is a complicated metabolic organism, he replied.

What?

Too many carbs, Abraxas said. *Lily is on her way.*

The little demon scampered up the next roof and Ana jumped across the few feet between houses without effort. A light wind from the south carried the smells of sweet pine, juniper and lemon that mixed with the gray scent of wet pavement from a light, early evening rain.

Six months ago, she'd been a corporate publicist whose biggest challenge was asking out the professor who made her guts feel like molten lava. Restless and too curious by half, Ana had stumbled into a murder and been captured by a group of demon summoners. She'd let Abraxas into her body to help her escape.

She hadn't realized she'd end up sharing her body with a demon full-time.

Ana went up and over four more roofs, paying close attention to her footing. Her agility hadn't increased with her strength. The fleeing demon was gaining a longer lead, it jumped from the last gabled roof down to the flat roof of a store as they approached a larger street.

She sped up and leapt after it, absorbing the impact by making a quick roll across the flat surface and letting her momentum carry her back up to her feet. Some of the effects of sharing her body with a demon were upsetting, to put it mildly, but she liked how much more resilient he'd made her. And his lessons in demon magics were pretty sweet.

Does Lily know the direction we're going? she asked Abraxas.

He answered with a wordless affirmative. He was probably still in the process of sending her their location. Half-demon,

Lily was the best banisher in San Francisco. Ana had met her that first week with Abraxas, when she was still trying to get rid of him. Lily helped them fight the stronger demon, Ashmedai, who wanted to kill Ana and bind Abraxas to him instead. They'd been friends since. More than friends when it came to Abraxas. Somehow he and Lily were carrying on an intimate relationship despite the fact that he had no body of his own.

The little demon scurried down the side of the two-story flat-roofed building and ran for the four-lane street. It was the size of a large dog and would be mistaken for one—if people could see its black form at all. Most humans couldn't see demons.

There were few cars this late and it dashed across with only a moment's pause. Ana held the edge of the roof, let her legs dangle and then dropped to a ledge at the one-story level.

She dropped again, caught that ledge for a moment and then let go. Her legs hit the sidewalk with minimal impact. She pivoted and sprinted across the street toward where the demon was climbing the wall of another shop.

She couldn't scale the two-story wall, but next to it was a shorter building. With a quick prayer that she had enough speed, she ran two steps up the side of the building and threw her arms up as high as she could reach. Her hands closed over the edge of the roof. She pulled up hard and scrambled with her feet against the bricks until she was up on the roof. On the side of the taller building, not facing the street, were pipes and brackets and a myriad of handholds that made it easy to climb to the higher level.

Did you see that? she asked Abraxas, though of course he had. *I'm like a ninja!*

A long sigh of exasperation crossed her mind in reply.

The demon wasn't even halfway across the higher roof. It had slowed, thinking she had only the strength of an average human and no way to chase it up the wall. Seeing her, its black-veined, red eyes looked around furiously, seeking escape. It turned to run but hit the side of a protruding metal vent and staggered sideways.

Wait for Lily, Abraxas warned.

This was too perfect and she didn't want to chase this thing over another block of rooftops only to have Lily bind it before she could get her hands on it. The little shit had been staring in her window and she wanted to be the one to punch it in its lopsided, toothy mouth. Then Lily could have it. Not that Ana could punch a mostly-incorporeal demon, but Abraxas could. And he could bind it well enough if they could grab it. She ran forward and dove at it.

As soon as she got her hands on it, she felt it begin to dematerialize. Like many of the small demons used as servants, it didn't have a physical body and could only pull the barest amount of solid matter around it so it could function in this material world. Holding it was like trying to enclose a biting, struggling cloud. For Abraxas to bind it, she had to get her arms around it in a circle. She stepped forward and to one side, trying to get a better angle.

Under her skin, Abraxas moved to help her contain it. She felt his energy flow through her arms, but so did the little demon. In a desperate effort to escape, it popped out of the material world. Ana's arms tightened on air. Overbalanced, she tripped forward, hit another vent, stumbled and saw the edge of the roof coming up too fast.

She caught it one-handed. Her momentum carried her over the edge and she felt a painful twist and jerk in her shoulder as her body's full weight snapped down under her. Her fingers lost their hold. She fell the rest of the way to the pavement.

Abraxas tried to break the fall by putting the loose cloudy form he sometimes wore between her and the concrete. That didn't stop her from slamming into it with enough force to knock the air out of her lungs.

Gasping and coughing, she tried to feel through the mass of pain in her back, arm and head to see if she'd really injured herself.

Nothing broken, Abraxas told her. He could scan through her body faster and more completely than she could. *Torn muscles and tendons in the shoulder. Get ice on it and I'll see what I can do.*

He could encourage her body to heal itself more quickly than normal, though hardly at a superhuman level. She wouldn't

be bouncing up off the pavement and shaking herself back into place.

If you try to lecture me about this, I'm going to tell Lily that you ogle other women when she's not around, Ana told him.

Just because you let your anger lead and forgot that it could banish itself? That's not enough subject matter for a full lecture. And you should think about that ogling accusation, considering that you're in control of our eyes.

Ana was still working on a retort when Lily drove up in a sporty matte silver crossover. Sometimes Ana thought Lily would be driving a sports car if she didn't need to carry so much magical stuff in the back. Lily worked the hip soccer mom look, probably because being half-demon, she appeared to be midforties but was closer to midnineties. Her thick, wavy, dark brown hair was pulled back and she wore a loose sweater with yoga pants and oversized slippers. If she'd arrived midchase, Ana knew Lily would have those slippers off in a second because her taloned eagle feet were much better for running over rooftops than anything that came standard on a human body.

Ana had managed to get herself sitting and pushed with her feet and good arm until she was leaning back against the wall of the store she'd fallen from. Lily crouched in front of her.

"I heard you had a misstep. Do you want to go home or to the hospital?"

"Home," Ana said.

Abraxas moved so that part of his being was outside of Ana, beside her, also crouching like Lily. His form looked made of mist, and anyone standing more than a few feet from them wouldn't see him at all.

"Before it dematerialized, I touched it," he said. His voice, outside of Ana's head, could sound like anything from wind and sand to a thunderstorm. Right now it was at the quiet end of that spectrum. "It was from Ashmedai."

"He's not—" Ana started, then had to cough, which sent pain shooting from her shoulder across her chest. She bit back a groan and tried again. "Not allowed in the city."

"I don't like this," Lily said. "He must be gathering allies. At least one who can summon demons in the city for him."

“Sick of this,” Ana said. “It was looking in my window while I was trying to meditate.” She didn’t add that she’d been relieved for the distraction and an excuse to stop sitting.

“If we catch the next one, I can try to get it to tell us who’s doing the summoning,” Lily said.

“I don’t want to keep chasing the little ones. This is the third one I’ve seen around my house this month. We have to find a way to get to Ashmedai, before he gets any stronger.”

“We’re working on it,” Lily said, meaning the larger group of protector demons that she and Abraxas were part of. “Do you want me to call Sabel?”

Ana sighed slowly so the motion wouldn’t jar her shoulder. It had turned out that the hot professor was part of an ancient order of witches and way more clued in about this magic stuff than Ana had been. She and Sabel had been dating for the last three months and she wanted nothing more than for Sabel to come over and sit with her while she iced her shoulder, but that wasn’t fair to Sabel.

“Let her sleep, she’s teaching this week. I’m okay, really, I think. But can we pick up a bag of ice on the way?”

She let Lily help her up and into the car, wondering if Sabel was in bed already and if so what she was wearing. Sabel had the best collection of lacy undergarments and things that were allegedly pajamas but that Ana thought weren’t meant to be worn for more than five minutes. But she saw them rarely and almost never got to take them off Sabel because of the centuries-old feud between the demons and the witches.

How much of her impatience to get rid of Ashmedai came from simply wanting to be closer to Sabel? And did it matter? Ana had defeated Ashmedai once and if she could just get rid of him for good, they’d all be happier and a heck of a lot safer.

* * *

Careful of her sore shoulder, Ana leaned back and to the left in the small, hard chair. Two days after the fall from the roof, she thought it shouldn’t still hurt that much, but it did. She was

glad for the distraction and happy to watch from the back of the classroom while Sabel lectured her class. Sabel wore a soft gray boat-neck top with a small string of pearls. Her black hair was pulled into a loose braid, exposing her slender neck.

Sabel was saying, “According to Jung, ‘Everyone carries a Shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.’ One way the Shadow appears to us is by our projections onto others—what you hate in others, you hate in yourself.”

Ana could think of plenty of things she hated in other people that had no connection to how she was, but she was afraid if she brought that up to Sabel later in private, she’d get argued out of thinking that way. Sabel stepped out from behind the desk and Ana saw that she was wearing a dark gray tweed skirt that ended just below her knees. Her calves looked bare, though they probably weren’t, and her feet were in sleek black pumps with low, skinny heels.

Ana wanted to cradle one of Sabel’s calves in her palm while she slipped off the shoe and then run her hands up under that skirt. But she couldn’t. Not just because of the strained shoulder, but also because Sabel wore an invisible, magical device that was supposed to protect her from demon possession.

The leash, as they called it, was hypervigilant. It tended to also protect her from Ana, since her body hosted a demon—Abraxas—and was therefore shot through with demon magic. They could kiss and sit close, but the hotter things got, the more energy the leash registered, and the more likely it was to trigger and start to constrict painfully around Sabel’s ribs until she lost consciousness.

“This weekend, look for one incident in your life where a person makes you angry or upset,” Sabel told the class. “Then explore it to understand how it’s connected to a factor in yourself that you can’t stand. We’ll discuss that on Monday along with chapters three through five.”

Scattered groans rose from the students and Ana gathered that chapters three through five must have a lot of pages. Sabel disconnected her laptop from the projector and closed it while

the twenty-odd students shuffled notebooks, tablets, papers, pens and sundries into their bags and backpacks. Like a flock of birds they rose, turned, massed into a roughly triangular formation and funneled through the doorway to the hall, leaving Sabel alone at the front of the room and Ana in the back.

It took her a minute to realize Sabel was standing with her hands on her hips regarding Ana with a bemused smile.

“Don’t tell me you have a teacher fetish too,” Sabel said.

“No.” Ana licked her dry lips. “Just you. That’s a really nice skirt. Did you tell yourself from the future that I was coming to visit?”

Sabel laughed. “You’ll only know the answer to that if you see what’s under the skirt.”

Ana tried to get up from the unsteady chair and managed to knock it over and nearly fall the other way before she caught herself on a desk. She straightened up with as much dignity as she could, which wasn’t a lot.

“We’d better go to my office before you break something,” Sabel said.

“Lead the way,” Ana told her with a grin.

“Uh-huh,” Sabel replied, but she was smiling too.

She dutifully turned away from Ana and preceded her out the door. Ana mostly tried not to stare at her neck and hips and legs as they left that building, crossed a corner of campus, and navigated the narrow halls to Sabel’s office. As an adjunct professor, Sabel had been awarded an office that was about the size of a supply closet. It held a desk, two chairs and two bookcases with enough space to drag in a third chair if necessary and if no one needed to get out the door in a hurry.

Ana paused inside the door with her hand on it and looked at Sabel; she couldn’t remember if Sabel had office hours now or not. Sabel nodded and Ana shut the door.

“Abraxas?” Sabel asked.

“I dropped him off at Lily’s; they’re working on—”

Sabel grabbed the lapels of Ana’s jacket and kissed her. Ana’s arms went around Sabel, pulling her close as Sabel’s lips opened to her. She couldn’t resist sliding her palm down from the small

of Sabel's back to stroke the curve of her ass under the tweed skirt.

Sabel broke the kiss with a breathless laugh, but she didn't move away from Ana. Her fingers touched the sides of Ana's face and played with the short hair at the back of her neck. "I like the new jacket," she said.

"I'll wear it to bed if you'll wear the skirt," Ana said, more to make Sabel laugh again than as a real suggestion.

She'd rather see the skirt come off. What she'd most like to see come off was the leash the other Hecatine witches had put on Sabel. Most of the time they could barely touch each other without her hurting Sabel.

At least now Abraxas could travel farther from Ana and Lily had made him a golem body he could use at her place so that he could spend time there. When he was outside of Ana, it was easier for her and Sabel to touch. Still, they'd had enough close calls in which the leash nearly rendered Sabel unconscious when they tried to have sex that they were stuck in a terribly frustrating stalemate.

Sabel had been appealing to her mentor, the witch Josefene, to have the leash removed. But since it had already worked once to prevent a demon from using Sabel's powers against others, the witches seemed reluctant to remove it.

"Is Josefene...Did you talk to her?" Ana asked.

"She wants to meet Abraxas."

"Huh?"

From everything Ana had heard, the witches, including Sabel's mentor Josefene, were strongly opposed to the Sangkesh demons. The Sangkesh were the demons sworn to protect humans against worse demons. Lily was one of them, as was Abraxas. Ana swallowed against the guilt rising in her—if she hadn't chosen to keep Abraxas and let him use her body as his home base while he gained strength, the leash wouldn't be an issue.

Sabel said, "She says if she can identify him as a Sangkesh who's not harmful, then she has evidence to offer the others for why the leash should come off."

“That’s not a firm yes,” Ana said.

“I think she’s on our side,” Sabel told her. “And if I hadn’t been wearing the thing, Ashmedai could have used me to kill you.”

Ana had the sinking feeling that until Ashmedai was long gone from this world, the other witches weren’t going to take the leash off Sabel and allow her and Ana to interact freely. For weeks, she’d been talking to Abraxas about ways to draw out Ashmedai and trap him, but they had yet to come up with a workable plan.

“Maybe Abraxas can teach you to be unpossessable the way he’s teaching me,” Ana suggested. “Then you wouldn’t need the leash.”

Sabel pulled back and stared at her.

“I can’t tell if you’re horrified or just offended,” Ana said.

“That kind of depends on how you expect him to do the teaching,” Sabel replied.

Abraxas did deliver most of his lessons from inside her head, Ana realized. “By talking, not putting him in your body or anything. That would be weird.”

Ana paced the two steps to the door and back. She hated this feeling of impasse. Sabel leaned back against her desk and crossed her arms.

“What’s the deal anyway?” Ana demanded. “You say the Sangkesh demons are pissed because the witches did something ages ago to limit their power, and Abraxas won’t even talk to me about it. Shit, every time you invite me over to your place he suddenly has something magical he has to try over at Lily’s. He won’t even go into your apartment.”

Sabel’s eyes narrowed with thought. “You’re right,” she said. “He’s never come with you. Not that you come over often. Is that why we always end up at your place? Is he influencing you?”

“He wouldn’t. Not like that, without my knowledge.”

But Ana wondered if he wasn’t doing it consciously. There were times when his preferences became hers and vice versa. She felt that her place was just more comfortable: her TV was newer, her kitchen was bigger, her couch was more broken in.

But maybe she felt that way because Abraxas also felt that Sabel's apartment wasn't...what?

Sabel must have seen the question in her eyes because she said, "There's a standing circle at my place. When you come over, you're inside of it. I wonder if he can't cross it."

"Did you make it to keep out demons?"

"Among other things," Sabel said. "But why didn't he just say something? I can let him in. I'd have to let him in anyway for him to meet Josefene."

"I feel like I'm being asked to meet your parents," Ana said sullenly.

Sabel shook her head. "No, that would be worse."

"Seriously?"

"Josefene wants me to stay healthy and learning. My parents don't have the same goals."

Ana raised her eyebrows but Sabel made a dismissive gesture. "I'd rather tell you about the Sangkesh and the witches," she said.

Ana nodded. She understood not wanting to talk family history. She'd told Sabel a few stories from her own childhood, but most of them she didn't want to revisit. Sabel knew all the important facts about Gunnar, her favorite brother, and if she never had to think about her brother Mack shoving or hitting her again, it would be too soon. She turned her attention back to Sabel's story.

"The witches have kept an archive for thousands of years," Sabel was saying. "The amount of knowledge in it—mind-blowing. But it used to also house a tablet with instructions that allowed us to create and control certain kinds of beings called the galla. The galla protected the archive and the witches who kept it.

"In the year eleven thirty-eight, the Sangkesh attacked the archive and destroyed it, and they either destroyed or stole the tablet. Most of us think they must have destroyed it because no one with power over the galla has surfaced since then and even the Sangkesh can't keep a secret like that for so long. They killed most of the keepers of the archive, including the head of

the archive. Without the tablet to control them, the galla turned on the witches...on us.”

Sabel stopped and took a long breath. She was looking down, away from Ana, her eyes distant.

“They hunted us for hundreds of years. The galla murdered thousands of witches and then, when they ran out of real witches to kill, they worked with the demons to whip up the frenzy that became the Inquisition and witch hunts among nonmagical humans. Thousands of innocents...” Her voice trailed off.

Ana put her arms around Sabel.

“All those people who had no part in it and died,” Sabel whispered. “Many of them gifted, magical, if they could have been found and trained...but we had nowhere to teach, nowhere to be safe. A few of the galla stayed loyal and tried to save some of the archive. They were safe, the other galla wouldn’t kill them. That’s how we rebuilt.”

“Are there still galla who hunt witches?” Ana asked.

Sabel shook her head. “Galla are a specific kind of being that must be created with magic and the secret to creating them was destroyed with the tablet. No new galla can be made. As the centuries pass there are fewer and fewer of them. Now the ones who aren’t in the new archive are all in a compound somewhere, defended from the rest of the world while they try to figure out how to make more of themselves. I pray they never find out how.”

“Abraxas and Lily both say the Sangkesh are protectors. Why would they attack the witches’ archive?”

“They protect humans, not witches,” Sabel said. “Even if we are human, mostly. We never got a good answer—at the time the ruling princes of the Sangkesh denied that they were involved at all. They said the attack came from the Shaidan demons, the adversaries, but our magic showed a Sangkesh prince leaving with the tablet. We assumed it was a splinter group inside the Sangkesh who decided we were a threat, but the princes of the Sangkesh weren’t willing to find that group and turn them over to us, and anyway we were too scattered the first few hundred years to do anything even if we had them.”

“You talk about it like you were there,” Ana said.

“I went back and saw some of it,” Sabel confessed. “We all do, it’s part of training as a Hecatine witch. But it’s so hard to watch it and not be able to do anything.”

Ana held her tightly and didn’t say anything for a long moment, but then she had to ask, “If you can go back, can’t you just see the demons who attacked the archive?”

“There are times you can’t see into,” Sabel explained. “It’s like geography: there are places it’s easy for you to go and places you can go with some effort, but there are also places you just can’t get to. Like you can climb up a mountain, but you can’t climb through a mountain. The more dense a time is with emotion, the harder it is to get into. The attack is one of those places you can’t travel into.”

Ana didn’t know how to reply to that, so they stood together for a while until the feeling of Sabel in her arms and the light coconut smell of Sabel’s hair made her think about getting under Sabel’s skirt again. She was trying to decide if it would be worth the resulting frustration to start kissing Sabel, when her phone buzzed.

She pulled away and looked at it: a message from Lily that Ana could come by any time to pick up Abraxas.

“Are you coming over later?” she asked Sabel.

Sabel’s blue-gray eyes brightened. “Want me to keep the skirt on?”

Ana thought that what she really wanted was to lock the door and pin Sabel to the desk, but she managed a cheerful, “Of course!” and fled.

* * *

Ana drove over to Lily’s shop feeling uncomfortably like a parent about to pick her kid up from band or soccer practice. Lily answered the door and they went upstairs to her apartment, where Abraxas was sitting on the couch in the clay body he and Lily had made for him. In the colors of orange, red and gold that made the room feel warm and inviting, the tan clay took on a ruddy cast, as if blood ran under its constructed skin.

The body looked like a medium-sized man, hairless, with handsome Middle Eastern features. The gray surface of his skin etched with words and interlocking symbols that showed a faint golden glow. When Ana entered the room, Abraxas poured himself out of the clay body and into her with a sound oddly like a sigh of relief.

Lily wearing you out? Ana asked him inside her mind.

He laughed. *Lily is a joy. That body, however, is heavy as stone.*

But you have superpowers.

Tired super powers, he said. *Very tired.*

Ana sat on the far end of the couch from the motionless clay body while Lily went into the kitchen to pour her a cup of tea. She looked around. The apartment hadn't changed much since the day she'd first staggered up here, an unwitting host to Abraxas, both of them hunted by the summoners and the demon Ashmedai.

The late sunlight was too weak to illuminate the front room that held the summoning circle where Lily could have removed Abraxas from Ana's body. He would have been much weaker outside of her and when it came down to it, she chose to keep him. Now lamps around the living room brought out the ruddy colors in the wood of the glass cases that lined one wall of the room. Paintings, bookcases, side tables and plentiful pillows on the chairs and couches made the room feel full without being crowded or messy.

Lily handed Ana a mug of tea and curled up in her armchair, tucking her clawed feet neatly under her. Half demon, Lily could pass as human if she wore her boots and the caps on her teeth, but her demon blood made her long-lived and gave her the knowledge and drive to be the city's best banisher.

"Can I ask you something?" Ana asked.

Lily raised an eyebrow.

"It's not about your sex life. I know too much about that already," Ana told her.

She didn't add that she felt pretty envious that Abraxas and Lily at least had some kind of sex life, even if the bulk of it happened in dreams. How a person had sex with a clay golem, she really didn't want to know.

“It’s about the demons and the witches,” Ana said. “You’re up on all the history. Do you know why the Sangkesh attacked the witches’ archive in eleventy-whatever years ago?”

“Eleven-thirty-eight, common era,” Lily said. “It wasn’t the Sangkesh. Did Sabel say it was?”

“She said it was a splinter group or something, that the guys in charge denied it.”

Lily sighed. “It was the Shaitans and the galla. Believe me, Ana, the Sangkesh looked through their ranks to see if anyone was involved. With what happened afterward—anyone who caused that, we would have brought to justice.”

“But the witches said they had evidence that a Sangkesh took that tablet.”

Lily nodded. “In the records it says they brought the signature of that demon to the Sangkesh—demons have an energy signature that’s like a fingerprint—but it didn’t match any of the princes.”

“Could someone have faked it?”

“We don’t know how, but yes, that’s what we assumed happened. But the witches were adamant that it had to be the Sangkesh.”

Lily paused and looked at the clay body on the couch and then back to Ana. “Did Sabel tell you what the galla are?”

“Just some kind of being. Are they like bound demons or something?”

“They were constructed,” Lily said. She motioned toward the clay body. “A little like that but not using clay. Using a human body, a whole human person turned into a demon-like creature that has to feed on other humans to survive. The witches used them as slaves—immortal creatures bound to serve the witches generation after generation.”

“Oh.”

That Sabel didn’t know that seemed unlikely. Perhaps, like so much in this struggle, the witches had a very different perspective. They saw the Sangkesh as brutal attackers and the galla as willing allies, while the Sangkesh saw the galla as slaves and felt themselves unfairly blamed for the destruction of the archive. What a mess.

Ana switched topics. “Abraxas, Sabel says that her mentor, Josefene, wants to meet you. This could help her get them to take the leash off. She says she can do that at her apartment.”

He answered in her mind: *I can't do that.*

“What the hell? Why not?” Ana replied out loud so that Lily could hear.

I can't, he said.

“That’s not an answer,” Ana snarled and then to Lily, “He said he can’t. Screw that, Abraxas, I’ve gone six months hardly being able to touch Sabel and you can’t do this one thing?”

Lily said, “Ana, you have to understand that he basically fought his way back from the dead. You have no idea what that takes. Frankly, I thought it wasn’t possible. It could be years before he’s regained his former strength and you’re asking him to expose himself to an enemy.”

“She’s not going to hurt him, she just wants to get a look at him.”

You have to trust me that this should not be done, Abraxas said.

The hard part was that she did trust him, completely, and he knew that even without her saying it. But the situation with the leash was more than aggravating.

Perhaps now is a good time to begin studying the energy of emotions, Abraxas suggested.

She didn’t bother to respond, since her emotions on that point would be abundantly clear to him. She got up and gave Lily a quick kiss on the cheek on her way to the door. That was a compromise between the lingering kiss Abraxas wanted to give her and the parting wave Ana preferred.

Her life had been so much easier before she hosted a demon. But so dull.