

## The Unlikeable Demon Hunter: Need

“I could do with a boy or a burrito.” I rubbed my belly, the silky material of the long-sleeved tunic that I wore as a mini dress sliding under my fingers. Were TV shows and book covers to be believed, I’d stake out my prey with a sleek fall of hair, clad in head-to-toe leather. Too bad my curls were allergic to flat irons and tight leather pants gave me yeast infections. Learned that the hard way.

“In that order?” My twin brother Ari was a disembodied voice in the shadows.

I side-stepped the run-off dripping from the broken rain spout onto the alley’s cobblestones, thinking fondly of my double-breasted, classic trench coat back inside the bar. “Depends on how good the burrito is.”

The bar’s dented back door crashed open, releasing a spill of music, a sharp blast of chatter, and two demons glamoured up to look human.

I jerked my chin at them. “Took you long enough.”

The taller of the two, Zale, swaggered toward me in his white shitcatcher pants, his white vest stretched tight across his wiry torso, and his fedora perched rakishly atop his bald black head. He cocked his finger and thumb at me like a gun. “All right, all right, all right.”

Fucking Matthew McConaughey wannabe. The original was more than enough.

Skirting the edge of the dim pool of light cast by the sole bulb over the door, I sashayed forward on my three-inch heels, a whisper of a breeze rippling my hem. “You promised me witches.” I trailed a finger down his chest. “Gonna deliver?”

His friend Dmitri barked a laugh.

Zale shot him an amused smile. “You want the goods? Pony up.” He reached for his elastic waistband.

I reached for my magic.

Look at that. I was faster. Electricity snaked out of my fingertips in a forked bolt.

“My implication that I was willing to blow you for their whereabouts?” I smiled sweetly and cracked open the concrete beside his shell-toe shoes. “Total fabrication.”

Zale blurred out of sight. I wasn’t concerned because this raku demon only had short range flash stepping ability and a dark shadow had disengaged itself from the gloom to give chase. Ari, my fellow demon hunter.

My brother’s smirk, sharp as a razor’s edge as he tracked the demon, made it all too clear how hunting suited him.

“What are you?” Dmitri’s perplexed and vacant blink at me fit right in with his dishwater blond man bun and tapered floral pants, but was still insulting.

“I’m Rasha.”

He laughed. “You can’t be a hunter, you’re a girl.”

I grabbed my boobs with a shocked gasp. “*That’s what this means?*” Damn, I had a good rack. “I can’t sing either, but that doesn’t stop me practicing for *The Voice* auditions. So, yup. Girl and Rasha.”

He made a sound of disgust.

I didn’t need that kind of disrespect today, so I flicked a bolt of electricity into his crotch.

The felan demon dropped to his knees, his wheezed exhale a pretty good dying bagpipe impression.

“You were saying?” I asked.

Five tentacles sprang from his chest like Shiva’s arms, the one closest to me striking the ground with a sticky slurp. The air fogged with the stench of patchouli and fungus.

I swiped at my watering eyes. “You’re missing a tentacle.”

“I’m perfect the way I am.” His snarled—and issue-laden—response made the hair on the back of my neck stand up, but the real kicker was his front tentacle lashing across my forearm.

Take the precision of a bee sting and magnify it by the mass destructive power of a nuclear bomb. That was close to the searing fire that his paralytic touch shot along every nerve ending in my body. I wheezed a gasp, my arm dropping to my side.

The felan snickered.

“Shut it, asswipe. At least I’m not wearing floral pants.” I tried to move my arm, receiving a wet noodle dangle for my efforts.

He fingered his fabric. “I’m wearing these pants ironically.”

“Not paired with that hair abomination you’re not. Might as well wear a button that says, ‘I’m a demon, ask me how!’” My arm felt like my mouth after a dental procedure—numb, swollen, and clunky. Had my elbow been able to drool, I’m sure it would have.

A sliver of moonlight guided me as I fired my magic at Dmitri, but the paralytic was already taking root, thick and sticky as molasses. My stream of blue and silver current stuttered out of me, the demon dodging it with ease.

Dmitri swaggered in closer, locked a tentacle around my ankle, and pulled. I crashed down on my ass, my legs wobbling like the finest Jell-O. “Cute panties,” he said.

I’d have killed him just for the use of that horrid word but my heart hammering at an unsustainable speed was all I was capable of. He pinned me down and wrapped a tentacle around each appendage like I was Gulliver imprisoned by the Lilliputians.

I stiffened out like a surfboard. My breath punched out of me in a scream, my pain spiking like I was coated in bubbling lava. I was half-convinced my flesh was melting from my bones. Gritting my teeth, I forced my magic out. Animated lightning bolts danced over my now-blue skin and a wave of current burst from my entire body to

wrap around the demon like barbed wire.

It knocked the felan back a whopping half-step, but at least it broke his hold. I still couldn't move, but I could take a deep breath.

"Witches. How do I find them?" I tightened my magic net on him, taking perverse satisfaction in his eyes bugging out of his head.

"Urban. Myth." He flailed his tentacles, caught tight in my web. "There are no witches, you moron."

My vision kaleidoscoped into black blobs, the paralytic sinking its hooks into every inch of me. Lungs burning, nervous system in a Code Red panic, I had to finish him off, except I was now seeing multiples of the lemon-colored tentacle tip indicative of his weak spot. His Achilles heel and the place I needed to direct my magic in order to kill him.

I dug down into my last molecule of energy and nuked Dmitri with so much magic that he charred like a well-done steak. The air reeked of fetid BBQ, but I'd hit his sweet spot and dispatched him into oblivion with a puff of lemon-colored-yet-hippy-scented-dust. At least I didn't have to clean up after myself. Lack of a corpse, the sole public service that demons provided.

Fumbling for the edge of my Spanx with spasming fingers, I pulled out the modified EpiPen tucked against my hip and blue-to-the-sky'd it in my thigh. Thanks to the fast-acting antidote, the pain in my body subsided from "rip my skin off" to "whimper madly." Much better. I twitched my fingers, happy to note they still moved, then flopped over, hands braced on the cobblestones. Luckily, the stones were dry. Landing in an unidentifiable puddle would have been an indignity too far.

The bulb over the back door cracked and sizzled out. I turned my head away from flying shards and sat up.

Zale blurred into the alley, eyes wide. Shadows pressed in as if they had weight and heft, tinged with an ashy smell. The raku backed away but he was cornered on all sides by darkness.

There was a languid elegance to my brother's magic.

Zale spewed some super homophobic insults involving Ari's interactions with his fellow hunters in a way I was almost positive was impossible.

The shadows expanded, like they were taking a deep breath, before wrapping themselves around each of Zale's arms and his upper torso. They jerked the demon back against the brick wall, the crack of his skull momentarily shutting him up.

I yanked out the doctored-up EpiPen still sticking out of my leg. It contained a felan antidote provided by the Brotherhood of David, the testosterone-laden secret society of demon hunters that I had become the first female member of. The antidote had dealt with the worst of the poison—the fatality part—leaving me merely battered and bruised. A run-of-the-mill Wednesday.

Zale struggled as Ari strolled closer, a pale blue silhouette. The raku's tendons

popped along his skin as he strained against his bonds. “Fucking psycho.”

Ari stilled. Flexed his fingers. The shadows holding Zale gave a sharp jerk, snapping both his arms out of their sockets. The demon’s roar cut off in a cough as a shadow slithered up his chest, wound around his neck, and strangled him.

“*Ari.*” I scrambled to my feet.

My brother’s eyes glittered dangerously. He edged his face close in to Zale’s and Zale flinched.

“Boo,” Ari said with a hard smile and fired a shadow like a punch into Zale’s abs. His sweet spot. The raku gasped and disappeared, dead.