

Excerpt from *Leonie Hendricks: Demon P.I.*

“He loves me.” *Pluck.*

The asper demon flinched and thrashed against his binding, as I ripped another one of his tiny wings off his knobby shoulder. It was less like wishing on a four-leaf clover and more like plucking a cantankerous, still-living chicken.

The bits of him that weren't chained to the wall with solid iron cuffs were pinned like a butterfly specimen using iron knives, while his three eyes were nothing more than puffy lumps in an already lumpy face from the concentrated salt and ghost pepper spray that I'd subdued him with. And sure, this sounded serial killer sadistic, but aspers were notorious for disemboweling first and asking questions later.

“He loves me not.” *Pluck.*

“Suck it, sweetheart.” The demon shook his rattlesnake tail at me, his sneer growing lewder.

Using one of the many blades casually tossed on the table next to me, I impaled his penis stand-in, driving it deep into the thick wooden wall.

He screamed, a high-pitched buzzing cry.

“Next time, get consent to bring that swizzle stick of yours to show-and-tell.” I kicked aside the pile of wings that resembled strips of dried jerky scattered at my feet. The friendly chat I'd called him in for had now gone on about three hours too long. Time to get what I needed and have a snack.

“Daeva's horn. You have it. Where'd it go?” I twisted the blade in deeper, taking no perverse thrills in this single-minded violence. My mentor and boss, Harry Dunn, had pounded it into me to never apply a human moral code where demons were concerned. My life was on the line with every single interaction, and power was the only language demons responded to. I'd become fluent, even if I always attempted to negotiate my way out first.

“She took from me. I took from her.” The asper spat blood at me, hitting me square in the face. There it was, the “an eye for an eye” philosophy these thuggish demons employed. Actually, it was more, “an eye for you looked at me funny,” or “an eye for, well, it's Tuesday,” with these guys.

I was going to take things up a notch when a few drops of asper blood got in my mouth and my inner goblin awoke with a vengeance, clawing for supremacy. The blood was hot and

rich, with just an edge of savory. My fingers froze into claw formations, my half-demon side howling in my head and forming a dark shadow in the white light that I always imagined my human body suffused with.

I eyed the asper like he was a chicken and I was the Colonel.

Wiping the blood off my tongue with my sleeve, I spun around and shouldered out the door, tossing my protective gloves on the ground. Sweat ran down my neck into my protective suit.

“You’re getting demon all over my nice office.” Harry jabbed a bony finger at the gloves, causing the unlit cigarette hanging off the bottom left corner of his mouth to quiver. “Keep that mess in the interrogation room.”

I stumbled past him into the small kitchen here at Dunn and Associates P.I.—a misnomer if there was one, as there was only one Associate and right now she was scrabbling at the cupboard, teetering on the balls of her feet, balance shot. I was so, so hungry.

Harry found me a protein bar, unwrapping it and shoving it at me in record time. “Je nourris. Tu nourris. Say it, Leo.”

“Je nourris. Tu—” I shuddered, a red wash coloring my vision.

My phone rang, buzzing against my thigh.

Harry grasped my chin and forced me to look him in the eyes. “Chew and talk, kiddo.”

“Nourris. Elle nourrit. I feed. You feed. She feeds.” I repeated the mantra that he and I had come up with to remind myself that where and how I fed was a choice. That my human nature was still in control. Had I caved to my demon half, blood sustenance would no longer be optional. Blood was life to goblins, it was sacred, and to refuse it, like I did, was blasphemy.

And friends wondered why I never had any interest in vampire stories. It wasn’t so sexy when you lived it day in and day out.

Six more times my phone rang, but I couldn’t answer, fighting to firmly reassert my human side. Despite my determination to eat from the basic food groups and not someone’s bleeding heart, I still had to chow down more often than most people. Luckily, I metabolized faster as well, so by the time I’d scarfed back an entire bag of chocolate-covered almonds, the haze and the frenzied need had faded.

Classical music floated in from the front office. Ugh. Mahler.

My phone rang yet again. Seven missed calls—all from my mother. She wouldn't stop until I answered. *Please let someone be dead.* “Hey, Mom.”

“Lord protect us. I just had the television on and they were reporting fresh demons on the prowl in Vancouver. Fresh! As if they were ripe melons. I was so worried about you, and then when I couldn't reach you, I feared the worst. Leonie, you need to come to church and pray. It's the only way we're going to survive this plague of evil. That's what we get for our sinful ways.”

Pretty damn ironic, since she'd had the one-night stand with my goblin sire, believing him nothing more than a charming and very human rogue, and I was the one suffering the consequences.

Gripping the edge of the counter, I tried to tune out her distressed chatter, wishing I could yell at her that her every word hit me like a bullet. Or just snap and show her the reds of my eyes, rip the veil off her nice and sunny little world once and for all. But I'd never do that. I was the good daughter, the child who understood her fears. Not one more part of the nightmare.