

## THE UNLIKEABLE DEMON HUNTER: STING

“Shove it in already,” I said through gritted teeth. My back was freezing from the damp, flaking basement concrete I lay against, while the two-foot-long, rat-shaped demon pinning me down was doing shit for my front.

Rohan Mitra, rock star turned demon hunter, shook his tousled dark hair, his full lips puckering in obvious disgust. “I’m not putting my finger in there. You want it so badly, do it yourself.”

I slammed an elbow into the underside of the vral’s jaw, whipping her head sideways, intent on keeping the demon’s double row of razor-sharp incisors out of my shoulder. One bite and I’d be paralyzed.

And lunch.

“*Now* you’re going to get all pussy about sticking your finger places it doesn’t belong?”

“I’ll reconsider if she begs as nicely as you did, Nava.”

The vral snapped her teeth at me, the sound a loud crack in my ear. Her dank, rotten-meat belch wafted over me.

I tried to plug my nose with my shoulder, my arm muscles straining with the exertion of holding her at bay. “Bite me, Mitra.”

He sipped his latte, standing there immaculate and infuriating in a camel-colored trench

coat more appropriate to a night at the theater than a demon raid. A raid it turned out that Rohan had no intention of participating in, deeming it “a training exercise for the newbie.”

Overhead, a bulb sizzled and popped out, dimming the light and casting almost-romantic shadows over the warped structural beams and grotty walls.

Rohan had the gall to check his watch.

“Don’t let me keep you from anything.” I shot lightning bolts at the vral from my eyes and she jerked, her weight almost off me. Hand blasts were so level one. I rolled sideways, but the demon crashed back down on top of me. The two of us tumbled into the shadows, her teeth flashing in and out of the darkness.

“Then finish her,” he said.

“I’m trying, but I don’t think she’s into me that way.”

Rohan took another sip. “Make her want it.”

Continued grappling with the demon wasn’t going to get me anywhere other than exhausted and then dead. Fine, mostly dead. Rohan wouldn’t let me be unequivocally taken out.

I wove an electric net around the vral’s body, temporarily paralyzing her with my magic so I could scramble free. My problem? The only way to permanently stop a demon involved hitting their weak spot. My other problem? There was a different spot for each demon. With vral, it was their left eye. As in the one that bulged jiggling out toward me from her socket, laden with pus. “If I blast her eyeball, demon goo will splooge everywhere.”

“Always about the hard and messy,” he chastised. “Gentle has its place, too, you know.”

The vral, who I’d thought was still suffering the effects of my magic paralysis, lashed

her tail around my arm. Surprise. What looked like smooth fur was actually dozens of tiny barbs. I wrenched free, my stomach heaving at the sight of my flesh that now looked like raw hamburger, and blasted the demon in the chest. “Have it at. *Gently* use one of your blades to puncture—son-of-a-bitch!”

The vral convulsed under the sharp crackle of my power, locking onto me in a spasming hug, her claws shredding my sweater. Eight bleeding gashes were not my idea of body adornment.

The air stank of sizzling fur, which was still a step up from the stale B.O. and garbage juice that had seeped into the walls of this squatter’s paradise.

“Stop acting from the flight part of your brain and go to the fight,” Rohan said.

Thrashing on the floor, I squeezed my eyes shut against the blood and sweat dripping into them. The vral’s claws burrowed into my back. “What do you think I’m doing?”

“Napping? Baruch trained you better than this.”

Yeah, for three whole weeks. Muttering an anatomically impossible suggestion Rohan’s way, I pulled out a self-defense move that Baruch had drilled into me. Before the demon’s tremors could subside, I wrapped my right leg around her left foreleg to trap it, curling my right arm over the same side of her body in a tight overhook. My fingers dug deeper into her wiry, scorched fur, hitting something squishy that was matted into her side.

Please don’t let that be leftover homeless person from her earlier meal.

I planted my left foot firmly on the floor, bridging up, my hips exploding into the air. The combination of that momentum, along with the pull/push dual action of my arms as I chopped my left hand into the demon, allowed me to swing on top of her.

“That’s a start,” Rohan said.

Snarling, the vral bucked me off like a seasoned rodeo bull. I flew onto my ass, then scrambled to my feet, panting, my right foot buckling as I stumbled backwards over a piece of ceiling tile.

Rohan tsked me. “We’re Fallen Angels, not Falling Angels. Try to stay upright.” In a display of rampant egotism, my fellow all-male hunters had dubbed themselves Fallen Angels. I’d graciously been extended the label.

“You’re hilarious.”

“I am rather,” he replied in a put-on posh British accent that intoxicated me like a shot of liquid sex. He gestured to the trash-strewn floor. “Be aware of your surroundings,” he directed in his normal voice that was all smoky baritone and velvet Californian curls. “Garbage can be your downfall.”

Nodding, I flung a damp lock of curly dark brown hair out of my face.

The vral scrambled back onto all fours, shaking out her fur like she was waking from a nap. Then the man-eating little fucker lunged and sank her two rows of teeth into the toes of my boots.

Steel-toed, but still. These babies were new. Very expensive. Who knew it was such a challenge to find badass boots with reinforced steel, a chunky heel that was far more practical to run in than stilettos, and silver buckles running up the side? It was my consolation gift to myself for having my lovely life of partying, sex, and naps getting shot to hell with the recent discovery that I was the first female Rasha, or demon hunter. I’d been reluctantly inducted into the Brotherhood of David, a dick-swinging secret organization.

Yeah, they weren’t thrilled to have their first vag-sporter either.

The vral’s eyes locked onto mine. She gave a chittered cackle, her teeth cracking deeper

into the leather.

My old tap dance mantra popped into my head. *A one, a two, you know what to do.* Nothing to it but to do it. I blasted the vral's eyeball, shielding myself with a ceiling tile against the putrid pus arcing out of her like a Tarantino kill. The splatter guard worked well, with only a few drops of warm liquid hitting my cheek. It tingled but nothing got in my eyes or mouth so score one, Nava. Which tipped into score the second as the demon death thro'e'd down to a single nubbin of fur.

The faintest scuff of claws on metal was our only clue that another demon was present. It flew off an overhead pipe, claws outstretched and the fur on its back raised. A baby vral, much smaller in size, but still deadly.

Before I even had time to gasp, Rohan's hand shot up, one wicked sharp blade extended from his index finger, the movement pulling his coat tight around his astoundingly well-defined shoulders. His magic allowed him to do that party trick with all his fingers, not to mention extend a blade that ran the length of his body like an outline. One time I'd asked him why his clothes didn't get shredded each time he brought out his knives. Maybe I'd said it a little too dejectedly because he'd stopped instructing me on the proper way to punch a chupacabra in the face and raised an amused eyebrow as he said, "It's magic."

He didn't look up when he aimed now, didn't even stop sipping that stupid latte, yet he shish-kabobed the vral right through the neck. Since it wasn't the sweet spot, it wasn't a kill strike, but he still stopped the demon in its tracks.

"Admit it. You're the devil." I trained my eyes on the shadowy corner but didn't see any other movement.

"Nice to see I've risen in the hierarchy of Hell during our brief acquaintance." With a

snap of his wrist, Rohan flicked the demon over to me.

Baby vral plopped at my feet with a wet splat, still quivering.

“Don’t say I never give you anything,” he said.

“I couldn’t possibly accept. You caught it. You kill it.”

Rohan waved a hand at me. “I insist.”

I toed the baby vral. Hmm. I stood behind it, which meant its eyeballs faced Rohan. “I serve at the pleasure of my commanding officer.” Barely hiding my snigger, I nailed its eyeball with a concentrated stream of electricity, killing the demon with a tad too much enthusiastic zeal.

Its entire body exploded. An almost impossible amount of pus, guts, and fur flew, dousing our immediate area like the splash zone at SeaWorld. Its various bits then winked into oblivion like they were supposed to when a demon was offed, but the damage had been done.

Rohan remained pristine. He looked like a god and I looked like the aftermath of a Dumpster fire. A dank-ass, gooey, Dumpster fire of demon pus. Awesome.