

Bent Out of Shade Excerpt

Bouncing on her toes, Sadie swung around to her dad with a gleam in her eyes. “Can I?”

Eli rubbed a hand over the back of his neck, though Nav looked as confused as I was.

My shoulders crept up and I turned slowly and menacingly to Eli, who’d once again fallen prey to Sadie’s puppy dog eyes. “Can she what?”

“I might have promised her a feel-better treat if she couldn’t null its magic.” He tossed his shades onto the couch.

“What kind of—” I put two and two together and groaned. “Not Phoebe.”

My kid had whipped the mini flamethrower out from the back of her loose shirt with a flourish.

“Our duplex is not insured for inside use of that weapon.” I’d checked.

“It’s on the lowest setting, Mother.” With a dramatic sigh, Sadie uncapped it, her finger on the trigger.

“Don’t ‘Mother’ me, child. Not committing arson is a perfectly reasonable request.”

“Dad promised.”

I ground my teeth together hard enough to take off a layer of enamel. Oh goody. Now I was somehow Bad Cop for telling our daughter not to incinerate her father’s home. “A little support here?”

“Sadie,” Eli said, “your mom is right.”

I leaned back into the couch and crossed my arms smugly. “Thank you.”

“You have to use it on the patio.”

I face-palmed.

“Yay! Come on, Nav! Let’s flambé this puppy.” Sadie flung open the sliding door and bounded into the yard.

“By all means,” Nav grumbled, poking the crab-demon with the light staff. “Allow me, a respected and formidable demon hunter, to do all the grunt work while you sit there, Your Majesty, and bask in the glow of your child’s love.”

Eli blew him an air kiss, and Nav whacked the demon in response.

Stunned from all its up close and personal time with the light staff, the demon wove precariously as if drunk.

“You are so making it up to me later,” Nav said.

“Gross!” I yanked my feet onto the sofa before the demon crashed into them.

At Nav’s prodding, it slid across the plastic, but he prevented it from bashing into the dining room table and spewing venomous pus. Or was that poisonous? Whatever. Dead was dead.

“‘Gross’ says the woman sleeping with my best friend.” Nav pushed his sunglasses into his hair. “None of us are overjoyed at the incestuousness of this situation.”

“Not you and Eli, dummy. The demon. Its pus bubbles were vibrating.” I threw a hand over my face. “Look out!”

The demon spun like a tornado, knocking Nav’s feet out from under him, then scampered nimbly outside.

I jumped up to run after it, but Nav was already halfway out the sliding door, staff held aloft like a spear. Remarkable reflexes, that man.

Eli lifted a corner of the sofa to release the tarp. “Thank God that’s over.”

What an adorable optimist.