

**HOW DO YOU
TELL SATAN THAT
YOU RAN OVER
HIS HELLHOUND?**

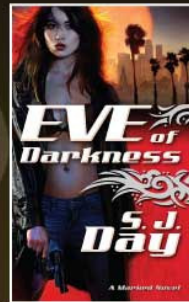
"Eve of Darkness is a sizzling, heart-pounding urban fantasy that thrilled and fascinated me from beginning to end. Eve is a smart, spirited heroine I won't soon forget!"

—Jeri Smith-Ready,
award-winning author
of *Wicked Game*

Evangeline Hollis has no idea and she doesn't want to find out. Living with the mark of Cain—and the two sexy brothers who come with it—is trouble enough. She doesn't need to borrow more. Too bad Satan is too pissed to oblige her.

Incensed at the loss of his pet, Satan has put a bounty on Eve's head, and Hell's denizens are converging en masse. The proliferation of Infernals is complicating Eve's hunts and creating chaos in her once orderly life. They've also brought her to the attention of an overzealous reverend who's certain she's Jezebel reincarnate.

Can a Mark drafted by God strike a bargain with the Devil? Eve's about to find out . . .



Available May 2009



Available June 2009

\$6.99 (\$8.99 CAN)

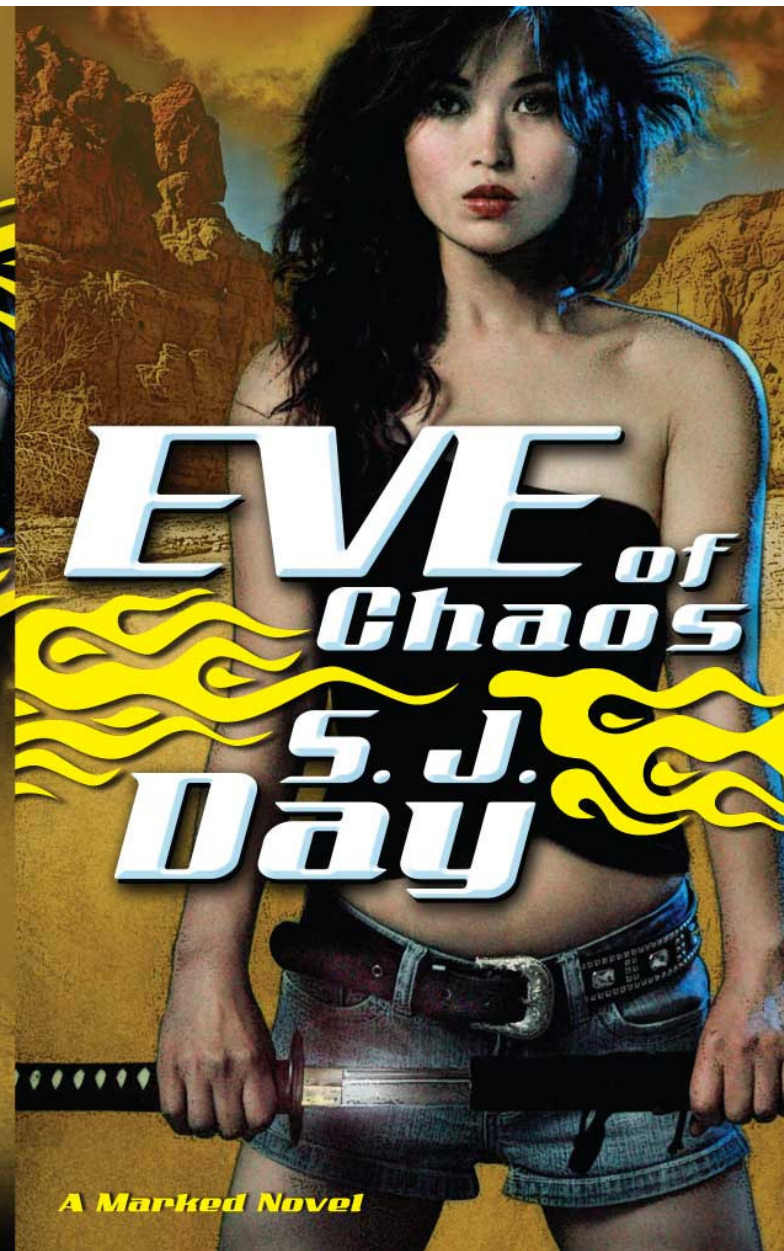
Cover art by Gordon Crabb
Tom Doherty Associates, LLC
www.tor-forge.com
Printed in the USA



**Eve of
Chaos
S. J. Day**



**A Marked
Novel**



EVE of Chaos

A MARKED NOVEL

S. J. Day

www.sjday.net

Tor Books - June 30, 2009

ISBN: 978-0765360434 / Price \$ 6.99

Urban Fantasy / Pages 384

Advance Chapter One Excerpt

©S.J. DAY • TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES, LLC • ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

All rights reserved. This work is protected under copyright laws and reproduction is strictly prohibited.
Permission to reproduce the material in any manner or medium must be secured from the Publisher.

*“God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and
the plumb line of desolation.”*

—Isaiah 34:11

Chapter 1

Evangeline Hollis watched with clenched jaw as a kappa demon served *yakisoba*—Japanese pan-fried noodles—to her mother with a broad smile. Eve guessed that the ratio of mortals to demons at the Orange County Buddhist Church’s annual Obon Festival was about fifty-fifty.

After three months of living with the Mark of Cain and her new “job” as celestial bounty hunter, Eve was resigned to the reality of Infernals mingling undetected among mortals. However, she was still surprised by the number of transplanted Japanese demons who had come out to play at the festival. There seemed to be an inordinate amount of them present.

“You want some?” her mother asked, holding out the plate. Miyoko had lived a mostly quintessential American life in the United States for thirty years. She was a naturalized citizen, a converted Baptist, and her husband, Darrel Hollis, was a good ol’ boy from Alabama. But she appreciated her roots and made an effort to share the Japanese culture with her two daughters.

Eve shook her head. “I want *yakidango*.”

“Me, too. It’s over there.” Miyoko set off, leading the way.

The festival was contained within the gated parking lot of the temple. To the right was a large gymnasium. To the left, the temple and school complex. The area was small, but still managed to hold a variety of food and game booths. A *taiko* drum was elevated in a *yagura* tower overlooking a space that would later showcase Bon Odori dancers. Children competed to win prizes ranging from live goldfish to stuffed animals. Adults hovered over displays of trinkets and homemade desserts.

The Southern California weather was perfect, as usual. A balmy seventy-eight degrees with plenty of sunshine and very few clouds. Adjusting her sunglasses, Eve relished the kiss of the sun on her skin and breathed in the scents of her favorite foods.

Then a foul stench wafted by on the afternoon breeze, assaulting her nose and ruining her rare moment of peace.

The putrid smell of rotting soul; it was unmistakable. It was a cross between decaying flesh and fresh shit, and it amazed Eve that the Unmarked—mortals lacking the Mark of Cain—couldn’t smell it. She turned her head, seeking out the source.

Her searching gaze halted on a lovely Asian woman standing across the aisle from her. A *yuki-onna*—a Japanese snow demon. Eve noted the Infernal’s white kimono with its delicate *sukura* embroidery and the detail on her cheekbone that resembled a tribal tattoo. In truth, the design was the demon’s rank and it was invisible to mortals. Like the Mark of Cain on Eve’s arm, it was similar to mortal military insignia. All Infernals had them. The details betrayed both which species of damned being they were and what their rank in Hell’s hierarchy was.

Contrary to what most theologians believed, the Mark of the Beast wasn’t something to be feared as the start of the

Apocalypse; it was a caste system that had been in place for centuries.

Eve's mark began to tingle, then burn. A call to arms.

Now? she asked with a mental query, exasperation clear in her dry tone. She was a Mark, one of thousands of "sinners" around the world who'd been drafted into service exterminating demons for God. She was expected to kill at the drop of a hat, but her mother was with her and they were at a house of worship.

Sorry, babe. Reed Abel sounded anything but. *You're in the wrong place at the right time. Her number's up, and you're closest.*

You've been singing that tune all week, she retorted. *I'm not buying it anymore.*

She'd been vanquishing a demon a day—sometimes two—for the last several days. A girl needed more than just Sundays off when her job was killing demons. *Why am I always closest?*

Because you're a disaster magnet?

And you're a riot.

Reed—aka Abel of biblical fame—was a *mal'akh*, an angel. He was a handler, a position that meant he was responsible for assigning hunts to a small group of Marks. It was a lot like skip tracing. The seven earthbound archangels acted as bail bondsmen. Reed was a dispatcher. Eve was a bounty hunter. It was a well-oiled system for most Marks, but to say she was a squeaky wheel would be an understatement.

Dinner tonight? he asked.

After that wisecrack, cocky bastard?

I'll cook.

She followed her mom, keeping an eye on her quarry. *If I'm still alive, sure.*

In the back of her mind, she heard and felt Alec Cain—Reed's brother—growl his disapproval. Alec was her mentor.

Once known as Cain of Infamy, he was now Cain the Archangel. She and Alec had a history together, starting ten years ago when she'd given him her virginity. Nowadays, his position as archangel had stripped him of the ability to have an emotional attachment to anything other than God, but Alec held on to her anyway.

What means more? he had asked her. *When someone wants you because he can't help it? Because of hormones or some chemical reaction in the brain? Or when he wants you because he chooses to want you? Because he makes the conscious decision to want you?*

Eve didn't know, so she was drifting along with him, trying to figure it out.

She was certifiably insane for stepping in the middle of the oldest case of sibling rivalry in history, especially since the three of them shared a unique bond that allowed a free flow of thought between them. Eve often asked herself why she played with fire. The only answer she came up with was that she just couldn't help herself.

I'm calling dibs on breakfast tomorrow, Alec insisted gruffly.

One-Eyed Jacks? No one cooked them like Alec. Grilled pieces of bread with a hole in the middle to hold a fried egg. Buttery and crispy, and served with syrup. He also toasted the centers and sprinkled them with cinnamon-sugar to serve on the side. Delicious.

Whatever you want, angel.

It was a given that Reed wouldn't be around for breakfast, since dating two men at once meant that all three of them were sleeping alone at night.

The *yuki-onna* excused herself from her handsome companion and moved toward the gymnasium, taking the tiny steps dictated by the tight fit of her kimono and the *geta* wooden

clogs on her feet. Eve was at an advantage with her attire. Her stretchy capris and ribbed cotton tank top didn't impede her range of movement at all. Her Army-issue "jungle boots" were breathable and functional. She was ready to rock. But that didn't mean she wanted to.

"I have to wash my hands," Eve said to her mother, knowing that as a retired registered nurse, Miyoko would appreciate the need for cleanliness.

"I have antibacterial gel in my purse."

Eve wrinkled her nose. "Yuck. That stuff makes my hands sticky."

"You're too fussy. How many dangos you want?"

"Three sticks." The rice cake dumplings were grilled on wooden skewers and coated with sweet syrup. They were a childhood favorite that Eve enjoyed too rarely, which aggravated her disgruntlement. If the demon ruined her appetite, there would be Hell to pay. Seriously.

Eve handed over a twenty-dollar bill, then set off in pursuit of her prey.

She overtook the demon and entered the gym where picnic tables had been arranged to provide seating for diners. Dozens of festival-goers filled the vast space with echoing revelry—laughing, conversing in both English and Japanese, and eating. Mortals mingled with Infernal beings in blissful ignorance, but Eve noted every one of Hell's denizens. In return, they knew what she was and they eyed her with wary hatred. The mark on her deltoid betrayed her, as did her scent. As rotten as they stunk to her, she smelled sickly sweet to them. Ridiculous really, since there was no such thing as a sweet Mark. They were all bitter.

Tucking herself against the wall, she watched through the tinted glass doors as the *yuki-onna* approached. From the forward

vantage, Eve could see the demon's feet hovering just above the ground. Backing up slowly, Eve rounded the corner to stay out of sight. A glass case was mounted to the wall at her shoulder, displaying trophies and a lone katana within its lighted interior.

Eve glanced around quickly, noting the distraction of the rest of the gym's occupants. With superhuman speed, she pinched off the round metal lock with thumb and forefinger, and withdrew the sheathed blade. She held it tucked between her thigh and the wall, hoping it was more than a decoration. If not, she could always summon the classic flame-covered sword. But she'd rather not. Buildings had a nasty habit of catching fire around her, and she had greater proficiency with the sleeker, moderately curved "samurai sword" than she did with the heavier glaive.

Her prey entered the gym and turned in the opposite direction, heading toward the restrooms just as Eve had guessed she would. Closing the women's bathroom while food and drink were present in copious quantities was always a bad idea, but Eve didn't have a choice. Her mother was waiting, and she couldn't risk losing her target.

Her present dilemma was one of the many reasons why Marks weren't supposed to have family ties. The sinners who were chosen were usually loners easily transplanted to foreign soil. Relatives were a liability. Eve was the sole exception to the rule. Alec had fought to keep her close to home because he knew how much her parents meant to her. He was also motivated by guilt, since their indiscretion ten years ago was the reason she was marked today.

The wheels of justice didn't turn any faster in Heaven than they did on Earth.

When the bathroom door swung shut behind the demon,

Eve followed. The mark throbbed hot and heavy within the skin covering her deltoid, pumping aggression and fury through her veins. Her muscles thickened and her stride altered. Her body's reaction was base and animalistic, the surge of bloodlust brutal and addicting. She had come to crave it like a drug. Too much time between kills, and she became short-tempered and twitchy.

Despite the rush, her heartbeat and hands remained steady. Her body was a temple now, and it ran like a machine. As she entered the bathroom, Eve was calm and focused. When had she become so at ease with her murderous secondary life? She would have to ponder that later, when she had some privacy and time to cry.

All of the stall doors were slightly ajar, except for the handicapped one at the far end of the room. The stench of decaying soul permeated the space. Affixed to the wall near the door was a tube that held a collapsible Wet Floor sign. She tugged it free and set it outside in the hallway, then closed the door and turned the lock. It wasn't quite as useful as an Out of Order cone, but it would have to do.

There was no way to stave off the sudden deluge of memories of another bathroom, one in which she had fought a dragon and paid with her life. She'd been resurrected to kill another day because of a deal Alec had made with someone, somewhere. She didn't know the details, but she knew the cost had to be steep. If she hadn't been in love with him already, his willingness to make that kind of sacrifice would have sealed the deal. She wasn't ready to die just yet, despite demon killing and a crazy love life.

One day she hoped to marry and have children, enjoy a successful career and family vacations. But she would have to shed the mark first—either by manipulating someone in power or

by collecting enough indulgences to work off her penance.

Of course, there were loopholes in the indulgence system. She'd killed the teenage son of the Black Diamond Pack Alpha werewolf *twice*, but had only been given credit for the second kill. Bullshit like that really got under her skin. What was a girl supposed to do when even God didn't play fair?

A soft whimper arrested Eve midstride. The sound had a high, trembling note that sounded childlike. She rolled her shoulders back and waited. Hunting was less about the pounce than it was about positioning. She stood dead center in the most open space in the room. The exit was at her back. The Infernal had no way out but through her. Damned if she would move just to hurry things up a bit.

The mark continued to flood her with adrenaline and hostility. Her senses honed in on her prey, flooding her mind with information. Her stance widened.

"Come out, come out wherever you are . . ." she crooned.

The lock on the handicapped stall turned. The door pulled inward. A child's face appeared, wan and tear streaked. A pretty girl of Asian heritage in a light summer dress with a watermelon design around the hem. Maybe six or seven years old. Shaking with fear. A moment later, the lovely visage of the *yuki-onna* appeared above the girl's head.

Eve growled. "A hostage was a bad idea."

When she had kids of her own, she wasn't letting them out of her sight.

"I will walk out of here with the child," the Infernal said in her lilting, accented voice. She stepped out of the stall with her hand on the girl's shoulder. "Then I will release her."

The child's teeth began to chatter and her lips took on a blue tinge. Gooseflesh spread from the point where the demon

clutched her.

“You’re going to die,” Eve said matter-of-factly. The *yuki-onna* had been targeted. Marks would hunt her until she was dead.

“So are you,” the demon retorted. “Do you really want to waste your last moments killing me?”

There’s a hostage, she told Reed, ignoring the standard demon intimidation and bargaining tactics. *A little girl. I need you to get her out of here.*

A warm breeze moved over her skin, tangible proof that her handler was always with her. He was forbidden to assist his charges in their hunts, but clearing mortals out of the way fell under his purview. *On your cue*, he murmured.

Eve had no idea where in the world he was, but as a *mal’akh*, he could shift—or teleport—in and out of a location faster than the blink of an eye.

“I was going to take you down fair and square,” she told the demon, holding the sheathed katana aloft. “I should have known you would want to fight dirty.”

“I have no weapon.” A lie. Demons all had certain gifts, like the *yuki-onna’s* ability to create extreme weather. Marks had only their own wits and strength. They were celestially enhanced physically—able to heal and react quickly—but lacked any supernatural “powers”.

“I’ll give you mine,” Eve offered grimly, “if you let the kid go.” She ripped the katana free of its sheath and hurled the lacquered wood at the demon’s head.

She reached out to Reed. *Now!*

The demon’s arms rose to ward off the projectile. The child was snatched by Reed before the *yuki-onna* caught it.

The Infernal’s cry of rage was accompanied by an icy gust

that burst through the room like an explosion. Eve was thrust backward into a heated-air hand dryer with enough force to hammer it flush to the wall. She held onto the hilt of the katana by stubbornness alone. Her booted feet dropped to the floor with a dull thud, and she hit the ground running.

Arm raised and blade at the ready, Eve rushed forward with a battle cry that curdled her own blood. The child’s fear lingered in the air, the acrid scent mingling with the stench of decaying Infernal soul. The combination sent her mark into overdrive. She leaped, slashing down on the diagonal, but the demon spun away in a flurry of snow. The temperature dropped drastically. The mirrors fogged around the edges, and her breath puffed visibly in the chilled air.

Eve pursued her, feinting and parrying against the sharp icicles the demon threw at her. They shattered like glass against her flashing katana, sprinkling the tile with slippery shards.

Crunching across the hazardous floor, she advanced with precision. The beautiful kimono fluttered with the Infernal’s retreat, the thick silk shredded by Eve’s calculated attacks. Once the sorriest swordswoman in her class, Eve had practiced exhaustively until she stopped embarrassing herself. She still wasn’t much beyond passably proficient with the weapon, but she no longer felt hopelessly inept.

She began to hum a merry tune.

As she’d hoped, the demon floundered, caught off guard by the implied boredom. The *yuki-onna’s* next salvo lacked the speed of the previous ones. Eve caught it with her fist, hissing as the ice splintered its way across her palm. Blood flowed, its scent goading the demon into roaring in triumph, a sound audible only to those with enhanced hearing.

Eve lobbed the icicle back, followed immediately with the

katana. The Infernal deflected the first projectile with an icy blast, but was left vulnerable to the second. The blade sliced along the demon's right triceps, drawing blood before impaling the wall behind her. A crimson stain began to spread through the pristine white of the kimono.

"Checkmate," Eve taunted. "Your blood for mine."

The Infernal retaliated with an icicle that pierced straight through Eve's right thigh. She cried out and dropped to one knee. Agonized, she sent up a silent request for a sword. She held her palm open to receive the gift . . .

. . . which didn't come.

Shock froze Eve. She'd gambled with the loss of the katana and rolled snake eyes. She always feared this day would come. Formerly agnostic, she didn't show the deference to the Almighty that others did. She wasn't disrespectful per se, but she might be too forthright in voicing her inability to understand the way God handled things.

She asked again, throwing in a "please" for good measure. The result was the same. Nada. Eve growled, furious that she would be denied the tool required to complete the task she was forced to perform.

The *yuki-onna* quickly deduced what had failed to happen. She giggled, a lovely melodic sound. "Perhaps he realizes that saving you is hopeless and not worth the effort."

"Fuck you."

"It is rare that Sammael sets a bounty so high or allows everyone in Hell a chance to claim it." The demon grinned. "But then, this is the first time someone has run over one of his pets."

"What bounty?" Eve hoped she hid the sudden fear she felt. "Is Satan upset that I ran over his *dog*? That's hysterical."

I'm not laughing, Alec snapped.

I know. Eve sighed. *My life sucks*.

She struggled to her feet, favoring her impaled leg. Reaching down, she yanked the ice dagger free and tossed it aside. Blood spurted from the gaping wound, then gushed. She ignored it for now. She had bigger problems.

"What is funny," the *yuki-onna* retorted, "is how you will be ripped apart by everyone in Hell."

"Everyone, huh?" Eve shrugged. "He'll have to do better than that, if he hopes to take me out."

That's my girl, Alec praised. *Never let 'em see you sweat*.

But she heard the unease in his voice. She also felt him poised to leap to her rescue.

I've got this, she said, staying him. She wasn't sure how, but she would figure it out on her own. Damned if some ice bitch in clogs would kick her ass.

"Sammael wants you," the demon taunted. Her disheveled hair and wide eyes only made her more beautiful. "And I will be rewarded for bringing you in."

Laughing through her growing panic, Eve made a third request—not quite a prayer—for a sword. Again, she was ignored.

She deflected the demon's next icicle with her forearm, then darted to the left to catch another. She threw it back. It was knocked off course by a burst of frosty air. All the while, she closed the distance between herself and the wall that held the katana.

"You can take hostages," Eve taunted, "but you can't take me."

Bravado. Sometimes it was all a Mark had.

"I am beginning to think otherwise," the demon retorted with a malicious gleam in her dark eyes.

Pounding came to the locked door, followed by a string of

anxious-sounding Japanese. Not for the first time, Eve wished her mother had taught her the language. All she knew was that someone wanted to come in, and the demon she was fighting was no longer eager to get out. In fact, the *yuki-onna* seemed energized by the intrusion.

Eve took another step closer. Her boot slipped on an ice shard and she skidded, her balance compromised by her injured leg. She was inspired by the near fall, her mind seizing on a possible means to the end.

Dependant upon God's willingness to cooperate and give her a damn break, of course.

Kicking hard, she sent up a spray of water and ice. As the *yuki-onna* retaliated with a rapid volley of icicles, Eve shot forward, using the slush on the tile to drop to the floor in a careening, feet-first slide into home plate.

"I could really use that sword now," she yelled skyward, as the white tile rushed past her in a blur. "*Please!*"

Nothing.

Time slowed to a trickle . . .

The demon leaped gracefully and was held aloft by icy air currents. Levitating into a prone position, the Infernal's facade of beauty fell away, revealing the true evil beneath—eyes of blood red, a gaping maw of blackened teeth, and grayish skin with a network of inky veins that spread into her hairline. With arms splayed wide, spears of ice appeared in her hands like ski poles.

Alec and Reed roared in unison, their shouts reverberating in Eve's skull with such volume they drowned out everything else. In slow motion, she watched the demon hovering like a ghostly apparition, her white robes in tatters, her hair a sinuously writhing mane. Eve raised her arms to ward off the coming attack, then jerked in surprise as a heavy weight forced her forearm to

drop to her chest. . .

. . . weighted by the miraculous appearance of a glaive in her hand.

Her grip tightened on the hilt and her back arched up. Hurling the blade forward like a javelin, she struck the *yuki-onna* straight in the chest. The glaive pierced deep with a sickening thud.

The demon exploded in a burst of ash.

Eve continued to slide until she slammed into the wall. At impact, the katana dislodged from its mooring, twisting to fall point down toward her head. She jerked to the side, rolling to avoid the blade. It pierced the floor where she'd been an instant before. Behind her, the glaive—no longer embedded in the demon's body—clattered to the tile.

"Holy shit," she breathed.

A pair of steel-toed boots appeared next to her head, then a hand extended into her line of sight. Looking up, her gaze met eyes of rich chocolate brown. Once, Alec had looked at her with a heat so scorching it burned her skin. She missed that look. Then again, she got hot enough for the both of them just checking him out.

At a few inches over six feet, Alec was as ripped as one would expect a skilled predator to be. He was God's most revered and trusted enforcer, and his body reflected that calling. His hair, as always, was slightly overlong, but she would fight off anyone who approached him with shears.

"Could God have waited any longer to bail me out of the mess he put me in?" she grouched.

"Did you note the lack of fire?" His voice—dark and slightly raspy—was pure seduction, even when laced with the resonance unique to archangels. It didn't sound that way when he

spoke to her telepathically, which was sadly appropriate. Who he was in reality was far different from who he was in her mind.

She blinked up at him. “*You* bailed me out? What the hell? Was he just going to let me die? *Again?*”

“Obviously not, since you’re not dead. It was a lesson in faith.”

“More like a lesson in ‘I am God, see me fuck with you.’”

“Watch it,” he admonished.

Eve accepted his proffered hand. As he pulled her upright, his powerful chest and tautly ridged abdomen flexed noticeably beneath his fitted white T-shirt. She couldn’t help noticing stuff like that, even though she couldn’t touch what she was looking at.

“What is it with demons and bathrooms?” she asked. “Grimshaw started a trend when he sent that dragon to kill me. I swear I’ve vanquished at least half a dozen Infernals in bathrooms since then.”

The dragon had been a courtier in Asmodeus’s court, but he’d killed her for Charles Grimshaw—former Alpha of the Northern California Black Diamond Pack and father of the wolf she’d had to kill twice. Demon retaliation was a bitch.

Alec cursed at the sight of her thigh. Her toes were squishing in the blood soaking her sock and puddling along the sole. She would need a new pair of boots.

He bent to examine her wound more closely. “I would have gotten here sooner, but I had to scare off the crowd of Infernals in the hall first.”

“Crowd?”

“I don’t think the ice bitch was kidding about the bounty.”

“What do you know that I don’t? You wouldn’t believe an Infernal without some sort of proof.”

Alec had assumed control over the day-to-day operation of

Gadara Enterprises—the secular front for the North American firm of Marks—since the archangel Raguel had been taken prisoner by Satan a couple of months back. That meant Alec was privy to almost every hellacious and celestial happening that occurred between the top of Alaska to the end of Mexico.

“The number of Infernals in Orange County has tripled in the last two weeks.”

Which was when she’d graduated from training. As she was often reminded, nothing was a coincidence. “No wonder it’s been so busy around here.”

He gave her a resigned look. “It will get busier, if Sammael’s set his sights on you.”

“With a free-for-all bounty open to all classes of demons? Jeez, you’d think I kicked his puppy or something. Oh wait . . . I did.” Eve put weight on her wounded leg and winced at the immediate throb of agony.

Alec tucked his shoulder under her arm to support her. “We need to bandage that leg, smart ass.”

“You *like* my ass, and not because of its IQ.”

“Love it.” He gave her butt an affectionate squeeze. Alec might be restricted from feeling emotional love for her, but lust wasn’t a problem. “But I love the rest of your hot body, too, and I’d like to keep it in one piece.”

The mark enabled her to heal super fast. In an hour or two, only a pink scar would remain, and by nightfall, the injury would be nothing but a memory. But she could help move things along in the recovery department by closing the hole with some butterfly bandages. She’d have to hurry; her mom was still waiting for her.

I’ll take care of Miyoko, he assured her.

“I’ll take Eve back to her place to change,” a deep voice

intruded.

They turned their heads to find Reed by the door. The men's features were similar enough to betray them as siblings, but they were otherwise polar opposites. Reed favored Armani suits and faultless haircuts. Today he wore black slacks and a lavender dress shirt open at the throat and rolled at the wrists. It was a testament to how completely, robustly *male* he was that he could look so damn fine in such a soft color.

Alec's arm at her waist tightened. The two brothers were like oil and kerosene together. Dangerously flammable. They refused to tell her what started their lifelong feud, and they kept the memory so repressed in the darkest corners of their minds that she hadn't yet been able to find it. Whatever the sore spot was, the murderous rage it incited was easily goaded. They'd been killing each other for years—Cain more so than Abel—but were always resurrected by God to fight some more.

Which was just nasty in her opinion. Why God enabled the two brothers to keep fighting was beyond her comprehension.

"What are we going to do about this mess?" She offered a soothing smile to Alec before stepping away from him. A trail of blood marked her recent kamikaze slide across the floor. The rapidly melting ice was spreading the crimson stain along the grout lines, creating an oddly compelling map.

Stepping into the water, Alec snapped his fingers and the liquid and blood filled the nearest sink, transferred so quickly she hadn't caught the movement even with her enhanced senses. She would go home with Reed in similar fashion.

Thankfully, Marks had handlers to pick up after them. She was luckier than most in that she had Cain, too, although that created some friction with many of the other Marks who thought she had an advantage. They didn't take into consideration how

many demons wanted to use her to get to the deadliest Mark of them all. She might as well wear a bull's-eye for cocky and rash Infernals to aim for.

Then again, it looked like Satan had taped the target on for her.

"Come on," Reed said, extending a hand to her. "Before your mother calls in the cavalry."

"Forget the cavalry." Alec winked at Eve. "Miyoko would charge in herself."

She was halted midlaugh by the stench of a sewer. Looking for the demon whose proximity had to be the cause, she found herself staring into an inexplicably lingering puddle at her feet . . . and familiar eyes of malevolent, crystalline blue. A face in the liquid. She stomped instinctively, destroying the visage of the water demon in an explosion of spraying droplets.

"What the hell?" Reed barked, catching her as her wounded thigh caused her to stumble.

In the literal blink of an eye, Eve found herself in the kitchen of her third-floor condo in Huntington Beach. "Did you see him?" she gasped, leaning heavily into his hard body.

Reed's arms tightened around her. "Yeah, I saw him."

He's gone. Alec's tone was grim. *I'm heading out to hold off your mom, but we need to address this when we're done here.*

The demon was a Nix—a Germanic shape-shifting water spirit. He'd targeted her almost from the moment she had been marked, then made a nuisance of himself until she killed him. Correction: She'd *thought* she killed him.

She *would* kill him. This particular Nix had taken the life of her neighbor Mrs. Basso. Sweet, forthright, widowed Mrs. Basso who had been a beloved friend. Eve's need for vengeance was what motivated her when the damned Infernal bounty hunting

got tough.

Pulling away from Reed, she limped down the hallway to her master bedroom. The crash of the waves against the shore pulsed in through the living room balcony's open sliding glass door. In her premarked life, she'd been an interior designer. Her condo had been one of her first projects, and the space remained one of her favorites. Even the mistakes she'd made in the layout were fond ones. She wouldn't change a thing. She felt safe here, less like a demon killer and more like herself.

Eve absorbed the calm she found in her home with deep, even breaths.

Reed called after her, his tone both seductive and challenging. "Need help getting naked?"

She sighed inwardly. Outside these walls, the worst of Hell's denizens were converging en masse. She would need to be ready when she ventured out again.

As if her love life wasn't dangerous enough.

AND DON'T MISS...

EVE of Darkness

ISBN: 978-0765360410

AVAILABLE NOW!

EVE of Destruction

ISBN: 978-0765360427

AVAILABLE NOW!

