



My Professor is a Demon (Demons for Hire)

Author: *Cali Mann*

Category: Fantasy

Description: He's bound by Hell's rules. She's destined to break them..

Charlotte

I came to Midnight Creek College to study magic, not end up on Hell's radar. But my research is uncovering something powerful—something dangerous. And my professor, Oscar Katz? He's not just brilliant and brooding. He's a demon bound by rules I don't understand.

Rules I'm about to break.

Oscar

This job was supposed to be simple—teach the class, avoid entanglements, and report back to Hell. Then Charlotte walked in, reckless, gifted, and completely unaware that her magic is a threat to forces far worse than me.

I should turn her in. I should walk away.

Instead, I want her. And defying Hell for her might cost me everything.

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Oscar

I adjusted my tie in the reflection of my office window, scowling at the perfect Windsor knot. The summer sun had set hours ago over Midnight Creek College, leaving Blackwood Hall's gothic architecture in shadow. Behind me, stacks of research papers sat on my desk—publications containing the depth of my knowledge compressed into a human timeline, attributed to the identity I now wore.

Three months as a visiting professor, and I still felt like an imposter. Not because my knowledge was fabricated—I'd spent centuries accumulating it—but because I'd never before attempted to transmit that knowledge to students.

My reflection stared back at me: dark hair artfully tousled despite the late hour, sharp jawline with carefully maintained stubble, piercing eyes that fashion photographers had once described as "hypnotic" during my brief stint as a model—one of many covers I'd used over the centuries.

The air shifted behind me, growing heavy with sulfur and smoke. I didn't turn around.

"You're late," I said, continuing to stare at my reflection.

The shadows in the corner of my office deepened, forming into a figure that seemed to absorb light rather than reflect it. "Time is different in Hell, Professor." The title dripped with mockery. "Or have you gone native in your little academic playground?"

I finally turned, keeping my expression neutral. "Vorthazul. What an unexpected

displeasure."

The demon liaison smiled, revealing too many teeth. "The Board is concerned about your progress. Or lack thereof." Vorthazul glided across my office, trailing wisps of darkness. "Three months observing the ley line anomalies, and your reports grow increasingly... vague."

"Thorough research takes time. Something your employers seem to have forgotten."

"Patience isn't the Board's virtue, Oscar." Vorthazul ran a shadowy finger across the spines of ancient books lining my shelves. "Especially not when other... developments have surfaced."

I kept my posture relaxed despite the sudden tension coiling in my chest. "Developments?"

A folder materialized in Vorthazul's hands, the edges smoldering. He tossed it onto my desk. "Charlotte Evers."

I maintained my carefully cultivated neutrality, but internally I flinched. I'd been hoping to keep her off my boss's radar a little longer.

"The human graduate student?" I asked, voice deliberately casual as I picked up the folder.

"Is she, though?" Vorthazul circled my desk. "Human?"

I opened the folder, revealing a photograph of Charlotte—blonde curls escaping a messy bun, a bright smile illuminating her entire face as she gestured enthusiastically to someone outside the frame. She looked so innocent. So unaware of the darkness gathering around her.

"Her energy signature during the ritual disruption last month was... unexpected," Vorthazul continued. "The Board wants answers."

The ritual disruption. I suppressed a grimace. I'd played my part carefully during that crisis, helping disrupt the blood magic ceremony while maintaining my cover. Charlotte had been there too, assisting Elowen and that wolf she'd mated with. I'd noticed there was something even more special about Charlotte then—impossible not to, with her energy signature flaring like a beacon amid the chaos—but I'd hoped Hell had been too distracted by the failed ritual to notice.

I should have known better.

"She's one of my students," I said, closing the folder. "Bright and dedicated to her research on magical theory. Nothing to concern Hell."

"Then you won't mind making her your priority." Vorthazul's smile widened. "Discover where her power comes from and whether she poses a threat to our interests in the ley lines."

I kept my expression neutral. "And if she does?"

"Then you'll bring her in, of course." Vorthazul said it as if discussing the weather. "For proper examination."

The thought sent ice through my veins. I knew what "proper examination" meant in Hell's terminology.

"Consider it done," I lied smoothly.

"Good." Vorthazul moved toward the shadows. "The Board is watching your redemption effort with great interest, Oscar. After your last... indiscretion... this

assignment is your final chance." His form began dissolving into darkness. "Don't disappoint us again."

The shadow vanished, leaving only the lingering scent of sulfur behind.

I exhaled slowly, running a hand through my perfect hair, deliberately mussing the style I'd spent no actual effort creating. My demonic nature allowed me to manifest any appearance I desired—one of the few perks of my species.

I stared at Charlotte's photograph again. Those bright blue eyes held no guile, just enthusiasm and intelligence. Whatever she was, whatever power had drawn Hell's attention, she had no idea of the danger circling her.

A soft knock interrupted my thoughts.

"Dr. Katz?"

I hastily closed the folder, sliding it into my desk drawer as the door opened.

Speak of the devil. Charlotte Evers poked her head in. "Oh good, you're still here! I was afraid you'd left already."

She bounded into my office with irrepressible energy, her petite frame practically vibrating with excitement. She carried two takeout coffee cups and a messenger bag overflowing with papers. My eyes involuntarily traced the curve of her hip where her simple sundress clung to her figure, the material thin enough to hint at what lay beneath. I quickly redirected my gaze to the coffee she offered.

"I brought reinforcements," she announced, placing one cup on my desk. "Triple espresso. You looked like you needed it during our research meeting earlier."

I found myself smiling despite my dark thoughts. "That's... thoughtful of you, Miss Evers."

"What's that odd smell?" she asked. "Like sulfur?" "Nothing to be concerned about," I said with a wave of my hand. "Oh, okay." She dropped into the chair across from me with casual familiarity, seemingly unaware of how many students found me intimidating. "And I had a breakthrough on those eastern campus energy patterns you asked me to look into."

I reached for the coffee cup at the same moment she pushed it forward. Our fingers brushed, and a visible spark of energy arced between us, blue-violet and unmistakable.

Charlotte yanked her hand back, eyes wide. "Static electricity! Crazy, right? This building is terrible for that."

But I had felt what it really was—her supernatural energy signature responding to my demonic essence, reaching out instinctively before either of us could control it. I'd never felt anything quite like it.

"Must be the carpeting," I agreed, taking the cup without further comment. The coffee burned my tongue, but it was nothing compared to the heat that had flashed through me at her touch.

Charlotte was already digging through her bag, pulling out hand-drawn maps covered in annotations. "So I cross-referenced the ley line fluctuations with lunar cycles, and guess what? The eastern quadrant's energy spikes correspond perfectly with the moon's perigee! That can't be coincidence, right?"

She leaned forward, gesturing animatedly as she spread the papers across my desk. The movement caused her sundress to dip slightly, revealing the delicate hollow

between her collarbones and a hint of cleavage. I forced myself to focus on the maps, disturbed by how easily this human, or whatever she was, distracted me from my well-honed control. She was too young for me, I tried to tell myself, but I was intrigued regardless.

Her enthusiasm was infectious, and I found myself leaning forward despite my better judgment, drawn in by her genuine excitement for the research.

"That's... actually quite insightful," I admitted, examining her work. The patterns she'd identified had taken me weeks to notice, and I'd been studying ley lines for centuries.

A shaft of moonlight cut through the window, illuminating Charlotte as she bent over the maps. For a moment—just a flicker of supernatural sight—I saw beyond her human appearance. Something ancient and powerful shimmered beneath her skin, like light refracted through crystal.

I blinked, and it was gone. But the impression remained. Whatever Charlotte Evers was, "human" didn't fully cover it.

"What exactly led you to focus on lunar influences?" I asked carefully.

"Intuition, mostly." She shrugged. "Sometimes I just... know things about magical energy. It's why I chose supernatural studies. I can feel the patterns."

I'd built my academic reputation on decades of careful, methodical research—though I'd had centuries rather than decades to accumulate that knowledge. Charlotte's approach was all intuitive leaps and creative connections that somehow landed precisely on target. It both fascinated and unnerved me.

"Intuition is valuable," I said, "but it needs to be backed by rigorous methodology."

"That's why we make a good team." She smiled up at me. "You've got the methodology part nailed down."

A strand of golden hair had fallen across her face. My fingers itched with the inexplicable urge to brush it away.

I stood abruptly, putting the desk between us. "It's getting late, Miss Evers—Charlotte. Perhaps we should continue this tomorrow."

Disappointment flickered across her face before her sunny smile reasserted itself. "Of course! Sorry to keep you so late. I just get excited about breakthroughs."

She started to gather her materials, tucking them haphazardly into her bag. "Can you leave them for me to review?" I asked. "Sure," she said, setting them down again.

"I'll walk you to your car," I found myself saying. "The campus can be... unpredictable after dark."

"Such a gentleman," she teased, apparently unaware of how unusual the offer was. After my visit, I wanted to take a few extra precautions. "But I'm parked right outside Blackwood. I'll be fine."

"I insist." Something protective stirred in me, an unfamiliar and unwelcome feeling.

The hallway outside my office was dim, the old building's lighting inadequate after hours. Charlotte chatted about her other classes as we walked, seemingly oblivious to the way shadows shifted unnaturally in the corners. But I noticed her instinctively avoiding the darkest patches without breaking her conversational flow.

Outside, the summer air still held warmth despite the late hour. The parking lot was nearly empty, her ancient blue Honda looking forlorn under a flickering streetlight.

"Thanks for the coffee," I said as we reached her car. "And the research insights."

"Anytime! That's what academic partnerships are for, right?" She fumbled with her keys, dropping them in a very Charlotte manner.

We both reached for the keys at the same time. Our hands touched again, and the energy sparked between us again, briefly illuminating the darkness around us.

Charlotte stared at our hands, then up at my face. For a moment, her expression shifted from surprise to something deeper, more knowing.

"What are you?" she whispered, so quietly I almost missed it.

I blinked, desperately trying to think of an excuse.

But then her sunny smile returned, the moment broken. "Wow, that static electricity is really something tonight! See you tomorrow, Professor!"

She slipped into her car before I could respond, the engine coughing to life after two attempts. I stood watching until her taillights disappeared around the corner, my hand still tingling where we'd touched.

Vorthazul 's orders echoed in my mind: Discover what she is. Bring her in.

"Not a chance in Hell," I murmured to the empty parking lot, already knowing I was risking everything by choosing her safety over my redemption.

But as I walked back to my office, the memory of her energy signature calling to mine haunted me. Charlotte Evers was a mystery—one that could either save me or damn me completely.

Either way, I was already falling.

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Charlotte

I balanced precariously on my tiptoes, stretching as far as I could. The ancient grimoire remained stubbornly out of reach on the highest shelf of the Midnight Creek College library's restricted section. Even the stepladder only brought me within tantalizing inches of my target.

"Come on," I muttered, wiggling my fingers. "Just a little closer..."

The book suddenly shifted toward me, as if responding to my plea. I snatched it before it could fall, almost losing my balance in the process.

"Thanks," I whispered to the book, stroking its leather spine. Old texts often responded to me this way—a quirk I'd learned to keep quiet about. Not everyone appreciated books with personalities.

The restricted section was deserted at this hour, just how I liked it. Early summer sunlight filtered through stained glass windows, casting colorful patterns across the worn oak tables. I settled into my favorite corner with my prize: "Lunar Influences on Telluric Currents," a text so obscure even Dr. Katz hadn't cited it in his extensive bibliography.

The thought of Oscar Katz sent an unexpected flutter through me. Last night's "static electricity" moment had been... intense. I'd felt something when our hands touched—something that definitely wasn't static electricity.

I shook my head. My research on the eastern campus ley lines was too important for

distractions, even distractingly handsome professors with mysterious auras. I carried the book back to my table, where my notes and several other resources were spread out.

After I settled in my seat, the book fell open to exactly the page I needed, another little "coincidence" I'd grown accustomed to. I traced the diagrams of ley line patterns with my finger, feeling the energy pulse beneath the ink.

"Well, if it isn't Midnight Creek's most dedicated student," came a familiar voice.

I looked up to see Elowen making her way through the stacks, looking more settled than she had since returning to town. The mate bond with Rudy clearly agreed with her.

After saving her aunt, she hadn't wanted to leave again. Luckily, she'd been able to transfer to Midnight Creek College to continue her studies, and I couldn't complain about having my best friend back in town.

"Hey, El!" I closed the book, giving my friend my full attention. "How's Rose doing?"

"Recovering well," Elowen said, sliding into the chair across from me. "The bookstore's almost back to normal, though Daisy's organizational system remains an enigma to mere mortals."

I laughed. "I still can't believe she arranges books by 'metaphysical resonance patterns.' What does that even mean?"

"No idea, but it works somehow." Elowen's eyes fell on my research notes. "Are you still working on the ley lines research with Dr. Katz?"

I felt my cheeks warm. "He's supervising my independent study," I said, aiming for casual professionalism. "The energy patterns have been unusual since the ritual disruption."

"Mmm-hmm." Elowen's knowing look was too perceptive for comfort. "And how is the mysterious Dr. Katz?"

"Brilliant, irritatingly correct about everything," I replied. "And possibly not entirely human."

That caught her attention. "What do you mean?"

I bit my lip, unsure how to explain. "There's something about him—the way energy reacts around him. Last night when our hands touched, there was this... connection."

Elowen's expression turned serious. "Be careful, Charlotte. After everything that happened with the blood magic ritual, we know there are entities interested in Midnight Creek's supernatural community."

"I know, I know." I waved away her concern with my usual optimism. "But Oscar's been helping protect the ley lines, not corrupt them."

"Oscar?" she asked teasingly. Heat rose in my cheeks. "I mean Dr. Katz. And you said yourself he helped disrupt that ritual." "True," she conceded. "But Rose says he's more than he appears."

"Everyone in this town is more than they appear," I pointed out. "Including me, apparently."

The words slipped out before I could stop them. Elowen's eyebrows shot up.

"What do you mean by that?"

I sighed, pushing a stray curl behind my ear. Elowen and I had been friends forever, and she was a witch, so I'd shared with her some of the weird things that I'd experienced lately.

"I'm supposed to be human... but whatever these abilities are, they've been getting stronger," I said. "Books respond to me. I can see energy patterns others miss. Sometimes I just... know things about magical theory that I've never studied."

"Have you told anyone else about this?" Elowen asked carefully.

I shook my head. "Just you. And maybe Dr. Katz suspects something." I gathered my notes, suddenly feeling exposed. "I should go. I have class in twenty minutes."

Elowen touched my hand. "We'll figure this out, Charlotte. Whatever's happening with your abilities, you're not alone."

I gave her a grateful smile. "I know. Thanks, El."

Outside the library, summer had fully embraced Midnight Creek College. The campus quad bustled with students enjoying the sunshine, sprawled across the lush grass or clustered around outdoor tables. I navigated through them, waving to familiar faces as I hurried toward Blackwood Hall.

"...absolutely gorgeous, but so intimidating..."

"...heard the Dr. Katz Fan Club has twenty members now..."

"...swear he looked right through me when I asked about office hours..."

I smiled at the snippets of conversation that followed me across campus. Oscar's effect on the female student population had become something of a campus legend. If they only knew he was just as intimidating up close—maybe even more so when those intense eyes focused directly on you.

The sky darkened abruptly as I neared Blackwood Hall, summer clouds gathering with unusual speed. By the time I reached the steps, fat raindrops were already falling. I darted toward the entrance, but the heavens opened before I made it, instantly drenching me.

"Perfect," I muttered, shaking water from my notes.

"Miss Evers."

Dr. Katz stood at the top of the steps, somehow completely dry despite the downpour. He held a sleek black umbrella, his tall frame cutting an imposing silhouette against the gothic architecture of Blackwood Hall. Even in casual academic attire, I noticed how his shoulders filled out his jacket, suggesting a physique more suited to a warrior than a professor. He towered over most of the other faculty, and I found myself wondering what it would feel like to have those strong arms around me.

"Need some assistance?" he asked, his voice carrying easily through the rainfall.

"That would be amazing," I admitted, dashing up the remaining steps.

He extended the umbrella to cover my already-soaked form. The gesture required him to stand close—very close—his arm coming around my shoulders to guide me under the shelter. I was suddenly acutely aware of our height difference, my head barely reaching his shoulder, and the sudden warmth in my core.

"Thank you," I managed, feeling that same strange energy from last night humming

between us. "Magical weather forecasting should be a required course."

His lips quirked in what might have been almost a smile. "I believe that falls under Atmospheric Thaumaturgy, which isn't offered until spring semester."

We ascended the steps together, moving in surprising synchrony for two people of such different heights. A group of female students huddled under the awning watched us with poorly concealed interest. Their whispers followed us inside:

"I've never seen him with anyone else... always the blonde one."

"He never smiles at anyone else like that..."

I felt my cheeks burn, even as I wanted to explain that this was purely professional. Mostly professional. Somewhat professional?

Inside, we paused in the grand foyer of Blackwood Hall, the umbrella dripping onto the marble floor. Despite being under its protection, my clothing was already soaked, my curls plastered to my head. Dr. Katz, meanwhile, looked like he'd just stepped out of an academic fashion magazine, not a drop of water marring his perfect appearance.

"You seem to have a talent for atmospheric timing," he observed, closing the umbrella with a swift motion.

"If by 'talent' you mean 'terrible luck,' then yes," I agreed, attempting to wring water from my hair. "I'm a meteorological disaster magnet."

His eyes followed the movement of my hands, something unreadable flickering in their depths. For a moment, I felt that strange connection again—like seeing past his perfectly controlled exterior to something ancient and powerful beneath.

"Your mapping session," he said abruptly. "I reviewed it this morning. Your lunar correlation theory is... surprisingly valid."

Coming from Dr. Katz, this constituted effusive praise. I beamed at him, momentarily forgetting my sodden state.

"Really? I was thinking we could extend the analysis to include gravitational effects on the ley line resonance patterns. I have some ideas about—"

"Dr. Katz." A sharp voice interrupted us.

We turned to find the Dean of Magical Affairs approaching, her perpetually severe expression even more pronounced than usual.

"Dean Winters," Dr. Katz greeted her with perfect professional courtesy. "How may I assist you?"

"The Faculty Affairs Committee meeting begins in five minutes," she said, her gaze flicking dismissively over me before returning to him. "Your attendance is required, as discussed."

Something like irritation flashed across Dr. Katz's face before his features settled back into polite neutrality. "Of course. I'll be there momentarily."

The Dean nodded curtly and strode away, heels clicking against marble.

"Duty calls," Dr. Katz said, turning back to me. "We'll continue our discussion on lunar gravitational effects during our scheduled research session."

"Looking forward to it," I replied.

He hesitated, as if wanting to say something more, then simply handed me his umbrella. "Keep this. The forecast suggests rain all afternoon."

Before I could thank him, he was striding after the Dean, his tall figure commanding attention even in retreat. Several students openly stared as he passed.

I clutched the umbrella, feeling oddly like I'd been given something more personal than mere rain protection. The handle was warm where he'd held it, and that strange energy still hummed through the material.

Throughout my next lecture, my mind kept drifting back to that moment in the rain—his arm around my shoulders, the strange energy connecting us, the almost-smile that transformed his intimidating features into something else entirely.

Whatever Oscar Katz was hiding beneath his perfect academic facade, I was becoming increasingly determined to discover it.

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Oscar

The glare I directed at the Faculty Affairs Committee as they filed out of the conference room would have incinerated lesser beings. Two hours of bureaucratic posturing about curriculum standards—two hours I could have spent researching the ley line anomalies or, more importantly, figuring out how to keep Charlotte Evers off Hell's radar.

Charlotte. The image of her standing rain-soaked on the steps of Blackwood Hall refused to leave my mind. Golden hair darkened by water, sundress clinging to her curves, and that irrepressible smile undimmed by the downpour. The way she'd fit perfectly under my arm as I sheltered her with the umbrella, her supernatural energy signature reaching instinctively for mine.

I had a research session scheduled with her that started fifteen minutes ago. Professional detachment dictated I should cancel it, create distance between us rather than encourage the dangerous connection forming. Yet I found myself hurrying back to my office, anticipation building at the thought of seeing her again.

When I arrived, she was already waiting outside my door, perched on a bench with a book in her lap. She looked up as I approached, her face brightening in a way that sent an uncomfortable warmth through my chest.

"Dr. Katz! I was beginning to think you'd forgotten our appointment."

"Faculty meeting ran long," I explained, unlocking my office. "Bureaucracy is the true eternal torment, not hellfire."

She laughed, the sound light and genuine in the somber corridor. "I'll remember that for my dissertation on comparative supernatural punishments."

As we entered my office, I noticed she'd brought not just research materials, but two takeout containers that emitted enticing aromas.

"I thought you might be hungry after your meeting," she explained, setting them on the desk. "The faculty lounge food is notoriously terrible."

The thoughtful gesture caught me off-guard, as did my unreasonably strong reaction to it. In centuries of existence, few had ever considered my comfort, much less acted to improve it.

"That's... considerate of you," I managed, taking a seat behind my desk.

She unpacked the food with casual efficiency, reaching across the desk to arrange the containers. The movement caused the top of her dress to pull tight across her chest, outlining curves that my eyes traced before I could exercise better control. Her proximity brought her scent to me—something floral mingled with the natural sweetness of her skin—and I found myself leaning slightly closer under the pretense of examining the food she'd brought.

"Research brain works better with proper fuel," she said. "I got Thai from that place near the physics building. I hope you like spicy food."

"I do." Another small truth about myself I hadn't intended to share.

We ate while discussing her latest findings about the ley line patterns. Her intuitive understanding continued to impress me; connections I'd spent decades discovering, she pieced together through pure instinct and creative thinking.

"The energy signatures in the eastern quadrant are definitely artificial," she said, gesturing with her fork. "Someone is deliberately manipulating the natural flow, creating dissonance rather than harmony."

"To what purpose?" I asked, though I had my suspicions.

"That's what I can't figure out." She frowned, a rare expression of frustration crossing her usually sunny features. "It's like they're creating interference patterns, but not to open a portal like the blood magic ritual attempted. Something more subtle."

"Perhaps to influence emotional states across large populations," I suggested, watching her reaction carefully. "The increasing tensions between supernatural species in Midnight Creek aren't entirely natural."

Charlotte's eyes widened, her quick mind immediately grasping the implications. "You think someone is deliberately making things worse between witches and werewolves? Vampires and fae? But why?"

"Divided communities are easier to control," I said simply. "Or to destroy."

A shiver ran through her despite the warm office. "We have to stop them."

"We?" I couldn't help the skepticism in my tone.

"Of course we." She leaned forward, radiating determination. "My connection to the ley lines could help."

"It's precisely your connection that concerns me," I admitted, choosing my words carefully. "If you can sense the ley lines so acutely, there's every possibility they can sense you in return. Including whoever is manipulating them."

The implication silenced her momentarily, though her expression remained thoughtful rather than fearful.

"All the more reason to work together," she concluded. "You know things I don't about these energies, and I can sense patterns you might miss. We're stronger as a team."

The word "team" created an unexpected warmth. I had been many things in my long existence—agent, servant, instrument, weapon—but rarely a teammate. The concept implied mutual respect and shared purpose. Things demons weren't supposed to value or desire.

Yet I found myself nodding in agreement. "Your reasoning is sound, if optimistic."

"Optimism is underrated in supernatural crisis management," she quipped, her smile returning.

As we finished our meal and turned to the research materials, I found myself watching her more than the ancient texts. The way she tucked errant curls behind her ear without noticing. How her small fingers traced energy diagrams with intuitive precision. The serious concentration that occasionally replaced her usual cheerful expression, revealing the formidable intellect beneath the sunny exterior.

"You're staring, Professor," she noted without looking up from the grimoire she was examining.

I hadn't realized I'd been so obvious. "Your methodological approach is unconventional. I'm analyzing its effectiveness."

"Mmm-hmm." She glanced up, amusement dancing in her eyes. "And your conclusion?"

"Unorthodox but surprisingly effective," I admitted. "Like much about you, Miss Evers."

A slight blush colored her cheeks, but her gaze remained steady on mine. "High praise from someone with such exacting standards."

Something shifted in the atmosphere between us—the professional veneer thinning as unspoken awareness shimmered in the air. I knew I should reinforce boundaries, maintain the academic distance appropriate between professor and student. Instead, I found myself leaning slightly closer.

"Your standards seem equally high, given your persistent questioning of accepted magical theory."

"I question everything," she said softly. "Especially things that don't make sense. Like why a professor with your knowledge would be interested in a small college like Midnight Creek. Or why energy reacts so strangely when we touch."

The directness of her observation left me momentarily speechless. In Hell's hierarchies, such forthrightness would be suicidal. In academic circles, it was considered impolite at best. Yet Charlotte Evers cut through pretense with refreshing clarity, her blue eyes focused on me with undisguised curiosity.

"Some questions are better left unasked, Miss Evers."

"And those are precisely the questions most worth asking, Professor."

I took a breath, trying not to react, and gestured to her notes. "The eastern quadrant requires direct observation. These patterns can't be fully analyzed through theoretical models alone."

Charlotte immediately perked up. "You mean a field trip? To the restricted area?"

I knew this was a bad idea for all the reasons that had nothing to do with research, but I couldn't seem to help myself where Charlotte Evers was concerned.

"The eastern edge of campus, where it borders the nature preserve, has been off-limits to students since the unexplained energy fluctuations last semester." She looked delighted rather than concerned. "A limited investigation," I clarified. "Given the potential dangers, discretion would be advisable."

"You're suggesting we break the rules?" Her eyes sparkled with excitement. "The intimidating Dr. Katz, advocating academic espionage?"

"I'm suggesting that valuable research sometimes requires unconventional approaches," I corrected, though I couldn't entirely suppress a smile at her characterization.

"When do we go?" She was already gathering her notes, practically vibrating with enthusiasm.

"Tonight. Eight o'clock. The area around it should be deserted then."

"I'll bring snacks," she announced, as if we were planning a picnic rather than investigating potentially dangerous magical anomalies. "Oh, do you want your umbrella back?"

I shook my head. "Keep it."

After she left, I stood at my window for a long time, watching her cross the campus quad, her step light despite the heavy bag of books she carried. Students and faculty alike seemed drawn to her natural brightness, several stopping to chat as she passed.

Vorthazul 's orders echoed in my mind: Discover what she is. Bring her in.

I had discovered enough to know that Charlotte Evers was extraordinary, her connection to the ley lines unlike anything I'd encountered. That knowledge should have gone directly to Hell's Board, fulfilling my assignment and advancing my redemption.

Instead, I was planning a clandestine research expedition with her, actively working to keep her off Hell's radar. The risk I was taking defied all logic, violated my contract in ways that could result in eternal punishment.

Yet as I watched her disappear into the library, her umbrella—my umbrella—swinging casually at her side, I couldn't bring myself to regret the choice. Something about her had awakened parts of me I'd thought long dead or dormant—protective instincts untainted by possessiveness and dangerously, emotions I had no right to feel after centuries of infernal service.

I was playing a dangerous game. If Hell discovered my deception, the consequences would be catastrophic for us both. But for the first time in my long life, something mattered more than my own survival or redemption.

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Charlotte

The east side of campus was eerily beautiful after dark. Ancient oak trees cast lace-like shadows across overgrown paths, their branches seeming to reach for us as we passed. The air felt different here—heavier somehow, charged with energy that made my skin tingle pleasantly.

Dr. Katz moved silently beside me in the darkness, his tall frame somehow blending with the shadows despite his light-colored shirt. He walked with predatory grace that made me wonder what other movements his body was capable of. I was grateful for the darkness hiding the blush I felt warming my cheeks.

I'd half-expected him to cancel our expedition, to revert to the distant professor persona he usually maintained. Instead, he'd been waiting precisely at eight, equipment bag in hand, a surprising readiness to bend rules evident in his otherwise serious demeanor.

"The energy feels strange," I whispered, though there was no one else around to hear us. "Like it's... vibrating at the wrong frequency."

He nodded, unsurprised by my assessment. "The natural resonance has been artificially altered just as you suspected. Can you sense the pattern?"

I closed my eyes, reaching out with that peculiar sensitivity I'd always possessed but never fully understood. The ley lines beneath us pulsed with power, but something was wrong—discordant notes in what should have been a harmonious symphony.

"It's like someone inserted a foreign object into a natural flow," I said, struggling to translate pure sensation into words. "Creating ripples that distort everything around it."

"Precisely." Dr. Katz's voice carried approval that warmed me more than it should have. "Most trained sensitives couldn't detect that subtlety without instrumentation."

"Lucky intuition," I dismissed, though his praise made me unreasonably happy.

"Not luck. Natural talent honed by dedicated study." He handed me a small device that resembled a modified cell phone. "This will help quantify what you're sensing. We need to place monitoring equipment at specific points around the quadrant."

We worked methodically in the darkness, setting up his sophisticated magical monitors at calculated intervals. Dr. Katz seemed different here, outside the classroom—more fluid in his movements, less constrained by his academic persona. Almost as if the shadows suited him better than fluorescent office lighting.

"You've done field research before," I observed as we configured the final station. "But none of your published papers mention practical applications."

"My earlier work was... less formal," he acknowledged, his hands moving with practiced efficiency over the equipment. "Before my academic career."

"And when was that exactly?" I pressed, emboldened by the darkness. "Because sometimes you reference magical theory that hasn't been taught in centuries, Professor."

He straightened, meeting my gaze directly. Something ancient and knowing flickered in his eyes, there and gone so quickly I might have imagined it.

"Perhaps your education has gaps, Miss Evers."

"Or perhaps you're not what you appear to be." I stepped closer, fearlessness overriding common sense. "Just like I'm not what I appear to be."

The admission hung between us, unexpectedly vulnerable. Before he could respond, a pulse of energy rippled through the ground beneath us—unnatural but deliberate. The monitoring equipment began emitting urgent signals, lights flashing in the darkness.

"Something's happening," I whispered, all challenging questions forgotten in the face of immediate discovery.

Dr. Katz checked the readings, alarm growing in his expression. "These are the same energy signatures that appeared before the ritual."

"You think someone's trying again? After Elowen and Rudy stopped them?"

"Not exactly the same," he clarified, studying the data. "Similar methodology but different target output. Someone is still manipulating the ley lines, but for a different purpose."

Another energy pulse shook the ground, stronger this time. I stumbled, and Dr. Katz caught me against his chest, his arms instinctively wrapping around me. The contact sent our energy signatures into immediate resonance, creating a protective field around us both as the unnatural power surged.

Through the thin fabric of his shirt, I felt the solid warmth of his chest, far more muscled than any academic had a right to be. His arms held me with effortless strength, his hands spanning my waist with room to spare. I tilted my face up to his, finding his dark eyes.

For a moment, we stood locked together. I felt something shift between us—the carefully maintained professional distance crumbling as our supernatural energies intertwined.

"Oscar," I whispered, using his first name without thinking. "What's happening to us?"

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Oscar

I couldn't answer—didn't know how to explain the impossible connection between us. Instead, I held her tighter as another shock wave rippled through the area.

This time, I felt my disguise slip further, features shifting momentarily toward my true form. Charlotte gasped, her hands coming up to frame my face as the change rippled through me.

"I knew it," she breathed, wonder rather than fear in her voice. "I knew you weren't human."

I pulled away abruptly, forcing my appearance back under control, rebuilding the walls between us. "We need to leave. Now. It's not safe."

"But the readings—the data—" she protested, still more excited than afraid despite what she'd glimpsed.

"Can be collected remotely," I insisted, gathering the core monitoring equipment. "This area is dangerous, Charlotte. More than we understood."

Something in my tone must have convinced her, because she nodded.

"I won't tell anyone," she said quietly as we headed back toward the main campus. "Whatever you are, your secret is safe with me."

The simple promise, offered without demand for explanation or reciprocal revelation,

touched something deep within me. I'd never known trust that hadn't come with conditions.

"Thank you," I said, the words inadequate for what I felt.

We walked in companionable silence until the lights of the dormitories came into view. Before we reached the building, Charlotte stopped, turning to face me in the gentle summer darkness.

"When you're ready to tell me," she said softly, "I'll be ready to listen."

Then she stretched up on tiptoes and, before I could react, pressed a quick kiss to my cheek. Her lips left a burning imprint on my skin, her supernatural signature briefly merging with mine in a way that sent shockwaves through my carefully constructed barriers.

"Goodnight, Professor," she said, sunny smile returning as she bounced away toward the doors, leaving me standing speechless in her wake.

I touched my cheek where her lips had been, feeling the lingering connection between us. In that brief contact, I'd sensed something impossible. Something I missed during the overwhelming experience at the eastern quadrant—her energy signature wasn't merely compatible with mine; it was complementary, as if designed specifically to balance the chaos of my demonic nature.

Whatever Charlotte Evers was, she was far more than the human graduate student she appeared to be. And my growing feelings for her were far more dangerous than she could possibly understand.

I glared at the midnight darkness outside my apartment window, willing the shadows to reveal their secrets. Three sleepless nights spent monitoring the eastern quadrant from a distance had yielded disturbing patterns but no clear answers. The corruption in the ley lines was spreading, creating subtle disharmonies that intensified supernatural tensions throughout Midnight Creek.

More concerning was Hell's unusual silence. Vorthazul should have demanded progress reports on my investigation of Charlotte Evers. Instead, nothing—no communication, no demonic visitations. Such restraint was uncharacteristic and deeply suspicious.

Charlotte . Even thinking her name sent a pulse through my energy field. Since our expedition, since she'd glimpsed my true nature and responded with acceptance rather than fear, I'd been fighting a losing battle against my growing attachment to her.

My phone buzzed with a message. I expected one of the other professors or the dean with some tiresome update. Instead, I found Charlotte's name on the screen:

Found something in today's readings. Energy signature doesn't match natural patterns. Can we meet? Important. - CE

I should discourage further contact. The wisest course would be to create distance, protect her through separation rather than continued interaction.

Instead, I typed: My office. 30 minutes.

Her response came immediately: On my way. Bringing coffee and those chocolate croissants you pretend not to like.

I smiled despite myself. Her uncanny ability to notice details about me—preferences I thought I'd kept hidden—was both disconcerting and strangely warming.

When she arrived exactly twenty-seven minutes later, her cheeks were flushed from hurrying across campus, blonde curls escaping their confinement as usual. She carried the promised coffee and pastries, along with a messenger bag bulging with research materials.

Tonight, she wore a pale blue dress that ended mid-thigh, the color matching her eyes and highlighting the creamy skin of her legs. I found my gaze following the line of her thigh as she moved around my office.

"You won't believe what I found," she announced without preamble, setting everything down on my desk. "The energy signatures in the eastern quadrant—they're not random corruption. They're a message."

I raised an eyebrow, intrigued despite my caution. "A message? From whom to whom?"

"That's the fascinating part." She pulled out sheaves of printouts, spreading them across my desk with characteristic enthusiasm. "When I converted the energy pattern disruptions into visual wavelengths, this appeared."

She pointed to a series of geometric patterns that seemed vaguely familiar, though I couldn't immediately place them. "These symbols aren't in any conventional magical taxonomy, but they appear in boundary mythology—stories about entities that maintain separation between supernatural realms."

"Boundary entities?" I asked, a cold suspicion forming. "Like dimensional guardians?"

"Exactly!" She beamed at me, clearly delighted I'd made the connection. "According to obscure texts in the restricted section, they once maintained balance between realms, preventing any single supernatural power from dominating across

dimensions."

Including Hell, I thought but didn't say. If boundary entities were involved, the situation was even more complex than I'd feared.

She leaned over the desk, tracing the patterns with her finger, completely absorbed in the discovery. The position caused her dress to pull tight across her hips, outlining the gentle curve that my hands itched to follow. A strand of golden hair fell forward, brushing against the graceful column of her neck, drawing my attention to the pulse point visible beneath her delicate skin. My enhanced senses could detect its quickened rhythm, matching my own increasing pulse.

"These symbols," Charlotte said, "they're not creating corruption—they're a warning about it. Almost like... a call for help."

"Or a test," I murmured, pieces falling into place.

"A test?" She looked up, curiosity bright in her eyes.

"Some ancient entities test potential allies before revealing themselves," I explained carefully. "Creating controlled challenges to evaluate capabilities and intentions."

Charlotte considered this, absently tucking an errant curl behind her ear. "So they might be watching us try to solve the problem they created? That's... morally questionable."

"Dimensional entities operate according to different ethical frameworks," I said, more familiar with such beings than I could admit. "They prioritize long-term balance over immediate harmony."

"That's still manipulative," she insisted, her inherent sense of fairness asserting itself.

"Playing with people's lives to see who measures up."

I found myself smiling at her indignation. "Your moral compass remains admirably consistent, even when confronting potentially cosmic forces."

"Someone has to hold supernatural entities accountable," she replied with a small grin. "Might as well be me."

Her confidence, her essential brightness even when facing overwhelming mysteries, continued to astonish me. In all my life, I'd rarely encountered anyone who approached the supernatural world with such a perfect balance of academic curiosity and moral certainty.

"The question remains," I said, returning to the research, "why now? Boundary entities have been notably absent from supernatural affairs for centuries. Why resurface with cryptic messages in Midnight Creek's ley lines?"

Charlotte's expression turned thoughtful. "Maybe because something is genuinely threatening the boundaries between realms. The blood magic ritual last month nearly opened a portal between dimensions. What if that was just the beginning of something bigger?"

The possibility had occurred to me as well. Hell had long coveted greater influence in the human realm, seeking ways to extend their power beyond traditional constraints. If boundary entities were stirring, it suggested the threat was significant enough to warrant intervention from forces that typically remained neutral.

"Your connection to the ley lines could be important," I said, studying her carefully. "You perceive patterns most trained sensitives miss. That suggests an unusual affinity with exactly the energies these boundary entities manipulate."

"You think I'm somehow connected to them?" she asked, surprisingly calm about the possibility.

"I think there's more to your abilities than either of us currently understands," I answered honestly. "And possibly more to your heritage as well."

She absorbed this without the shock or denial most would display. "That would explain a lot, actually. Why I can sense magical patterns intuitively, and why our energies connect the way they do."

The casual mention of our energy connection sent a jolt through me. We hadn't discussed that phenomenon since the night in the eastern quadrant, though I'd felt it every time we were near each other—a harmonic resonance that grew stronger rather than diminishing with repeated exposure.

"About that connection," I began, then hesitated, uncharacteristically uncertain of my words.

Charlotte's expression softened. "It's okay. You don't have to explain what you are. I've done my research since that night."

Ice formed in my veins. "What research?"

"Supernatural entities whose energy signatures disrupt normal magnetic fields. Beings who can alter their appearance at will. Ancient presences who understand magical theory across centuries of development. And I did get a glimpse of your true form the other night." She ticked the points off on her fingers. "Not many options fit all criteria."

"And your conclusion?" I asked carefully, bracing for her response.

She met my gaze directly, fearless as always. "You're a demon. Or at least, you have demonic heritage. But you're not evil." She stated this last part with absolute certainty, as if classifying a botanical specimen.

I stared at her, momentarily speechless. In all my long existence, I had never been so efficiently and accurately assessed—nor had my demonic nature been so casually accepted.

"That doesn't concern you?" I finally managed.

"Should it?" She tilted her head, genuine curiosity in her expression. "You've had countless opportunities to harm me or others at the college. Instead, you've worked to protect the ley lines and helped stop the blood ritual."

"Appearances can be deceiving," I warned, needing her to understand the seriousness of what she'd uncovered. "Demons are manipulative by nature."

"So are most of my professors," she countered with a smile. "At least you're interesting about it."

A laugh escaped me—perhaps the first truly unguarded response I'd had in centuries. "Your ability to normalize the supernatural is remarkable."

"I grew up in Midnight Creek," she reminded me. "My best friend is a witch mated to a werewolf. I talk to books and they answer. 'Normal' is relative."

She reached across the desk, hesitating just before touching my hand. "May I?"

The request—so simple, so respectful of boundaries I wasn't accustomed to having acknowledged—undid me. I nodded, not trusting myself to speak.

Her fingers touched the back of my hand, and the now-familiar energy connection flared between us—stronger than before, a harmony of power that sent warmth spreading through my entire being. But this time, there was new awareness in her eyes as she observed the reaction, a scientist cataloging a fascinating phenomenon.

"Our energies shouldn't be compatible," she noted. "Demons and humans typically create discord, not harmony."

"Which suggests you're not entirely human," I completed her thought.

"Or you're not entirely demonic," she countered. "At least, not anymore."

The insight struck uncomfortably close to truth. My questioning of Hell's methods and my preference for knowledge over destruction had always marked me as different from my brethren.

"These boundary symbols," I said, redirecting the conversation to safer territory as I tried to catch my breath from all her revelations. "If they're indeed a message or a test, we need to understand what response is expected."

Charlotte allowed the change of subject, though her small smile suggested she recognized the evasion. "I think we need to go back to the eastern quadrant. Not just to observe, but to interact with the energy patterns directly."

"Too dangerous," I said immediately.

"Because of the boundary entities or because of Hell?" she asked shrewdly.

I stared at her. "What do you know about Hell's interest in Midnight Creek?"

"Just what I've pieced together," she admitted. "The blood ritual had infernal

elements and the ley line corruption benefits chaotic forces rather than balanced ones. Also, you're clearly working for someone you'd rather not be working for."

Her perception was as unnerving as ever. "Hell has... expectations regarding my investigation of the ley line anomalies. And of you."

"Me?" Her eyebrows rose in surprise. "What would Hell want with a graduate student?"

"Your connection to the ley lines makes you valuable," I said carefully. "And potentially threatening to certain agendas."

Understanding dawned in her eyes. "They sent you to investigate me, didn't they? That's why you agreed to supervise my independent study."

I couldn't lie to her, not when she'd seen through so much already. "Initially, yes. My boss ordered me to determine what you are and whether you pose a threat to Hell's interests."

"And your conclusion?" She watched me, surprisingly calm about discovering she'd been under supernatural investigation.

"That you deserve protection, not exploitation," I said. "Whatever your connection to the ley lines or boundary entities might be, Hell has no right to it. Or to you."

Charlotte's expression softened, something warm and dangerous flickering in her eyes. "That's probably not what your boss wanted to hear."

"No," I agreed, the weight of my quiet rebellion suddenly heavy between us. "It won't be."

"So what happens now?" she asked. "If Hell wants information about me that you're not providing?"

"Eventually, they'll send someone else," I admitted. "Which is why understanding your connection to these boundary symbols is increasingly urgent. Knowledge is protection in the supernatural world."

Charlotte nodded, serious for once. "Then we go back to the east side of campus. Together. Tonight."

I should have refused. Should have insisted on safer methods, on more research before direct engagement. Instead, I found myself agreeing, already calculating what protective measures I could implement.

"After midnight," I stipulated. "When the campus is deserted."

"I'll bring better snacks this time," she promised, her irrepressible optimism returning. "Supernatural investigation requires proper fuel."

As she gathered her research materials, her hand brushed mine again, our energies harmonizing briefly in that impossible, beautiful way. She looked up at me, something unspoken passing between us.

"Whatever happens," she said quietly, "I'm glad it's happening with you. Demon and all."

The simple statement hit me with unexpected force. Few had ever chosen my company willingly, much less expressed gratitude for it. Most who knew my true nature reacted with fear or attempted manipulation. None had ever looked at me with the genuine warmth I saw in Charlotte's eyes.

"Be careful what you wish for, Miss Evers," I warned softly. "Demons make dangerous companions."

"Call me Charlotte," she insisted.

And for once, I couldn't argue. "Only if you call me Oscar."

She smiled and reached over to squeeze my hand. "Oscar."

"Dangerous," I muttered, but I didn't move. I didn't want to admit how much I needed this, needed her.

"So are these boundary entities, apparently," she said. "Yet here we are, right in the middle of their cosmic test. Sometimes the dangerous path is also the right one."

After she left, I stood motionless for a long time, her words echoing in my mind. The dangerous path. I had been walking it since the moment I chose to protect Charlotte rather than report on her. Every step had taken me further from Hell's redemption, closer to something I hadn't dared name or acknowledge.

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Charlotte

The night air held a hint of autumn as we made our way toward the eastern quadrant, though summer officially had weeks remaining. The moon was high in the sky, lighting our path. Oscar moved silently beside me.

The knowledge that he was a demon should have terrified me. Instead, it created a strange sense of clarity, pieces falling into place to create a picture that felt right despite its inherent impossibility.

"The energy disturbance is stronger tonight," Oscar observed, his voice low. "The boundary symbols are amplifying."

I nodded, feeling the discordant patterns even without instrumentation. "It's like they're trying to get our attention. Becoming more insistent."

We reached the small clearing where we'd placed monitoring equipment during our previous visit. The devices were still there, but clearly tampered with—components rearranged in patterns that matched the boundary symbols from my research.

"Someone's been here," I whispered, crouching to examine the altered equipment.

"Not someone," Oscar corrected, his eyes scanning the darkness surrounding us. "Something. These arrangements weren't made by physical manipulation, but by direct energy interference."

A chill ran through me despite the mild night. "The boundary entities themselves?"

"Perhaps." His expression was grave, more serious than I'd ever seen it. "Charlotte, we should reconsider this. Direct interaction with dimensional entities can be dangerous, especially for someone who's mostly human. Deadly even if the surge hits wrong."

"We need answers," I insisted, straightening to face him. "About the ley line corruption and about these symbols. Running away solves nothing."

He studied me for a long moment, conflict evident in his expression. "Your courage is admirable, if occasionally reckless."

"Part of my charm," I quipped, trying to lighten the tension.

Something softened in his eyes. "Indeed. One of many parts."

The unexpected warmth in his voice sent a flutter through me that had nothing to do with supernatural energy. Before I could respond, the air around us thickened, pressure building as if a storm approached. The monitoring equipment began emitting urgent signals, lights flashing in erratic patterns.

"Something's coming," Oscar said, moving protectively closer to me. "Be ready."

I wasn't sure what "ready" meant in the context of potential dimensional entities, but I nodded, focusing on the strange energy building around us. It felt different from the corrupted ley lines—purer somehow, more deliberate in its manifestation.

The clearing before us darkened, shadows coming together into a form that seemed to absorb light rather than reflect it. Not human-shaped, but not entirely abstract either—a presence that existed somewhere between defined and undefined reality.

"The anomaly and the contract-bound," a voice spoke, though not with sound exactly.

The words resonated directly in my mind, ancient and powerful. "An unexpected pairing."

Oscar tensed beside me, his energy and his appearance shifting in a way I hadn't felt before—becoming more clearly demonic, though still distinctly his own.

"We seek understanding of the boundary symbols," he said, his voice carrying a resonance I hadn't heard before. "And the purpose behind the ley line corruption."

The shadow-entity rippled, something like amusement emanating from it. "Purpose requires context. Context requires identity. Identity remains unacknowledged."

Its attention shifted to me, an almost physical weight of awareness that made breathing difficult. "Boundary guardian blood flows dormant, and awakening requires a catalyst."

"Boundary guardian?" I repeated, the term sparking recognition though I couldn't place why. "What do you mean?"

"Guardians maintained balance between realms," Oscar explained quietly. "Beings created specifically to ensure no single supernatural power could dominate across dimensions. They were thought to have disappeared centuries ago."

"Not disappeared," the entity corrected. "Dormant because the bloodlines are diluted. Powers remained latent until needed."

Understanding dawned with shocking clarity. "You're saying I'm a boundary guardian?"

"Potential exists, but verification requires testing and the testing requires corruption." The entity's form rippled again. "The contract-bound serves Hell yet protects the

guardian potential. Contradiction creates possibility."

Oscar's expression remained carefully neutral, though I felt his energy signature pulse with surprise and concern. "The corruption was deliberate," he stated. "A catalyst to activate dormant guardian abilities."

"Correct," the entity acknowledged. "Purpose was served if the guardian awakens. Balance restored if contract breaks."

The cryptic statements swirled in my mind, pieces of a puzzle I couldn't quite assemble. "You corrupted the ley lines to trigger my abilities? To wake up whatever guardian heritage I might have?"

"Necessity dictated the method. The boundaries are thin, and"—it gave a nod toward Oscar—"Hell expands influence." Then it seemed to turn its attention back to me. "But balance requires guardians and guardians require awakening."

"And what of the contract-bound?" Oscar asked, his voice tight with controlled emotion. "What role does Hell's servant play in your calculations?"

The entity's attention shifted to him, shadows swirling with increased intensity. "Balance requires opposition in harmony. Guardian and demon. Restriction and freedom. Order and chaos."

"That's why our energies connect the way they do," I said, realization flowing through me. "If I have boundary guardian heritage and you're demonic, we should be natural opposites. But instead—"

"Harmony creates power," the entity completed. "Connection defies conventional limitations and potential exceeds expected parameters."

Oscar's hand found mine in the darkness, our fingers intertwining as if by instinct. The now-familiar energy surge flowed between us, stronger than ever before—violet-gold light spiraling around our joined hands, illuminating the clearing.

The entity's form seemed to expand and contract, absorbing and reflecting our combined energy signature. "Test progresses. Potential confirmed. Interference required."

The cryptic pronouncement was followed by a surge of power that made the ground beneath us tremble. The ley lines pulsed with sudden intensity, raw energy flowing upward in visible streams of light.

"What's happening?" I gasped, feeling the power rising around us.

Oscar pulled me closer, his arm wrapping protectively around my shoulders. "They're accelerating the process. Forcing your guardian abilities to manifest fully."

Before I could respond, darkness surged between us and the entity—not the boundary presence's shadows, but something different. Heavier. Sulfurous.

"Contract-bound," a new voice hissed, this one harsh and grating compared to the boundary entity's resonance. "The Board is displeased with your deception."

Two figures materialized from the darkness—humanoid in general shape but with distorted features, radiating infernal power that made my skin crawl.

"Hell's agents," Oscar murmured, his body tensing beside mine. "Vorthazul has tired of waiting for my report."

"The anomaly will be collected," one of the figures announced, its gaze fixing on me with terrifying intensity. "The contract-bound will face judgment for his betrayal."

Oscar moved in front of me, his form shifting subtly—still human in appearance but somehow more, power radiating from him in waves I could feel against my skin.

"She is under my protection," he stated. "By ancient right and freely chosen bond, I claim sanctuary."

The Hell agents hesitated, clearly surprised by the declaration. The boundary entity remained present but separate, its shadowy form observing without intervention—as if this confrontation was part of the test it had mentioned.

"Your contract binds you to Hell's service," the second agent reminded Oscar. "Your claims hold no validity. Your protection offers no sanctuary."

"Then I renounce the contract," Oscar said simply.

The words fell into sudden silence, their impact evident in the shocked stillness of the Hell agents. Even the boundary entity's shadowy form seemed to pause in its constant motion.

"Impossible," the first agent hissed. "Contracts with Hell cannot be broken by mere declaration."

"Not by declaration alone," Oscar agreed, his hand tightening around mine. "But by choosing a higher purpose. By acknowledging a deeper truth."

He turned to me then, his eyes meeting mine with an intensity that took my breath away. "Charlotte Evers, boundary guardian in awakening. I choose you over Hell's dominion. I sever all bonds except one—the connection freely formed between us."

The power in his words was palpable, a declaration that seemed to resonate with the ley lines themselves. Our joined hands glowed brighter, energy spiraling upward to

create a protective dome around us.

The Hell agents advanced, their forms rippling with fury. "Your choice condemns you to eternal torment, contract-bound. And fails to protect the anomaly."

"I am contract-bound no longer," Oscar replied, his appearance shifting more dramatically now—darkness and light intermingling around his form, wings of shadow materializing from his shoulders. "And she is not merely an anomaly, but a guardian awakening to her birthright."

The boundary entity's form expanded suddenly, interposing itself between us and the Hell agents. "Balance shifts. Guardian awakens. Contract breaks. Pattern completes." Its voice resonated through the clearing. "Hell's agents have no authority here. Retreat or face dimensional banishment."

The agents hesitated, clearly unprepared for resistance from both a boundary entity and a demon breaking free of Hell's control. Their forms rippled with uncertainty and barely contained rage.

"This isn't over," the first agent snarled. "The Board will not surrender its interests so easily."

"Perhaps not," Oscar acknowledged calmly. "But they will respect boundaries properly enforced."

With a final furious hiss, the agents dissolved back into darkness, their presence fading from the clearing though the lingering scent of sulfur remained.

The boundary entity turned its attention to us once more. "Test completed. Guardian emerges. Contract-breaker aligns. Balance begins restoration."

Its form started to dissipate, shadows thinning as it prepared to depart.

"Wait!" I called, still trying to process everything that had happened. "You can't just leave—I have questions! About what I am, about these abilities—"

"Knowledge comes through experience and power grows through necessity." The entity's voice grew fainter as its form dissolved. "The guardian and the contract-breaker begin a new pattern."

With those cryptic parting words, the entity vanished completely, leaving us alone in the moonlit clearing. The ley lines beneath us pulsed with renewed harmony, the corruption that had concerned us apparently healed by whatever had just transpired.

I turned to Oscar, who had returned to his human appearance though something about him seemed fundamentally altered—his energy signature stronger yet more balanced, no longer carrying the chaotic undertones I'd sensed before.

"You broke your contract with Hell," I said, still trying to comprehend the magnitude of what he'd done. "For me."

"Yes." The simple acknowledgment carried weight beyond its brevity.

"What does that mean?" I asked. "What happens to you now?"

"I don't know," he admitted, a hint of wonder in his voice. "No demon has successfully broken a contract in recorded history. I am... something new now. Neither what I was nor what I pretended to be."

His hand remained joined with mine. I looked down at our intertwined fingers, the glow of power finally fading though the sensation of connection remained.

"Boundary guardian," I said, testing the words. "That's what I am? Or what I'm becoming?"

"It appears so." His expression softened as he studied me. "It explains your intuitive understanding of magical energy, your connection to the ley lines, your ability to perceive patterns others miss."

"And this—between us?" I squeezed his hand gently. "Why our energies connect instead of conflict?"

Oscar considered the question carefully. "Boundary guardians were created to maintain balance between realms. Demons embody chaos and change. In traditional supernatural theory, those forces should oppose each other. But perhaps true balance isn't about opposition but integration—finding harmony between seemingly contradictory elements."

"Like a former demon and a newly awakened boundary guardian," I suggested, a smile forming despite the seriousness of our situation.

"Precisely." His own lips curved slightly, that rare almost-smile that transformed his features. "A partnership unlike any in supernatural history, if the boundary entity is to be believed."

"Partnership," I repeated, liking the sound of it. "Is that what we are, Oscar? Partners?"

His expression turned more serious, something vulnerable flickering in his eyes. "If that's what you wish us to be."

The careful phrasing, the respect for my agency even after he'd sacrificed his very existence for me, melted something in my chest I hadn't realized was frozen.

"I think," I said softly, stepping closer to him, "that 'partners' is a good starting point. But perhaps not the complete definition."

His free hand came up to touch my face gently, fingers tracing my cheek with a reverence that took my breath away. "What definition would you suggest, Charlotte?"

Instead of answering with words, I rose onto my tiptoes and pressed my lips to his. The kiss was gentle at first, a question rather than a demand. Then his arms wrapped around me, pulling me against him as the kiss deepened into something that answered every unspoken question between us.

Our energies exploded into brilliant harmony, violet-gold light surrounding us as boundary guardian and former demon found a connection that transcended supernatural categories. Power flowed through and around us, the ley lines beneath our feet pulsing in synchronization with our joined energies.

When we finally broke apart, both slightly breathless, Oscar's expression held a wonder I suspected few had ever witnessed.

"That," I said with a smile, "is a much better definition of what we are."

His laugh—genuine and unguarded—was possibly the most beautiful sound I'd ever heard. "As usual, your intuition proves remarkably accurate."

The energy between us continued to build, the harmonic resonance intensifying rather than fading. Each point of contact between our bodies sent shivers of power through my awakening guardian senses. I could feel Oscar's restraint, honed control battling against something new and powerful.

"Oscar," I whispered, my hands sliding up to frame his face. "Take me home."

His eyes darkened, the carefully maintained humanity in his appearance wavering slightly to reveal something more primal beneath. "Charlotte, you don't understand what you're asking. What I am—what I'm becoming—it's still unstable."

"I understand perfectly," I insisted, pressing closer to him. "I'm not afraid of your true nature. I never have been."

He studied me for a long moment. Then he gathered me into his arms, his power wrapping around us both like a protective cocoon.

"Hold tight," he murmured against my hair, and the world dissolved around us.

When reality stabilized, we stood in Oscar's apartment, the transition so smooth I barely felt it happen. Teleportation—another ability he'd kept carefully hidden until now.

"That's handy," I observed with a breathless laugh. "Much better than campus parking."

His smile was brief but genuine, his eyes never leaving mine as he slowly released me. "Last chance to reconsider, Charlotte. What's happening between us—it's unprecedented. Unpredictable."

I took his hand and placed it directly over my heart, letting him feel its rapid beating. "I've never been more certain of anything in my life."

That was all it took. His control—the careful restraint he'd maintained since the moment we met—finally broke. His mouth claimed mine with an intensity that stole my breath.

My back hit the wall as he pressed against me, his body hard and unyielding. At the

contact, his control slipped further. The air around us grew heavy, charged with power as the walls of his human disguise thinned.

Our energies surged together, creating visible patterns of light that spiraled around us, casting the darkened apartment in violet-gold illumination.

"Charlotte," he groaned against my mouth, his voice rougher, deeper than I'd ever heard it. "Your energy—it's intoxicating."

"Then let yourself get drunk," I challenged, my hands finding the buttons of his shirt and tugging them loose.

He caught my wrists, holding them gently but firmly above my head, pressing me back against the cool surface of the wall. "Slowly," he insisted. The shadows in the room responded to his emotions, stretching and curling around us in protective layers. "I've waited centuries to feel this way. I won't rush it."

The declaration sent heat pooling low in my abdomen. Oscar Katz—unbound demon, reluctant professor, being of immense power—wanted to savor me.

While one hand held my captured wrist, his other hand moved downward, tracing the line of my throat, his fingers possessive, reverent. Wherever he touched, my skin illuminated with boundary guardian energies—luminous patterns appearing and fading like ethereal tattoos marking his claim. He mapped every inch of my skin as if claiming me, his touch setting my nerves ablaze. The friction, the anticipation, made me ache for more, but he kept his pace deliberate, savoring every reaction, every sharp inhale and breathy moan I let slip.

His lips followed the path his fingers had blazed, lingering over my pulse point, his tongue flicking over the sensitive skin. "I've imagined this," he murmured, his voice a low rasp of desire. "Since the first time our hands touched over coffee. Since I felt

your energy call to mine."

"Show me," I gasped. "Show me what you've imagined."

He released my wrists. His eyes darkened, something ancient and primal flickering behind his human mask. Then he stripped me, leaving me standing naked. Lifting me with supernatural ease, he pressed me against the wall. He cupped my thigh and spread me wider.

I gasped as his fingers found my folds, spreading me apart, dragging through my slick heat with an aching slowness that had me arching against him. He pressed his thumb to my clit, circling with just enough pressure to make me whimper.

"Oscar, please," I begged, gripping his shoulders, nails biting into his skin as he worked me with deliberate skill.

"Not yet," he said, voice thick with restraint. "I want to feel you come apart first. I want to see you lost in it."

His fingers plunged into me, curling in a way that made my whole body tense, pleasure coiling tighter with every thrust. His thumb never stopped its torturous rhythm against my clit, driving me higher, his mouth capturing every moan, every desperate plea.

I shattered, my orgasm rushing through me in waves, my thighs trembling as I clung to him. He groaned against my neck, as if he could feel the way my release pulsed around his fingers, as if it was feeding his own hunger.

He withdrew his fingers slowly, bringing them to his lips to taste me, his eyes dark and possessive. "Perfection," he growled, then pressed his forehead against mine, breath ragged. "And now I need to be inside you."

I nodded, still breathless, and reached for the waistband of his pants, anticipation making my fingers tremble. When I freed him, I inhaled sharply. He was thick, larger than I even thought I could take, his length hot and heavy against my palm.

He caught my chin, forcing my gaze back to his. "We'll make it fit," he assured me, his voice a wicked promise. "I'll make you take all of me."

I whimpered at his words, heat rushing back through me. He shed the rest of his clothing, and then he lifted me again, positioning himself at my entrance. Slowly, he pushed forward, stretching me inch by inch.

My eyes widened as I saw more of his true form emerging—subtle ridges along his shoulders, those shadow wings becoming more substantial, the planes of his face taking on an otherworldly sharpness that was both terrifying and beautiful.

"You see me," he whispered in wonder, his voice layered with otherworldly resonance. "Truly see me—and still want me."

"All of you," I confirmed. My fingers traced the supernatural markings appearing on his skin, leaving trails of violet light wherever I touched. "Everything you are."

He stilled, letting me adjust, his jaw clenched as if restraining himself from thrusting too soon. "You're perfect," he murmured, reverence in his voice. "So tight, so warm."

I shifted my hips, encouraging him to move, and he groaned, withdrawing slightly before pushing in again, deeper this time. He found a rhythm, slow but devastating. The pressure built again, pleasure winding impossibly tight as he drove me toward another peak.

"You feel like you were made for me," he rasped, his movements growing rougher, his control slipping further. The shadow wings fully manifested now, curving

protectively around us both. "Like the universe designed you to fit me."

"Yes," I gasped, nails raking down his back, leaving trails of light across his skin. "More, Oscar, please."

His grip tightened on my hips, and he gave me what I begged for, each thrust deeper, harder, pushing me closer to that edge again. The friction, the stretch of him inside me—it was too much, too perfect. The boundary between our energies dissolved completely, demon and guardian powers merging into something entirely new. I shattered for the second time, his name a cry on my lips, my release squeezing around him like a vice.

He followed moments later, burying himself to the hilt, his groan low and guttural as he spilled into me, his whole body trembling with the force of it.

The energy between us surged, violet and gold light exploding outward in a shockwave that momentarily transformed the apartment. Books levitated, furniture shifted, and every electronic device in the room briefly activated as the power flowed outward, connecting with the ley lines beneath the building and sending ripples of harmonized energy throughout the campus.

For a long moment, we simply held each other, bodies still joined, the aftershocks pulsing through us both. His wings slowly faded back to shadow, though they remained partially visible, curled protectively around us both. He pressed a lingering kiss to my temple, his breath warm against my skin. "You've unmade me, Charlotte. And remade me into something I never imagined I could be."

I smiled. "Then we're even. Because you've done the same to me."

Outside, the ley lines still hummed with the aftershocks of what we had done. But inside this moment, inside his arms, the only thing that mattered was us.

"That was..." Oscar began, then shook his head slightly, apparently at a loss for words.

"Supernatural?" I suggested with a small, satisfied smile.

His laugh vibrated through both our bodies. "Indeed. Though I suspect even supernatural beings rarely experience such perfect resonance."

"Lucky us," I murmured, nestling closer to his warmth.

Oscar lifted me and carried me into the bedroom. Soon, we were both settled in the bed, still wrapped in each other's arms.

He stroked my hair gently, his expression thoughtful. "The boundary entity said our connection was part of a pattern. That we were creating something new together—a different kind of balance."

"Mmm," I agreed sleepily. "If that's their plan for restoring dimensional harmony, I highly approve of their methods."

His smile was soft as he pressed a kiss to my forehead. "Rest now. We have much to discuss tomorrow."

"Together," I murmured.

"Together," he agreed, the word a promise and a future in one.

As I drifted off to sleep, I thought about the unlikely journey that had brought us here. From suspicious professor and curious student to demon and boundary guardian to whatever new category we were creating together.

My professor was a demon. And somehow, impossibly, perfectly, he was mine.

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Charlotte

One month later, I sat cross-legged on the floor of Oscar's apartment, surrounded by ancient texts and my own research notes. Sunlight streamed through the windows, illuminating the magical diagrams I'd sketched—far more precise now that I understood the principles behind them.

"Your energy control is improving," Oscar observed from his desk, where he was translating a boundary guardian text we'd discovered in Rose's collection. The formal professor persona had softened over the past weeks, though his academic precision remained intact.

"Having an actual understanding of what I am helps," I replied, tucking an escaped curl behind my ear.

His lips curved into that small smile I'd come to treasure. "Terminology matters."

"Says the being who's spent the past month redefining his own classification," I teased, rising to stretch my cramped muscles.

That earned a full laugh—a sound that had become more frequent as he adjusted to life without Hell's contract.

Oscar had changed in subtle but significant ways since that night. His energy signature had stabilized into something neither fully demonic nor human, but uniquely his own. The power he commanded remained impressive, but it flowed differently now—balanced rather than chaotic.

"'Former demon with reconfigured essence' lacks academic precision," he admitted, setting aside his translation.

I moved to stand behind him, resting my hands on his shoulders. He leaned back into my touch with an ease that still surprised me sometimes—this powerful being who had existed for centuries, finding comfort in simple contact.

"The department might need to update your faculty profile," I suggested. "'Dr. Oscar Katz, expertise in interdimensional boundaries and demonic reformation.'"

"I believe that would violate several supernatural confidentiality protocols," he replied dryly, though his energy hummed pleasantly against mine.

I slid my hands from his shoulders down his chest. After a month together, our connection had only grown stronger, more intuitive. "Speaking of violations," I murmured against his ear, "we've been researching for hours. I think we deserve a break."

He caught my hands, bringing them to his lips. "Your definition of 'break' has proven remarkably consistent over the past month," he observed, though the heat in his eyes belied his tone.

"Are you complaining, Professor?" I asked innocently, moving to perch on the edge of his desk.

"Merely making an observation." His hands settled on my waist, drawing me closer. "Your academic dedication extends to all areas of study."

I laughed, wrapping my arms around his neck. "Some subjects are more engaging than others."

The kiss started slow but quickly deepened into something more urgent.

Oscar lifted me effortlessly, setting me fully on his desk and stepping between my legs. Ancient texts and research notes scattered to the floor, forgotten as his mouth traced the sensitive path from my jawline to my collarbone.

"What about your precious organization?" I teased breathlessly, my fingers threading through his perfect hair.

"Some chaos," he murmured against my skin, "is worth embracing."

My laugh turned to a gasp as clothing fell away beneath practiced hands, each of us having learned exactly how to unravel the other's control.

"Beautiful," I whisper. "I'll never get tired of seeing you like this."

His eyes darkened to endless depth. "Nor I you," he replied.

When he entered me, there on his desk amid scattered research, our energies erupted into perfect resonance.

Oscar moved with deliberate control that drove me to the edge of madness, each thrust precisely calculated for maximum pleasure. I wrapped my legs around his waist, urging him deeper.

"Charlotte," he groaned, his voice resonating with power that vibrated through my very bones. "You undo me completely."

"Good," I gasped, fingers digging into his shoulders as tension coiled tighter within me. "About time someone did."

His laugh—rough with desire but genuine—was cut short as I deliberately tightened around him, using my newfound control over my guardian energies to create patterns of sensation that made his eyes flare with otherworldly light.

"Two can play at that game," he warned, his hand sliding between us to touch me exactly where I needed him most. Power surged through his fingers directly into my core, pushing me over the edge with breathtaking speed.

My climax triggered his, our energies exploding into a supernova of violet-gold light that momentarily illuminated the entire apartment. The force of our combined release sent a pulse through the ley line network, a harmonic wave that spread outward in expanding circles of balanced energy.

Afterward, he held me against his chest, both of us breathing hard, our skin still glowing with the aftermath of our connection. I traced lazy patterns across his shoulder, watching as my touch left trails of light in its wake.

"I've created a monster," Oscar observed, though his satisfied smile suggested he had no complaints.

"You've created a boundary guardian," I corrected, pressing a kiss to his jaw. "Though I admit, my training methods are somewhat unorthodox."

"Highly effective, however." He lifted me easily, carrying me the short distance to the couch where he settled with me in his lap. "Your control over your energy signature has improved remarkably."

"I have an excellent teacher." I nestled against him, enjoying the way our energies continued to harmonize in gentle aftershocks. "Though I'm not sure the faculty committee would approve of your instructional techniques."

He chuckled, fingers combing through my tousled curls. "Hence our need to maintain certain professional boundaries."

The past month had brought significant changes to Midnight Creek beyond our personal transformations. With the artificial corruption removed, the ley lines had

returned to their natural harmonious flow. Supernatural tensions had eased throughout the town, not repaired entirely, but certainly better.

Hell had maintained a conspicuous absence since our confrontation, though Oscar remained certain they were simply recalculating their approach. The boundary entities that had engineered our "test" had also remained silent, though occasionally I sensed their attention through the ley lines—watchful but approving.

"The semester starts again next week," I reminded him, reluctantly extracting myself from his embrace to retrieve my scattered clothing. "Are you ready to return to academic life?"

Oscar had been granted a sabbatical following the "unexplained energy disturbance" that had damaged part of campus—the college's official explanation for our supernatural confrontation. He'd spent the time helping me understand my guardian abilities while exploring his own transformed nature.

"The faculty committee has approved my revised curriculum," he said, watching with appreciation as I dressed. "Though I believe Dean Winters remains suspicious about my background."

"She should be," I pointed out. "Your actual experience significantly exceeds the timeline on your CV."

"A technicality," he murmured, pulling me back into his arms once I'd buttoned my shirt. "More concerning is our continued academic relationship."

Ah. That particular complication. Despite everything we'd been through—interdimensional confrontations, magical awakenings, and the undeniable bond between us—the fact remained that on paper, he was still a professor and I was still his student.

"Dean Winters offered me an independent study position," I reminded him. "I could officially transfer to her supervision for academic purposes."

"A sensible solution," he agreed, though his tone suggested it wasn't the most pressing issue on his mind.

His hands found my waist, drawing me closer until I stood between his knees. The energy connection between us hummed stronger with proximity, our signatures harmonizing in that unique way that still fascinated both of us.

"Charlotte," he began, uncharacteristic hesitation in his voice. "These past weeks have been... unprecedented."

"Good unprecedented or bad unprecedented?" I asked, trying to lighten his sudden seriousness.

His expression softened. "Definitively good. In ways I couldn't have imagined when I accepted this assignment, when I was still bound by Hell's contract and pretending to be nothing more than an academic."

"You're still an academic," I pointed out. "Just with some interesting extracurricular activities."

That earned another smile. "Indeed. But the point remains—everything has changed. My nature, your abilities, our understanding of the balance between realms."

I nodded, sensing he was working toward something important. "Change seems to be the only constant lately."

"Yet some constants remain valuable," he continued, his hands tightening slightly at my waist. "Our connection being foremost among them."

My heart quickened at the intensity in his eyes. "I've grown rather attached to it myself," I admitted.

"I've existed for centuries," Oscar said quietly. "Observed countless human lives, supernatural bonds, connections between beings of all realms. Yet I've never experienced anything like what exists between us."

"Is that your scholarly way of saying you like me?" I teased, though my voice wasn't quite steady.

"It's my scholarly way," he replied, drawing me even closer, "of saying I love you, Charlotte Evers. Boundary guardian, magical anomaly, woman who somehow cracked open a demon's long-dormant heart."

The declaration—so formal, so perfectly Oscar—filled me with joy that radiated through our connected energies. "I love you too," I said simply.

When he kissed me, our energies did what they always did—merged into something greater than the sum of their parts, boundary guardian and unbound demon creating perfect balance.