

Original Sin

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Possession Academy Book One

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This book contains mature themes and graphic sexual descriptions. All characters depicted in this book are over eighteen years of age.

Chapter One

Beautiful Sinner

As it turns out, the most prestigious academy for the possessed orders their uniforms from an online adult shop. My thighs can't possibly be that big.

I pull down my red plague miniskirt just below the area of indecency. My wedge sneakers plop against the shimmering, wet cobblestone as I walk between the rows of densely ornamented ivory, cream, and coffee-colored buildings with more windows than facade on them. Orange streetlights illuminate the colossal gothic structure of the main campus building in the distance, its pointed tower splitting the full moon in half. Magnificent and grandiose, yet eerie all at the same time. Reliefs of little flying imps surround the main doors, and a nude statue of our lord and father Sataghnia stands by the right side, looking down upon you with his welcoming gaze as he extends his hand. His body is the envy of men, and his bald head a symbol of setting aside one's pride in order to achieve happiness and enlightenment. Students have already begun gathering around the entrance.

Once I get my turn, I take hold of the statue's hand, close my eyes, and whisper, "Only love."

And just then, my living red yarn doll Hush-Hush has to rear his bulbous head out of my backpack with his little horns, and huge eyes and a zig-zag mouth both as hollow as his capacity for kindness.

"Pray to the idol of your false god while you still can," he says in his condescending, phantasmic voice. "Once I find a way to rid myself of my dependance on you, I will eradicate you along with this eyesore of a world."

I sigh. “Nobody ever said he was God. He was just a fallen angel who preached love and forgiveness towards the demons who enslaved him and his people.”

“Can you move a bit?” a female student asks me in a slightly sterner tone.

Without thinking, I hunch my shoulders, bow my head down, and scurry away like a frightened little mouse. “O-oh! Sorry!” All that’s missing is a tail to tuck between my legs, and the manifestation of my cowardice would be complete. She didn’t even ask me nicely. She basically ordered me like I was below her, and yet, here I am, ready to drop down to the floor and grovel just so she won’t be mad at me, even though I don’t even know who she is. As she touches the statue and goes inside through the side door, all I catch is a glimpse of curly ginger hair.

“Pathetic,” Hush-Hush comments in a low, yet furious tone. He climbs up onto my shoulder and nestles himself on the back of my neck, wrapping his pointy tail around it, then grabbing two locks of my hair like reins with his stubby clawed fingers. “Well, if you’re going to keep acting like you are below others, then it’s only fitting you be treated as such.” He kicks the base of my neck with the back of his cloven hooves and whips my hair. “*Hya!*”

Don’t cry, Gaby. Don’t you dare cry. Don’t prove his point any more than you already have.

I make my way inside through the smaller door beside the main ones, holding my head up high to keep my eyes from spilling tears down my cheeks.

If I weren’t such a coward and my upper body strength weren’t a negative one-hundred, I would fling him across the Hadijazyk River back to Svetleni with my parents. But when the shimmering lights hit me and I find myself surrounded by all the gorgeous statues and mosaic windows, my rage and sadness just melt away and are replaced by awe and tranquility.

I slowly tread down the aisle to the first row as the other students are taking their seats in the back.

At the end stands a stone altar and behind it towers another one of Sataghnia’s statues—his face continuing to point down at his children rather than the heavens from which he was cast out.

Hush-Hush hops onto the top of my head and onto the bench on the left, then takes a seat in the middle. "I can guarantee you that this is going to be an absolute waste of time. From what I understand, the dean is just going to introduce himself and give a pointless motivational speech. You are scum. Your existence has no worth. You are a maggot feeding off discarded beast carcasses because the dead can't raise their voices at you. Are you feeling motivated yet?"

I cross my arms, trying to keep on a stern face. "You don't need to follow me everywhere I go, you know."

"Hmph. Unfortunately, I do. For now, at least," says Hush-Hush. "I may not be bound to your will or proximity as other curio-type demon powers, but keeping a close eye on you may yet prove itself to be a fruitful endeavor."

"All right...well...can you please at least make some room for me on the bench?" I ask him.

"You may take your oversized posterior and seat it somewhere else," he says, shooing me away. "This seat is not wide enough for the both of us."

I take a seat on the bench behind him and take out my tablet with a yellow silicone cover from my backpack.

I need to distract myself, or else I'll just keep thinking about his words, start crying, and embarrass myself in front of everyone on my first day here. No, I can't let him know how miserable he makes me feel. He'll probably just make it out to be all my fault anyway.

I scroll through the gallery of sultry ebook covers full of tentacles, claws, fangs, and half-naked women and tap on the one titled *Forced by the Serpent King*. I go back to reread the beginning of the page a few times until I can finally immerse myself into the story.

But just as I am about to get to the good part, a male student walks up to me and asks, "This seat taken?"

A nervous smile cracks onto my lips and I scoot farther away. "No, go ahead!" I reply. I can't even lift my face to look at him. I just go back to staring at my tablet, though I'm admittedly too nervous to continue actually reading. When he sits down with his legs spread and his arms stretched out along the edge of the backrest, I turn my head towards him ever so slightly.

He's wearing the same black suit as the others, with the difference being that his red plaid tie almost completely loosened, and his white shirt unbuttoned to the point where his plump, muscular chest peers between the two sides of the fabric. He has the most luxuriant, mesmerizing head of hair that is almost as tall as him. With the slightest of movements, it shimmers like a gentle waterfall of rubies, or the scarlet silk of a royal bed. He has an islander's sun-kissed skin, and his eyes are a brilliant peridot green—sharp and venomous, yet when coupled with his warm, wide smile, they leave me submerged in a state of total submission to whatever he may desire to do with me.

Wait... Smile... He's smiling at—*shit!*

He lets out a heart chuckle as I slap the screen of my tablet onto my face. My nose makes a terrifying crunch sound. "Ouch! *Mother—!*" I forgot you can't *literally* bury your face into flat surfaces.

Nevertheless, he continued to laugh at my misfortune. "Oh—shit! You okay? That sounded painful."

I smile and glance at him while rubbing my nose. "My pride hurts more than my nose ever could right now. I'm sorry. You're really handsome—I got nervous."

He almost spat as he burst out into another fit of laughter, so hard his voice almost fills the entire room.

No, no no... Everyone's staring at us now. "Please keep it down. We're gonna get in trouble," I beg him.

He dials down the laughter and smirks at me again. "What are you talking about? Why would a sweet little thing like you get in trouble for anything?"

My heart pounds in my chest, and my skin crawls from his words. That *definitely* hurts more than my aching nose.

But as I'm distracted by the agony of my infatuated state of mind, he yanks my tablet from me and starts skimming through the pages. "Whoops—I take back what I said," he comments with a chuckle.

"C-can I please have that back?" I ask him very, very politely as I reach for the tablet.

But before I could touch it, he leans back against the armrest with that pointed grin of his widening from cheek to cheek. He places one leg up

on the bench while keeping the other down on the ground holding my tablet by the side of his head. "What's your name?" he asks me.

"U-um... Gabriela?" I answer.

"Gaby," he says, "you won't be needing this anymore."

A tall slender middle-aged man with long blond hair wearing white and red robes strolls down the aisle in feminine high-heel boots and slips the tablet out of his hand. "And neither will you, Mr. Klesar," he tells him in a sly, gloating tone. "I'll need everyone's undivided attention for the next hour. The young lady may proceed to entertain you after I've finished my speech."

The student groans and rolls his eyes as he adjusts his sitting position to face forward again.

No! Why did he have to take my tablet? My tablet is innocent!

He steps behind the altar and places my tablet by the edge. He raises his arms and I get a mini heart attack as he grazes it.

The entire room goes silent.

He smiles as he slowly places his hands onto the altar. "My darlings," he announces, "nothing brings me more joy than seeing so many of your faces. So much...*potential*."

It's as if he is orgasming at every other word.

"My name is Dragutin Balaur. And as the new dean of Crescendo Academy for the Possessed, it is my solemn duty to make sure that potential reaches its absolute zenith," he says. "Our lord Sataghnia died for us. He died to release us of our hatred for our demon masters. The demons were swallowed by the ashes of an erupting volcano, and we burned Sataghnia at the stake for having sympathized with them when they were still alive. When the flames of our rage died out with Sataghnia's ashes, they left nothing but grief, emptiness, and regret. Only then were we able to see the beauty in his vision. The demons may have met their end in the physical realm those thousands of years ago, but their powerful spirits lived on, and because we desired to make up for Sataghnia's unjust condemnation and punishment, they have been given new life in each and every one of you, granting you the amazing powers with which you will conquer and reclaim your demons' lost world and find glory eternal!"

All the students applaud, myself included—all but the guy sitting next to me. He just continued to glare at the dean with an annoyed expression and half-closed eyes.

Then, something pokes my shoulder. I turn to him, but he doesn't look like he's moved a single muscle. I slowly turn away to focus on the dean's speech, but I feel the poke again. All right—he's messing with me. Fine. I'll just ignore him. If I react, I'll probably just get reprimanded instead of him. Best to just let him grow tired of it. As expected, there's another poke. Then another. Again and again. My ribs are already aching, but I try my best to keep myself composed. But there is no poke this time. My chest bursts aflame and my heartbeat jumps to over a hundred beats per minute as he digs his long, scorching fingers into the meat of my backside.

My mind is in utter chaos. I don't want to lose this feeling. I want to move closer. But the people... Oh Lord, the people! What if they see it? What if they shout at us? Damn it! I can't tell him to stop. He'll get the wrong idea. But someone will complain if we keep doing this.

Then, I don't know if by some miracle or by some horrible stroke of misfortune, Hush-Hush climbs onto the backrest of the front bench and leaps towards the student with a high-pitched roar and his claws ready to disfigure his face.

I throw myself at the student and grab Hush-Hush mid-descent, but I end up landing directly onto his lap.

Hush-Hush thrashes in my hands as I try to keep him still. "Either you stop him or I do!" he tells me. "I can't bear another second of this!"

"W-well, maybe I don't want him to stop!" I argue.

"Just say *something*, you insufferable coward!" Hush-Hush shouts at me.

The dean's cough rings through my head. I quickly move away and pull Hush-Hush against my chest, keeping my head down.

"Young lady," the dean calls out to me in a stern tone, "there is a time and place for that, and it's Saturdays at four o'clock at the indoors pool! I'm not going to warn you again!"

The student stands up, grabs my wrist, and pulls me onto my feet. "You can take your speech and shove it. Nobody here wants to listen to you suck Sataghnia's dick for a whole hour. If it weren't for this girl, I'd

have blow my brains out by now.” He drags me down the aisle with him towards the exit.

No, no, no! Now I’m definitely going to get reprimanded for this! I hide my face under my hair. Everyone is probably staring. Oh Lord, what did I do to deserve this? I didn’t want to offend anyone, but I just ended up offending *everyone*. “I—I’m really sorry!” I shout towards the dean as the student storms out along with me.

Hush-Hush climbs onto the top of my head. “Thank you!” he tells the student. “At long last, somebody speaks up! You have no idea how cathartic it was to watch you tell that man off. Have I mentioned I love you? I love you.”

I pace around in a circle, unable to hold the air in my lungs for long. The dean is going to call me into his office. He’s going to tell me I’m a horrible person, that I should be ashamed, that I’m immature and behave inappropriately. My heart is beating like mad. I feel like I’m being chased by a murderer with an axe.

“You okay?” the student asks me.

“Not particularly,” Hush-Hush answers. “I’m very dizzy on account of all this circling.”

I turn to him. “We have to go back inside and apologize! Maybe he’ll go easy on us then!”

“Pft. Fuck no,” he scoffed with a smirk and slipped his hands into his pockets. “If he wants to expel me for this—fine. I’m only here so I don’t have to get a ‘real’ job. But now that some weird dude who says he’s my dad started sending me cash, I can just focus on my music career.”

“But *I’m* going to get expelled!” I tell him.

He chuckles. “Why would *you* get expelled? You didn’t even do anything.” He glances to the side as he smirks. “Except maybe when you tried to give me head in the middle of the opening ceremony.”

That son of a—! “I-it was an accident! I was trying to keep my doll from killing you!”

“That is correct,” says Hush-Hush. “I may not have planned out exactly how I was going to do it, but I would have done it...eventually.”

The student steps closer to me, gazing down at me with his devious smirk and those mysterious, deadly eyes of his.

My heart jumps into my throat. I can't breathe. My chest is only moments away from combustion.

His face is so close to mine now, and it continues to close in on me. Then, he looks down and lifts up the golden inverted pentagram pendant hanging off my black choker. "Mertvyrh, huh?" he comments and steps back just a bit, still smirking at me. "Designer shoes, submissive, bookworm... I guess it really is always the quiet ones who have the dirtiest secrets."

"N-no...um...I'm from the capital," I explain and glance down at the pendant. "It's my late grandma's. It was a gift from her lover."

"Anyways, I gotta get to band practice," he says as he turns around and proceeds to walk away. "Like I said, you won't be needing your books anymore." He turns his head back. "You're gonna be too busy going out with me."

I stand in place, my body completely paralyzed.

What did he just say to me? Did I hear that right? How? What? When? Where? "Wait! What's your name?"

"Ilia!" he shouts back and disappears into the night.

"Ilia..." Not even when I had my very first kiss did my lips shudder from so much tenderness. Such grace, such elegance, yet so much mystery and power all in four simple letters. I could write poems just about his name.

The other students walk past me, but I can't look away until his gleaming hair disappears from my vision.

"Good—you're still here," a familiar voice shoots through my ears like a spark of high-voltage electricity, making my skin crawl and my heart rate double in speed.

I turn around, just glancing up to see who it is.

"You are—?"

"G-Gabriela, Sir," I reply. "Gabriela Loutkar."

He walks back to the entrance of the main campus building. "Follow me, Miss Loutkar."

I hurry over to him and match his pace, not even looking where I was going. All I could do was hold my head down, praying he would come to understand how incredibly sorry I am for what had happened at the opening ceremony. No, who am I kidding? The real reason why I

couldn't bear to hold my head up was because I was a good-for-nothing coward. That was the only reason and nothing else.

We go back inside as the last of the students empty out the large room.

He unlocks the door on the side of the small staircase leading to the altar and holds it open for me.

Hush-Hush climbs down from my head and onto my shoulder. "You do understand that the rules of monsters don't apply to humans, don't you?" he whispers to me. "If you make yourself appear like less of a threat, it will only make you that much more pleasing to abuse."

I understand his point, but why can't he understand mine? People always respond to confrontation with aggression. There is at least a small percent of people out there who might choose to take pity on me if I appear weak and submissive.

I move my hair away slightly and look up.

In the middle, at the other end of the room, under the dim lights and before heavy, red curtains stands a bulky wooden desk with a wide and thin desktop computer on top of it. A black bookcase fills the entire left wall while a large oil painting and a Baroque sofa beneath it cover the right one.

But before I can look further up and inspect the contents of the painting, the dean takes off his red and white robes, revealing black pants and a white shirt underneath as he sits down behind the desk. "Can I get you anything?" he asks me.

I shake my head, still unable to face him. "N-no, thank you."

"Miss Loutkar, I—" Suddenly, he stops mid-sentence and murmurs something in the tongue of the primal demons whose descendants had climbed from the depths onto the surface of Nebeskala. Curious and overwhelmed with panic, I finally lift my head up.

His eyes roll up until only the whites are left and his head is slowly turning towards the back.

"Mr. Balaur, a-are you all right?" I ask, trying my hardest to keep calm when my entire body is screaming to back away.

He shakes his head and his eyes return to normal. "I'm so sorry you had to see that, darling," he says, his neck still twitching a bit. He takes out a red potion from his pocket and takes a swig. "When you host a

demon spirit in your body that you're incompatible with, hiccups like these can occur from time to time," he explains with a smile.

"Sir...I—I would just like to say how very so—"

"Don't worry about it. It's all in the past," he tells me.

Thank the Lord. I smile lightly to express my deepest gratitude with sincere piety. "Thank you."

But then, he his eyebrows jerk upward as he glances at the desk and clasps his hands together. "However..."

Oh, no. A "however?" What could possibly be there for him to "however" me about? I honestly only had the best intentions!

I can feel him trying to melt through my eyes with his disappointed gaze, but I continue to stare at my lap.

"You have piqued my interest, Miss Loutkar," he explains. "Would you mind telling me a little bit about yourself?"

I glance up at him. He just wants to know more about me? Perhaps there really is nothing to be afraid of, then. I clear my throat and force a smile onto my lips. "Oh! W-well... As I've said, my name is Gabriela Loutkar, I'm twenty years old, I come from Svetleni, I like to read in my free time, and...all I've ever wanted is to be a member of the High Priestesses."

"The famous dungeon crawling team?" he asks while typing something on his computer.

"Y-yes," I reply. "I know you probably think I'm naive for thinking I can make it, but I've been working really hard ever since I was little."

"No doubt," the dean added. "Your grades are outstanding. Your score of the theory part of your high school exit exam is the third best one of your generation."

"Thank you! I didn't go out much, so I had a lot of time to study," I confess.

"And why do you want to be part of that particular team?"

Is that a serious question?

"Surely a smart and ambitious young woman such as yourself knows that there are managers who employ more skilled crawlers than them. I am merely curious as to why you wish to be part of that team in particular."

I glance around the room in hopes of an idea coming to me. Why do I want to be part of that team specifically? But as the answers form in my head, the more I try to think of an alternative that would not be a lie, but rather an embellished truth. Sadly, there is no way of sugarcoating it. I look away in shame as I say, "Because...everyone loves them. They're better than most people, so they have the right to do what they want and nobody can tell them a thing. All my life, I've never been able to stand up for myself because I felt like I had no right to do so. I have no right to talk back to my parents about anything because they've provided me with such a wonderful childhood and the best possible education. I have no right to talk back to professors about inhumane amounts of schoolwork because children in impoverished villages are able to find time to study even when they are selling old shoes to make sure their families don't go to bed hungry. I have no right to make my own choices or speak my mind. I have no right to live my life the way I want to. I just want to...feel like I have a right...to be me...Sir."

The dean nods his head, still keeping a steady gaze on me. "I see," he says. "But catching the eye of the High Priestesses' manager is no small feat. I'm really interested in learning more about your demon powers. Who, may I ask, is possessing you?"

"Baphomet, Sir," I answer with a light smile and glance at Hush-Hush, who's been sitting on my shoulder. "This is Hush-Hush, her power. It's a curio type. He's a living yarn doll that can wrap itself around inanimate objects and take over them when I'm in possession mode."

"Oh, how meta," the dean comments with an amused smirk. "You are possessed by a demon whose power allows you to possess other things. I'm curious, though, why 'Hush-Hush?'"

Hush-Hush crosses his leg and clasps his hands as he's sitting on my shoulder. "Originally, I wanted to go with Carnage, or Massacre, but after having spoken with my ornery steed here, I've realized that an implication of an immoral deed is often more disturbing than if it were presented without understatement."

"Would you mind doing a little demonstration for me?" the dean asks. "Feel free to have Hush-Hush possess anything in this room, except for my computer, of course. I'm a little too attached to it at the moment." He chuckles.

“O-oh! Sure! N-no problem,” I reply. Damn it... I guess there’s no avoiding it. It was only a matter of time, I suppose.

He rests his chin onto the backs of his clasped hands as he places his elbows onto the desk. “Great. Whenever you’re ready, darling.”

I swallow the knot in my throat and make my way to the center of the room.

Hush-Hush jumps down from my shoulder onto the ground. “Yes, Mount.” Hush-Hush snickers. “Show the man what you can do with your demon power.”

Why are you doing this to me, Hush-Hush? Why is it so fun for you to torture me? Why do you hate me so much?

I give him a look of sadness in hopes that he might show me kindness just this once, but he keeps his wide, jagged grin stretched wide as he stared back at me from below. I turn forward and whisper, “Baphomet.”

A dark, sparkling mist slowly spirals around my feet, up my legs, and all the way over my head until it grows thicker and swallows me whole. Darkness covers my eyes as a dull aching spreads through me. My bones stretch and morph, making my body grow bigger. My nails transform into gut-ripping claws as my hands pass over my newly formed furry digitigrade legs. I trace my enlarged clawed hands up my stomach, over my chest, and all the way up to my head as my skin continues to overgrow with rough fur. I take a deep breath through my short goat muzzle and glide my long tongue over my new fangs. My goat ears twitch, and my short, stubby tail wags as excitement flows through me, down to my cloven hooves.

The dark cloud clears and a cool breeze passes between long horns and through my hair.

The dean is sitting at his desk with a curious gaze, and Hush-Hush stands beside me with a taller, human-shaped body and head, while all his other features are left unchanged.

Adrenaline rushes through my veins. My heart beats faster and faster. It’s as though holding back from pulling off wax from one’s body. The fear overwhelms, and the longer you postpone it, the harder it is to force yourself to do it. But the wax has already been applied. There is no taking it off without suffering the consequences anymore. The only path is the one through the pain.

“H-Hush-Hush,” I say as I turn to him. “Please possess the oil painting.”

He crossed his arms and continues to grin at me as if he’s enjoying himself. “No.”

My eyes are straining from the tears that are forming within. I dare not even look at the dean. “Hush-Hush...please...do as I say.”

“I only take orders from Baphomet, and her alone,” he says with a stern tone, his smile diminishing and his eyes turning into a glare.

“And the Baphomet part of me is kindly asking you to possess the oil painting!” I add, raising my voice in panic. “Hush-Hush, I’m begging you!” I drop down to my knees and grasp his legs, burins my face in the yarn to hide the tears flowing out of my eyes. “Please!” Please, Hush-Hush! Please...do as I say, just this once.”

“And this is exactly why I refuse,” he argues, kicking me away. “Baphomet would never stoop this low. Not even if it meant saving her life. She never tolerated disrespect. Not from me, not from her peers, and not even her superiors. Even when she became a lowlife slave to the Trickster, she spat in his face simply because he chose a different concubine to sleep with one night.” He knelt in front of me, burning through my eyes with his glare. “Baphomet has fire in her your pitiful human mind cannot conceive. *Your* flame has been extinguished a long time ago.” He stands up, looking down at me with disappointment in his hollow eyes. “You are as good as dead.”

I can’t stop myself from crying. I merely look away to try and hide my shame and the anger that burned inside me. I hate you. You fucking piece of shit doll...I hate you! I’ve worked tirelessly my entire life to get where I am now, and it’s all going to be ruined thanks to you. More than anything in the world right now, I just wish I could tell you how much I despise you! Why did Baphomet choose me of all people if she was so much braver than I am? How are we compatible if we are nothing alike? That fucking doll... I want to hang him by his own threads! I want to rip him to pieces! But why...can’t...I...do it?

I drag my claws across my arms, digging them through the thick fur down to my skin. I grit my teeth as I continue to burn up from the inside. More than anything, I wish I could tell them all to go to hell. No. I need to contain my emotions. They will only say that I’m incapable of

controlling my anger. I can't show them how furious I am. I can't say a thing. They will only use it against me. Just hold it in. Hold it in, Gaby. Keep your head down. Don't talk back. Don't confront anyone. You need this. You can't become a member of the High Priestesses without Hush-Hush or the academy. Keep your head down. Don't talk back. Better that they pity you than hate you.

"Miss Loutkar," says the dean.

I turn to him, quickly standing up and wiping the tears from my eyes as he stands up from his desk. He looks at me with a soft, disappointed gaze. "What I'm about to say...please don't take it to heart."

Not take it to heart? What does he mean by that?

"Dungeon crawling is an increasingly dangerous sport," he explains. "Even the most experienced and powerful of crawlers meet horrifying fates in this field of work. Without being able to use your demon power, no matter how admirable it may be...I'm afraid you don't stand a chance."

My heart titters and my arms tremble. No...he can't mean...

"I'm sorry—but I cannot let someone like you attend the academy. I hope you understand."

I rush to his desk, tears flowing from my eyes. "N-no! Please! You can't do this!"

"I don't want to be the one responsible for your inevitable demise if I let you stay," he replied with a resolute look in his eyes. "I don't know how you've managed to pass the practical portion of your high school exit exam, but I can't in good conscience let you remain here knowing what I know now."

"Just one semester! Give me one semester, and I'll leave! I promise!" I tell him. "If I don't get Hush-Hush to listen to me by the end of the semester, I'll go! But please give me just one chance! That's all I ask!"

He sighs and pinches the base of his nose. "Miss Loutkar—"

"Please don't do this to me, Sir!" I beg him. "I've already done so much! Please don't tell me it was all for nothing! I know how dangerous it is, but I'm willing to take that risk! I've gotten this far! I—"

Dean Balaur closed his eyes and raised his hand.

I shut my mouth, crumbling inside at the thought of what his final words might be.

“All right,” he says. “Have it your way. I will give you until the end of the semester to gain control over your demon power.”

I took a step back and bowed my head. “T-thank you...Sir. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.” Thank you... Thank you so much...

Though I’ve already won, I still can’t shake the stress off myself. My heart is still pounding like a jackhammer, and my hands won’t stop shaking. It’s as if my body is yet to catch up with the information my brain has just received.

He walks past me and hands me my tablet that he’d been keeping under his robes as a thick, black mist envelops my body again, and I transform back into my human self, and Hush-Hush reverts back to his small doll shape. He sighs and pens the office door, then shakes his head and smiles at me. “If I find you in the obituary before winter, I’ll kill you.”