CRUSH
An Unlikeable Demon Hunter Short Story

DEBORAH WILDE
“Eat the damn kid already,” I said.

The woman on the other end of the park bench edged away from me, horror contorting her perky blondeness. Her hand clutching her coffee cup shook. Nice touch. “I beg your pardon?”

I motioned at the munchkin stomping through sandcastles and terrorizing the other droolers on the far side of the playground. “She’s an asshole.”

“She’s a toddler!”

I shrugged. “Calling a toddler an asshole is neither illegal nor immoral.”

Unlike your plans for her.

I tipped my black cap back, tilting my head so she could see my stubby goat horns. Fake horns, but she’d never know. We demon hunters had this shit down to an art. “Drio.”

Her eyes swept my body, so I obligingly stretched out my legs for her to note the shorter right one. Amazing the transformation possible with lifts. The blinding distraction of a hideous, tight, turquoise silk shirt that I’d borrowed from my buddy Kane didn’t hurt either. His batshit ugly wardrobe fit the hit-and-run fashion that nivoglio demons were known for.

The tension drained from her shoulders. She smiled, sliding closer, and held out her hand.

“I’m Ally.”

Ally the ala demon. Mamma mia. No points for originality.

“I’m charmed.” I kissed her hand.

She giggled and scrunched her nose. A disturbingly adorable gesture from a fiend that sucked the marrow out of babies’ bones. “Don’t try any of your tricks on me.”

“Bella, I wouldn’t dream of it.” Maybe one trick. Unlike an actual nivoglio, mine would involve less kissing and stealing of memories, and more killing. I’d been on Ally’s trail for a few
days now, one frustrating step behind, until my break this morning. Asshole or not, that little kid was going to live a long life.

“Hmm. I don’t know.” Ally took a sip of her coffee, much more relaxed. “The last time I ran into one of you guys, it took me three days to piece that night together.”

I cocked an eyebrow. “But was it worth it when you remembered?”

She grinned.

The asshole child let out a wail that cracked my skull open, stomping through my brain like an invading army to set up camp as a sharp pulse somewhere behind my left temple. “Then let me apologize for my rude kin by offering you first dibs. Per favore. Eat her. You’ll be providing a public service.”

“I know, right?” Ally’s eyes glinted. “I don’t suppose you’re free for an early dinner?”

“I am kind of hungry.”

“Then perhaps we should get to know each other somewhere a little more private.”

“Potluck?” I said, and she laughed at my joke and playfully swatted me. I had her.

Soon I’d have justice for the little boy who’d been lured away from his dad at the Fairview Slopes Fire Station Family Day last Sunday. Justice for all the families who’d never know what had happened to their children. Ala demons found humans good to the last drop.

I gave her my most attentive smile.

The clouds above us went from steel to charcoal, and the air crackled with the threat of rain. Even if I hadn’t been certain of her identity before, this clinched it. Ala demons couldn’t help calling up thunderclouds when they got excited, jizzing hailstorms of rain when their emotions could no longer be contained.
“Ally? Ohmigod!” A petite brunette with a pixie cut, brown eyes, and a silver eyebrow ring, stood there clutching one of those massive purses that had to weigh almost as much as she did. Her wide-eyed shock as she met my eyes was wiped clean suspiciously fast in favor of a bright smile. “I’m so glad I ran into you? Didn’t you get my texts?”

“Jackie, hey. Yeah, sorry,” Ally said. “I’ve been busy.”

“No problem?”

As this Jackie chick nattered on, I couldn’t help but wonder if her obliviousness to Ally’s “get lost” vibes was genuine or deliberate. Something about her made my neck prickle. And made my teeth grind together at the way she turned everything into a question.

“So you wanna grab a coffee?” Jackie asked Ally.

“Actually,” I said, “Ally and I were discussing dinner plans.”

Jackie gave an embarrassed laugh. “Oh? Was I interrupting?”

I’d have bet everything I had that she knew damn well she was. More than that, I’d swear we’d met before. “Yes.”

I crossed my arms and waited for her to go away.

Her eyes glinted, almost like the acknowledgement of a challenge. “Are you Spanish? Your people are so beautiful.”

“I’m Italian,” I growled.

An unholy “Noooooo!” came from the sandbox. The little shit-disturber flung sand in a wide arc, bullseyeing it into the faces of two of the three kids around her and blinding them. The injured duo burst into tears, the other one joining in for the hell of it.

Her mom ran over to try and control her daughter, but it was clear who was running this show.
I rubbed my temples, desperate to kill something. “Ally, let’s–”

“Hang on,” Ally murmured, distracted by the arrival of a boisterous group of chubby preschoolers. Or more precisely, her take-out smorgasbord. She jumped up, coffee cup in hand, meandering toward the garbage cans–and the children.

I stood up to follow, then grunted, crashing back on my ass as Jackie thumped her purse into my arms. “Hold this a sec? I can never find my phone?”

“Non farmi incazzare.” Continue to piss me off and see what happens.

Jackie stopped rummaging through her bag to blink at me. “Huh?”

I shoved the purse back at her. “Va bene. Now run along and–”

Only years of training at keeping my emotions under wraps kept me from startling at the spark that coursed through me when my hand touched her arm. I’d felt that connective heat before. It was as unwanted now as it had been then. I stretched out my arm along the back of the bench. “You’re Nava’s friend.”

Another innocent blink. “Who?”


I didn’t know what her game was–yet–but she was stalking a demon. She knew Nava was a hunter and had to know I was as well. So, what? Was she some demon groupie or severely deluded into thinking that demons were like genies and could grant wishes? Either way, if she was going to these lengths to get close to one, then she was either insane or dangerous.

Probably both. Her fate depended on how much of either.

The smile I gave her was dagger-sharp.
“Don’t be silly?” She shoved her purse at me again, and I grabbed it, intending to toss it down. The second my hands were full, I heard a snap. Cool metal clinked around my wrist. She’d chained me to the bench.

I tugged on the cuffs, arching an eyebrow at her smirk. “Extremely unwise, bella.”

“I just need an hour, then she’s all yours.” Leonie slung her bag over her shoulder, glancing back at the sandbox where the pigtailed hellraiser was currently braining her peers with a plastic shovel. “That kid is such an asshole,” she said and followed the demon.

Was she a demon too, or just the most annoying human ever? If she was evil and had Nava fooled? Well, I’d killed demons who’d gotten close to people before and I’d do it again in a heartbeat. Shame to destroy her, though. She kind of glided when she walked, her hips swaying in a hypnotic rhythm.

Almost as if she felt my gaze, Leonie threw a finger wave back over her shoulder. I crossed my legs at the ankle willing down my hard-on, and let her get away.

Or so she thought.

***

I’d made short work of the cuffs, the fake horns, and the lifts, and had been tailing Ally and Leonie for the past forty-five minutes. They had no idea that I’d flashed in behind them at the front door of the Store It Unlimited or that I was spying on them from around the corner now.

Leonie was still in her Jackie disguise. “Like, I totally appreciate you helping me move this table?” Her “totally” had two extra syllables, while Ally’s “Yeah, sure,” was a mumbled single one.

Leonie unlocked her storage unit door. As she bent over to roll it up, I zipped down the hall toward them, using my flash step powers that were too fast for the human eye to see, and
snapped the ala demon’s neck. Then I fired more magic in to Ally’s shattered cervical vertebra, directly into her kill spot.

It was over before Leonie had rolled the metal door up a quarter of the way. She whipped her head around, but Ally was gone. Literally. Like all demons, her body disappeared when she died.

I planted myself in front of Nava’s friend. With about ten inches and at least eighty pounds on her, there was no way she was getting past me. But instead of launching into some pathetic excuse or trying to cute her way out of this, she scowled at me, shoving me with her shoulder hard enough to jostle me sideways.

Amazing. She was outdoing even Nava in being annoying. At least Nava didn’t knowingly consort with demons.

“You idiot.” For such a short person, she had a fucking loud roar. “You know how long it took me to put all this in place?”

My brows drew together. This wasn’t a stalker with a need to confess. Sounded more like an assignment.

“...How long I had to go around speaking like a freaking twit?” She wasn’t Italian, but she’d nailed those angry hand jabs as she spoke that were a sign to take cover. I’d learned that the hard way from my nonna when she went on and on about me sleeping in.

Leonie was ranting about how she’d busted her ass on this gig and I’d ruined it, her mouth curled up at one end just enough to make you wonder if she loved slinging vicious epithets more than she cared about you causing the problem, or if she just plain hated you, deep and simple wrath, and was mocking you because you didn’t get it.

She looked like she could do damage.
My dick hardened.

“Cosa?” I tried to regain my footing. She was... lush. She didn’t even reach my shoulder but her body was exceptional. In my head, a bomb whistled and detonated. Man, what a hatefuck this would be. Stupid and hazardous, but damned if I didn’t want it anyway.

Except I didn’t do hook-ups that upended me.

Not anymore.

Besides, she was probably one of those women who got all offended when you said you didn’t kiss. “Listen—”

Stalking past me, the boxes stacked on the wall of shelving units, and an ugly-ass plastic kitchen table, she rose on tiptoe and reached for a battered box.

I tilted my head, following the smooth curve of hip between her risen-up shirt and low-cut jeans. Her skin was so pale.

“Don’t just stand there. Help me.” She jumped and missed. On closer inspection, she was gunning for a silver jewelry box on a high shelf.

With a sigh, I gently pushed her aside and retrieved it, keeping it out of reach. The box wasn’t very heavy though it rattled a lot. Even though there was no lock on it, the lid didn’t budge. “How were you going to get her to open this?”

“Taser. I just needed her thumbprint. Not her cooperation.”

I kept my expression stony, mentally applauding her.

She crossed her arms. “Well?”

I held the box up higher. “Talk and get a remote chance of me handing this over.”

She glared at me. “I’m a criminology student and I work part-time for a P.I.”

“A demon P.I.?”
“No.” Her chin jutted up. “Demons figure we pathetic humans are too shit scared of them to try and cheat them.”

“Cheating them ends you up dead or a giant pain in my ass,” I sneered. “Why don’t you just run along and play with something less monumentally lethal?”

“I’m following my passion.”

I blinked. “Your passion is child-murderers? What? Arms trafficker not work out for you?”

“It was repo woman for life support systems actually, but there are only so many plugs a girl can pull before it stops being fun.”

I refused to let her see my amusement. My hand tightened on the jewelry box. She willingly worked for the evil creatures I’d sworn to destroy. Enjoyed destroying. Her moral abyss trumped me finding her hot.

She rolled her eyes. “Look, you can either pretend the monsters don’t exist under your bed or you can face them head on.”

“And get well paid.”

“Cha-ching.”

I failed to keep the contempt off my face. “This box?”

“None of your business.” She grabbed for it.

She was faster than I thought. My hand missed hers and brushed the side of her chest, warm and soft.

Leonie’s nostrils flared. She stepped back. “Give it.”
Chivalry is not one of my strong suits. Yeah, okay. I had just accidentally touched a breast. It happens. She didn’t seem to be making a big deal out of it. There was no reason to keep replaying the sensation over in my head. I was an asshole, not a pervert. “No.”

She broke out the sexiest smile I’d seen in a long time. “Play you for it?”

“No.”

She pulled her wig off, her silky red hair spilling down her back like a waterfall. “Come on. Unless you don’t know the difference between a straight and a flush?”

I stuffed my hands in the pockets of my jeans so I couldn’t give in to the temptation to tuck that single strand along her cheek back into place. “Let me guess. Texas hold’em.”

“Strip.”

I dropped my cocky smirk.

Hers grew larger. She trailed her fingers up my chest and I hissed. “Scared the odds aren’t in your favor? I mean, I am wearing more clothing than you.”

“Not for long, bella.” Keep the box and see her naked. I didn’t want to fuck a demon enabler but I wasn’t a saint. I could see no downside to this plan.

Until I reached for a chair to sit down and play, and found myself handcuffed to a metal shelving unit, watching Leonie walk away with the jewelry box.

Twice with this girl. In one day. Porco dio.

Her glower when she reached her car to find me sitting on her hood was gratifying.

“Planning on getting a different demon friend to open it?” I asked.

“Ally’s magic. Only she could undo it. Fuck!” She opened and slammed her car door. Twice. Then she just deflated, the weight of her failure slumping her shoulders and bowing her head. All the fight had fled.
Oh cavolo. It was one little box, not the end of the world. I slid off the hood. “I could help.”

She shook the box. “There is no way into this thing other than getting the lid off. And that includes blowtorching it.”

“Dynamite?”

“Can’t. I need what’s inside undamaged. That’s why I couldn’t melt it either.”

I held out my hand for the box and after a moment’s hesitation, she reluctantly sat it in my palm. I flipped it over and ran my finger along the seam between the lid decorated with these curly vine things and the box itself. Smooth and sealed tight. No hinges either. “The magic has a tight hold on the lid, which means the only way in is through the sides or bottom.”

“We need something between blowtorching and dynamite,” she said. “I have no idea what that is.”

“I do. Force equals mass times acceleration, and I’m a hell of an accelerater, bella.”

The parking lot for Store It Unlimited was a long straight stretch and mostly empty. Ideal conditions. By the time I’d zipped to the far end and thrown the box, the force on that bastard as it struck the ground, decimating the concrete into a tiny crater, caused the box to crack wide open. Except for the lid that didn’t even dent.

Items spilled out of it like a piñata, though it took another second for me to make sense of what I was looking at. I knelt down, sorting through some of it: a toy racecar, a small plastic dinosaur, and a tiny gold bracelet with the name “Ava” engraved on it.

Leonie snatched the bracelet out of my hand.

“It’s trophies. From her kills,” I said.

“Give the man a medal.”
I picked up a baby tooth, closing my hand around it. Anger speared my chest and I wished I hadn’t been so hasty to kill Ally. She deserved long, drawn out, and exceedingly painful. “You weren’t working for a demon.”

“Not on this, but how do you think I found out about the box in the first place?” She stroked her thumb over the bracelet. “Today I get to go to a mother who’s been grieving for eight months, and maybe help her find some closure. If working with demons is the trade off?” She shrugged and scooped the box and its contents up.

It was hard to remember the last time I’d misread someone that badly. You’d think my psychology degree would keep me from messing up like this, but no. She wasn’t out for the money at all.

By the time I could wipe my jaw off the ground and move, she was gone. And since I’d rather sit through repeated viewings of the Housewives of Whatever-The-Fuck City than ask Nava for her friend’s phone number, a different approach was necessary.

I waited until Nava was with Kane in the kitchen, pestering him to make her dinner. Then I flash stepped to borrow Nava’s phone and grab Leonie’s number. I didn’t want to freak Leonie out, so I phoned first.

The call was already doomed to failure: I had to make up some lie about getting her number from Nava and wanting to check in about the box and making sure it didn’t have a curse on it. Total bullshit. But Leonie, like most humans, didn’t have much experience with magic, and didn’t call me on it. Then again, she sounded pretty awful.

“What happened?” I growled. “It didn’t go well?”

“It did.” A rush of static, then a silence. “But her kid is still dead. She just knows it now for sure. So that sucks really fucking hard.”
I’d been there, more than a couple times. Sometimes you’d go out on missions with good
guys and sometimes you’d come back and they wouldn’t. I’d been at more than my fair share of
spouses’ doors, telling them they’d been widowed. It was a shit job, but someone had to do it,
out of respect for the dead and those they left behind.

“Yeah,” I said after another pause, then thought what the hell and went for it. “Do you
want cheering up?”

I meant taking her out somewhere for a drink or something, but when she answered with
her address and hung up, I wasn’t about to bitch.

***

She opened her door wearing a smirk and a Fugue State Five T-shirt that barely covered
her ass.

My fingers dug into the leather jacket I had slung over one shoulder. “I’m not his fucking
substitute.”

In one fluid move, she peeled off the shirt, pitching it to the ground. Venus in a green
push up and matching bikini briefs. “Just making sure I wasn’t either.”

I laughed and kicked the door closed behind me. “No danger of that.”

Leonie sucked on her bottom lip. Watching. Waiting for me to make the first move.

I ran my thumb up her wrist, her chocolate eyes molten as she tracked the motion. When
I reached the velvet-smooth inside of her elbow, she squeezed my hand and I tensed, thinking
she would drop my hand and move away but, she gave a husky laugh that half-caught in the back
of her throat.

The way that sound hooked into me, I should have taken it for a warning, not a signal to
finally cave and let her hair fall through my fingers. The strands rippled like a river, cascading
over my skin, mesmerizing me. Then I fist ed her hair, tilted her head, and sucked on the hollow of her neck.

Rising onto tiptoe, she arched against me with a wanton moan, curling her fingers into my belt loops.

The fraction of an inch I put between our bodies might as well have been a mile for the effort it took. “Ladies first.”

She laughed. “You like to torture yourself?”

I smiled, but she had no idea.

I led her to the sofa. Sitting lengthwise, one leg stretched out along the cushions, the other foot on the floor, I tucked her against me, back to chest, suckling and nibbling on the creamy line of her shoulder.

Leonie swept her hair out of the way to give me better access. Her hand splayed on my thigh when I nipped the hollow of her neck and she melted into me.

I loved the puzzle that each woman’s body presented. Loved unearthing their secret desires and controlling their pleasure. Taking them from zero to sixty. These first strokes of my hand across Leonie’s softly rounded belly was the lightest touch; the brush across her nipple, the gentlest tweak. Still, she was so petite, I was worried that I’d hurt her.

“Drio.” She half-twisted around. Dark lashes swept her cheek, her eyes huge under half-closed lids. “Don’t hold back.”

I laughed, just the kind of throaty growl they all liked to hear. “I’m not.”

But Leonie didn’t flutter her eyelashes and toss her hair, which was the usual response that got. She just huffed a soft laugh and straddled me. “Yeah. You are.”
She leaned in and I shook my head. “Sorry, bella. I don’t kiss.” The words left an ashy
taste in my mouth for the first time ever.

Something flashed in the depths of her eyes. Not hurt. Pity? I wasn’t a charity case. I
swung my other leg onto the floor, but Leonie pushed me back with a hand to my chest, brushing
her nose against mine.

“Plenty of other things we can do.” She rocked against my erection. I might still have
bailed, except she placed my hands on her tits, forcing my palms to grind against her. Heat
poured off of her, infusing my soul, and blunting the edges after a day being so angry and so
alone. With Leonie, skin on skin became a comfort I hungered for.

She was like a siren, sliding over me, all supple curves and soft warmth, her faint floral
perfume weaving through my senses like a net drawing me in.

I wanted to mark her. Bruise her skin with my lips, thread pleasure with pain. I wouldn’t.
I was the perfect gentleman in bed. Containing the darkness, letting it cut only me, was my
private ongoing damnation. I waited for the day it finally sliced me open, bleeding me out.

“Calmati.” My control was hanging on by a thread.

Leonie unclasped her bra, letting it dangle for a second, before dropping it to the floor.

With a growl, I pushed her onto her back, sucking her tit into my mouth. I didn’t unleash
the full weight of my desire on her; I wouldn’t, because neither of us would survive it, but I
loosened my iron control a fraction.

I wrapped my arms around her waist, gently sucking the sweet curve of her hip. She
arched against me, her fingers threading through my hair. I sucked harder, scraping my teeth
against her skin, checking that her low cries and writhing stemmed from arousal and passion and
not anything distressing.
I couldn’t say whose groan it was that stuttered along my spine and took root in my dick, now pulled hard and tight against my stomach.

Gripping her wrists with one hand and holding them above her head, I teased her nipples into stiffened peaks, licked into the hollows of her collarbone.

“More.” Her command was a growled drawl.

I skipped one finger against the lace waistband of her underwear. “Like what?” My hair fell forward into my eyes, all my focus on the rippling of her abs as I ghosted that finger back and forth across her waist before finally sliding it between the lace and her skin, flexing my fingers against her stomach.

“Bastard. Stop teasing.”

Slowly, deliberately, I removed my hand.

“Don’t you even–” She dragged in a shaky breath, her head falling back as I trailed kisses and tiny nips down the length of her body.

Making short work of the bikini briefs, I had to stop a moment and take her in. I wanted to map out the freckles along her left hip, learn how hard her thighs could squeeze when wrapped around my waist, spend hours savoring the minute differences in taste and scent over every inch of her. “Bellissima.”

She blushed, pink tingeing across her body in a soft wash. “Aren’t you going to get undressed?”

“No.” I nudged her knees apart, trailing my lips up the curve of her thigh. “That okay?”

“Uh-huh.”

I chuckled at her high-pitched agreement. “Natural redhead, huh?” A raw heat pooled low in my gut. I ran my finger over her clit, Leonie growing breathless and frantic.
Not as frantic as how badly I wanted to taste her. My dick strained against my zipper. I slid my hands down her hips, pinning her thighs open, and licked her engorged clit.

Leonie bucked her hips. “Yes.”

A ragged groan escaped me. An asteroid hit couldn’t have stopped me from feasting on her. I slid one finger inside of her. Over and over, I licked into her, gripping her thighs, one finger thrusting.

Her cries of my name were the only thing anchoring me to reality.

That and my determination not to come in my jeans. If she hadn’t orgasmed then with a sharp buck of her hips, her thighs tensing and her cunt muscles spasming, I might have lost that resolution.

I pulled my finger out of her, and, my eyes locked on hers, sucked on it.

Leonie hissed, her eyes fully dilating once more.

I don’t know who was breathing harder, but the satisfied lopsided grin she bestowed on me made all exertion worth it. I forced air into my lungs. Repeats were not how I rolled, and the fact that I wanted to spend the night and see how many more times I could make her lose her mind and earn that look was the only kick in the ass I needed.

I pulled a knit blanket that was draped over the back of the sofa onto her. “Relax. I’ll let myself out.” I was already on my feet, making my escape, my back to her.

The cushions rustled and she paddled up behind me. “I’ll walk you out. It’s the least I can do.”

Seeing her with her hair tumbled about her shoulders, a feline smile on her face, and the blanket barely hiding her naked body, I almost didn’t make it out the door.
There was a moment of hesitation where I worried things might get weird. I opened my mouth to say one of the bullshit lines I gave women at this point to leave them in a good mood, but Leonie spoke first.

“Don’t tell Nava, okay?”

I blinked. The fuck? “No problem. I leave for Rome in a couple of days anyway.” That ace up my sleeve in case she’d wanted to see me again was supposed to elicit a frown or a pout, not make her nod, clearly relieved, making me wish I’d said something else.

“Have a great trip.” She held the door open for me.

I stepped into the hallway, then turned back to say something, but she’d already shut the door.

I narrowed my eyes at it. Oh bella, I may have been going to Rome but I was definitely coming back.