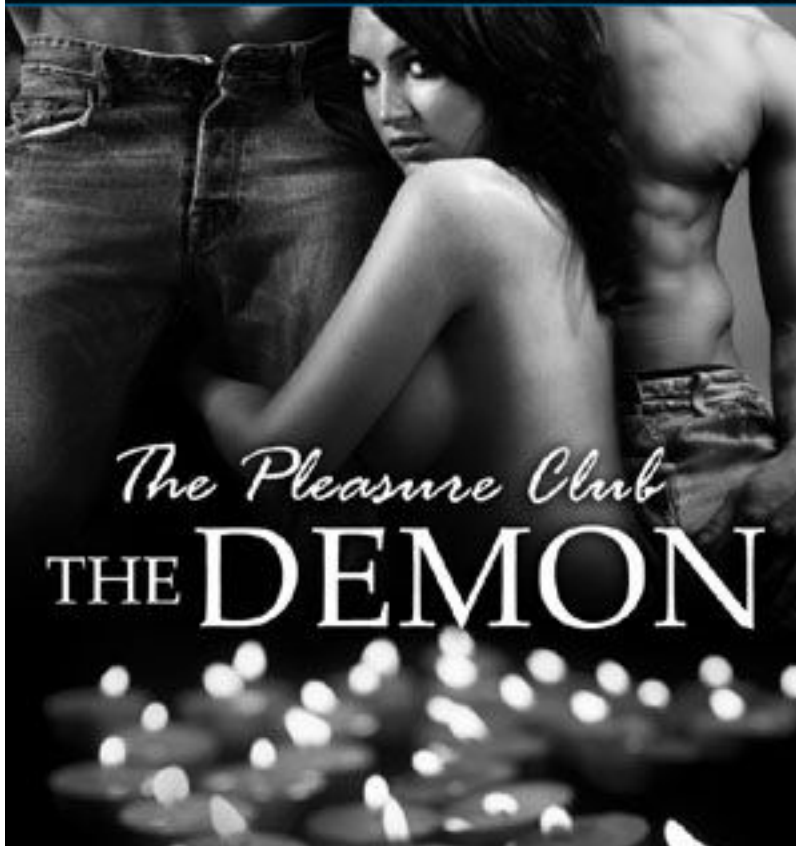


COBBLESTONE PRESS PRESENTS



WICKED

Kate Austin



The Pleasure Club

THE DEMON

The Demon by Kate Austin

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By

Kate Austin

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Dedication

To my friend Heather—
who is out there, just like Morteza—
changing her life.

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Morteza,

We're pleased to welcome you to The Pleasure Club.

As you have already signed and returned the contract and filled out all the necessary forms to ensure you receive your every wish, we will be in touch with you shortly with the details of your first Pleasure Night. Your Wish List and Pleasure Forms have been turned over to our staff of highly trained Pleasure Guardians, and they are hard at work finding your perfect match.

We will endeavor to meet your personal fantasy.

When you are contacted again, you will be given a location where your Pleasure Night will begin, and you will also be given a safe word to use should you at any time become uncomfortable. There is no shame in changing your mind. We're here to pleasure, and should your safe word be used, your match for the evening will cease all activity, and the game will be put on hold until a mutual agreement between you, your Pleasure Mistress and your Pleasure Master can be reached.

Once again, welcome to The Pleasure Club.

Please feel free to contact the office at any time should you have any questions.

*Yours truly,
The Pleasure Club Management*

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Morteza,

*Your Pleasure Night will begin Tuesday the 15th, 6 PM,
when you enter the green door at 1275 James Street.*

Your safe word is homo sapiens.

* * * * *

I'm not your usual demon.

That's putting it mildly.

I'm fascinated by humans and instead of devouring them or torturing and killing them—the usual demon response to humans—I watch them, trying to figure out what makes them tick. What makes them so different from us? Why are they able to have long-term satisfying relationships? With both sexes?

I didn't even know these things were possible until the first time I left the Underworld for the human world. Once I started watching them, I realized that the long life I'd lived hadn't taught me anything. At least not anything of importance.

We don't do love or even sex—

It's easy to figure out why demon relationships are invariably short-term. We're mean and nasty creatures, and our relationships are all about power. Who has it? Who doesn't? Who wants it and how is he—demons are invariably male—going to get it? Even the lord of the demons is constantly being challenged.

Me? I'm just the demon at the bottom of the pile with absolutely zero chance of making it to the top. And no desire to be there, either. I'm a misfit.

So I watch humans.

And I wonder.

I spend most of my time these days in the human world. For one thing, it's way safer here. I'm tougher and bigger than almost any human

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male, so they stay away from me. The other reason I like it here is that I've learned a lot, especially since I discovered the Internet. One of the few places where no one seems to notice that I'm different is the Internet café. Everyone is odd, and I'm not that much odder when I'm disguised as a human. The only thing I can't hide is my size.

But other than being bigger than any human except a few basketball players, I'm no more noticeable than anyone else who sits in front of a computer on an uncomfortable chair, in a poorly lit and kind of smelly room, staring into a lit screen.

All of us geeks and nerds drink cup after cup of bad coffee, eat bags of chips and boxes of donuts. I don't know what this diet does to the humans, but for me? It's heaven.

Though I have to say that being a demon, it's obvious that I'm not totally clear on the concept of Heaven. But I'm willing to bet that it involves the Internet, drinking coffee, and eating donuts and chips. Maybe being in Heaven is just feeling better than I have in my whole, very long life.

I want that feeling for the rest of my life.

But in order to do that, I need to figure out *everything* about humans.

The Internet has taught me a lot, but I need to know more. I need what some sites call *hands-on* experience. And last night I found a way to get that.

It's an organization called The Pleasure Club, and its slogan is "where fantasy meets reality." I realize both parts of this equation might be difficult for me—I'm not sure exactly what my fantasy is, and I'm certainly not part—yet—of any human reality. But I'm hoping that The Pleasure Club can figure out *what* I want and then find someone, or maybe even more than one someone, who can give it to me.

I've got one night to decide what to do with the rest of my life. A single night to change my world. They'd better get it right.

* * * * *

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Eli and Ellie—it's ridiculous really, Ellie thought, but since they'd first met in grade three, they'd been known that way, even though her mother had insisted that she be called Elena. They weren't siblings, but they looked enough alike to be mistaken for brother and sister, unless someone was paying attention.

Ellie's background was Italian, Eli's Jewish. But their dark hair and eyes, their olive skin and their expressions, often had people mistaking them for twins.

Eli and Ellie had, from the first day they'd met, been inseparable and had spent most of their lives rebelling against everything and anything. That rebellion had brought them to The Pleasure Club. There had to be *someone* who was interested in their unique combination of talents.

Because they were good. No, Ellie thought, they were great. They knew everything there was to know about the human erogenous zones—both male and female. She preferred men but was happy on occasion to settle for a woman. Eli preferred women, but he, too, was flexible.

The one thing they'd learned in their rebellious years was that both of them were what doctors or therapists might call sex addicts. Some people wanted alcohol or cigarettes or drugs; Eli and Ellie wanted sex. Lots and lots and lots of it, with lots and lots and lots of different partners. No one person had ever been able to satisfy either of them, though they'd both tried.

Eli had gone so far as to marry his college sweetheart, but that only lasted until she tired of his insistence on daily and often thrice-daily sex. He'd told Ellie afterwards that he hadn't even mentioned the number of times he masturbated when Laura was unavailable or unwilling.

Ellie laughed at the memory of the look on his face when he told her this, as if Laura should have appreciated his restraint. Eli had been totally disgruntled. Laura had taken the matter into her own hands and had moved on to someone a little less demanding.

Ellie hadn't made Eli's mistake, though she'd had problems of her own. She'd thought surfing the net would be a good way to find partners.