

Celestina Silvenfare
Book One: The Legend Begins©
by Kelly Lynne

Chapter Two

The demon, Gobnia, was pleased. He and his human host, Tumeric, the High Priest of San Roraima—the capitol of Meréllier—had just returned from Castle Silvenfare, and none of those dreaded sisters had even known they were there; although their precious Carrianna had certainly known. But he had made certain she would not be able to tell her aunts anything, ever again. The look on the poor girl’s face when she’d seen him had given the demon an immense amount of pleasure. He would be sure to savor that moment more a bit later.

However, as tickled as he was with their success, they had narrowly escaped. Another few seconds and all would have been for naught. If discovered, he would have been sent straight back to the ninth level of the underworld, where he had resided for eons, until Tumeric had unwittingly called him forth and unleashed him upon this world. Stupid human.

If any one of those crazy sisters had caught his scent, all of his careful planning to usurp the prophecy and permanently insert himself in this plain of existence would have been ruined. Each of the Silvenfare sisters possessed the ability to banish him back to his hellish home, where he would then have to start all over with his careful plotting and planning before he could even hope to attempt a return. And that would not have been an acceptable outcome.

Fortunately for the demon, but not for anyone else, he had nothing to fear at the moment, since he and Tumeric had secured the very thing they had intended to retrieve this night. Yes, Gobnia was downright giddy.

“Well done, Tumeric,” said the demon. “You have proven to be a very worthy ally, and that is high praise indeed coming from the likes of me.”

“I would thank you if I wasn’t so sick to my stomach,” Tumeric responded.

“Oh, I think that will pass soon enough, given that it’s more likely your weak human conscious upsetting your stomach, rather than anything you ate. Honestly, I don’t know why you have such a soft spot for that stupid girl. You could have a hundred just like her falling at your feet if you but ask. After all, your wish is my command,” chided the demon, sarcastically.

Tumeric walked over to the full height mirror he kept in his private dressing chamber and stood directly in front of it, staring at his reflection. He was a man of moderate height and build, neither ugly nor good-looking, pretty much average in every way. He had a full head of wavy, light brown hair, which he was very proud of given his 35 years of age, but the most remarkable thing about the man was the eye-patch he wore over his left eye.

Most people in his congregation assumed he had sustained an injury and wore the patch to cover a grotesque scar, and he gave them no reason to think otherwise. The real reason he wore the patch was to cover up the fact that his own left eye had been replaced with a demon's eye. A hideous, red-tinged green eye with a lizard-like pupil immediately recognizable as inhuman, for it belonged to Gobnia.

As soon as Tumeric lifted his eye-patch in front of the mirror, the image of himself was immediately replaced with Gobnia's image, and for these short periods of time, when the demon was in the mirror and not securely coiled within his spirit essence, Tumeric actually began to feel a little human again.

But those moments never lasted; such was the price paid for fame and fortune unfairly gained. Although Gobnia could sense and feel most of what Tumeric did, standing in the mirror and exposing the demon's eye was a way for them to communicate man-to-demon.

Tumeric was not sure if he would ever get used to seeing the demon's image, and he was careful not to reveal just how terrified he was of the creature. The horrid thing was only in the mirror on a dimensional level, but its image was no less intimidating than if it were standing right next to him. It was at least eight feet tall and had the build of a small giant, with bulging muscles in its chest, arms, and thighs. And though one might expect a demon's skin to be red, Gobnia's was a yellowish-orange, which made his overly large green eyes stand out all the more.

The demon's mouth was filled with razor sharp teeth, and each of its pointed fingers ended in sharp black talons. It also had two thick, black curly horns on its head and a long, thrashing tail, easily used for a whip. The demon was not a creature to be messed with, and Tumeric was certainly not of a mind to make it an enemy. He could only imagine the torture it could inflict on a hapless victim.

Given the demon's surprisingly good mood, Tumeric figured he'd better not push the demon too much with regard to his sorrow over Carrianna, nor should he allow it to become fully aware of the extent of his weakness where the girl was concerned. Even though they now shared a soul--his soul--he had found ways to keep certain thoughts and feelings private, and he wanted to keep it that way. He decided to change tactics and get the demon's focus off of him and on to something else.

"She meant nothing, and besides, what's done is done. I have no regrets," Tumeric said.

"Somehow I doubt that, but you're right, we have better things to talk about, like how my...I mean, *OUR* plan is moving along quite nicely. I would say phase one is complete given our success tonight. We may not have the prophesied child, but we have its twin brother, and the benefit of knowing he exists where those sisters haven't a clue at the present time, and

that's a huge advantage. It will be your job to see to it that 'our' child grows up to be every bit the nemesis our plan calls for, so we can thwart the prophecy and rule this world.

"The next phase of our plan will necessitate a bit of time, given the education and training this child will require to take on that brat those sisters will raise and train, so we'll have to wait awhile until we can realize further victory. In the meantime, you can continue to enjoy your amazing success as the High Priest of San Roraima and I'll continue to do what I do best, which is plotting to take over this world."

Gobnia paused to relish the knowledge that his plan was firmly in motion with the birth and abduction of the male Silvenfare child. He was surprisingly okay with the fact that it would take a lot more time and patience on his part before his greatest victory could be fully realized. Time was most definitely on his side, and there were many things a clever demon could find to occupy his attention while waiting.

Humans were such grand entertainment, and occasionally, if he was very lucky, he could snare an even more interesting treat, such as an elf or faerie. No more dwarves, though, they were too ornery and the demon didn't like to work that hard for simple entertainment.

"I might have to leave you for a little while, but rest assured, I will be back," Gobnia informed Tumeric.

"What?! Why? That's never been necessary before," said Tumeric, quite shocked, but also hopeful.

"That would be the part that would be none of your business. I've kept up my end of our little bargain and you need to continue to do your part. Raise the boy to be strong and lethal, train him to be our weapon against those Silvenfare witches. Keep growing our little congregation of initiates and letting the people of this land fall under our spell. Leave no village untouched by your influence and wherever you encounter resistance, crush it. We need warriors and sheep my hypocritical friend, if we're to rule this world, warriors and sheep!"

With that, the demon was gone. Tumeric almost fell over from the sheer lightness he felt over having the demon temporarily removed from his mortal coil for the first time since he had laid eyes on it. He even had his left eye back, functioning properly and with no signs of a demonic presence. If he had known how at the moment, Tumeric would have most certainly danced a jig.

He was about to let out a yell of excitement when he felt a very hot breath on the back of his neck. A chill ran up his spine as he glanced in the mirror to see Gobnia standing just behind him.

"Don't think I don't know what just happened here. You may think you've tasted a bit of freedom, and maybe you rather enjoyed it. But I can assure you of one thing, you'll never be

free of me. Wherever I go, the bond that connects you and me will always bring me directly back to you. We're partners after all, remember?"

As quickly as it had appeared, the demon was gone again. But this time, Tumeric didn't feel much like celebrating. In fact, he felt a lot more like crying.

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After the demon had been gone awhile, Tumeric felt comfortable enough to more closely examine his predicament. He had not previously experienced this level of joyful emotion from the demon. It felt akin to elation, but how was that possible? Knowing how evil the demon was, he had no idea it could be capable of reaching that spectrum of emotions.

As a result of these new sensations, Tumeric was feeling much dirtier from Gobnia's already invasive presence. It was one thing to live symbiotically with a devil-spawn and be a party to its expected dark thoughts and emotions, but this level of pure delight meant that perhaps he was not as in control of the demon as he had previously thought. Maybe he was not in control at all.

Since it had invaded his body and soul some 18 months ago, he had really only known the demon's dark emotions, aside from the occasional excitement it felt when it was able to toy with and torture a luckless victim. When Gobnia had first melded with him, he'd felt horribly violated, even though he had willingly agreed to the wicked partnership. That feeling had been made all the more horrible after what he had done to that poor girl while under the demon's influence.

Tumeric had genuinely cared for Carrianna, but Gobnia convinced him the attack was a necessary action to ensure their ultimate victory. But now he wasn't so certain the demon cared a wit about Tumeric's hopes and dreams, and that thought was proving very troublesome.

Before any of these latest events in his life had happened, Tumeric had achieved mild success in his career as a San Roraima holy man. Once he had finished his preliminary training, he began his career as a literary associate and had been assigned to the city library to conduct research for the church elders on various subjects.

It was not a glamorous assignment, and Tumeric felt he had been overlooked for positions that would have put him in closer proximity to the church elders, where he could better use his subtle manipulations to get ahead. He was not one to work hard or long to earn advancement and reward; he preferred shortcuts and back-stabbing maneuvers to get the things he desired, which was likely why he was in his current predicament.

Perhaps it was also his weak character that made him such an easy target for the demon, not to mention his arrogance, and his blind ambition. Whichever the case, almost

immediately upon entering the front door of the huge city library for his first assignment, he had felt a strong urge, or more of a calling, to descend to the basement catacombs. After a very brief search, he'd discovered an ancient tome covered in an inch of dust, tucked away in a tight crevice at the very back corner of one of the rooms.

He had no idea why he had even looked in that particular spot, but he could vaguely recall a small voice in his head giving him careful instructions on just where to find the voluminous book. He also remembered feeling exhilarated at the discovery of the tome, thinking it would lead to some major unearthing of information for the church, which would gain him much respect and admiration from the church elders.

He could not have been more wrong.

The moment he found the book was the moment his imminent corruption began. Unbeknownst to Tumeric, the book was a gateway to the underworld, and it was no accident that he was able to quickly locate the volume, tucked away as it was. And certainly what happened next couldn't have been more scripted, because it played out exactly as Gobnia intended.

Tumeric reached for the cover to open the book, and just as he did, a sudden burst of air kicked up, seemingly out of nowhere, and several pages fluttered to life until finally settling open, about mid-way through the book. The markings on the page were unrecognizable to him, yet somehow he began to read aloud in a language he couldn't possibly understand. The strange words flowed easily past his lips, as if he were fluent in the ancient script. As he read, visual images began appearing above the open pages, depicting great success and wealth for him.

The more he read, the better the images appeared of a life he had only dreamed could be possible. He saw scenes of the church elders taking notice of him and appointing him to key positions, making it possible for him to rise quickly through the ranks of the church hierarchy. Other scenarios depicted him enjoying the finest food, clothing, and accommodations reserved for only the cream of the crop within the church. His entire life was visually transformed above the pages of the book, from one of mediocrity to one of power and respect. He continued reading with great enthusiasm, almost like a man possessed, for he had never felt more excited before in his life.

Surely this had to be a good thing, though somewhere in the back of his mind a tiny thought suggested perhaps he had better stop. But stopping soon became out of the question, and that little bit of goodness that resided in Tumeric was instantly tucked down inside of the man in a place he wasn't sure he could ever get to again.

Tumeric said “*Yes!*” to the life he was just promised, and let go of his heart and his soul in exchange, and as quick as he did, the demon’s visage appeared, hovering above the book. Holy man and demon were then joined together, for better, and then much worse. Tumeric’s life had not been the same since.

Indeed, much of what the book, or rather the demon, had promised was quickly realized. In a short period of time, he rose through the ranks of the church and enjoyed many of the perks and benefits bestowed on a high-ranking church official, as well as many bestowed by the demon. Pretty soon Tumeric found himself at the very pinnacle of success within his order, firmly situated as the High Priest of San Roraima. Everything had been so amazing up until these last few months . . . when the demon had begun demanding his due.