

# *DARK THRALL*

By Jo Carlisle

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## **Chapter One**

Some days, being a thrall sucked.

Not the part where he'd willingly given himself to serve as a sexual submissive to Vampire Queen Raina Zharov and her mate – his best friend – Johan Stone. Their slave, bound by law to entertain not only their cherished Coven "family", but invited guests as well. No, that part rocked.

Or it would, if only the ones he loved most remembered he was alive.

*They don't love you, will never appreciate your gifts. Come to me.*

Hidden in the shadows of Raina's lush gardens, Zane Ramsey walked the path, soft earth cool underneath his bare feet. Though the night hours he was required to keep for his duties were still crisp with a hint of bite, the daylight teased at the coming spring. Dispelling the winter's chill over the land...but not in his soul. The darkness was slowly eating him alive, the black poison taking over his mind and body.

A costly sacrifice, made out of love. To protect Johan two weeks ago as he gathered evidence in a futile mission to imprison Drakkon, the Demon King, and thwart the bastard's plans to create an invincible army. The later had met with success, but the former...

Zane had kept the Demon King occupied, all right. Footsteps faltering, Zane shivered, recalling the sweet nectar of Lord Drakkon's rich blood flowing past his lips, down his throat. Drakkon taking his body with a vicious, beautiful cruelty like none before him. Addicting a former Exodus warrior turned inexperienced thrall, as surely as a junkie to heroin.

*Once they know, Johan will be forced to execute you. Come to me now, Zane.*

Zane staggered, gripping a tree trunk. “No. Stay out of my head!”

*I am one with your mind and heart. You cannot exercise me, so do not try, my boy.*

“I don’t belong to you!” he cried.

*Do you not? Observe how they withdraw as though their thrall is a leper, though they don’t consciously recognize their actions. Your bond with them fades, while your tie to your new master strengthens. You are mine.*

He shook his head, trying to rid himself of Drakkon’s seductive lure. “Never,” he whispered. “I’m not getting within ten miles of you.”

*Ah, yes you will. Now, and at Raina’s party tomorrow night.*

“You’re not invited. My mistress and Johan have rescinded your invitation.”

*As if that will stop me.*

“I’ll warn them all! I’ll—”

*You’ll do what? Confess that your master is a fever in your blood? That you’ve been communicating with him silently, that you can’t wait to submit to your dark lord’s touch once more? That even now, you could use your connection to lead them to the Demon King’s defeat, and will not do it?*

“Oh, gods,” Zane moaned. True, every word. He wanted to be sick.

*Beautiful one, have any of them called upon your talents since you became a thrall?*

No. Not in the way he’d hoped. Other than the sexy Delilah, their new Coven member and Raina’s best friend, permitting him some light petting of her small body, none had sought him. But the humiliating admission stuck in his throat, right in the vicinity of his jeweled collar.

*Go now, my boy. Emerge from hiding and see for yourself how they do not need you. Then you will believe. Tonight you’ll attend to my pleasure and tomorrow night, I’ll take you from this farce and reveal your true destiny.*

“You’re wrong! They love me. They want to help me.”

But the damage was done. Ugly doubt, simmering just below the surface, rushed in. Hurrying the rest of the distance down the path, he paused where the edge of the garden met the lighted pool area. Tiki torches gave the shimmering water and

surrounding gardens the feel of an oasis in the darkness. And in the center of that oasis...

Johan. Lounging naked on a towel spread on the grass, shoulder-length black hair damp, his big sculpted body glistening from his recent swim. He lay on his back, one knee cocked up, hands clasped behind his dark head. The position made his massive biceps, chest and abdomen bunch, taut and mouth-watering.

His best friend – his rightful lord and master – was alone.

Encouraged by this unusual circumstance, Zane started from his hiding place. Now he would prove that Drakkon was wrong. His Coven needed him. Dammit, he wasn't going to be a demon's whore!

A movement from the patio halted his steps. Lady Delilah Vane emerged from the main palace and strolled toward the pool, her gate light. Carefree. Long dark hair cascaded over her petite shoulders and tumbled to kiss her delectable little ass. Her small, pert breasts thrust upward, water lapping at her dusky nipples as she waded into the pool.

Saints, he could watch Delilah forever and never get enough. Problem was, she felt the same way about Johan. Who'd definitely noted her arrival. Those two had carried loads of unresolved sexual tension between them ever since Johan, in his former role as Raina's human slave, had been forced to service Delilah. Although Johan's elevated position of the Coven's dominant male gave him full rights to claim anyone within his household he wished – whether Coven member or guest – he had yet to take Delilah.

Even Raina, his true love, knew it was only a matter of time before Johan abandoned his bruised pride and surrendered to his vampire nature. Not to mention loosing the beast, the *ardin* inside him. A demon attack had left him with the *ardin* and a permanent, highly elevated sex drive many times more potent than a normal vampire. Johan was tireless. Insatiable.

And tonight, he'd seize his destiny.

Zane read the lust in Johan's glittering golden eyes as his friend watched Delilah swim laps. Johan's cock lengthened to rest across his tight belly, every cell in his body

alert. The musk of his arousal drifted to Zane's place in the dark.

At last, Delilah climbed the steps and left the pool, squeezing the excess water from her long tresses. She turned. Met Johan's hot gaze.

"See something you like, my Lord?"

"Come here," he growled in response.

Her lips curved upward. "As you wish."

Zane's heart sank even as his shaft hardened.

*Help me. I can't watch him fuck her.*

Drakkon's knowing chuckle reverberated in his brain. *Oh, but you will, my boy.*

*Observe, let the pain rip at your heart and know that you will soon be freed from this agony, transformed in my embrace.*

Zane couldn't tear his gaze away as the female he secretly longed for went to Johan, knelt on the towel beside him. Prepared to give her lord what she'd never deigned to give Zane, a mere thrall.

By inches, the pair ripped out his heart.

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Johan's cock thickened, his body burned, as Delilah stalked him like a graceful feline. They had issues between them, and by the Gods, he was tired of pretending. Exhausted from ignoring the fact that he burned to have her, from denying his very nature. He wasn't human anymore, dragged down by human taboos. He was a vampire, with an immortal's needs.

Delilah knelt beside him, dark eyes flashing in wicked exultation, the consummate temptress.

Removing his hands from behind his head, he laid a palm on her tiny waist. "You understand that if Raina wasn't encouraging me to claim full rights as Lord of our Coven, nothing would take place between us?"

She nodded. "Yes, my Lord."

His balls tightened. "You further understand that I'm in charge here. You'll do as I command." Right. Like the caveman shit would have better results with her than it did

with Raina.

Her dark eyes glittered with amusement as she slid a delicate hand up the inside of his spread thighs. “Indeed? Then you are delusional...Johan.”

Exasperating female! “You will – ahhhh.”

Her clever fingers found his sac, kneading. Manipulating his balls with delicious pressure. She moved to crouch between his legs and grasped his aching shaft with her other hand, squeezing. He moaned low in his throat, fangs throbbing. His entire body strung tense as a bowstring from avoiding this pleasure for days.

Fisting him, she pumped his length from head to base. Slow and excruciating. Building the heat of silken friction with clever fingers. Bending, she flicked out her pink tongue and tasted the broad head. Licked a drop of pre-cum, swirled, causing mini-shocks to zip down his shaft.

When Delilah took him in her mouth, he was certain he’d die from sheer ecstasy. He groaned, lifting his hips, granting her better access. Silently pledging his body to her wishes, despite his previous – and misguided – mandate. Fascinated, he watched his cock disappear between her sensual lips. Loved the warm, slick sheath sucking him, her shiny black hair curtaining his lap. Pulling him deeper into her web.

“Gods, yesss...”

A sudden spear of guilt had him reaching mentally for his mate. *Raina? Oh, Christ, I’m sorry.*

*No apologies, my love. I’m surprised you were able to resist even for a few days.* Her voice was rich with love, and a bit of humor. *We’re watching from the second story deck, Alexi and I. We think you two make quite a beautiful sight together.*

Watching. Observing Delilah kneeling between his splayed thighs, eating him like stick candy. Enjoying what they saw. The idea torched him from head to toe, and he moaned, grabbing a fistful of the towel he was lying on.

*Raina, you are my mate. If you have any doubts –*

*None, darling. There is no shame in Coven members loving one another, in sharing that love. Allow her to do as she wishes. Give her what you both desire. Fuck her and let me see the*

*beauty of your joining, let me share the experience through our bond.*

He nearly shot down Delilah's slim throat at the picture his mate painted. But not yet. Panting, he sat up and gently urged his lover from his sensitized, throbbing cock. "Easy, tigress, or this will be over too soon."

She smiled. "Doesn't matter. You possess an immortal's stamina and immediate recovery time now, lucky man."

He grinned back. "I keep forgetting."

She arched a dark brow. "Shall I demonstrate?"

"By all means." He liked this game. Even more, he liked Delilah.

"They're watching, aren't they?" She gestured at the second story, where Raina and Alexi hovered unseen.

"Yeah. Can't blame them. If the tables were turned, I'd do the same."

"Then let's make them so hot, they go at each other as well. Stand and turn to the side, give them that impressive profile for the full effect."

He complied, bracing his feet apart, erection arching to meet her. Delilah knelt at his feet, reached and drew him to her mouth once more. Slid him deep, taking the entire length down her throat as her small hands grabbed his ass cheeks and held him there.

"Shit! Ahh, fuck!"

He wasn't going to last. She was so goddamned sexy, swallowing him. Sucking hard, her tongue laving the underside of his cock. Bathing him in wet, hot wonder, taking him to the root. Tangling his hands in her hair, he urged her forward, began to pump his hips. Fucking her sweet mouth, loving the scrape of her fangs along his skin.

His balls tightened, his cum gathering, boiling...

With a shout he stiffened, jetting his seed down her slim throat. She drank greedily, every drop. At last his spasms subsided, but not his blinding need to bury his cock in her pussy. To claim her as her lord and master. He couldn't deny this part of himself any longer.

Still hard and ready, he slipped from her mouth and pointed to the towel. "On your hands and knees."

Lips curving upward, Delilah complied without a word. He inhaled the rich scent of her arousal as she spread her thighs, lifted her ass in delicious offering to him. The light from the torches danced across her bronzed little body, illuminated the pink, gleaming slit so wet and ready for his cock.

The beast in him roared for satisfaction, demanding that he fuck her hard and fast. He knelt behind her, laying one hand on the firm, round globe of her rear as he used the fingers of his other hand to rub her moist folds. She moaned, arching her spine as he spread her cream, teased her tiny clit. Next, he parted her folds and plunged two fingers into her channel, driving her to near insanity.

“Do you know how long I’ve ached for this, my saucy little vamp?” A whimper met his inquiry and he chuckled. Their resident spitfire with the smart mouth rendered speechless and coming apart in his hands? He could get used to this. “Do you want me inside you?”

“Yes,” she whispered, backing into his touch. Opening herself wider.

Steel threaded his tone. “Beg me.”

“Johan, fuck me! Please, my Lord...”

Her broken plea nearly sent him over the edge again. Every muscle trembled with the fierce urgency to couple with her. Withdrawing his fingers, he grasped her hips and guided the broad head of his cock between her folds. Nudged her entrance.

And then he pushed inside by inches, savoring her cry of joy. Relishing the sensation of her slick heat surrounding his shaft. She opened for him like a flower, submitting to his will as she’d done for no other. Knowing how important control was to Delilah, the innate dominance she wore like a suit of armor, he treasured the gift even more.

“You are mine now, little one.”

“Yes! Oh, gods...”

“I will protect you always.” The first rule of the Coven. Cherish and protect the others. Delilah – all of them – were *his*. And he belonged to them.

Digging his fingers into her flanks, he watched his cock part her tender flesh,

disappear into her fiery channel. Seated to the hilt at last, he held himself deep and let the decadence of their joining wash over him. Sweep him away.

*“Fuck me, now! Please, I can’t take this!”*

Shaking, he withdrew to the tip, hovering at her entrance. The *ardin* strained to be freed from its confines. Usually he held it in check to keep from hurting Raina even the slightest bit, but tonight his lust was too great, the fight too much. He let go, allowed the *ardin* to flood his veins, thick and burning like fire.

Growling in triumph, he slammed home, burying himself to the base. Filled her, grinding his balls against her juicy pussy. Then he withdrew and lunged again. And again. Hard and deep. Faster, faster.

*Claim her, fuck her. Mine!*

Loosing the beast, he pounded into her relentlessly. Rejoiced in the dark, feral creature he’d become. Nothing but the blazing fury between his thighs, his fangs throbbing in tempo to his thrusts. Bending over his lover, he twined his fingers in lush black hair and pulled her head back to expose her throat.

And plunged his fangs deep. She cried out, meeting his thrusts as her sweet nectar flowed over his tongue. Electrified every cell in his body. Her blood was rich and ancient. As a fledgling vampire, even a dominant one, Johan was no match for the explosion that rocked him to the core.

Release tore through him and he pulsed into Delilah. On and on, spilling into her, his eyes rolling back in his head from sheer pleasure. His release triggered hers and her walls convulsed around his cock, squeezing the last drops like a fist.

Raina’s husky voice penetrated the haze in his brain. *Ahh, yes. Just like that, my love. Do you know how beautiful you are fucking her? That is how a Vampire Lord claims his own.*

Withdrawing his fangs and slipping his cock from his lover, he smiled and shook his head. *I don’t know if I’ll ever get used to this...but learning is wicked fun, sweetheart.*

*Isn’t it? I’ll see you later. Much later, I assume.*

Raina knew he’d not return to their bed this night and wasn’t jealous. Gods, he was a fortunate man. He felt her withdraw and knew she would take her pleasure with

Alexi, their lovely blond former prince and her longtime companion. Given the circumstances, he could hardly begrudge them.

Sitting on the towel, he pulled Delilah into his lap and nestled her sex against his half-erect cock. She turned her small, exotic face to his, dark eyes questioning. “Thank you,” he murmured into her lips.

Before she could answer he kissed her thoroughly. Slid his tongue into her mouth and explored. Glutted on the spicy taste of her until she pulled back and settled her head against his chest.

“Satan’s cock, Johan, you’re an insatiable bastard.”

He laughed and hugged her close. This was his scrappy Delilah. “You’d have me no other way.”

“So true.” She fell silent for a time, idly stroking his side. Her featherlight touch stirred him again and he became so lost in her nearness, the worry in her voice plucked him from his bliss. “Have you seen Zane around lately?”

He frowned. “Not much. He’s been like a damned ghost since the battle with Drakkon and his demons.”

Delilah pulled back and looked up at him. “Raina said he won’t take his blood reward. He tried and it made him sick.”

“I know. He won’t talk to us about what Drakkon did to him, either. Every time we try, it seems to push him farther away. He just needs space, I suppose.”

“No, you’re thinking like a human now. It’s much bigger than that. I know Drakkon better than any of you, remember? I was his minion for years and he only plays one way – dirty. Johan...I think Zane has been enslaved by him. If Zane drank the Demon King’s blood--”

“That’s ridiculous. You specifically warned him not to and he knows better. He was a Warrior of Exodus, for fuck’s sake, far from a novice when it comes to dealing with unsavory beings.” The alternative was unthinkable.

“Yes, but he’s never dealt with Drakkon’s brand of evil seduction. What about the black stain on his bond with you and Raina?”

A winter chill gripped his heart. “There’s another explanation. There has to be.”

“And if there isn’t?”

“Then I’ll do what has to be done.”

Delilah stared at him in horror. “You’d execute your best friend?”

He cupped her face. “Only as a last resort. Raina and I have talked of this. There are other measures to try first. If Zane is truly infected with Drakkon’s blood, we can summon a Healer. If that doesn’t work, we can try turning him vampire.”

“If he is infected, the turning might go dangerously wrong. He could come out of it completely feral, Johan. If he does, you know there’s no hope. He’ll have to be...put down.” Her quiet voice broke on the last two words.

“Hey, it might not come to that,” he said softly, tracing her cheek with one thumb. *Please don’t let it come to that.* “Even if Drakkon gave him blood, the infection might not take. Since there’s no medical test for this, we’ll watch and wait. It’s only been two weeks since he was alone with the murdering asshole. In another two, his eyes will turn from his natural brilliant green to black and then glow red, or they’ll clear.”

“The green is already dull and muddy. But...some victims do recover without intervention,” she allowed. “So we wait.”

He nodded. “We wait. In any case, he’ll be fine for the party tomorrow night.”

“All right. He’s been so looking forward to his debut as our Coven’s thrall. I’d hate to disappoint him.”

“So would I.” Johan’s cock hardened under her lap. “What do you say we change the subject?”

She wrapped her arms around his neck. “Mmm. I believe a new one just came up. It’s your night off from Exodus patrol, isn’t it?”

“Oh, yeah. Tonight and tomorrow night, too.”

Johan stood, scooping Delilah into his arms, his groin already heavy once more. Without another word, he carried her into the palace, heading for her chambers.

Where he fully intended to fuck the luscious little female until sunrise.

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Zane stood rooted to his spot in absolute horror.

*I'll do what has to be done.*

*Execute.*

*Put down.*

His death discussed as casually as which old clothing to toss out of their closet. Yes, he felt their genuine worry and sorrow over what might have to be done. But they'd band together and they *would* execute him if necessary.

"Drakkon was right," he whispered through bloodless lips. Terror seized his heart, stole the breath from his lungs.

He was truly alone. Nowhere to run.

*Run to me, beautiful one. Why allow them to hurt you so? At least when I hurt you, you'll beg for more.*

Zane's balls tightened at the memory. He closed his eyes, recalling the cruel mastery of the Demon King. The way his body responded eagerly to the torture. So dangerous to let Drakkon have him again. Forbidden.

His blood yearned to taste the forbidden.

*You heard them. Eventually, they will kill you. Are you going to let them?*

He gave a bitter laugh. "You'll murder me when you tire of me, just like you do all of your slaves. Do you really think I don't know that?"

*I might, but what are your options? You can choose execution by Johan's hand, which will be merciless and swift, your pleas ignored. Or you can choose to serve your true lord and master, and be rewarded with death at the height of ecstasy should I choose to end your existence – which may never come to pass. I could very well decide to keep you forever.*

That, Zane supposed, was as honest an answer as Drakkon had ever given anyone. Either way, Zane was destined to die. Goddammit, he'd chose death on his own terms! At least Drakkon would keep him around a while, versus the mere days he had to live if he stayed here. Nothing would save him from the infection. Drakkon's blood was too powerful.

And though Johan's casual words hurt, Zane knew his friend would grieve over

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being forced to execute him. He couldn't let Johan live with the guilt for eternity.

*Come, my boy. Our bond will guide you to me.*

Traitorous body humming with dark desire, soul heavy, he hunched his shoulders against the cold and walked through the gate. Left the palace behind him as he trudged alone through the gloomy streets of St. Louis.

Ready to meet his twisted fate.