

Tempting Sin – Chapter One

By AJ Hampton

Chapter One

Howling wind tunneled down the nearly abandoned back alley of the nightclub, Sin. Debris and trash stirred into the air, moving above the gritty asphalt in a ghostly dance. A dented, faded blue trash bin held a scurry of squealing rats that grappled over the last scrap of rotten food. On the hunt for more, the shivering rodents escaped through a decayed, jagged hole. Hugging close against the building, their silhouettes created large shadows on the opposite walls.

A hiss erupted over the last remnants of an apple core, followed by a growling tussle of fur. A pitiful yowl melted into the night, silencing everything but the wind.

Annoyed at the scratching of short nails against pavement, Brendon Alexander narrowed his eyes. He pulled back his lips and bared teeth that weren't quite human. With a growl, he let the beast deep inside him leap toward the surface.

Sensing the danger, the animals froze, shrinking back before they scurried down the alley and rounded the corner to the busy street.

Satisfied that they were gone, Brendon tugged the invisible leash he held in his mind, forcing his tiger back into the depths before he could fully shift. Years of practice had taught him to control the animal inside. Drawing in a deep breath of frost-licked air, he turned back around.

Knocking briskly, he rapped his knuckles against the metal door in front of him.

A flake of snow landed on his cheek, melting from the heat of his skin. He drew his gaze up to the night, where bleak, dark clouds concealed the moon. The wind spun the hazed clouds, and even in the darkness he could see them churn and morph.

He blinked the flurries from his eyelashes as he watched the crystalline flecks spin against the breeze. Under the potent smells of the night, he could scent the falling snow.

His shoulders stiffened with the chill that pressed along his spine as a strong gust of frozen air made his eyes water. Swirling, the drifts fell harder, dusting his jacket until it melted and stained the leather.

He shouldn't be here. Not after what *she* did to him.

The hollow sound of hammering metal echoed through the barren alley as he pounded his closed fist harder. As his impatience grew, the control he held over his strength slipped until his insistent knocking made slight dents in the rusty metal. Waiting for someone to answer, he blew out a white blur of moisture, shivering as his eyelids fluttered shut at the sudden, severe drop in temperature.

He smoothed up the collar on his jacket, drawing the material closer around his face to conserve body heat. Movement sounded from behind the door. The day-old stubble on his jaw rasped against his collar as he took a step back.

"About time," he huffed, shoving icy fists into the pockets of his jeans. His heavy boots crunched over broken glass as he backed up. Because his acute hearing amplified the scratching sound the pieces made,

he cringed.

The door swung open in rush of warmth and muted light. An array of stifled sounds he felt more than heard pounded from deep within the club. The heavy beat of pulsing music, the murmur of laughter, and the muffled sounds of screams made up the chaos of the elite nightclub.

The scent of fear, excitement, and sex tickled his senses, drawing his beast dangerously close to the surface.

It figured that he'd track her here, to *his* club.

Something more beast than man stepped forward to fill every inch of the back entrance, effectively blocking the chorus of sound and heat.

Brendon had to lean his head back to scan the face that matched the bulk. Eyes with an iridescent shine, similar to his own, had eyeliner that extended past the edge of his lashes in a long, red line, which made his eyes appear cat-like. They stared down at him with an unsettling potency.

The tiger inside him hissed at the other feline shifter, and his fingers split into claws. The whiteness of his breath evaporated into the air as he waited for the bouncer to say something. There was a twitching of sheer muscle that rippled from the gruff, oblong face before it moved down a thick, meaty neck.

With an ethereal glow, the shifter's skin gleamed white, its pale flesh apparently unaffected by the frosty temperature. It stood seven feet tall in nothing more than a pair of form-fitting, black, leather pants that left nothing to the imagination. The beast's chest was smooth and slicked with a gloss of shimmering oil. Over its glistening shoulders, Brendon was

just barely able to make out the background of the club.

The familiar press of his Smith and Wesson 9mm against his lower back wasn't much of a comfort in those first few seconds, when he felt the wisps of power emanating off of the thing in front of him. This fight, if the bastard gave him a hard time, would be fought with teeth and claws. Anticipation rose within him, making his skin itch to split apart and reveal his cat.

A slow, sadistic grin lifted the corners of his mouth. With a mischievous narrowing of his eyes, he drew his gaze up the solid four-hundred pound block of muscle.

Fists that seemed as large as Brendon's head curled into boulders. A deep, menacing growl vibrated through its chest in a warning to back off.

"Lines in the front, pussy cat," the bouncer hissed.

If Brendon were smart, which wasn't always the case, he'd turn and march back through the fresh layer of snow. Getting past the bouncer would be an issue, but not a problem he couldn't handle. He was here in the middle of the night for a reason, and he wasn't going to leave without getting what he came for.

"I'm here for Amelia." Brendon's voice was raspy from the frost.

The thing snarled and flashed what weren't quite fangs, but looked more like canines. Suddenly, Brendon wasn't quite sure he wanted to know what this thing shifted into. He'd heard rumors of cross breeding, something he'd thought impossible until his father, the man he'd

inherited his shifting gene from, was torn apart by a half wolf-half bear. Not many things could take down a five-hundred pound tiger.

“She is not your business, boy.” Its voice was low and gritty, like tires grinding over unpaved road. “You want in, go wait in line like all the other pathetic sightseers.”

Brendon gritted his teeth and reached for the handgun tucked against his back. White smoke from the freezing moisture of his ragged breath clouded his watery vision as he pulled the weapon free and aimed it dead center between the things glowering eyes. Flicking the safety off, he held his hands out, steady in a firing position, a silver bullet ready to fire.

Laughing, the shifters deep voice rumbled over Brendon’s body and scathed his soul. The cat inside of him, vicious in its fearlessness, fought even harder to break free. It didn’t care how big or tough his enemy was.

“Bullets won’t hurt me, but you’re welcome to try. I find the pain exciting.”

Brendon cocked his head to the side, a slow grin pulling at his lips as he took a step forward, glass and snow crunching under his boots. “You’re one sick mother fucker. These bullets are made of silver. It won’t kill you, I know, but it’ll take a while to heal. Just let me in—my fight’s not with you, unless you feel like making it that way.”

Teeth that looked long before grew sharper as it snarled, its nostrils flaring. Its balled fists unclenched, fingers shaping into claws, and a ripple

of power moved through sheets of muscle.

Brendon's heart sped, and his blood raced through his veins.

"Do you wish to die tonight, tiger?" the shifter snarled, eyes narrowing into slits that now curved toward its pointed ears.

"I've come to see Amelia," Brendon growled. "This is your last warning. Either we do this, or you move the fuck out of my way."

Their gazes locked for just a moment, and Brendon let the power unleash from inside of him. An unspoken understanding passed between them; Brendon would fight to kill, and he had the means to back it up.

"Kieran will not be pleased."

"Fuck Kieran. I'm not here for him," Brendon spat, his tone growing more impatient with every second he stood out in the cold.

"As you wish." The bouncer nodded. An apparition of a terrifying smile swept across his face before it shifted back into a human man and moved to the side.

Brendon hesitated for a moment, staring at the rippled back of the bouncer, before he slid the safety back on and tucked his weapon into the front of his jeans. Heat moved over him as he stepped inside and the door behind him slammed shut to seal out the whirling of wind that still roared in his head. His skin prickled at the temperature change, and loose snow melted and ran down the front of his jacket.

Red lights flashed in tempo with dark, melodic music. It morphed into a slow shift of hues until the light was an eerie blue that glistened in the atmospheric darkness. A haze of fog clouded everything. From a

distance, he couldn't really be sure what he saw. The closer he got to the main room, the louder the mindless beat of the music became. A bead of sweat rolled between the blades of his shoulders, tickling his skin until it disappeared.

Black painted walls made the club seem never-ending. Private rooms were neatly concealed through seamless doorways he could barely make out.

He scanned the crowd, sifting through the throngs of bodies that ground erotically against one another. There was a tangle of nude bodies in the middle of the dance floor, and the scent of sex was almost too much. Eyes narrowing, he caught a flash of fangs as a deep scream rang through the air before it turned into a moan of ecstasy.

Not sure if the impromptu sex fest was a show or just a happenstance, he decided he couldn't care less. The group gyrated together in a twist of writhing flesh, moving like one mindless entity of desire that the spectators couldn't help but watch. He tilted his head back. Above the crowd, blue metallic railings exposed a second story balcony.

Taking a deep breath, he grimaced. The air was so stale, he could almost taste it. He focused on the giant ahead. The crowd parted for the formidable beast, letting the alpha pass. With a purposeful stride, he followed.

He ran a hand through his wet locks, shaking his hair free of dripping moisture. A brunette sidled up against his side, startling him for a moment. The overwhelming scents and sounds threw him off his game.

She pressed blood-red nails against his chest in a seductive manner. Covered in a black, see-through lace halter, her breasts were large and soft when she pushed them against his arm. Like ice, her hand trailed under his stubble-covered jaw and brought his gaze away from her breasts and up to her face. Eyes that were a deep purple shimmered unnaturally, and it matched the highlights in her russet curls.

“Looking for a good time, kitty-cat?” she purred. The tip of her forked tongue slithered over a fang she flashed before she rose onto the tips of her toes to take his earlobe between her teeth. Her hand traced down his chest, making the muscles underneath his shirt flex in instinct.

He caught her wrist before her fingers settled on the buckle of his belt. Squeezing the cool flesh as tight as he could, he ripped her hand away and shoved her back a few feet. “Back off, bitch. This cat’s not on the menu.”

His tone was harsh, and the vampire hissed before she turned in a huff and disappeared into the crowd.

Brendon shivered as revulsion moved through him. He wanted to get in and get out of this hellhole called Sin. The music shifted with the lights, and the horde of vampires, humans, and shifters pulsed in an orgy of energy.

A gap in the crowd parted, and the breath in his lungs slowly drifted over his lips when he spotted her. She sat alone, a miasma of light surrounding her, despite the dark vagueness of the club.

He glanced at those who watched her as if they were studying her

every breath. Half of her audience seemed to hope it would be her last; the other half seemed to want to feel that warmth against their lips.

A bored expression curved her full lips. She sat with her back to the bar, her elbows resting behind her on the silver railing. It exposed the strong line of her shoulders. It was a pose that said she wasn't in the mood to be fucked with. A potent image rolled through him, clenching his stomach, as he remembered how the curve of her shoulder felt under his mouth.

To her left was a full drink, the glass dewed with moisture that rolled down the side and pooled around the flute. Sounds from the balcony caught her eye, and she turned her head toward it.

Brendon's gaze moved with her, taking in her golden-blonde hair that was twisted up. A few lone tendrils fell in wispy curls around her face. The power radiated off her in waves and made the tiger deep inside him purr. She always had that affect on him.

Pale, green eyes shimmered as he approached, her inky pupils dancing in the flashes of light. Her eyes were drawn in dark mascara and smoky gray eyeliner that made her look paler than the last time he'd seen her almost six months ago. She twisted the lithe lines of her body, crossing one leg over the other, as she sat at the bar like a goddess on display. In some ways she was—the queen to the son of a bitch who called himself the vampire king.

That would change. Tonight.

The dress she wore was black, tight, and when she moved, the hem

inched higher, exposing the contour of her thigh. The bodice strapped across her breasts and seemed to leave everything else exposed. Her shoulders sparkled with glitter, the colored lights making it seem as if she were glowing. He knew, though, that it had little to do with glitter and everything to do with the magic that ran untamed in her veins.

Brendon crossed the distance between them, his shoulder nudging through the crowd without mercy until he found his way in front of her. She turned her head, sensing his approach. He scanned her face and found nothing but unforgiving darkness.

A wealth of emotions hit him at once as she shoved her power at him, and it was like a slap in the face. Not a vampire, and not a shifter, Amelia was a being all her own.

He'd never meant to fall for her; the probability of it had been one in two million. She'd gotten under his skin without even blinking her doe-like eyes, and right now he realized how badly that pissed him off. She was stubborn, bossy, and sexy as hell.

Standing silently, he was caught in a moment where he had to decide if was going to capture her crimson lips or drag her out back and fuck her. Perhaps both.

"Goin' goth now? It looks good on you, sweetheart." He whistled and trailed a finger along her cheek before she turned her head away from his cruel caress.