

CHILD OF DARKNESS

By Caroline Metzloff

Prologue

The razor demon hit the wall with a satisfying thud, its greasy blood streaking down the dirty concrete wall of the building, like black sludge on a warm day. His slick, black hair barely moved from the impact, though his numerous gold chains clanged loudly against each other from his open tan, silk shirt. A warning streak of lightning flashed against the sky, illuminating the dark, garbage strewn alley and the bug zapper flickered on and off as it disintegrated the surrounding bugs. Back alleys, they were all the same, and lately, they were where Holly conducted most of her business.

Holly knew she had the advantage over the dazed demon, but only for a few minutes at best. The fight had been going on for nearly ten minutes now, back and forth, back and forth, until finally she had managed to throw him head first in to that wall.

It had been very close.

In the background a police siren wailed and the thunder roared, backing up the ominous lightning. She had to work fast, and for more than one reason. Deftly she reached down and pulled a long, black, curved knife out of her boot. Throwing her leg up, she caught him squarely in the throat with her heel, and held him tightly in place. She leaned in and brought the knife up to his face.

Razor demons, somehow they always looked like cheap pimps to her. His eyes flashed orange with hatred...it made her laugh. He spat at her. Of course he did.

“See, it doesn’t have to be like this, why do you guys always go and make things so ugly? All you have to do is tell me what I want to know, and no one gets hurt.”

“I shall never answer to a human child.” His voice was strangely deep and hollow as if it emanated from elsewhere. She grimaced, razor demons were so stilted.

“Yeah, well you’re going to answer to me, or I’m gonna send you home to poppy, and I hear he’s not in a good mood lately.”

“What would a human rat know of my world.” He spat.

“I’m not human, so relying on my ‘humanity’ would be a very big mistake. I’m looking for a female. A very old and powerful female. The first female. Tell me what you know.” She said with great intensity.

“Human rat. Scourge of the earth. Made from dirt and soon to return to that from whence you came. What business is the politics of Heaven and Hell to to a virus such as yourself. I shall feast on your human bones, I shall lick the marrow from my fingers.” He hissed, baring his five rows of razor sharp teeth.

“Yadda, yadda, and then we can paint each other’s nails.” She whispered as she plunged the knife in to his chest. He disintegrated in to an oily splotch.

“Say hello to papa, amigo.” She muttered.

With disgust she wiped her hands on her well worn black tights. Razor demons, good fighters, and flashy dressers, but man they made for a messy demise.

She walked slowly in the rain, letting it wash the demon grime from her as it pelted down from the sky. The dark and dirty alley way she strode through was in the most dangerous, seediest part of town. The part of town that soccer moms never even drove through, where hotels rooms were rented by the hour and bed bugs were pets.

A part of town that pretty young girls *never* just strolled around corners, they worked them...deals were made and lives were ended.

But Holly was neither a whore nor an addict.

She was the child of Lilith. And she was looking for her mom.

Chapter One

The orange and purple neon sign read ‘Mount Caramel Hotel’. Or rather, it would have read, if both of the O’s hadn’t been burned out. The bug zapper zapped incessantly beside the entrance of the dilapidated old hotel. What was it with the bug zappers in this town? They were everywhere. The paint was peeling, a step was missing and the door squealed when you opened it...the hotel had seen better days. It had been home for two weeks now.

Holly took a quick look in at the dark and smelly lounge and wondered if she should head in and win some cash. A quick game of poker or pool, a couple of extra bucks. The locals were always eager to bet against a young teen, especially a young teen *girl*. They considered her easy pickings. They were wrong, and Holly made a living playing against stereotypes. The barkeeps invariable turned a blind eye and allowed her to stay and play even though she was obviously underage, Holly tipped well. Business is business.

But she was tired, she checked her wallet and found fifteen dollars and some change, not a fortune by any standards, but it was enough. Tomorrow, tomorrow she would hustle some

money. Tonight she was tired and sore, so she trudged past the sleeping front desk clerk and carried on up the dark, stained staircase.

Dressed in her worn leather biker jacket, black tights and shitkicker boots that hid a variety of concealed weapons, Holly looked far more menacing than your typical eighteen year old. Her dirty blonde hair poured down her back in wet tangles and her black eyeliner was more than slightly smeared from her business in the alley. But apparently not menacing enough, the paunchy man in the yellowing wife beater looked her over with appreciation.

Here we go a-freaking-gain. She sighed.

“Heeeeeey...baby.” Wife beater snickered as he did a little dance in front of her, effectively blocking her way past him. “You lonely tonight?” He reached out and grabbed her shoulder. “You look like a sweet little thing.” His breath smelled of garlic and cheap whiskey as he grinned down at her, searching for breasts no doubt.

“Not really.” She replied tonelessly. “Remove your hand.”

He laughed at her. “I’m just being friendly is all sugar.”

“Do it now.” She whispered.

He leaned in closer and Holly was assaulted by the heavy, unwashed scent that seeped out from him. She was so not in the mood for some drunken yahoo idiot.

“Last chance.” She whispered somewhat louder with a slight shake of her head. She knew he wouldn’t take it, he was far too stupid to read the menace emanating from her. She knew his type.

“You think you is one tough chickie, huh?” He teased, his attempt at charm came off more as smarm, his breath made her stomach lurch. “Come here baby, show daddy how tough you is.” He smiled suggestively and pulled her closer to him roughly, his free hand reached for her breast.

Mistake.

She raised her head and smiled coldly up at him, and as he looked in to her dark navy blue eyes, his hand froze. They glowed, her eyes had begun to glow.

Before he could even tell what was happening, Holly had spun around, punching him squarely in the jaw on one side and kicked him on the other side of his head, he reeled ion to the wall. She threw him face down on the floor. With one foot placed firmly on his back, she held his arm out behind him and applied just enough pressure to make him whimper.

“I don’t think anything buddy. And just to be sure, I don’t recommend you pestering young girls ever again. You just never know when you might come up against the wrong one. That, would not end well for you. Do we have an understanding?”

He moaned under her boot. She pulled harder on his arm.

“I can’t hear you. Don’t make me rip this off, because believe me, I’ve had a really bad night, I’m looking for someone to take it out on.”

“Okay, okay! Shit! I just wanted to have a little fun, let me go!” He cursed as sweat poured off his face.

Holly let go of his arm and jumped off his back. “Idiot.”

Wife beater scrambled up, and made a quick getaway. “Crazy bitch.” He threw over his shoulder before he slammed his door shut. Holly heard several locks clicking in to place. She had no interest in following him and showing just how crazy this bitch was, she faced bigger and badder almost nightly. But the sound of all those locks clicking in to place did put a small smile on her face.

She walked up the last flight of stairs and fumbled in her pocket for the keys to her room. Damn. She hoped she didn’t lose them in the fight with the demon in the alley. The idea of having to break in again exhausted her, and her muscles were already aching. All she wanted was a nice long bath. Razor demons were tough, they hit hard and taking one on single handed was always a serious fight, but they were usually ‘in the know’. They had a reputation as ‘underground gossips’ so she had really hoped to get something, anything out of him. But she had gotten exactly nothing, he didn’t even seem to know who she was, which was, in retrospect, a good thing. The last thing she wanted was to fight Heaven and Hell at the same time.

No one in their right mind walked in to that battle on purpose.

She found her keys and opened the warped door that led in to her room.

Her room. This week anyway. Holly was on the move, and she wouldn’t stop until she got her mother back. Just how she was going to do that, and how they were going to survive on planet Earth, with Heaven and Hell both gunning for them....

The decrepit room was just as she had left it. The wallpaper peeling, an old sheet for a curtain on the one small window. The bed unmade, her bag containing her few possessions thrown across the chipped dresser that was missing more than one drawer, several bottles of water and an empty pizza box. Wait, the box hadn’t been empty when she left.

Oh shit. Adrian was here.

“Lucy...I’m home!” She called out, sighing as she threw the empty pizza box in to the trash. She had really been looking forward to cold pizza. Adrian could be such a mooch.

A beautiful, blonde head, haloed by a soft golden glow poked out of the washroom doorway.

“Do you realise that you are perilously low on toilet paper?” Adrian asked in his clipped upper class accent.

Adrian the angel. Adrian with his navy blue glowing eyes, his golden skin, wavy shoulder length golden hair and perfect jaw. Beautiful Adrian, who hadn't passed the guardian angel test yet so was still just classified as a cherub. He wasn't particularly fond of the term 'cherub', therefore Holly used it constantly. They had met by accident several months ago, and for some strange reason, she had found herself trusting the beautiful, young angel. He was her only friend now.

Being friends with Adrian was easy, she didn't have to keep secrets or construct stories for his protection. For instance, she hadn't had to explain anything about her mother...he already knew. Lilith was a name very well known to all who traversed the heavenly realm. He knew all about demons...and was very good at protecting himself, although Adrian never seemed to get dirty in the process. Holly had no idea how he managed that, but she assumed it came part and parcel with his angelic glow. Politics had placed them on opposing sides in an ancient battle, fate had something else in mind.

Lilith, Holly's mother, had been the first human female ever created on planet Earth alongside the first male, Adam, in the garden so long ago.

The mandate had been to be fruitful and multiply, but Lilith had seen no reason for herself to be second to Adam. When she questioned the current ranking, Adam had become enraged, refusing to discuss it and attempted to use his physical size as dominance over her. She ran.

The archangels pursued her, but were unable to strike her down because she had consumed fruit from both the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. Instead they placed several curses upon the scared and shivering female. Of the curses bestowed upon her, Lilith had found the loneliness of barrenness to be the heaviest.

Lilith walked the earth for thousands of years, witnessing mankind's unique journey through time. She watched as the children of Adam and his new wife, Eve, filled the earth. She watched them build cities, design pyramids, crown kings and queens; she watched them wage wars. Surrounded by the ever growing human population, yet genetically disconnected from the race, Lilith sought friendship in other super beings.

You see, the apples had not only enhanced Lilith's intelligence, they had left her immortal as well. Her regenerative ability was astounding, she was a quick learner and she was exceptionally strong. Lilith was truly formidable.

She hadn't been taken without one hell of a fight.

The curses were intended to destroy her, and make a lesson of her defiance. But Lilith was much stronger than they had ever imagined.

She ran, she hid, she learned, she loved. She survived.

And then the impossible had happened. Lilith was pregnant. Fearful for her child, she procured an old and powerful spell from an equally old and powerful friend, this spell kept the fetus in stasis in her womb for thousands of years. And so she waited for just the right

century to bare her young. She waited for herself to become a myth. Finally the time arrived, and Holly was born. Lilith had succeeded in the unimaginable and thwarted Heaven.

But the deed had not gone unnoticed. Six months ago they had come in the dead of the night and taken her while Holly was away. Who exactly 'they' were, Holly wasn't sure, and apparently they couldn't trace Holly herself, because she was still standing, but you could be sure she was a target. To Heaven, she was an abomination, to Hell...leverage. Later, when she had met Adrian, she had found that to be more than suspicion, it was fact. This was Holly's best weapon, neither angels, demons, nor all in between could trace Holly Vanright. Only Adrian the angel was able to, and that was only due to the fact that he had reached in to her soul and healed her one night as she lay dying in a gutter. Little had he known that the soul he was healing, was number one on both Heaven and Hell's list. According to the 'Order of On-high', Adrian, as an angel was required to turn Holly in to the archangels, but after he had felt her soul, he found himself conflicted. He did what he could to assist her in her search instead. His resources as a cherub were not astoundingly plentiful, but he quickly became Holly's best friend anyway.

Holly had inherited her mother's strength and natural ability, her IQ and her beauty, but Holly had something that her mother didn't. Holly *had* powers. Holly could throw a shield up around her and a limited space, she could move things without touching them, and she could blow things up. Small things, and it took tremendous energy, but she could do it. When the abilities had first manifested themselves after her mother's abduction, she had been terrified. She hadn't known how to use them, and she had no one to ask. She still wasn't entirely sure how they worked but she was making progress all of the time. Demons gave her a lot of opportunity. Holly was sure these abilities had come from her father, which only solidified the idea that her father could not have been human. She had never known him.

"Apparently I'm out of pizza too." She commented dryly, as she flung herself in to the only, moss green, under stuffed chair in the dark and dingy room.

"And soap. You mustn't forget the soap." Adrian added as he turned the dim light out in the small, moulding washroom.

"Did you find anything from the Razor demon, or did you lose your temper and recycle him?" The angel asked with a knowing smile on his full, perfect lips. He perched lightly on the bed and wrinkled his nose.

Holly shrugged, of course she had lost her temper. The demon called her human. It happened.

"You smell like dirty demon and cheap whiskey. Perhaps you should jump in the shower while I find some dinner for you. I've left some soap for you. You do need it. We have a lot to talk about when you get out." He said meaningfully.

Her pulse sped up instantly. "What did you find out?" She asked, completely alert now.

The angel shook his finger. "Shower first. And perhaps some clean clothes? Your attire is appalling."

Holly flashed him her middle finger, but headed for the shower anyway. Adrian wasn't one to be pushed, when he said later, he meant it, and no matter how much that irritated Holly sometimes, she knew there was nothing she could do about it.

When she emerged from the shower twenty minutes later, Adrian was waiting with pizza and pop, toilet paper and soap.

Clad in an extra large Iron Maiden tee-shirt, Holly was ready for pizza and bed. In exactly that order. She launched herself at the pizza box, suddenly ravenous. It wasn't cold, but it was cheesy. She looked up at him expectantly.

"Have you heard of Dionysus?" Adrian asked casually.

"Mythical Greek god." Holly replied before taking a huge bite of the extra cheesy pepperoni and mushroom. "Fifth grade studies."

"Oh, he is quite real I assure you."

"No shit!" She replied between bites. Anything was possible now. Holly had heard and seen more than she wanted to process in the last six months since her mother had been abducted, a Greek god was far from the most shocking.

"No shit." The angel confirmed in his upper class, clipped way, as if the words were unfamiliar on his tongue. Which in fact they were.

Dionysus. Ancient Greek god of fertility...and wine. Had her mother known him in his prime? Lilith had walked the earth for countless millennia, obviously they would have traveled in the same time.

"And the other gods? You know, like Hercules, Athena, Zeus?"

"Some are still around, a few pledged allegiance to the new powers, some died but most went in to hiding when the age of the gods ended in Greece." The angel shrugged. "Politics."

"Did my mother know about them?" She asked. Lilith had told Holly much, but not nearly as much as Holly had assumed. But then again, how could you impart many millennia of information to a teenager. Lilith had told her the basics, assuming they had many lifetimes together. Unfortunately someone had had other plans.

"Evidently."

"So what about Dionysus? Do you think he knows something about my mother?" She reached for the bottle of Coke Zero Adrian had thoughtfully provided.

“Perhaps, I have been doing some routine research in the great accord halls and I noticed a few interesting entries that bore his name. That made me think that the spell that held you in stasis could have come from him, he was after all, ‘God of Fertility’. Something of that magnitude would have been well within the powers of a demigod.”

“Demigod?”

“Half human.” He answered.

“So that means he knows something, how?”

“Well, it doesn’t mean he knows anything, but it does mean he has possibly helped Lilith in the past, therefore he may be persuaded to help now.”

Holly stared blankly at him.

“He is connected. To Heaven *and* Hell.”

Holly shuddered to think of her mother being held prisoner in Hell, although Heaven wouldn’t be much more pleasant when you stopped to think about it.

“If she were in Heaven, wouldn’t you know about it? I mean you live there, could they keep something like that secret?”

“I’ve already told you. Heaven is a very big place, it would be like me saying ‘you live in America, shouldn’t you know my cousin Jim-bob?’ She could be anywhere, which is why I suggest we enlist help.”

“Jim-bob?”

“I trust you understood my very savvy analogy using current vernacular.”

“You aren’t going to tell me anything about your home are you.” She didn’t even bother to phrase it as a question. Adrian was notoriously tight lipped about ‘on-high’.

“I wouldn’t even know how to begin.” He admitted with a devastatingly angelic smile that lit up the room...literally.

“Well, where is this Dionysus?”

“Dionysus currently lives in what you call ‘California’, and he now goes by the name Mr. Dion. In this incarnation, he is a movie producer, according to the gossip, he did love the arts.” Adrian responded wryly.

Holly sprang up from her bed. “Alright, I’ve got a bus schedule here somewhere.”

She fumbled through the pockets of her leather biker jacket.

“Not so fast.”

"You're right. I've got an app for that." She nodded as she reached for her smart phone.

"That's not exactly what I meant. You were in at least two fights this evening. And I know how your temperament fares when you are tired or hungry. I can always transport us both there in the morning if need be. You need your rest, Dionysus is not a lower level demon." Adrian gently reminded.

"True. But if he is as connected as you think he is, someone might see me arrive with you. They'll bust your ass up there if they think you know where I am. How do you know who he sides with? It's not like he hides himself...Mr. Dion...come on, that isn't even trying."

Adrian smiled again, lighting the room with his soft glow, making him almost too beautiful to look at.

"Sweet of you to worry about me." He responded quietly. "Sweet but unnecessary."

"Okay glow ball, stop it. You're hurting my eyes." She muttered as she quickly averted her eyes.

Glancing away from Holly, Adrian's blue eyes fell upon her knife. The dangerous, black curved knife that Holly never fought without. Curiously he picked it up off of the dilapidated dresser. Carefully he placed it first in one hand, than the next.

"Where did you get this knife?" Adrian asked as he ran his fingers delicately down the black blade. The symbols carved in to the handle specifically held his attention.

"It was my mother's. She said it had been a gift from a very good friend. That it was both ancient and priceless."

"Indeed." He responded. "It would have been a very good friend. These symbols are written in Anastis. The official language of Heaven and Hell. This is not a simple knife you see, it would be considered a relic to both. Very deadly, very sought after."

Holly's navy blue eyes met the angel's. She held her hand out slowly. This knife had been one of her mother's most prized possessions...and the only knife that she knew of that recycled demons so effectively.

With great reluctance he handed the knife back to Holly. Carefully, she received the knife from him and tucked it behind the pillow under her head. It wasn't that she really thought Adrian would steal the knife from her, but it did make her uneasy, the way he stared at it. Like he recognised it somehow. She trusted Adrian, but she felt better with it beneath her head anyway.

"Bus leaves at eight tomorrow morning." Holly said, consulting her smart phone. "I should arrive in California by night fall. Crap. I don't have any money." She threw back the ratty covers and began to get out of bed. "I'm sure there are some guys left at the bar."

Adrian gently lowered her back down to the bed and tucked the covers, such as they were, around her.

“If you will not allow me to transport us there for fear of endangering me, at least allow me to procure your ticket for the forsaken *bus*. Sleep easy, the ticket shall be here upon your awakening.”

Gently he laid his soft hand on her forehead, working his ‘angel mojo’ as Holly referred to it, and she felt herself contentedly sink down in to the bed. She didn’t even bother to fight it, she was exhausted.

Holly’s last thought before sleep over took her was of her mother...as it always was. The gentle glow of the angel, seated in the moss green chair, served as a night light chasing darker thoughts and memories away from Holly’s exhausted mind. She had seen so much in the past months.

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When Holly awoke, Adrian was gone. But sitting on the dresser, next to a muffin, was a one-way ticket to Los Angeles.

She pulled the charger for her phone out of the wall, at least she could fill her time on the smelly bus by looking up everything she could on good old Dionysus...and his alter ego ‘Mr. Dion.’ She had never paid enough attention in grade school, come to think of it, there were a number of things she should have paid closer attention to. Better late than never...she hoped.

She packed her few belongings and said goodbye to her home of the past two weeks. She wouldn’t miss it.

Bus stations were all the same. People coming, people going, people excited, people depressed. It was a cornucopia of people and emotions. Holly kept her head down as she made her way through the throng. She didn’t really want a lot of attention, and she wasn’t in the mood for well meaning chit chat, she hadn’t been for some time now. She just wanted to get on the bus and start researching. A small part of her wished that Adrian was there, the angel was the only person she *could* talk to lately. Hunting is lonely.

Holly felt a prickling feeling crawl up her back and centre itself just at the base of her neck. She knew that feeling. She was being watched. With a show of great indifference, she reached around and ran her fingers through her tangled dark blonde hair, allowing her to appear casual as she looked behind herself.

Scavenger demon. Dressed like a homeless man in his forties or fifties, he ambled along behind her, only identifiable by the red rims and dark hollows around his deep, black eyes.

Damn scavengers, her mother had regularly dispensed of them. They smelled terrible and they preyed on lone teens, gaining their strength and longevity from the youth they inhaled. They disgusted her, but they were easily disposed of, it just meant she might miss her bus. Shit. She glanced at the ugly demon again...Dionysus was going to have to wait.

Sighing to herself, she turned the corner that took her in to a deserted back alley way, exactly where the demon wanted her. The scavenger demon excitedly followed her, he couldn't have asked for more.

Dark, dirty back alleys, they all looked the same. Overflowing garbage, stray cats digging around for scraps, ugly rats with their beady little eyes, graffiti and peeling paint. This wall had a very inaccurate depiction of a male appendage with the cute phrase 'suk it' written in childlike block letters immediately beneath it. Hilarious.

She waited, muscled tensed and ready for immediate action, as the scavenger demon shuffled towards her turned back, gleeful in his luck. With all of her senses on high alert, she waited until he was just close enough.

And like a flash she threw a roundhouse kick, causing him to stumble backwards. She hated scavenger demons nearly as much as her mother had. His eyes flared red as he realised that she was not a scared human teen that he could overcome easily.

"You freaking coward!" She screamed as she spun around landing another kick on the retreating demon. "How many kids have you sucked dry!"

The demon, angered now, extended his clawed hands and lunged for Holly's face. She ducked as his dangerous claws swept forward and snagged on her hair, successfully pulling a few strands out by the root. She screamed. He smiled and roared.

"You asked for it scabface." She muttered and pulled her hand back as she concentrated carefully on her target.

Before she could send her energy out, the demon's heavy fist shot out for her head and knocked her across the alley, head first in to the cold concrete. Dazed by the force of the blow she lay there, collecting her breath. The demon, no longer shuffling, sprinted forward and loomed over her. His weight was crushing. He opened his mouth to reveal a second, drooling mouth that hovered over hers.

It was now or never and as he prepared to inhale her youth and vitality, she struck. She plunged the small pocket knife from her key chain in to his red and wrinkled neck. It only went in less than an inch, but it was enough to buy her those much needed seconds.

He roared and clutched his neck, pulling the small knife out, Holly used the time to roll out from under him and stand up. He swept at her with his claw and brought her back down on the concrete in a heap, anger and pain written on his ugly face. But she was ready.

She flung her hand at him, open palmed and his face caught fire. The force that emanated from her sent her backwards and she fell to the dirty ground once again. He immediately reached up to stop the flames but the fire radiated from within. He screamed in agony as his face burned from the inside out. Holly watched him impassively for a minute.

Reaching in to her shitkicker boots, she pulled out her long, black knife and crawled over to him.

“You should thank me for this, I’m just a freaking bleeding heart do-gooder today it seems.” She plunged the knife in to his chest and he disintegrated immediately.

She lay back down on the concrete and felt for the dampness on her head. Damn, she was bleeding, a lot. Head wounds, notorious for their blood, even when the wound wasn’t significant. But, this did mean that she had better stop the bleeding and clean herself up before she boarded the bus. Way too many questions if she didn’t. Reaching in to her pocket, she felt for a Kleenex. Now where was that washroom she had passed?

Cleaning up in the washroom took less time than she had expected, and other than a few curious stares, she managed the entire process without any interruptions and slid in to her seat on the bus at exactly seven fifty eight. She swallowed some pain killers with a bottle water and took out her phone.

She was on her way to Dionysus.