

A misty forest scene with tall trees and autumn foliage. The ground is covered in fallen leaves, and the air is hazy, creating a serene and slightly mysterious atmosphere.

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O Mighty Perseus

A Demon Hunter's Short Story

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Tory breathed in the crisp fall air on a sigh. She loved this time of year. Candy, kids, costumes. Halloween. It was always the one time of the year she felt normal.

"Come on. You're going to be late." As the disembodied voice whispered in her ear, she settled the bag of candy on her hip, rolling her eyes at the mist swirling around her ankles. Well, as normal as she could get.

"Sam, go away," she mumbled, kicking at the mist in the hopes of discouraging the spirit. He wouldn't be hovering if Michael was around but her mate was taking care of extremely important business, leaving Zadkiel to follow after her like a Labrador retriever. She glanced over her shoulder. Yep, her new *best friend* was less than ten feet behind her.

Not that Tory really needed Zadkiel's annoying presence. Halloween was the one night of the year she was safe. When the veil between the living and dead lifted and ghosts flooded the Earth, for reasons Tory had never quite understood, demons hightailed their demented asses back to Hell. Michael wouldn't have allowed her to leave the house otherwise.

"Why don't you let me carry that?" Zadkiel offered as he tried to lift the brown bag from her arms but she jerked it away, glaring at the angel.

"Oh no you don't. It's because of you I had to buy more. If you think I'm dumb enough to just hand this over to you, you've got another thing coming," she chastised, shaking a finger at Zadkiel before skirting around him and stomping up the walk toward the house she shared with her mate, Zadkiel, and several other of Michael's warriors. Her mouth twitched as she tried to hold back the smile threatening to consume her face at his sputtered apology. She should probably feel guilty pretending she was so upset with him but she couldn't. She was tired of residing with a bunch of males who thought nothing of raiding the kitchen without ever bothering to replace the things they consumed.

"Love, are you antagonizing the help again?"

Tory peered into the darkened depths of the front porch to find Michael sitting on the swing and the smile she'd been fighting took hold. The bag slipped from her hands unnoticed as she rushed to reach him.

"Missed me, have you?" his teasing cadence sent shivers down her spine as his arms wrapped around her and drew her onto his lap. Staring down at him, Tory snorted. Hell yeah, she'd missed him. But she'd never admit it. Michael's head was big enough.

Draping her arms around his neck, she soaked in his presence, wanting to melt against him. Sighing, she finally gave into the desire and whispered, "Did you find them?"

"Yeah," he replied softly into the shell of her ear before his lips pressed against her skin.

"And you are sure they are the right ones? They'll take care of her?"

"Love, I gave you my word. Your Ari will be protected."

Leaning back, Tory searched his gaze and what she saw in Michael's blue depths eased her fears. When he had suggested the unthinkable, the rebirth of Ari's soul, she had thought him crazy. And even more insane, as the child of two hunters. It seemed a sure-fire way to instill Gabriel's never-ending hatred. But who better to protect the mate of an Archangel?

Still it didn't totally ease Tory's anxiety.

"Now shouldn't you be getting ready for Halloween?" he asked as he stood, taking her small frame with him. "Don't you have a pointy black hat to don?"

Tory let her legs slide slowly down Michael's body and once her feet hit the ground, she elbowed him. "I can be a little more creative than that."

Chuckling, Michael cupped her ass, pressing her tightly against the bulging erection in his jeans. "Don't I know it," he said huskily.

She rolled her eyes. Michael might not be human, but just like a man, he only had one thing on his mind. "Nor am I dressing up as your personal sex kitten."

"A pity," he drawled as she skirted out of his embrace. "I thought it was such a good suggestion."

Yes, he had. And he'd even picked out the costume himself. The pink and black spotted fabric had barely covered her ass. There was no way Tory could answer the door dressed as a Naughty Pussycat. At least not without scarring the neighborhood children.

"I am not wearing that in public," she mumbled as she went to retrieve the grocery bag filled with candy only to discover it missing. Tory sighed. If Zadkiel touched one piece, she was going to kill him. She'd all ready had to replace her stash twice. Who knew angels' had such a sweet tooth?

Michael stopped her just as she was about to open the front door. Enfolding her back into his embrace, he leaned into her ear whispering, "How about a private showing later then?"

"You tore it, remember, trying to get it off me. It was beyond repair," she replied as she pulled away from him and yanked the door open before stepping into the foyer.

"I think you are over-exaggerating the damage, love."

Catching his reflection in the small mirror to the right of her, Tory smiled at the frown that had settled on Michael's face. Turning, she waited until Michael had closed the distance between them then ran her hands slowly up his chest. "Now why would I do that?" she whispered as on tippy-toes, she rubbed her lips against his. "That night ranks in the top ten of best nights ever. But you ripped it almost in two. Anyway, I'm dressing as Medusa tonight and it took forever to get the costume just like I want it."

Michael gave an exasperated sigh. "Well, that's hardly sexy. She was a demon, you know."

Tory took a mental step back. Okay that threw her. "Medusa really existed?"

"A Gorgon. They're for the most part extinct. Good thing, too, cause the snake thing is kind of hard to explain away to humans. Perseus made it his mission to exterminate the whole damn race."

"Perseus?" she squeaked out as she lifted her gaze to meet his.

"Was one of my best hunters," Michael said with a shrug. "Now shouldn't you be getting ready for your big night? It's almost dark and I absolutely refuse being subjected to the hordes of freeloading little monsters."

"But, baby, I'm going to need your help," she said huskily as she buried her face in his chest, hiding the smile that threatened to break free. "And I got the perfect outfit for you."

Michael stiffened against her. "No costume, Tory."

She kissed the spot covering his heart before softly saying, "Please. I promise to make it up to you."

"How?" he asked, sucking in a sharp breath as she rotated her hips, rubbing against the erection threatening to break free from his jeans.

"I got a surprise. A new costume."

Michael swallowed heavily. "What kind?"

Tory slid her arms around his neck before dragging him down to whisper in his ear, "Indian Princess."

As Michael descended the staircase, sputtering laughter reached him and his narrowed gaze swept across the foyer, ignoring the stunned looks on the faces of his six warriors until reaching Zadkiel. His second in command was not so covertly trying to hide his amusement.

"One word," Michael began in warning. "One word and I take it out in your hide."

Though his lips still twitched, Kaskiel managed to smother his glee. "I'm just surprised, Michael. I never would have suspected you had such nice legs."

Some snickering escaped the warriors behind Zadkiel and with a sigh, Michael glanced down, taking in the full scope of his humiliation. Tory had tried to appease him by calling it a tunic, but really, who was she kidding? He was in a fucking dress. Somehow she'd gotten him to agree to wear the cheesy fake battle armor, green dress, and vinyl greaves.

Michael snorted. Somehow, his ass. And without even glimpsing the Indian Princess outfit. It had better be worth it.

"Laugh it up, asshole," he growled, returning his gaze to Zadkiel. "My mate has plans for you." Michael felt a smidgen of satisfaction in watching his second blanch. "Where is the candy?" When Zadkiel's gaze hit the floor and all trace of humor disappeared, Michael groaned. "Tell me you didn't eat it. Again."

Zadkiel's head popped up, his eyes filled with worry. "I swear, this time, it wasn't me."

He felt it, in the pit of his stomach, the sudden anxiety even a horde of demons could not produce. And all because one little human female would soon be on the warpath. "Christ, are you trying to get us all castrated?" he demanded with a deep groan. "Go buy more."

"There is still some left," Zadkiel assured as he made a sweeping gesture to the small table next to the front door where a ceramic bowl in the shape of a pumpkin now resided. "I rescued it from Camael before he was able to devour the whole bag."

Michael looked about, finding Camael suspiciously absent and cursed under his breath. His warriors weren't fools, they knew who the title *Truly Scary* belonged to and it sure as hell wasn't him. When his mate was upset, they all ran for cover, leaving Michael to deal with the mess. If the demons ever discovered a few tears could send some of Heaven's greatest warriors fleeing for their lives, they'd all be screwed.

Inspecting the bowl, he was relieved to find it better than half full and prayed Tory wouldn't notice some was missing. "How much did he eat?"

"Two bags." Zadkiel studied the six warriors until they began to shift uneasily. "I believe he had some help."

Michael suspected his second was right, six someones given the guilty faces surrounding him, and was just returning the bowl to the table when, "How do I look?" reached him from the top of the stairs. Pivoting, he took in the long green gown and headdress of writhing black snakes. "Terrifying," he replied as he met her at the bottom. "Small children will weep in horror."

A small smile settled on her lips. "And will you protect them, O Mighty Perseus? Slay the evil Medusa with your big sword?"

"I'll slay you with my big sword, all right, love. Later," he drawled, his eyes narrowing on the way her dress tightened across her breasts as she lifted her arms to rest her hands on his shoulders.

"TMI," Zadkiel mumbled, turning from them to amble down the hall.

Tory's gasp drew his attention back to her but she was pushing away from him, her eyes fixed on something over his shoulder. Michael almost groaned when she rushed to the candy bowl. "Where is it?" she demanded, her gazing sweeping across the warriors and when she made a noise that sounded more like the growl of an Cerberus demon than a Gorgon, Michael knew she'd seen the same thing he had in their countenance. Guilt.

Grasping her by the shoulders, Michael attempted to massage away the tension the same time he hoped to ease her by saying, "I'll send Zadkiel for more."

It was at that moment the doorbell rang.

"There isn't time," she said with a sigh as bowl in hand, she moved to answer the door. "I'll just have to spell some more."

"Do you think that wise?" he asked while sending looks promising retribution to his six warriors. He'd make them all pay for putting him in the position, especially if Tory began to cry. Her casting was still not anywhere near where it should be as a witch with her power and her spells had a tendency to go wrong. Burn-the-house-down wrong. And Lord only knew what

would happen to the children she dispensed said spelled candy to. The last thing he needed was an epidemic of children turned into toads. Or given her Gorgon costume, to stone.

"Would you rather the house get egged when we run out of candy?" Tory asked after handing a piece of candy to the miniature Batman and Spiderman and shutting the door.

"That is what these knuckleheads are for."

Her lips twitched in amusement. "The kids would have to catch them first."

"I meant clean up the mess made by the little heathens but that works, too."

Tory's laughter was like music to Michael's ear. He might not have to kill the candy-eating culprits after all. And he was glad. His mate had grown used to the bastards being underfoot. She no longer tensed when one of the eight warriors he'd assigned to her protection entered the room. He'd hate to have their lives revert back to a series of uncomfortable interludes.

Watching as she slowly moved toward him, hips swaying provocatively, Michael gave a silent pray of thanks that she was his. Sometimes he still woke in a cold sweat, remembering her near-deadly encounter with the Archdemon Asmodeus.

That is, until she shoved the bowl of candy at him. Quizzically, he met her gaze, arching a brow and when she returned his mocking gesture, he asked, "What?" only to have Tory press the bright orange pumpkin into his chest. In a move more reflexive than anything else, he wrapped his hands around circular surface, taking possession of it. Then with a stomach dropping sense of dread, Michael watched her start up the stairs.

"Love, just where the hell do you think you are going?" he demanded, panic filling him as the doorbell rang. But Tory did not respond, she only kept climbing upward. "Tory, you cannot think to leave me to the task of passing out the candy."

"You'll do fine. And I'll only be a moment."

The doorbell rang again, drawing his narrowed gaze. Not a chance in hell. "Tory, get your ass back down here," he ordered, only to discover she had already reached the top of the stairs and had disappeared from sight. As the doorbell now rang in a series of quick secessions, Michael wondered if the culprit's parents would truly miss the little bastard. Because he was going to kill him some children.

Only a moment, his ass. For fifteen minutes, a steady stream of children had kept Michael too busy to follow after Tory and he still wasn't certain exactly why he'd continued to answer the door. Like he was really required to pass out candy to the snot-nosed little brats.

Damn it, it was all Tory's fault. He just couldn't stand to disappoint her.

The ground suddenly lurched beneath his feet and the walls surrounding him pulsed as the glass chandelier above his head began to sway. The pumpkin fell from his fingers to the floor, shattering on impact but to Michael, Tory's silly bowl hardly mattered. He was already teleporting to the attic.

Smoke blurred his vision and forced him to cough as he tried to take a breath. "Tory?" he called, praying she was in one piece, that this time she hadn't blown herself up. "Tory, answer me damn it."

"I'm right here," her voice called from his left and if his heart hadn't still been lodged in his throat, he might have found humor in her disgruntled tone. But once again, one of her spells had gone awry and it would take both time and distance before he saw any amusement in this blunder.

The attic door burst open, Zadkiel and Camael storming the room, both armed with fire extinguishers and as he groped his way to Tory, Michael was relieved to find the fire has already been put out. Streaked with soot and her hair slightly singed, she appeared unharmed and as he ran his hands over her small frame, searching for any burns, he said, "This is the last time, Victoria. I am too damn old for this. My heart can't take it."

A pout settled on her lips. "I was certain I could do this spell. It looked so easy."
He just shook his head and sighed. "At least you spelled the house this time. I don't know how we would have explained this to the neighbors. Not after the last time."

She snorted as he drew her into his arms. "Not like they don't already think we are strange. Just me living with you and the boys," she murmured dryly.

"I take offense to the remark," Zadkiel said from the other side of the room. "I am hardly a boy."

"And yet you still ate all of my chocolate," she retorted.

Guilt settled on his second's features. "Well there is that," he mumbled, glancing over at Camael but the other male was already making a hasty retreat.

"Unbelievable," Michael mumbled, shaking his head. His mighty angelic warriors all terrified of a little woman. But Zadkiel just shrugged.

"Camael has already had the pleasure of being turned into a mouse. Your mate left him like that for an hour," Zadkiel replied.

He threw up his hands. "Hell, she does that to me daily."

"But you are a sick bastard. You probably enjoy it."

"It does have its benefits," Michael murmured, glancing down at his mate and wondering how quickly he could get rid of Zadkiel so he could begin enjoying her. He'd lived up to his end of the bargain. Stupid skirt, worn. Candy to little brats, taken care of. Tory in their bedroom dressed as an Indian Princess, priceless.

"And I think Camael had the right idea," Zadkiel added before making for the door and Michael couldn't say he wasn't glad to see the other male go.

He curled his arm around Tory's waist and tried tugging her closer but she braced her hands on his chest, resisting. "I'll get you all dirty. My costume is ruined, isn't it?"

Michael gently kissed her forehead, hating the faint trace of sadness he heard in her voice. "Let's get you into the shower, Pocahontas. Then you can pretend I'm your Indian brave."

He breathed a bit easier when she giggled. As he led her from the attic and then down the stairs, Michael felt a twinge of disappointment that their first Halloween together had not gone as Tory had planned. But there would be more. Many more, in fact. Next year would be perfect. He would see to it. He just needed to lock up the candy.

About the Author

As a shy child, I learned at a very early age that one could be and do many different deeds, all it took was opening the pages of a book. From there, it was a natural progression into writing. A fan of all things paranormal and a lover of romance, it is hardly surprising to family and friends that I've combined these two great loves.

I live in the Midwest with my fixer-of-all-laptop-problems husband, three energetic and excessively talkative kids (send duct tape please), two of the laziest dogs who still somehow manage to chew up everything, and a swarm of invading ladybugs.

I love hearing from readers and can be found at madelynford.com or at my blog madelynford.com/blog.

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