

The Holy Dark
By: Kyoko M.

BOOK SIX: THE HOLY DARK

*There was a time you'd let me know
What's real and going on below
But now you never show it to me, do you?
And remember when I moved in you
The holy dark was moving too
And every breath we drew was hallelujah
Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah.
- "Hallelujah," Leonard Cohen*

CHAPTER ONE

JORDAN

Honest to God, I hadn't meant to start a bar fight.

"So. You're the famous Jordan Amador." The demon sitting in front of me looked like someone filled a pig bladder with rotten cottage cheese. He overflowed the bar stool with his gelatinous stomach, just barely contained by a white dress shirt and an oversized leather jacket. Acid-washed jeans clung to his stumpy legs and his boots were at least twice the size of mine. His beady black eyes started at my ankles and dragged upward, past my dark jeans, across my black turtleneck, and over the grey duster around me that was two sizes too big.

He finally met my gaze and snorted. "I was expecting something different. Certainly not a black girl."

I shrugged. "What can I say? My mother was a religious woman."

"Clearly," the demon said, tucking a fat cigar in one corner of his mouth. He stood up and walked over to the pool table beside him where he and five of his lackeys had gathered. Each of them was over six feet tall and were all muscle where he was all fat.

"I could start to examine the literary significance of your name, or I could ask what the hell you're doing in my bar," he said after knocking one of the balls into the left corner pocket.

"Just here to ask a question, that's all. I don't want trouble."

Again, he snorted, but this time smoke shot from his nostrils, which made him look like an albino dragon. "My ass you don't. This place is for fallen angels only, sweetheart. And we know your reputation."

I held up my hands in supplication. "Honest Abe. Just one question and I'm out of your hair forever."

My gaze lifted to the bald spot at the top of his head surrounded by peroxide blonde locks around the rim. "What's left of it, anyway?"

He glared at me. I smiled, batting my eyelashes. He tapped his fingers against the pool cue and then shrugged one shoulder.

"Fine. What's your question?"

"Know anybody by the name of Matthias Gruber?"

He didn't even blink. "No."

"Ah. I see. Sorry to have wasted your time."

I turned around, walking back through the bar. I kept a quick, confident stride as I went, ignoring the whispers of the fallen angels in my wake. A couple called out to me, asking if I'd let them have a taste, but I didn't spare them a glance. Instead, I headed to the ladies' room.

Thankfully, it was empty so I whipped out my phone and dialed the first number in my Recent Call list.

"Hey. He's here. Yeah, I'm sure it's him. They're lousy liars when they're drunk. Uh-huh. Okay, see you in five."

I hung up and let out a slow breath. Only a couple things left to do.

I gathered my shoulder-length black hair into a high ponytail. I looped the loose curls around into a messy bun and made sure they wouldn't tumble free if I shook my head too hard. I took the leather gloves in the pocket of my duster out and pulled them on. Then, I walked out of the bathroom and back to the front entrance.

The coat-check girl gave me a second unfriendly look as I returned with my ticket stub to retrieve my things—three vials of holy water, a black rosary with the beads made of onyx and

the cross made of wood, a Smith & Wesson .9mm Glock complete with a full magazine of blessed bullets and a silencer, and a worn out page of the Bible.

I held out my hands for the items and she dropped them on the counter with an unapologetic, "Oops."

"Thanks," I said with a roll of my eyes. I put the Glock back in the hip holster at my side and tucked the rest of the items in the pockets of my duster.

The brunette demon crossed her arms under her hilariously oversized fake breasts and sent me a vicious sneer. "The door is that way, Seer. Don't let it hit you on the way out."

I smiled back. "God bless you."

She let out an ugly hiss between her pearly white teeth. I blew her a kiss and walked out the door. The parking lot was packed outside because it was half-past midnight. Demons thrived in darkness so I wasn't surprised. In fact, I'd been counting on it.

There was a large white four-door pickup truck idling in the rear of the lot. Its driver had the window down so she could blow smoke out every so often and watch it spiral up into the cloudy night sky. She was black like me, but in her mid-forties; her hair, peppered with grey streaks, elegantly permed and pulled back into a neat short ponytail. Even though we were here to work, she still wore dark red lipstick and mascara just because she liked looking good.

I opened the passenger's door and climbed in. She glanced at me with a smirk as I put my seatbelt on. "Took you long enough."

"They patted me down, remember? It kind of takes a while, especially after I kicked the bouncer in the nuts for groping me."

She glanced at my shirt, hiding 34 B-cups, and that was being generous. "Where?"

I smacked her in the shoulder. She laughed, making her own 38 C-cups jiggle and turning me green with envy. "Shut up and drive, Myra."

She took one last drag on her cig and tossed it out the window, adopting a feral grin.

"Avec plaisir."

She revved up the engine, threw the truck into gear, and then drove straight towards the building in front of us at breakneck speed.

The impact rocketed the two of us forward in our seats. The seatbelts did their job, keeping us from flying headfirst out the windshield as the guard rail smashed straight through the wood and plaster holding the rear wall together. Dust and rubble kicked up everywhere, engulfing the vehicle. I let out the terse lungful of air I'd been holding and unbuckled the belt before leaping out.

I drew the Glock and pointed it at anything that moved within my line of vision. The demons clustered around the wreckage in anger and confusion, but they stayed back when they saw the gun. The fat demon I'd interrogated stumbled from around the overturned pool table, his cigar forgotten somewhere, fury blazing in his eyes.

"What the hell did you do that for?"

"I told you I was looking for Matthias Gruber. You have something I need."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Bullshit," Myra spoke up, cocking back the shotgun she held. She kept it steady on him, her voice clear and hard as glass.

"You can either hand it over or we'll tell your mates why we're here."

He spat at her feet contemptuously. "Rip 'em apart, boys."

His five hulking bodyguards darted forward—two heading for me, three heading for Myra. They were liquid fast, almost too fast for me to see, but unfortunately for them, our bullets were faster.

I plugged the dark-haired guy first, two in the chest. The bullets hissed as soon as they hit him and steam issued from the wounds. He fell to his knees, screaming and clawing at the wounds as they burned him alive.

I swung the barrel towards the blond. He grabbed it just as I fired and the bullet tore straight through his palm. He didn't even flinch—instead, he wrenched it out of my grip and grabbed me around the throat. He slammed me into the hood of the car, squeezing so hard that white specks popped up all over my vision.

I grappled for the holy water in my pocket and smashed the vial into the side of his head. His skin bubbled red with a second-degree burn, but he wouldn't let go, digging his calloused fingers in harder. He was trying to outlast me, ignoring his own injuries because it would only take another minute before I'd suffocate.

With my last bit of strength, I grabbed the torn Bible page and pressed it to his chest, gurgling the words, "*In nomine Patris, et ego repellam te!*"

The paper glowed brilliant white and then his entire body burst into flames. He dropped me and screamed, clawing at his clothing, but it was more than that. His very skin was reacting to the purity of the holy item and decomposing from the inside. The other demons scattered as he rolled past them, thrashing violently until the fire took its toll. As soon as he died, the fire vanished, leaving a charred corpse.

I rubbed my sore throat and picked up the page, then the gun. The tussle had distracted my attention from Myra, but thankfully, she had fared much better. Her shotgun had left three victims on the ground and she only had a bloody cheek to show for it. She was ex-military so I wasn't surprised, merely jealous because I only knew basic martial arts and self-defense. Plus, I was only a hundred and twenty pounds soaking wet.

"We can do this all night, Matthias," I rasped. "Give us what we came for or this is going to get even nastier."

"Blow me, Seer."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "Fine. Have it your way."

I raised my voice to the throng of demons watching us. "Attention, bar patrons. The man standing in your midst who so kindly provided you with drinks and probably sacrificial virgins is on the Top Ten Wanted List of every angel in the known world. He is in possession of a piece of silver that we and the angels have been searching for. In fact, it is right there around his neck."

Many of them glanced over to confirm it. The necklace was a thin chain holding a gold coin slightly larger than a quarter. "That ain't silver, lady."

"Because he painted it gold so no one would figure it out. So if you all don't want a first class ride back down to the Pit, please proceed to tear his head off and hand over the coin."

"Bullshit, Seer," one of them said.

I holstered the Glock and reached into my pocket, this time withdrawing a lighter. I lit it and held it just underneath the Bible page, lifting my voice so they could all hear. "Afraid not, friend. This is a page from the personal Bible of Pope Benedict XVI. If I light it, it sends out a wave of energy so pure that it'll burn your rotten souls right out of your bodies. Test me and I'll toast the lot of you."

Furtive glances darted between the demons, some whispering to each other for confirmation. It was understandable. Not many common demons like these knew the sorts of stuff Myra and I did. And we'd been counting on it.

"You saw what it did to your buddy. Do you really think I'm bluffing, assholes?"

Matthias swallowed hard as he noticed the unfriendly looks he began to receive. He raised his huge hands, backing away from the crowd. "Don't listen to her. If you guys rush her all at once, she can't stop you all."

By the looks of things, they believed us and not him. Myra spoke up then. "Well, now you have two options, Mr. Gruber. We can take you alive or let them take you dead. What's it gonna be, buddy?"

"There's forty of them. You can't get out of here alive."

"Wanna bet your life on it?"

He cursed under his breath, stumbling over to the truck. "Fine, fine! Get me out of here!"

"Get in the back, fat ass."

He climbed into the truck as the other demons advanced, some licking their lips and flexing their hands eagerly as they cornered us.

"Jordan?" Myra said.

"Got it."

I nodded to Myra and she got in the truck first, firing up the engine. I stepped back until I could reach the rear passenger side, opening the door.

"Oh, and one more thing."

I lifted the lighter to the paper, grinning. "*Vaya con dios*, bitches."

The page exploded a blinding white light through the room. The demons didn't even have enough time to duck for cover. It blew them straight off their feet, evaporating their bodies into ash. The burning paper fluttered to the ground.

I got in the truck. Myra pulled out of the gigantic hole we'd punched in the back of the building and drove off into the cool October night.

"So what are you gonna do with me?" Matthias grunted, eying the Glock I kept aimed at his enormous midsection.

"You gonna burn me too? Aren't servants of God supposed to have moral codes?"

"Usually, but you really ticked me off by lying," I said, and it was the truth. Being tasked with helping souls with unfinished business cross over to the other side meant trying to do good whenever possible. Still, it was a rather loose creed to hold.

"So hand over the coin and we'll see where it takes you."

He sent me a hateful look. "Do you have any idea what it took to get this thing? It cost more than a three-level house in Beverly Hills. You really think I'm just gonna hand it over to some skinny broad with a gun?"

"You got in the truck, didn't you?"

He shook his head, letting out an ugly chuckle. "Sorry, sweetheart. You'll have to pry it from my cold, dead—"

I shot him in the kneecap. He screamed, clutching the large bloody hole and rocking back and forth in his seat. The silencer did its job—turning what would've been an excruciating gunshot to a loud 'pop.' It still made my ears ring and so I could hear the muted sound of Myra scolding me.

"I just had this truck cleaned, Jordan!" she shrieked, glaring at me over her shoulder.

“What? I had to prove a point,” I said, wiggling a finger in my ear. Okay, realistically, yes, that had been a dumb thing to do in the back of a truck, but I had to let him know I was being serious. Although the accompanying headache and having to pay for getting the truck cleaned would be a bitch.

“You psycho!” Matthias snarled, reaching for me, but I held the gun up higher. He restrained himself, nursing the wound with his left hand instead.

“Now that I have your attention, are you going to give me the coin or do I have to give you a second limp?”

“You think I can’t endure a little pain? I was born in hell. You’re nothing but a barely evolved monkey playing with fire.”

I aimed at his other knee, starting to pull the trigger, but he swore again and ripped off the necklace. “Here. I hope you choke on it, bitch.” He tossed it in my lap.

“And they say demons don’t have good manners,” I said, picking up the coin. It was the right size—about 58 millimeters in diameter—and the emblem of Augustus on the front side matched the others I’d seen. I rubbed my thumb across its surface and gold flakes came off, revealing the worn silver beneath it.

After a second, I frowned. No, this was too easy. Why would he just have it around his neck? Why not put it in a safe or bury it somewhere like other demons had done?

“Before we let you go, I have some questions as to how you got this thing—”

Matthias kicked open the rear door with his inhuman strength and dove out of the speeding vehicle. Myra slammed on the brakes. I pitched forward, smacking my head against the back of the seat.

“Shit!” I yelled. “Reverse, go, go!”

She backed up the truck to turn around when we both heard the ominous horn of an eighteen-wheeler. I could only watch in horror as it rammed into Matthias, sending him flying. He hit the pavement several feet away, his head lying at an awkward angle, his busted legs splayed in opposite directions. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was dead.

“Son of a bitch,” Myra panted, sending a shocked look at me. “What the hell was that?”

“I don’t know, but we’d better not stick around to find out. Punch it.”

I climbed into the front seat and she hit the gas, speeding off into the dark before the unfortunate truck driver could capture our license plate number. Forty-six dead demons in one night. We were definitely setting a new record.

My cell phone rang inside my pocket. I jumped, scared shitless thanks to the adrenaline. However, the area code confused me. It was from Albany, New York. No one had called from there in months.

“Hello?”

“I’m looking for Jordan Amador.”

“Speaking.”

“This is in regards to Lauren Yi, who had you listed as an emergency contact. I’m sorry, but there’s been an incident.”

My blood ran cold. It must have shown on my face because Myra gave me a concerned look.

“What? What is it?”

“Drive me to the airport. Right now.”

