

MELHARA

A Novel by
Jocelyn Tollefson

Lost Girl Creations
Edmonton, Alberta

Copyright © 2016 Jocelyn Lewis

All rights reserved. The use of any part of this publication reproduced, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, or stored in a retrieval system, without prior written consent from the publisher is an infringement of copyright law.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover art by:

Chris Moet, chrismoet.com

Distributed by Smashwords and Amazon

Ebook formatting by www.ebooklaunch.com

Lost Girl Creations

4811 31 ave, NW

Edmonton, Alberta T6L 4H8

Published in Canada

Dedication:

For all the women who have felt lost as they fought their demons,
struggled with destiny and creating their own path.

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to all of my friends and family that supported and encouraged me over the years by reading my many versions of my work in progress.
Randina, Dawn, Amanda, and many others.

A very special thanks to
Channy, Jenilee, Mary Ann, Sharlyn and Nicole, for providing me with
constructive feedback that helped shape the story.

And thank you to the fantastic freelance editors from the Editors'
Association of Canada, Vanessa Ricci-Thode and Marg Gilks.

Table of Contents

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Author's Note](#)

Prologue

The Year 2000

Kyra dashed down the dark hall on the balls of her feet, running from the demon. As she neared the open doorway of the bathroom, a sensation of anxiety rushed over her, but too late—she turned the corner and her momentum carried her into the room.

She stopped.

Something was wrong.

Someone was in here.

Panic rose from her stomach and clenched in her chest. Her eyes struggled to adjust in the dimness. Slowly, she made out a dark figure on one side of the tiny room. It stood up.

Holding her breath, Kyra fumbled for the light switch, flicked it on. Light flooded the tiny room, temporarily blinding her.

“What the hell!” demanded her sister Hailey, looking startled before her expression grew puzzled. “Why are you naked? Just because it’s your birthday doesn’t mean you can run around in your birthday suit,” she teased. “Get a freaking towel.” She grabbed a towel off the shelf and tossed it at Kyra without unfolding it.

Kyra felt her cheeks heat up. She caught the towel and wrapped herself up.

“Yeah, that was pretty cheesy.”

“So was saying *cheesy*.” Hailey smirked.

“Sorry I barged in on you. I-I couldn’t sleep so I was going to take a shower and get ready. I didn’t think anyone else was awake yet,” Kyra stammered. *Idiot*. Foolishly panicking over a mystery shadow. Of course it was her sister in the bathroom—what did she expect, the monster from her nightmare to be in there, waiting to pounce? That’s just silly.

“What’s wrong?” Hailey asked, looking closely at Kyra’s face. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost—well, like a normal person would look like, if they saw a ghost.” Giggling, Hailey faced the mirror and turned on the tap.

Kyra peered into the hallway before focusing back on her sister.

“You have to promise not to say anything,” she whispered.

Hailey tipped her head toward her, her soapy hands poised over the sink. “Oh my God, did you see a ghost again?”

“No, but—” Kyra recoiled, flooded by memories of psychiatrists and countless prescription drugs. She lurched forward, commanding her memories to recede back to where they belonged, buried in the past. “You can’t say anything, no matter what,” she said, her voice sounding more desperate than she intended.

“I won’t,” Hailey said, and bit her bottom lip.

Kyra nodded, just once, and drew a deep breath. “I had another dream about that demon, but this time, it actually freaked *me* out.”

“You’re still having nightmares about demons and angels?” Hailey rinsed her hands in the warm water. “I thought they had stopped.”

“They did,” Kyra lied, wanting to vanish from the room and reappear in her bed—and she could—but then Hailey would know that secret too, and that might be too much for her to keep to herself. It was too late to escape, and besides, it might help her nerves if

she told someone, and there was no one else she could talk to. “Or I thought they had, until last night. I saw the same demon that I always see.” She realized she was nervously scrunching her towel tighter between her hands, and willed herself to stop. “But this time, it felt different.” She dropped her voice. “I think it’s after me.”

“What are you talking about?” Hailey asked. “Why would a demon be after you?” She reached around Kyra and pulled the hand towel off the bar hanging on the wall.

“Before, my dreams were always like watching a movie,” Kyra explained. “But this time, it knew I was watching, and it spoke to me.”

“What do you mean?” Hailey grimaced. “Tell me exactly what happened.”

“It wasn’t doing anything, just lying in a cave, then it sat up and looked at me—like, *really* looked at me. And it said, ‘Soon you will belong to me.’ Then it lunged at me and I woke up terrified.”

Hailey puckered her lips a moment, then said, “It’s a creepy dream, but it’s still just a dream, Kyra.”

Kyra sighed. “It was so real that I panicked and had to check my arm where the demon’s claws had grazed me. I thought for sure there was going to be huge gashes bleeding all over the place. I swear, I felt the claws cut me.”

“You’re okay. It’s over and nothing actually happened. It was just a dream,” Hailey said, pulling her sister in for a hug. “Are you going to be okay, moving out and going off to a college where no one knows about the crazy girl?” She pulled away, met Kyra’s eyes, and grinned.

“Ha-ha,” Kyra drawled, then she smiled. “I’ll manage. It’ll be nice to have friends that aren’t afraid of me.”

“Happy birthday, by the way.” She thrust a thumbs-up gesture into Kyra’s face. “Now you can buy us beer.”

Hailey spun around and dashed out of the bathroom, purposely avoiding the response.

“Um, thanks,” Kyra muttered and started the shower, hoping her morning routine would help her forget the nightmare. But she couldn’t purge from her mind the vision of the demon’s black eyes, or the cold trickle of dread that ran down her spine as it spoke to her.

She stepped over to the tiny window, cranked it open a crack, and rested her folded arms on the windowsill. She closed her eyes and inhaled deeply of the refreshing morning air. The sun was rising, and she savored the wan warmth of it on her face as she tried to reassure herself that what she’d experienced really was nothing more than a bad dream.

The sunlight dimmed, as if clouds cast shadows over her face, then the sunlight on her eyelids disappeared. Her eyes popped open to a cluster of green leaves, and she jerked back. The Virginia Creeper vines that normally hugged the lower wall of the house jerked away from the window and hung, unsupported, the tips arcing toward the window, swaying, as if they were watching her.

How could they have climbed three feet in a couple of minutes? Squinting, she leaned in closer and the vines drifted toward her. She drew back, surprised, and then scratched her head in confusion. One of the vines on the outer edge of the cluster bent inward and vibrated, its leaves fluttering. She shifted her weight, swinging her arm down from her head.

The vines mimicked her.

Impossible. What is happening?

She flapped her hand in a shooing motion and willed the vines to return to their original state. They obeyed and shrank down below the window.

She shook her head. She didn't want to think about this right now. Not on the heels of the nightmare. Dropping her towel, she stepped into the bathtub. Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes and plunged her face into the spray of water, washing the residual fear from her nightmare and the mystery of the freaky vines down the drain.

She kept her eyes closed and dropped her face, allowing the water to hit the back of her head, then trickle down her body. Calmer now, she breathed deeply.

The spray of water began to slow. Then the pressure of the water on the back of her head stopped. Confused, she opened her eyes and stepped back. The water from the showerhead stood still—as if time had stopped. It was as if the spray from the showerhead was frozen.

Almost frozen, she amended. It still fell, but at an impossibly slow rate; it was barely moving, like the wings of a bird taking flight in a slow motion video. The drops that had escaped the showerhead and dripped off her body clung to the point in time where they had been when it had slowed; those in the tub made their way sluggishly toward the drain. She put out her hand to touch the drops suspended in front of her. As her hand moved upward, a pool of water formed in it.

She sensed a presence approaching, and lost her concentration. The water began to flow freely again before the knock at the door startled her.

“Honey, are you almost done?” asked a muffled voice from outside the door. “I’m going to start making pancakes. Do you want chocolate chips or blueberries?”

“Um, yeah Mom, I’ll be right out. Chocolate would be great. Thanks.”

Her attention turned back to the showerhead and she held both her open hands toward it. Closing her eyes, she listened to the running water, the heat from the droplets relaxing her. Then she took a deep breath and opened her eyes. The water slowed almost to a halt. Gravity had stopped forcing the water to the floor, but it was more than that. The pressure from the water was barely forcing the flow out of the showerhead, too. She stood on her tiptoes and brought her face closer to the showerhead. It was in slow motion again. And she was controlling it.

“Damn it, what’s wrong with me now?” She dropped her hands and the water resumed its natural flow.

Chapter One

Present Day

Alexis Bennett scanned the parking lot, careful to ensure it was vacant of any potential witnesses. Satisfied, she turned to the SUV that was parked a foot over the yellow line of her assigned stall—probably by some drunk idiot headed to the bar down the street last night. She narrowed her eyes. The encroaching SUV slid away from her Honda Fit and into its own stall.

Kyra Parker pulled into the lot as Alexis climbed out of her car. Deciding to wait for her best friend, Alexis watched her park, but then stay in her car with the engine running, her hands clenched on the steering wheel. Sighing, Alexis approached Kyra's vehicle. As she drew closer, she could see Kyra's nails tapping against the steering wheel as she stared blankly at the wall of the bank.

She's overthinking again. She spends too much time doing that, and it's getting worse.

Moving up the driver's side of Kyra's car, Alexis made a jerky dance movement to get her attention. Kyra looked over to her side window and frowned. Alexis contorted her face, crossed her eyes, and stuck her tongue out the corner of her mouth, then made another awkward dance move. No reaction from Kyra.

Not a good sign.

Kyra took the keys out of the ignition and stepped out of her car, tucking her necklace inside her button-up blouse.

"Morning, crazy lady," said Alexis. "Whatcha daydreaming about this time?"

"Nothing," she said, too quickly. "Nothing exciting, anyway. Why do we have to be here again?"

"Um, 'cause someone has to pay the bills and we like shoes!" Alexis squealed.

"Ha! True story." Kyra smirked and her emerald eyes lit up.

They headed toward the building. Kyra sighed. "I don't know what's up with me lately. I can't seem to focus on my life." She dropped her keys into her purse and slung it over her shoulder. "I mean, I'm not sure what I'm doing anymore. I just feel...lost."

"That's depressing," Alexis replied. "If you weren't taking off after work to go on an adventure, we could go get some drinks and create some of our own excitement." She wriggled her eyebrows and winked at her friend.

Kyra groaned. "What adventure? Our camping trip?" She rolled her eyes. "Maybe if we went into the bush with nothing but a pocketknife, it would be an adventure. Our trip has turned into hotels and cabins. James wants Wi-Fi and cable, 'in case it rains.' Yeah, right, in case it rains. He'll probably spend the entire trip in the cabin."

"That's just James for you. He's never been the outdoorsy type."

"Well, we both know that I am. I feel like I'm being suffocated by the city, more now than ever. I need to be out in the wilderness, surrounded by nature."

"Yeah, your flower gardens are amazing, but they could be better if you used," Alexis dropped her voice and adopted a wheedling tone, "just a tiny bit of your powers." Kyra grimaced at her. "Oh, come on, it's so little, it wouldn't even count as using magic!"

When they reached the door, Alexis pressed her hand over the lock. Her keys were still in her purse.

“This vacation will help you reconnect with yourself and figure out the path you want to take.”

Kyra placed her hand over Alexis’s. When Alexis looked at her, her mouth was pinched with worry.

“I have some reservations about this whole thing,” she said somberly.

“What do you mean, did you have a premonition?”

She shook her head, making the large curls of her long blonde hair bob. “I-I can’t explain it.”

“Neither did I, but I have a bad feeling about you going too,” Alexis admitted, “and I can’t pinpoint it either.” *Whoa, lighten up.* She grinned. “Maybe, it’s because I’m going to have to entertain myself while you’re gone.” She gave Kyra a playful poke. “It’s probably just nerves, because you’re venturing into new territory and leaving Calgary—finally,” she said, trying to ease Kyra’s anxiety, but she knew there was more to it. Even to her, though she couldn’t identify why, it felt like a major change loomed over Kyra.

“Yeah, maybe, but…” Kyra trailed off when the heavy clunk of the deadbolt unlocked the door.

Alexis pushed open the door and stepped inside. The familiar high-pitched beeping from the alarm system made Alexis oddly uneasy. She flicked her wrist at the keypad, the numbers for her code punched in, and the alarm fell silent.

“If it’s meant to be, it will be,” Alexis said, knowing Kyra was still struggling at a crossroad. “It can still be a great trip. You can go hiking with your sister, and it’s a good way to start Xavier’s summer vacation.” She smiled reassuringly.

Kyra responded with a weak smile.

Seated behind her desk, her chair turned around so her back was to the door, Kyra gazed out the window, letting her irritation at the shady client dissipate faster than the stench of his cologne. Her eyes wandered the landscape outside, pausing to watch a flock of sparrows swoop in to land gracefully on the sidewalk, where they hopped around, pecking at invisible tidbits, before taking off into the sky en masse. With nothing more to distract her from her thoughts, her eyes glazed over and her daydreams took hold.

She was ripped back to reality by the ringing of her office phone. Spinning her chair around, she stared at the blinking red light, her hand hovering over the clunky receiver. She closed her eyes and tried to determine who was on the other end, but she couldn’t tell. Which left only two options.

“Hmm, I wonder…”

She opened her eyes and snatched up the receiver. “Good morning, Kyra Parker speaking.” She glanced through the sidelight next to her office door. The hallway outside was vacant.

“Oh, hey.” She grinned. “Miss me already?”

She pushed the stack of paperwork and file folders off to the side of her desk, then swiveled her chair to face the window again. Her fingers instinctively toyed with the chain around her neck as she listened.

“I don’t want you to go.”

Her smile turned into a frown. “I know. We will sort this out when I get back. I have to go. Everything is just so...so *confusing* right now. It will be okay, I promise.” She sighed, staring at the walnut-colored sphere hanging from her necklace, then pulled the chain over her head and set it on her desk. “I just need some time to sort things out for my family first.”

She listened to the chatter that followed, nodding along and throwing in the odd “uh-huh.”

“I don’t think it’s a good idea. You should stay in the city and spend some time alone to figure out what you want. Take some more time off work so Alexis doesn’t distract you or maybe work some extra hours to keep yourself out of the house.”

“Work is actually part of the problem. I think I might quit. It’s become so stale and I just don’t give a crap anymore.”

She heard her door close abruptly behind her, and spun around. Alexis was standing in her office, lips pursed, the harsh overhead fluorescents making the light dusting of freckles over her cheeks stand out. The effect made her look younger than her thirty-five years.

“I have to let you go,” Kyra said quickly, and hung up the receiver.

Alexis marched over to Kyra. Her eyes dropped to the necklace on the desk, then drifted back to Kyra. “Sooooo, who was that?”

“Alexis, it was no one. My door was closed for a reason. It was supposed to be a private conversation,” she retorted, casually swiping her necklace into the desk drawer. At times it was annoying, not being able to sense other witches—no, unfair, because even though they shouldn’t be able to, somehow they could sense her. Well...in a small way, the fact they could sense her presence did help her feel more normal; more human. “How long were you eavesdropping?”

“Does that matter? Long enough,” Alexis scoffed. She pulled her auburn hair over her shoulder and twisted it as if she were wringing out a towel. “Why didn’t you tell me you were thinking about quitting?” she asked, sounding hurt. “I know you hate our boss as much as I do.”

Kyra hesitated, realizing that Alexis thought she’d been talking to a headhunter. *Okay, that will work.*

“Sorry. I wasn’t sure if you would understand and I’m not sure I’m going to leave yet.”

Alexis’s shoulders relaxed. “No worries. And I *do* completely understand.” She flipped her hair behind her back. “Your patience with clients has diminished since Colleen took the management position. She’s so uptight and a huge, ball-busting pain in the ass. I’ve thought about quitting because of her crap too.”

“Yeah, she does have a huge stick up her ass.” Kyra snickered. “And she always looks so constipated and angry.”

“She probably hasn’t gotten laid in thirty years.”

They shared a laugh at their boss’s expense. Alexis flopped down into one of the oversized armchairs facing Kyra’s desk. When the giggling subsided, Alexis’s expression turned serious.

“I know you’ve been going through some other things, even though you haven’t really talked to me about it since the initial incident at the Christmas party, but I can see it on you.” She held up her hand as Kyra opened her mouth to protest. “You’re always

daydreaming or distracted and never really here anymore.” Her face softened. “I know it’s hard with James being the way he is...and I sometimes really wonder why you picked him to be your husband. He’s so—so *vanilla*.”

Kyra chuckled, then sat back in her chair with a sigh. “James is a lot like my father was, and I love him for it, but—” she threw up her hands “—is this really all that my life was meant to be? It doesn’t feel right.”

“Maybe you do need a bigger change,” Alexis said. “You know I love you and just want you to be happy, whatever you decide.”

“Thank you.”

If only she could tell Alexis everything, every detail about what she was really daydreaming about! But she didn’t fully understand it herself, so how could she explain it to someone else? If Alexis only knew...

Her thought escaped unfinished. A presence was fast approaching, one she immediately recognized.

“Oh, shit.” Kyra fumbled for some papers and pulled a pile in front of her as Alexis slouched down in her seat, doing the best she could to hide in her chair, and started casting.

The office door swung open and their stout manager, Colleen, stormed in before Alexis could finish her spell.

“What just happened with Mr. Rumaluck?” Colleen demanded, her pudgy face flushed red. “I could barely get him to calm down and talk to me as he rushed out of the building. You were supposed to schmooze him into being a client, not alienate him...and *you*.” Her head rotated to Alexis. “What are you doing in here? This is not a coffee break or social hour. Get back to work. I wonder how either of you could possibly have the numbers that you do, with all of the clients that walk out on you two.”

Alexis offered a tight smile. She glanced sympathetically at Kyra before leaving the office.

Colleen stepped forward and braced her hands on Kyra’s desk. “Keira, this is getting ridiculous.”

Kyra unclenched her teeth. “It’s K-eye-ra, like Tyra or Myra. We’ve had this conversation before.”

“Oh, yes. Well, the spelling suggests it should sound like Keira.” She shrugged. “Now what happened with Mr. Rumaluck?”

Rumaluck. He’d given off a vibe that made her uncomfortable. She was convinced he was involved in some sort of criminal activity, although she had failed to uncover any evidence. She knew she was right, though—her intuition was seldom wrong.

“He’s not looking to move his accounts at this time,” she lied. “I’ve no idea why he’d have been upset when he left.”

“I’m sure,” Colleen said bitterly. “Well, you have another new client after lunch, and you’d better get the account. No excuses. If you don’t snag this one, I’ll be talking with my superiors about your lack of performance.”

Their eyes locked as Colleen leaned over the desk, bringing her pudgy, red-mottled face closer to Kyra’s. Kyra refused to sit back, even when she could smell the onions on Colleen’s breath. She forced a smile.

With a soft huff of displeasure Colleen pushed back from the desk and turned to leave. She paused in the doorway. “Good luck, Keira.” She disappeared into the hall.

Chapter Two

The sun was a burning orange orb as it set behind them, casting a revitalizing glow over the landscape as James guided the car through the hills. Kyra opened her window a crack, allowing the sweet smell of summer to flow into the car. There were few signs of civilization out in this open space, just the odd car on the narrow highway bordered by farmer's fields and fences, and the occasional house.

Kyra peered into the backseat at her son. Xavier was playing his video games, completely unaware of the passing beauty outside. With the exception of his mother's bright emerald eyes, he was the spitting image of his father.

Kyra's little sister, Hailey and her husband, Nick Miller, had recently become the proud owners of a beach house, which Hailey had found a way to work into every conversation with her since the fall, until this had become the compromise for a camping trip. Kyra was no longer sure how camping in a tent out in the bush had turned into a two-day drive to an oceanfront beach house for a week's vacation.

She looked at James and slowly smiled. With one hand draped over the wheel and his other arm resting on the door beside him, he looked relaxed and content. And classically handsome, with his normally clean-shaven face now sporting a five o'clock shadow. At this moment she found him very tantalizing. Her smile turned into a grin.

He caught her gaze and turned serious brown eyes her way before he returned the smile. "What's that look for?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing. Just thinking about the things we can do while we're on vacation."

"Oh? Please do elaborate."

"Can't, honey. We're not the only ones in the car. But I can show you tomorrow," she said with a wink. "We could go for a walk along the beach while Xavier stays with my sister."

"I like that idea," James said, smiling. He returned his attention to the road. "But it is a public beach, and I'm not so keen on rolling around, getting sand in places where sand shouldn't be."

She sighed. "It's been a while since we've actually spent any time together, just us." She paused. "I miss us. The way we used to be."

"What are you going on about? We spend time together every day."

"Lying in bed for an hour with laptops and books before we go to sleep doesn't count as spending time together."

"We're taking two days to drive out to the ocean instead of flying so we could spend time together, aren't we? Or what's the point of this waste of time?" he said, his tone defensive.

"Yes, but—"

James cut her off. "We could have flown there, which would have been more cost-effective and saved us four days of driving and two hotel nights, never mind the mileage on the car."

She sighed. "I just miss the way we were when being together and in love was more important than getting to work on time. We were an hour late for dinner reservations more than once, because we couldn't seem to keep our hands off each other. And we put

the effort into timing our schedules so we could spend our lunch hours together, talking our heads off. That sort of thing used to be important to us.”

“Well, sweetheart, things change. We couldn’t stay like that forever. We both have more demands on us now, with our careers, and Xavier’s activities that you insist on him being in; they take up a huge chunk of time, money, and energy. Between that and taking care of the house, there isn’t much time left for us to act like newlyweds.”

“True story, but...there should be,” she grumbled. “Don’t you think that’s important?”

She sighed when she realized he wasn’t going to say what she wanted him to say—that she was more important than everything else. She turned away from him and looked out her window.

“We can hire a housekeeper and a gardener or some other help, if you like,” he said after a moment.

“I’m in my garden because I like to be there. You’re missing the point. It’s not the busy schedule so much as the priorities we give to everything.”

“I don’t know what else you want me to say. You’ve been bugging me to go on a work-free family vacation, so that’s what we’re doing—even though I’m going to have a ton of catching up to do when we get home. I’m hoping this will bring you back from whatever midlife crisis you seem to be going through. Your head has been in the clouds for a while now, and I—”

“Hey, look at that,” she blurted, pointing to an old motel on the horizon, the two-story wooden structure was lit up by the final rays of the setting sun so that it stood out from the shadowy hills around it, drawing the eye, demanding attention like a highlighter over ink. “It’s a very cute motel. Can we stop?” She whipped her head around to face him. “I want to stay there.”

She sat forward and squinted to read the distant sign. Her heart raced when she hit the last word: VACANCY.

“Oh, look! It says vacancy!” she squealed in a little-girl voice. “Please, James.”

Xavier looked up from his game and took part in the conversation for the first time since they left the city limits. “Hey, that’s kinda cool,” he said, his eyes on the motel. Saloon doors had been painted on the real doors, and bales of straw marked both approaches to the service road, supporting arrow signs. “It looks like a motel from cowboy movies,” he added.

“It’s not where we planned on staying tonight. Besides, it looks cheap and dirty. We only have an hour to go to get to our planned hotel,” James argued as he drove past.

Kyra looked to him with the biggest pouty face she could muster. “Please, James. I keep saying that I want us to be more spontaneous. This is something we never do, so let’s do it—*now!*” Kyra pleaded, filled with a desperate excitement.

“Gee, you’re a little intense. What’s all this about?” asked James.

“I don’t know. I just really have an impulse to stop here.”

“I like it too, Dad.” Xavier popped his head up between the two front seats.

“All right. Two against one. We can stay at the shady motel in the middle of nowhere, but only because I love you guys so much,” James said. “But, if we end up with hepatitis, I’m going to say I told you so.”

“What’s hepatitis?”

“Nothing. Your father’s just being silly.”

James slowed the car and reluctantly pulled onto the service road, then headed toward the motel. He drove into the small parking lot and parked a few spaces from the office attached to the motel rooms. The drapes were drawn but lights within illuminated them, and an oval neon sign hanging in the window glowed with the word *OPEN* in red. Murals of cowboys, Native Americans, horses, cattle, and tumbleweeds sprawled across the walls. A picture of a sheriff had been painted on the door. Above his head were the words *Sheriff's Office*.

James frowned. "Are you guys sure you want to stay here? This place is creepy enough to belong in a horror movie. We might find questionable stains on the carpets."

Kyra and Xavier exchanged looks before nodding in unison, smiles on their faces.

"Okay, then. Wait here and I'll check us in."

Kyra rolled her window all the way down and watched James as he headed for the office. As he pushed open the door, he collided with two men trying to exit.

"Hey man, watch it."

"Sorry, I didn't see you," James said quickly.

"You better open your eyes or you might get your ass beat," the older man warned as he pushed his way past James, nudging him in the ribs.

The second man glared at James, then pursed his lips to kiss the air in front of his face as he passed. Momentarily stunned, James stood holding the door open for a moment, then went inside.

Kyra's anxiety began to build the moment James stepped through that door and the two scruffy-looking men stepped out. They made her uneasy. Her impulse to leave this place grew as they wandered closer to her.

The younger man was around her age and passed by without a glance, but the older one, mostly bald beneath the greasy mesh trucker hat he wore, stopped in front of the car to stare at her. He turned his head to the side, looking perplexed. Kyra's tension escalated as he stood watching her.

The first man, once he realized his companion was not listening to what he was saying, stopped walking and turned around. He hurried back to the man—at least twenty years his senior, though there was not enough of a resemblance that he might be his father—and followed his gaze to the car. His jaw dropped, then he smacked his friend in the arm and said something, his expression enthusiastic.

James stepped out of the office with a key in his hand. He stopped short and locked eyes with the men when their heads swiveled toward him. They turned away and continued down the wooden sidewalk before James reached the car.

"Are you okay?" he asked, pulling the door open. "Did they say anything to you?"

"No, they were just staring at me. It was really creepy. I-I don't know if this was such a good idea after all; maybe we should keep driving to the city."

"I bumped into them in the lobby, if you can call it that, and irritated them a bit more than I thought, I guess." He frowned and reached for Kyra's hand. "Don't worry, we'll go unwind in our room and have a few drinks. We can just relax and get some sleep before we finish our long drive to the coast tomorrow."

"I don't know. I have a bad feeling about this place now. I think we should go."

"Kyra. What is going on with you? You wanted to stop here so badly, even though we'd already booked a five star hotel. Nooo, you wanted this crap-hole instead—and now you don't. I will gladly keep driving for another hour to stay in a nice, safe, clean hotel."

Xavier's head bobbed between the seats, looking first to his father, then to his mother. "No way. This is where we're supposed to stop. It's fate."

"Xavier, there's no such thing as fate. Life is choices," James said, annoyed.

"I'm sorry. You're right. I'm a—I'm just being silly." Kyra took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. "I don't know what's wrong with me. It's like I'm being pulled in different directions. I just feel...I don't know. Never mind, it'll be fine."

As soon as they walked through the door of their room on the second level, James turned on the TV. Kyra rummaged in the suitcases for sleepwear.

She washed the dirt and worries from her face in the small sink as James flicked through the channels. Xavier, already in his pajamas, sat next to his father, watching the channels flick by.

Kyra watched her boys from the bathroom doorway. They're such a pair, those two, solely focused on their own worlds—oblivious and isolated from the reality of the world around them—like father, like son. Except, Xavier won't always be just like his father. One day, he will change to be more like his mother.

James settled on the news channel and moved to get more comfortable on the bed. Xavier lost interest in his father's choice of entertainment and hopped over to the other bed. He pushed aside the open suitcases, clothes spilling out onto the blankets.

"Mom, could you tell me one of your angel stories? A good one about battles and fighting and stuff."

She looked at her son and smiled. "Sure, baby, but you have to clean up that mess on your bed first."

"But I didn't make it," he whined.

"I know, but I made it looking for your jammies—and I asked you to. Besides, I can't tell you a story if I have nowhere to sit."

Xavier started to push the clothes off the bed onto the floor. Kyra looked down at him. "If you do that, then there will be no story at all. Do it the right way."

"Argh! Fine."

Xavier gathered up the pile of clothes and stuffed them into the suitcase before zipping it shut. He struggled to tug it off the bed until Kyra grabbed the handle and lifted it to the floor for him. Then she plopped down beside him and smiled.

"So, any particular story you want to hear?"

He snuggled under her arm. "Just one that is from a super long time ago and has people fighting the bad guys, too."

She thought for a moment. "Once upon a time in a land far away—way, way back in the old world—there lived a young girl. She had vibrant, fiery red, curly hair."

"Was she pretty?"

"Beautiful. And all the boys loved her and wanted to be her boyfriend."

"Like all the girls love Axel?"

She laughed. "Yes, just like that, but she was different from regular girls. When she was twenty years old, an evil sorceress summoned a dark entity."

"The demon," he breathed.

"The sorceress knew the demon was searching for the beautiful enchantress. When he came to the girl's small seaside village, the sorceress took him to the girl. The evil demon killed the girl's parents and her little brothers. He took the redheaded beauty and

tortured her. She fought him with all of her strength and refused to join him in his evil ways, for a long time.”

“Then what?”

“And then the angels came to save her and they won. The end.”

“Come on, Mom, the angels didn’t save her.”

“Why would you say that?” she asked quickly, a quaver in her voice.

A stunned look swept over his face. “Um, you told me before.”

“No, I didn’t. How do you know that I changed the ending?” She pressed, trying to hide the panic in her voice.

“I-I just guessed.”

“Just guessed?” Her eyes skimmed over the room.

“Well, the angels can’t win all the time. Sometimes the demons win, and sometimes the humans have to win without the angels helping.”

She sighed. “That depends on what you consider winning. All the sides still lose something when they cross each other’s paths.”

“Why are they always fighting, anyway?”

“I don’t really know. They’ve always been in a battle with each other.”

“Why can’t the angels just get rid of the demons? Then they won’t have to fight anymore.”

“Because they just can’t.”

“So, what about the rest of the story? What happened to the girl?”

“She spent many years with the demon before she gave in to him and became evil. When they started to ravage the country, the people who loved her tried to save her.” She eyed her son. “And then they did.”

He looked up at her, confused. She cringed.

“They tried to save her, but she was evil now. She struck down many of the people she loved in a frenzy of madness. Eventually, one man was able to get close enough to her. He stabbed her in the heart with a dagger even though he loved her, because he had to stop the evil from spreading any further.”

“Yeah, he had to stop her,” Xavier whispered, looking down at his feet.

“The demon attacked him and he perished before the evil presence vanished from this world. He sacrificed his life to save the rest of the world.”

James cleared his throat. “Is that really an appropriate story for an eight-year-old?”

“Story is over.” She attacked her son with tickles. “It’s time for bed anyway.”

He rolled around in a fit of giggles, squirming to escape his mother’s reach.

Chapter Three

Kyra grabbed the ice bucket off the table and stood in front of the TV, facing the boys. “I’m going to grab some ice from that grungy-looking machine we walked by on the way here.” She shifted her weight to better block the TV from their view. “Did you bring the Hennessey in from the car?”

“Yes, yes. It’s right there.” James peered around her, pointing to a bag next to his suitcase.

“Okay, I’ll be right back,” she said and headed out the door.

She made her way toward the ice machine, trailing her fingers along the raw wooden banister that stretched the length of the walkway. Pausing halfway along, she slowly inhaled the crisp evening breeze, letting the fresh air fill her lungs. Night had found its way to the countryside; the highway was hidden in the dark distance. Here, outside of the smothering street lamps of the city, the moon and the stars shone brightly.

She leaned over the handrail to peer down on the parking lot. It appeared everyone had called it a night. The lights in all the suites were off, except for their room. Even the manager had turned off the *Open* sign and all of the office lights. She continued to the ice machine, the dim overhead bulbs gently illuminating her path. She found this place calming, yet it was also energizing, being out of the hustle and bustle of the city and the pressures that went with it.

Kyra placed the ice bucket under the dispenser and pushed the button. It made an awful grinding sound as it sputtered out shavings of ice. A loud bang ended the machine’s struggle.

“Great,” she muttered to herself.

A familiar eerie feeling rushed over her. She released the handle of the ice bucket, flexed her shoulders back, and stretched her neck from side to side in preparation for what was about to begin.

“Hey, pretty lady, do you need some help with that ice machine?” a voice cooed from the darkness. The speaker cautiously approached her. “Sorry about before. You look a lot like my sister; coulda been twins, you two.”

“That’s fine. I don’t need any help. Please keep your distance.” She turned to face the older of the two men. When he had leered at her from the sidewalk she knew, without a doubt, that he was a tainted soul with malicious intent.

“Name’s Derek. And you are?” He continued toward her, slowly closing the gap between them. “No need to be afraid. I can help you,” he assured her. “Or I can leave you be, but I have to pass you to get to my room.”

Kyra could feel his lies deep within her. There was something else happening...she felt another presence. The thought swiftly entered her mind—

Decoy.

She spun around. The other man, within steps of her, gripped a needle-tipped syringe. Shock flooded his face before he stumbled back. She glared into his eyes and he froze.

“What is this? What do you think you’re up to tonight, boys?” she challenged, turning back and forth between them as she spoke. “This is not a wise decision for either of you. Maybe you should reconsider and try behaving.”

They both stood still. They exchanged baffled glances, then the younger one broke the silence. "She must be the right one, or she would be afraid of us."

"Grab her, Jed! What are you waiting for?" Derek shouted.

"You grab her," Jed retorted.

Kyra fixed her scowl on Jed and the syringe. "I am giving you your last warning. Piss off or things are going to end badly."

"Yeah, for you, sweetheart." He lunged at her with the syringe held high.

She raised her arm to block his strike as the needle swooped down on her. Jed's other hand clenched around her throat when she moved too slowly to block it. She quickly twisted her arm and grabbed hold of his wrist before he could stab her. Derek rushed up behind her and wrapped his arms around her waist, lifting her off her feet, and Jed's fingers slipped off her throat. Jerking her hair from behind, he pushed her to the floor. Jed tried to scoop up her thrashing legs.

Her anger flashed. *Enough.*

Time slowed as she fell. She repositioned herself on her feet and removed her hair from Derek's grasp, slipping away from them with ease. Plucking the syringe from Jed's fingers, she tossed it over the balcony. She stepped back to survey the two immobilized men, still standing hunched over where she'd been. She sensed the darkness in them and knew they'd done horrific things and would continue to do so, if she didn't put an end to it.

She would teach them a lesson they wouldn't soon forget.

Kyra casually waved her hand and both men collapsed onto the wooden walkway. Confused and disoriented, they scrambled around on the floor for a few seconds until they saw her.

"That was tricky, you clever girl, you," Derek hissed.

She focused on his eyes. Mesmerized, he couldn't look away, even when the pain in his head became intolerable. He screamed as blood seeped from his ears. His hands maneuvered to touch his face as his eyes and nose began to bleed.

Jed looked on, horrified. "She's just like him," he mumbled, backing away, preparing to run. Kyra's gaze fixed on him. "Please," he whispered.

He dropped to his knees and started to bleed. Invisible claws ripped through the air, cutting into his flesh. Both men rolled around on the floorboards, screaming in horror and pain.

"We're sorry! Please," Derek choked, "we weren't going to hurt you."

"Please, oh God, please," Jed begged, blinking, trying to see through the blood streaming from his eyes. "Please don't kill us."

Furious and focused, she ignored their pleas for mercy. They had attacked her and she was determined to show them that they had messed with the wrong woman.

The commotion brought James out into the walkway.

"Kyra! Kyra!" James rushed down the hall to his wife's side. "What happened; are you okay? What—what's going on?"

As her face became clearer in the dim lighting, he saw a look of pure anger and nothing else. He had seen her furious before, but this face was unrecognizable. He looked down at the men rolling around on the planking, wailing away for no apparent reason.

Were they having some kind of seizure? He looked back at Kyra. Why was she just standing there, not trying to help? She seemed unaware of his presence. Shock. She must be in shock.

He moved directly into her line of sight, trying to break her out of whatever trance she was in. She seemed to look right through him. Holding her shoulders, he shook gently and her eyes rolled to the back of her head, then refocused on him. She took a deep breath and as she released the air from her lungs, she collapsed into his arms.

The two men on the walkway went silent. Gathering their wits, they climbed to their feet and ran their hands over themselves, searching for nonexistent injuries. Their expressions confused, they surveyed the dry floorboards under their feet before they noticed James and Kyra.

“Stop,” the older man said sternly. “She’s coming with us.”

“Yeah, I don’t think so. You need to back off.” James picked up Kyra. “I’m calling the police if you come near any of us again.” He turned away and started back to the room.

Xavier poked his head out from the room. “Dad, look out!” he shouted, startling James.

He started to turn, but the younger man grabbed his shirt collar and jerked him backward. He stumbled and almost dropped Kyra. The older man jumped in front of him and pulled Kyra from his arms. He threw her over his shoulder and started carrying her to the end of the walkway. Before James could go after them the younger man was in front of him, throwing punches. Kyra disappeared down the stairs with her abductor while James was fending off blows and throwing a few of his own. Xavier, crouched in the doorway, began to cry.

James wrestled with Jed and they fell to the floorboards, rolling around in their struggle to overcome the other. Punches landed repeatedly, eliciting grunts and groans.

A cry of relief drew James’s eye to Xavier, then beyond him to Kyra, who came strutting back up the stairs alone. She planted her feet shoulder width apart and balled her hands into fists. A vindictive grin split her face, and her eyes narrowed. Seconds later Jed and James burst apart, flung aside by some invisible force between them.

James lifted his head to see Kyra still standing defiantly near the doorway where Xavier crouched. He rolled over to his stomach, pushed himself up, and started toward Kyra, but the look on her face stopped him. Quickly following her stare, he turned around in time to see the attacker go flying off the edge of the balcony.

A strong gust of wind—a really strong wind? That only affected him? Maybe he tripped...upward over the railing. Or he jumped. Nothing made sense, and it frightened James not to have an answer—so he pushed the questions out of his consciousness.

“We have to get out of here right now,” Kyra said calmly.

“What? What are you talking about? Do you know those men?” James asked, pushing himself to his feet.

“Get in the car now!”

James swung his head back and forth between the last point where he’d seen the younger attacker and his wife. “Kyra, what is going on? We can’t just run away and leave our stuff. Let’s call the police and report the attackers.”

“James, we have to go *now!*” She grabbed Xavier’s hand and pulled him toward the stairs. “I’ll explain later. Just trust me now.”

Kyra ushered Xavier into the backseat before she jumped in behind the wheel. James climbed into the passenger seat, not quite as panicked as his wife seemed to be. The car peeled out of the parking lot and headed for the exit to the freeway, whipping past the two men as they climbed into an old rusty pickup truck. Its engine roared to life as they shot onto the highway. The tires squealed when she pressed down on the accelerator.

“There’s a town only a few miles ahead. Maybe we can find the police station,” James suggested.

“Or maybe we can lose them,” Kyra said through clenched teeth. “Those men are damned. I should’ve killed them.”

James gaped at her. “What’s going on, Kyra? I feel like we’re in the twilight zone.”

“It’s a long, complicated story. I’ll explain later.”

She kept her foot on the accelerator as she guided the car toward the dimly lit town ahead. James looked away from the speedometer. He had never seen her this way in the fifteen years he’d known her.

“What just happened back there? Did you do that to them? Are you some kind of spy or secret government agent, living a double life?”

“James, please, I am none of those things. Well, maybe the double life is *partly* accurate. There is a wide range of things I am able to do that are supposed to be impossible. I can feel the evil surrounding certain people and I’ve had dreams about angels and demons fighting for as long as I can remember.” She paused and glanced at him. “The stories I tell Xavier about angels and demons are a positive spin on my dreams.”

“Kyra, dreams are just your subconscious working through things that you experience when you’re awake.”

She snorted. “Fucking typical.”

“What is typical? What is your problem?”

“You are. You always do this.”

“Do what?”

“There are realities in this world that you can’t fathom but trust me, they still exist, nonetheless.”

Headlights glared through the car’s rear window; the pickup truck was gaining on them. They sped into the small town. She jammed on the brakes, whipped the car around a corner, and made another turn at the end of the block, losing their pursuers. The car screeched to a stop and she cut the engine.

“Get out. We don’t have much time.”

Xavier and James obeyed even though James could barely keep up with everything that was going on.

Kyra took several agitated steps forward, then whirled to face James and her son. “Look. They’re after me. You guys go to the police and I’ll call you after I lose them,” she instructed.

James shook his head and took a step toward her. “No. No way. What makes you think you can lose them? What if you can’t?”

“Um...what you witnessed at the motel is kind of minor compared to other things I can do.”

“I don’t know what I ‘witnessed’ at the motel.”

“I can take care of myself, but I might not be able to protect you both.” Her eyes searched the streets. “We don’t have time for this.”

She put her hand on James’s arm and their eyes met. His tension and confusion gave way to trust. He didn’t understand why, but he knew he had to let her go.

“Okay. Be careful.” James grabbed Xavier’s hand, and headed down the sidewalk. “We’ll have to finish this later. I’ll need a better explanation than about ‘I have a double life,’” he called back to her.

James tugged Xavier along, the boy glancing frequently back to his mother with worried eyes. They paused at the entrance to an alley and took one last look at Kyra. She gave them a reassuring smile before they ducked into the alley.

Kyra turned away and waited.

The old truck squealed around the corner onto her street. Now she could lead them away while her family escaped. And prevent them from witnessing any more of her powers that she didn’t want to explain.

She bolted in the opposite direction. The headlights skimmed over her as she darted across the street and fled through a grassy field filled with children’s playground equipment. She fell to her knees at the edge of the park, just short of inadvertently launching herself down a steep hill that was only dimly revealed by the moonlight. She crouched, catching her breath, and watched the truck turn off the road, bounce up over the boulevard, and head across the grass toward her.

She shook her head and tried to focus. She had to slow them down, or use her powers on them again. Her eyes drifted back to the steep embankment. It descended into hiking trails through a forest. They wouldn’t be able to drive down there; that would slow them down enough.

Using the tree trunk in front of her for support, she pulled herself to her feet and clambered down into the woods. Cold, damp grass whipped her ankles as she abandoned the path; branches scratched her legs and arms as she stumbled her way toward the moon hanging above the trees. Her mind raced, trying to figure out how to escape these men but still keep them from turning back to look for her family. Weakened from her first encounter with them, she now wished she had built up her endurance in using her powers.

She heard voices, and snapping twigs and the thrash of leafy branches as they charged clumsily after her. They were far enough away that they couldn’t see her in the darkness, but she figured they could hear her as clearly as she heard them. And they were gaining on her; soon they would spot her. She’s wasn’t going to make it. She had to try something before they caught up.

Ducking behind a large tree, she pressed her fingers into its bark, not knowing if it would work. Calming her breathing, she melted into the tree, becoming silent and invisible.

Jed rushed past her, unaware of her presence. His arms flailed wildly in front of him as he chased shadows through the dark forest.

She waited silently.

Now Jed was at least fifty feet ahead of her. Derek had still not appeared. She closed her eyes and searched for his presence. She released her breath when she couldn’t sense anyone in the vicinity—Jed had disappeared from her sight and was now off her

supernatural radar. Where was Derek? He might have run out of energy and returned to get the truck to try to cut off her exit from the trees.

She peered carefully around her tree.

Silent darkness.

She shifted to peer around the other side of the tree. When she still saw nothing out of the ordinary she stepped away from her hiding place and ran off to her left, not wanting to run into either of them.

She'd taken fewer than ten steps when she felt a sharp pain in her butt. She must have been stabbed by a thorn or a sharp twig, she assumed, reaching back to pull it from her flesh. *Crap. Not a twig*, she thought, staring at the small tranquilizer dart with its red fluff end. She started to feel muzzy as she stared down at the dart. She lifted her eyes and looked around and the movement made her head spin.

"I got her, Jed!" she heard Derek yell. "Get back here!"

She dropped to her knees as the fog settled in. Her vision faded away, though her eyes were still open. She could feel her body going limp and tried vainly to get back on her feet. She toppled over. Dragging her numb hands out from under her, she pushed her torso back up, bracing her hands on the ground as she struggled to wobble onto her knees. She could hear footsteps drawing closer.

This can't be happening, she thought. How could a couple of hillbillies have outsmarted her? Probably going to die and be cut up into tiny pieces. Why did they have to stop at that crappy motel; was it fate? Maybe that was what all her dreams of being chased by evil were trying to warn her about—how she was going to die.

One of the men grabbed her arm. She jerked it away and let out a final shriek of defiance, until all the air had left her lungs. Then she collapsed onto the soil.

Pre-order your .epub (Kobo, iBook, etc) copy now here:

<https://www.smashwords.com/books/search?query=melhara>

You must click the 'adult content' button to enable your access to view.

Pre-order your .mobi (Kindle) copy now here:

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B01N5GMUNY?ref=pe_2427780_160035660

Author's Note

If you enjoyed this read please,

Rate it on Goodreads, Amazon, or other reader review sites. And/or

Write a review on these sites or the author website. And/or

Check out the author website:

JocelynTollefson.com

For more novels available and to come...and don't forget to join our mailing list for exclusive access and offers.