

Helping your children choose books they will love



Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website
created for parents and children to make
choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from
**The Demon Trappers:
Forgiven**

Written by
Jana Oliver

Published by
Macmillan Children's Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.





Jana Oliver's imagination has always had the upper hand despite her attempts to house-train it. When she's not on the road tromping around old cemeteries, she can be found in Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband and far too many books.

Also by Jana Oliver

The Demon Trappers: Forsaken

The Demon Trappers: Forbidden

Forgiven



THE
DEMON
TRAPPERS

JANA OLIVER

MACMILLAN



First published in the US 2012 by St. Martin's Press

First published in the UK 2011 by Macmillan Children's Books
a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited
20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Basingstoke and Oxford
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-0-330-51949-6

Copyright © Jana Oliver 2012

The right of Jana Oliver to be identified as the author
of this work has been asserted by her in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or
transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written
permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorized
act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal
prosecution and civil claims for damages.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library.

Printed and bound in the UK by CPI Mackays, Chatham ME5 8TD

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not,
by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out,
or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent
in any form of binding or cover other than that in which
it is published and without a similar condition including this
condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

'Hell begins on the day when God grants us a clear vision of all that we might have achieved, of all the gifts which we have wasted, of all that we might have done which we did not do.'

– Gian-Carlo Menotti

Chapter One



2018

Atlanta, Georgia

Riley Blackthorne's tears were no more. She'd cried herself dry, yet she still lingered in the arms of a dead man. If given the chance, she would remain in her father's arms for the rest of her life.

When she looked up, sad brown eyes gazed back. Master Trapper Paul Blackthorne was a reanimated corpse now, summoned from his grave by none other than the Prince of Hell. Like the day he'd been buried, he wore his best suit and favourite red tie, the one she'd given him as a present.

On the run from the Vatican's team of Demon Hunters, Riley had taken refuge in the home of Mortimer Alexander, a summoner of the dead. She had not expected to find her father waiting for her. Now, as they huddled together, she laid her head on his chest, seeking solace in his embrace.

'I've missed you,' she whispered.

'I've missed you too, Pumpkin.'

This isn't right. We're just borrowing time.

Her dad should be in his grave. Then he would never

The Demon Trappers

know that Riley wasn't his innocent little girl any longer, that she'd given up her virginity the night before.

I was a fool. Why did I let Ori do that?

She'd spent that night in the arms of someone who said he would protect her. Who said she was special and that he cherished her because she reminded him of Heaven. Morning brought the bitter truth – Ori's protection came with a big price tag. Her lover, the *Fallen* angel, would watch over her only if she consigned her soul to Hell. Then Lucifer, the Prince, had arrived and turned Ori into a statue for failing to follow his orders.

Riley wiped a bead of sweat off her forehead. Her body felt like a war zone, some unknown fire burning inside her now.

What if I'm pregnant? She shuddered at the thought. Ori had said that wasn't possible, but that could have been a clever lie. Is that why the demon hunters wanted her? What would the child of a Fallen and mortal be like? Normal? Evil? Somewhere in between?

What would the Church do to me and the baby?

When she shivered, her father broke the embrace.

'Come with me,' he said, taking her hand and slowly rising to his feet. 'I need to feel the sunlight again.' He stopped in the kitchen and poured her a tall glass of apple juice, then they entered a walled garden where cardinals and raucous blue jays flitted around a well-stocked birdfeeder. Water cascaded from the fingers of a nude stone nymph perched in the centre of a broad fountain. They settled on a stone bench still covered with frost, and Riley's behind immediately

Forgiven

reacted to the cold. Her father didn't seem to notice it.

He handed her the juice. 'Drink. You look awful.'

It wasn't a good sign when a dead guy said you looked bad.

Riley took a long sip. It was cold and it tasted good. Clutching the glass in her hands, she gave into the questions that careened around inside her.

'What's it like to be . . . dead?' she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

'Very peculiar.'

'You can't tell me, can you?'

'No. Not like I thought,' he murmured.

The next question was harder. 'Did you see Mom?'

He shook his head as his eyes clouded with sadness. 'No.'

Riley's heart fractured into smaller pieces. 'Lucifer told me what you did. How you gave up your soul for me.'

Her dad's eyes widened. 'You spoke with the Prince?'

'He was in the graveyard this morning after . . .' Riley paused, biting down on her lip. *No, can't go there.* Maybe someday she'd have the courage to admit what she'd done, but not now. 'Lucifer said you pledged your soul to him so that Archfiend wouldn't kill you. So you could take care of me.'

Her dad issued a resigned nod. 'Your mother understood why I did it.'

'Mom knew?' she blurted. 'Why didn't you guys tell me?'

'You were too young.'

'That's crap and you know it,' she retorted. 'I was old

The Demon Trappers

enough. What else haven't you told me, Dad? What else is going to fall on my head when I'm not looking?'

He didn't reply, his eyes not meeting hers now. Which meant there *was* more.

It was so unfair. Her father was supposed to remain alive until she became a master trapper.

'Lucifer didn't keep his bargain,' she complained. 'Your soul should be yours.'

'He said he wouldn't release it, that I owed him a debt, but he wouldn't say what.'

'So you're stuck in Hell until he decides you're not?'

Her father winced. 'Don't be angry. I did what was best. My soul isn't important.'

It was so important that Lucifer wasn't willing to give it up even when her dad had died before his time.

'Does Mort know who summoned you?' There was a faint nod. 'And he's OK with that?' she asked, surprised.

'He was shocked, but he hasn't thrown me to the wolves yet.'

'What about Beck?'

Her father shook his head. 'I don't look forward to the day he learns the truth. It's going to tear him apart.'

Denver Beck, her dad's trapping partner, had considered Paul Blackthorne a mentor. To learn he was aligned with Hell would be as devastating as when Beck had found out she'd slept with a Fallen.

Her father touched her arm. 'I'll see if our host has some place for you to sleep. You need rest.'

Forgiven

Riley blinked to hold back the tears. 'In a little bit,' she said, not wanting to be separated from him. Closing her eyes she leaned against him, inhaling the confusing scents of oranges and cedar chips. Desperate to find some good in all this disaster, she took his hand and squeezed it, remembering what it had been like before he died. When his hands were warm and his heart beating. When there had been all the time in the world.

The spare bedroom in Mort's house was bright, decorated with cream walls and peach accents. It felt like a girl's room which made Riley wonder if he had a sister or a niece. She yawned, then pulled the curtains to reduce the light. As she pulled off her shirt, her long brown hair fell over her face. With it came the unmistakable scent of crisp night air. *Ori's scent.*

'Damn you,' she swore, flinging her clothes in all directions as if that might reverse the dark echoes of the angel's touch. She fled into the shower stall, adjusting the temperature as cold as she could stand to combat the inferno inside her veins. As the water cascaded, she scrubbed her skin until it turned red. The memories refused to be washed away.

When Riley finally climbed into the bed she found the thick down comforter the stuff of legend. She curled into a foetal position, sleep tugging at her. She wasn't the first to give up her virginity to a guy who said he'd always care for her. Riley had heard other girls admit the same mistake during whispered confessions in school restrooms. From this

The Demon Trappers

point on, she would always divide her life into *Before* and *After the Angel*. Statue or not, Ori would be inside her heart, affecting every chance at love for the rest of her days.

Just like Beck.

To Denver Beck, there were many ways to welcome a new day – spread-eagled on his own lawn, wrists secured by flex-cuffs wasn't the best of them.

'What the hell is goin' on?' he bellowed into the dirt.

The response was the sound of combat boots tromping around inside his house as their owners' voices called out to each other in Italian. When there was a sharp shatter of glass, he swore. Beck closed his eyes to keep the dirt out of them and forced himself to relax. If he fought back, the demon hunter behind him might feel the need to make this his last day on earth.

I'll be damned if I die like this.

His only choice was to remain here until the Vatican's elite team finished their search. Which, from all the commotion, involved tearing his house apart.

When he heard a name in the midst of the voices flowing around him, he sighed into the dirt. They were searching for Riley Blackthorne., the seventeen-year-old daughter of Beck's dead trapper buddy, Paul.

The day had sucked even before this paramilitary-style raid, one Beck was sure his neighbours were enjoying with their morning coffee. Right after dawn Riley had arrived on his doorstep, weeping and shell-shocked. Through tears and

Forgiven

sobs she'd admitted her blackest sin: she'd spent the night with a Fallen, one of Lucifer's own.

Beck had known this Ori guy was bad news from the first moment he'd seen him with Riley, but he'd never expected the bastard to be a Fallen angel.

Why him? Even now he could see her huddled on the couch, weeping, as he'd shouted that very question at her. After all Beck had done for her, she'd taken up with that *thing*.

When he'd spat insults at Paul's daughter, she'd responded in kind. Fearing how bad it might get between them, Beck had bolted from the house. When he'd returned a short time later he'd found his front door wide open and the Vatican's team on the prowl.

More rapid-fire conversation bounced around him now: Beck didn't need to speak the language to hear the frustration. Since Riley wasn't lying in the dirt beside him, this raid made the hunters look bad. They would need a scapegoat and Beck would do just fine. A new voice cut in – it was the hunters' captain. Apparently he'd finally decided to join the party.

Without warning, Beck was hauled roughly to his knees. Once he was up, he tried to wipe his mouth on a shoulder: it proved impossible with the flex-cuffs in place. The demon hunter with the rifle circled around to the side now, the weapon pointed at Beck's chest.

The captain of this unit squatted in front of him, his dark eyes flinty. Elias Salvatore was thirty-two, a decade older than Beck. He had a Mediterranean complexion, black hair and a goatee, coupled with an athletic build. His navy turtleneck

The Demon Trappers

sported epaulettes and the Demon Hunters' emblem – St George slaying the dragon. Crisply pleated trousers tucked neatly into polished combat boots.

'Mr Beck,' he said evenly.

'Captain Salvatore. What the hell is goin' on?'

'We were informed that Riley Blackthorne was here.'

Who told ya that?

'She was here a while ago. Must have left.'

The man's eyes narrowed further. 'Where is she?'

'No idea.' It was a safe bet one of the neighbours had heard them shouting at each other, so he went with the truth in case the hunters bothered to check. 'We had words.'

'About what?'

'That's none of yer business,' Beck said. A second later he was back face down in the dirt, a heavy boot pressing on his back.

The captain issued a crisp command and Beck was hauled up again. He gave a look over his shoulder and found the boot belonged to Lieutenant Amundson, the captain's second-in-command. He was a tall man, Nordic, and not known for his manners.

Beck spat dirt. 'Get these damned cuffs off me.'

Salvatore gave a gesture. There was the snick of a knife then the cuffs fell away. Amundson had made sure to cut Beck's palm in the process.

Beck wiped his hands on his jeans, then inspected the wound.

The captain delivered a penetrating look over the

Forgiven

prisoner's shoulder then gestured for the lieutenant to move away. 'I apologize.'

Beck clamped down on his fury. Throwing punches wasn't a smart move right now.

Did the hunters know about Riley and the Fallen? *They have to. Why else would they be looking for her?* Still, he didn't dare make assumptions.

'What's this all about?' Beck asked.

The captain rose. 'Let's go inside.'

Beck stood, dusted off his jeans and retrieved his trapping bag where it lay near the driveway. He felt the bottom of the canvas and was relieved to find it wasn't wet, which meant none of the glass spheres inside had shattered when he'd been tackled by the hunters. He'd need those special magical globes to trap Hellspawn.

After ensuring they were alone, Salvatore closed the front door behind them. Beck had expected the place to have been turned inside out, but that wasn't the case. The only damage appeared to be a glass that had been knocked off the counter. He ignored the mess on the floor and dropped on to the couch in the same place that Riley had occupied when she'd delivered her devastating news.

Where are ya girl? If she ran to her apartment, they'd find her there. If she was smart she'd go to Angus Stewart, one of the two master trappers in the city. Stewart would watch over her.

The captain sat in a chair opposite him. He moved as if he hadn't had a decent night's sleep in days. 'We must find Riley

The Demon Trappers

Blackthorne as quickly as possible.'

'Why?'

'There's a Fallen angel in Atlanta. His name is Ori. We believe he has targeted Paul Blackthorne's daughter.'

Beck made sure he appeared shocked. It wasn't hard. He still couldn't believe that Riley had been with one of Lucifer's allies.

'Why would one of those want her?'

Salvatore shook his head. 'He is known for his seductions.'

Beck's jaw tensed, but he didn't reply.

'There is a strange pattern of events in this city, and that usually means there's an epicentre, a focus to that activity.'

'If yer sayin' that Riley's the reason for all this –'

'What other conclusion can we draw?' Salvatore retorted. 'Every demonic event in this city has centred on her: a Grade Five demon tried to kill her. The same fiend pressed its attack during the trappers' meeting at the Tabernacle and that ambush alone cost you a third of your Demon Trappers Guild.'

'I know the numbers, hunter,' Beck replied sullenly.

'If she is the nexus of this activity, we have to locate her and find a way to break that connection with Hell before more people die.'

Beck didn't want think about what 'break that connection' meant. 'Why a commando raid on my house? Ya could have knocked on the door like anyone else.'

'You weren't home,' the captain observed. 'Do you usually leave your house unlocked?'

Forgiven

Beck hesitated. 'No. Why?'

'Both the front and back doors weren't bolted and your alarm wasn't engaged. The back door was partially ajar, indicating a hasty departure, perhaps?' The captain leaned forward, elbows on knees. 'Did you call Riley and warn her that we were coming?'

By now they'd have gone through his phone and know he'd called Riley after they'd quarrelled, so he opted for the truth. 'I didn't know ya were comin' here.'

'Yet you spoke to her.'

'Yeah. We argued about this Ori guy. He'd told her he was a freelance demon hunter and I told her to stay away from. She wasn't listenin' so we had words. I called her to . . .' Why had he called her? Certainly not apologize, that was for sure.

'Where is she now?'

Beck shook his head. 'I don't know. Now I'm done talkin' to ya unless the Guild's lawyer is watchin' over me.'

The captain sighed. 'Look, I respect your loyalty to the girl's father. Paul Blackthorne trained you, brought you up through the Guild. You were there when he died at the hands of the same demon that tried to kill his daughter. I know what you're feeling, but we need your help.'

'Bite me.'

Salvatore scowled. 'So be it.' He triggered a radio on his shoulder and Italian filled the air. He'd barely finished giving the order when two hunters were through the front door.

The captain rose, his face set. 'Denver Beck, as representative of the Holy See, I arrest you for obstructing justice, additional

The Demon Trappers

charges to be filed at a later time. You are duly warned that if you are found to be aiding Hell in any manner, the ultimate penalty is death.'

'Go figure,' Beck muttered.